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Citizen Security Research Initiative (CSRI)

Research and Learning Agenda





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Citizen Security Research Initiative (CSRI)

RESEARCH AND LEARNING AGENDA

Introduction

Innovations for Poverty Action's (IPA) sector programs and initiatives engage with researchers and partners to identify and address the most policy-relevant knowledge gaps where rigorous research and high-quality data can help decision-makers to design, support, and scale cost-effective programs. The [Citizen Security Research Initiative \(CSRI\)](#) is a new research initiative within IPA's Peace & Recovery Program launched in 2024 and supported by the United States Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), through the Partnership to Advance Research and Scientific Evidence (PARSE). By producing and examining rigorous evidence, CSRI works to build an evidence base of "what works" to strengthen citizen security and justice and to help governments and communities achieve lasting reductions in crime and violence. This Research and Learning Agenda offers a framework to guide and prioritize CSRI's efforts, focusing on the areas most critical for strengthening security and building the evidence base.

CSRI's mission

Global security challenges are growing. In 2023, 83 percent of the world's population lived in a country with high levels of organized crime, which means that criminal markets and criminal actors have significant to severe influence on society ([GI-TOC, 2023](#)). Organized crime, escalating violence, drug trafficking, and weak institutions undermine community safety, hinder economic growth, and restrict the functioning of justice systems. Security interventions that lack rigorous empirical foundations frequently fall short in creating sustainable change, risking unintended consequences and perpetuating community insecurity. Addressing these threats requires building a robust evidence foundation that directly answers the most pressing policy questions facing practitioners and policymakers working to build safer communities.

CSRI advances this mission through two core pillars: synthesizing existing evidence with actionable policy recommendations and supporting novel research. In areas where reliable evidence and relevant contextual studies already exist, CSRI distills key findings into accessible guidance for practitioners and policymakers, translating complex research into clear, practical recommendations. In areas where critical evidence gaps remain, CSRI will support rigorous research. By generating high-quality research on priority topics, CSRI provides actionable insights for more effective policymaking and programming. This Research and Learning Agenda identifies thematic areas within citizen security and justice where the evidence base is growing and where critical knowledge gaps remain, to guide both CSRI's future research generation (by informing funding priorities) and dissemination (by identifying thematic areas for synthesis reports).

Building on these evidence gaps, CSRI's research fund will prioritize supporting studies that address the identified unanswered research questions. Through competitive calls for proposals, CSRI will support novel impact evaluations that measure the causal effects of interventions, programs, or policies, as well as foundational and contextual research that deepens understanding of emerging issues in citizen security. The fund will also promote the development of data and tools that strengthen future research and inform evidence-based policy decisions.

Additionally, on the dissemination of research findings, CSRI will also support the publication of evidence syntheses that translate complex research into accessible and practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. Finally, CSRI will aim to build a networked research community by convening organized crime scholars, law enforcement practitioners, and policymakers to identify actionable research priorities, share operational insights, and develop coordinated strategies for disrupting criminal organizations. These convenings will ensure that CSRI-funded research is grounded in practitioner needs and that findings are rapidly translated into operational guidance.



Learning Priorities

This Research and Learning Agenda highlights priority areas where rigorous evidence can inform and strengthen policy and programmatic decision-making in the citizen security and justice fields. It is not intended to be an exhaustive mapping of all existing research or evidence gaps. Rather, this agenda serves two main purposes: (1) highlighting areas where emerging bodies of research exist, informing the thematic scope for new evidence synthesis reports that CSRI will develop and (2) identifying evidence gaps where critical questions remain unanswered, informing the next generation of novel, rigorous research that CSRI will support. Although CSRI's research fund will seek to advance answers to the identified research questions, their scope extends beyond what CSRI alone can address. This agenda is therefore intended to guide CSRI's work while informing future efforts by IPA and its partners to strengthen the evidence base on citizen security and justice.

This agenda incorporates insights from 65 experts and leaders in the security and justice spaces working across Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, and on global initiatives, who were directly consulted for this purpose. These thought partners include researchers from academia and think tanks, practitioners from multilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations, former government officials, as well as donor representatives. This agenda also draws on IPA's 15 years of experience implementing and supporting [policy-relevant research on crime, violence, and justice](#), through which it has developed a strong network of researchers and practitioners across governments, non-governmental organizations, and other key stakeholders. As part of its ongoing efforts, CSRI will regularly update this agenda, aiming for it to reflect the evolving state of the evidence.

Based on the analysis of these expert consultations, complemented by an extensive literature review, CSRI's Research and Learning Agenda focuses on four thematic research areas and one cross-cutting methodological area:

Research Areas

1. **Countering Organized Crime**
2. **Combating Drug Trafficking and Production**
3. **Preventing Crime and Violence**
4. **Strengthening Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Systems**

Measurement and Design

5. **Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Programming**



RESEARCH AREAS

1. Countering Organized Crime

Organized crime undermines public safety, stifles economic progress, and erodes democratic governance in countries worldwide ([GI-TOC, 2023](#)). Nearly 40 percent of global homicides are connected to organized crime-related violence ([UNODC, 2023](#)). To weaken organized criminal groups, policymakers need evidence on what works: which interventions effectively reduce gang violence and recruitment, disrupt trafficking operations, eliminate revenue sources, counter territorial control, and diminish criminal influence.

A growing body of research examines how to prevent gang recruitment and reduce violence. Research shows that individual, social, and structural factors shape why people join, stay, or leave organized criminal groups ([Adamse et al., 2024](#); [Calderoni et al., 2022](#); [Weisburd et al., 2020](#)). Building on this understanding, evidence suggests that gang recruitment prevention is most effective through intensive, culturally adapted family-based programs paired with community engagement and holistic social services ([Valdez et al., 2013](#); [Thornberry et al., 2018](#)). While causal evidence is limited, some studies suggest that a lack of economic opportunities may drive gang recruitment, highlighting the potential value of programs that offer viable alternatives ([Dell et al., 2019](#); [Carvalho](#)

[& Soares, 2013](#); [Enamorado et al., 2016](#); [Khanna et al., 2023](#)). Evidence also shows that several types of interventions can reduce gang violence. These include focused deterrence strategies—which combine law enforcement and social services to reduce criminal offending by targeting high-risk offenders—as well as psychosocial interventions and programs offering education and employment opportunities ([Braga et al., 2014](#); [Gonzalez et al., 2023](#); [Pyrooz, 2024](#); [Engel et al., 2011](#); [Williams et al., 2014](#)).

Yet critical knowledge gaps remain. Most existing research has been conducted in high-income countries, leaving significant knowledge gaps for low- and middle-income contexts. These gaps are particularly important as organized criminal groups evolve, leveraging social media for recruitment, broadening revenue sources, and expanding trafficking operations ([Bledsoe, 2025](#); [GI-TOC, 2023](#)). Evidence remains scarce on how to disrupt these activities while minimizing the risk of triggering violence or driving criminal organizations into more hidden channels or locations. Moreover, rigorous causal evidence is especially limited for interventions implemented at community or city levels. CSRI has identified the following open research questions:



1.1 Organized Crime Recruitment and Membership

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What are the key motivations and life trajectories that drive individuals to join and exit criminal groups, and how can this knowledge inform more effective prevention, desistance, and reintegration policies?
- What are the different pathways through which criminal organizations recruit various types of members into their structures at distinct levels? How dynamic and context-specific are these pathways? Who seems to be the most susceptible to being recruited? What is the role of local drug markets?
- How do organized criminal groups identify and leverage individual vulnerabilities and contextual factors to facilitate recruitment into violent activities? Specifically, how do recruiters target and leverage factors such as economic precarity (e.g., unemployment, income shocks, or limited economic opportunities), peer networks and social status dynamics, and prior exposure to violence, trauma, or family instability to draw individuals into joining criminal groups and taking on violent roles?
- Which interventions, or combinations of interventions, are most effective at preventing recruitment into criminal groups? What are the critical windows for disrupting criminal pathways, and what interventions effectively mitigate vulnerabilities associated with these pathways? How do programs designed to counter recruitment disrupt the labor supply and operations of transnational criminal organizations, and how do these effects interact with enforcement pressure?
- What strategies can effectively disrupt criminal group recruitment on social media? How can these strategies minimize the displacement of criminal activity to encrypted channels or alternative platforms?
- How is the emergence of synthetic drug markets changing criminal recruitment profiles, and what are the implications for the skillsets and motivations of new recruits across age groups?
- What factors seem to normalize and facilitate criminal recruitment (e.g., normalization of violence, narco-culture, etc.) and how can prevention programs address both individual attitudes and broader social norms?

1.2 Illicit Trafficking Activities

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What strategies can effectively disrupt trafficking operations while minimizing and mitigating violent competition between criminal groups?
- How should interventions account for trafficking networks' ability to adapt their operations, routes, and structures in response to enforcement pressure?
- How should interventions account for the structural characteristics of different trafficking supply chains to increase effectiveness and minimize displacement to alternative routes, markets, or mechanisms?
- How can tech-based strategies, including imagery intelligence technology, maritime domain data, or GPS for security forces, help locate, infiltrate, disrupt, and dismantle illicit economic activities?
- How can governments improve institutional security responses to cross-border trafficking and drug smuggling? How can customs officers improve risk profiling practices for containers or people to better curb levels of illicit trade across borders? What priority skills and capacities should training programs for customs officers and coast guard personnel emphasize?
- How can leveraging administrative or big data improve the forecasting of threats and actions that affect international security, in particular, illicit trafficking?

Additional emerging research areas related to drug trafficking are discussed in [Section 2 on combating drug trafficking and production](#).

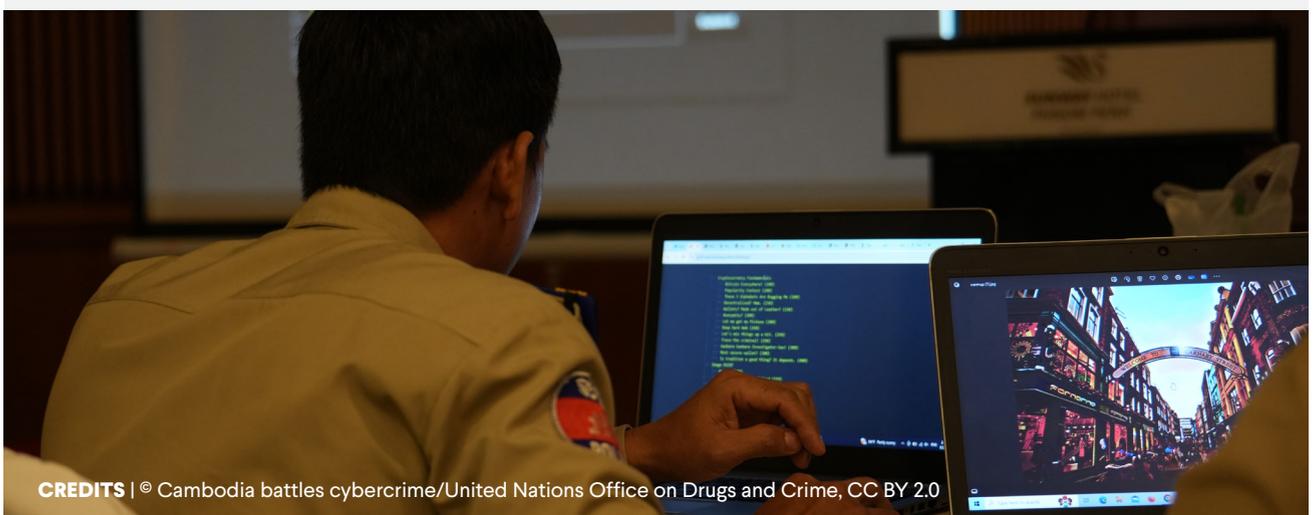
Although human trafficking is a critically important issue and a source of revenue for organized criminal groups, it is not included in this agenda because IPA has a dedicated [Human Trafficking Research Initiative \(HTRI\)](#). [HTRI's research and learning agenda](#) addresses the "4Ps" framework of human trafficking initiatives: prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership.



1.3 Organized Crime Revenue Streams from Sources Different from Trafficking

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What are the principal revenue streams of organized criminal groups including those derived from legal and illegal activities? How do these dynamics vary across specific groups or cities, particularly in contexts where evidence remains scarce? How do different revenue sources shape the operations, resilience, and adaptability of organized criminal groups?
- How can criminal revenue streams other than trafficking (e.g., extortion, financial crimes, kidnapping for ransom, illegal mining, among others) be effectively disrupted while reducing unintended consequences?
- What non-enforcement approaches (such as financial transparency measures, fiscal policies, screening mechanisms, asset blocking, or recovery strategies) effectively reduce criminal revenue or prevent criminal groups from legitimizing their revenue through legal systems?
- How does reducing criminal revenues lower the demand for labor workers in illicit activities, and, in turn, reduce employment in these sectors?
- How do criminal organizations structure and execute money laundering operations, and what tools can improve the tracking of illicit financial flows?
- How effective are anti-money laundering frameworks in detecting, deterring, and disrupting illicit financial flows across different contexts?
- How do variations in the governance capacity, market structure, and territorial control of organized criminal groups influence the outcomes of interventions targeting their revenue streams?
- How can interventions be tailored to contexts with differing levels of state capacity and local governance strength to enhance effectiveness?
- What factors drive the emergence and evolution of new criminal markets, and how can early detection improve state responses?



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1.4 Additional Research Priorities in Organized Crime

In addition to the above questions, there are broader dimensions of organized crime that also warrant further research. These include questions related to criminal governance, territorial control, and the influence of organized crime on state institutions. For example:

- How do the origins, structures, and strategic environments of criminal organizations shape their evolution and relationships within the broader criminal ecosystem?
- How do criminal groups establish and sustain territorial control and governance, and what institutional weaknesses enable and perpetuate these dynamics?
- How do variations in local institutional capacity, criminal group organization, and territorial context shape which evidence-based interventions or combinations thereof are most effective in reducing criminal governance?
- How do organized criminal groups exert influence over state institutions and decision-making processes? What pathways, weaknesses, and entry points enable them to infiltrate, intimidate, influence, or co-opt these institutions? What institutional safeguards, accountability mechanisms, and broader governance reforms can effectively prevent or mitigate the capture of state functions and corruption driven by organized crime? What role can negotiated agreements or structured communication channels between state actors and criminal organizations play in reducing violence, and under what conditions can enforcement strategies leverage these arrangements to weaken and dismantle transnational criminal organizations?
- How are organized criminal groups structured and governed across countries, and how do these structures vary across cities and national contexts? Through what mechanisms do criminal organizations expand their operations to new cities and regions, what factors determine whether these expansions succeed or fail, and how do such dynamics shape broader transnational security landscapes?
- What interventions are most effective in disrupting organized criminal groups' operations, territorial control, and governance structures? How can these interventions reduce violence while minimizing unintended consequences such as displacement or escalation?
- How can focused deterrence strategies be designed and implemented to disrupt the operational capacity of organized criminal groups in urban settings? Under what conditions do these strategies effectively reduce violence, territorial control, and recruitment?
- What enforcement "levers" (including credible threats to disrupt revenue streams, targeted sanctions on leadership, and coordination with intelligence systems) are most effective at weakening urban criminal organizations? How can city- and metropolitan-level authorities deploy these levers in coordination with national and international enforcement efforts?
- What lessons can be drawn from current and historical enforcement, military, and secondary prevention campaigns against urban criminal organizations (including anti-mafia operations, gang suppression strategies, targeted dismantlement efforts, targeted counter-recruitment and exit/reentry programs) across different national contexts? Which operational approaches, institutional arrangements, integration with secondary prevention, and sequencing strategies have proven most effective at durably weakening organized criminal groups, and which have backfired or produced unintended escalation?



RESEARCH AREAS

2. Combating Drug Trafficking and Production

Established and emerging drug markets present a significant challenge for societies worldwide. Traditional plant-based drugs remain dominant: cannabis is the most seized substance globally, followed by coca- and cocaine-related products (UNODC, 2021), with illegal cocaine production reaching an all-time high, increasing by 34 percent from 2022 to 2023 (UNODC, 2025). However, synthetic drug markets are simultaneously expanding globally, fundamentally transforming trafficking dynamics.

The rise of synthetic drugs represents a profound structural shift in drug supply chains. Unlike plant-based drugs such as cocaine and heroin, which are geographically constrained by the need to cultivate coca or opium poppies, synthetic drugs can be manufactured almost anywhere (GI-TOC, 2024). The disconnect from agricultural origins, combined with the proliferation of open-source knowledge, new technologies, and efficient lab setups, has lowered barriers to entry (GI-TOC, 2024). Access to precursor chemicals is also relatively easy, as they are widely available due to their legitimate industrial uses, and production does not require sophisticated laboratory equipment, though manufacturing still requires knowledge of safety protocols to avoid intoxication and death (GI-TOC, 2025). What is more, in the case of fentanyl, research suggests that traffickers exploit international trade cooperation agreements, such as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), to conceal illicit shipments within legal cross-border commerce through official ports of entry (GI-TOC, 2025). Furthermore, the extreme potency of synthetic drugs means that far more doses can be obtained from a given weight compared to traditional substances (UNODC, 2021). These factors combined mean that synthetic drug production is no longer dominated by large, territorially-based organizations but has become an accessible market for different criminal actors—from established cartels to small criminal operators (GI-TOC, 2024).

These supply-side transformations intersect with rising drug consumption worldwide. Over the past decade, the number of people using drugs has increased by 28 percent, reaching an estimated 316 million in 2023 (UNODC, 2025). North America illustrates the severity of this crisis. Since 2000, opioid overdoses have claimed over 1.1 million lives in the United States; a toll so extensive that more than 40 percent of adults in the United States have lost someone in their lives to overdose (RAND, 2024). This complexity underscores the urgent need for rigorous, data-driven research to unravel the dynamics of illicit drug production, trafficking, and consumption, and to inform effective responses.

In recent years, enforcement and non-enforcement strategies have been tried and tested to reduce drug trafficking. Research indicates that tougher criminal penalties may discourage certain individuals from engaging in drug trafficking, yet these sanctions fail to undermine the criminal organizations themselves, which can often readily substitute arrested members with new recruits (Montolio and Oliveira, 2023). Hardline law enforcement approaches, such as targeting organizational leaders and conducting intensive militarized operations in drug markets, have proven ineffective at dismantling trafficking activities and frequently escalate violence (Dickensen, 2014; Dell, 2015; Cano and Ribeiro, 2016). New approaches are critically needed, and significant evidence gaps remain in understanding which strategies can effectively disrupt trafficking networks while avoiding triggering violence. This includes the following research questions:



2.1 Drug Market Dynamics and State Responses

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Can state-led interventions effectively disrupt and dismantle drug markets while minimizing violence stemming from power vacuums, territorial disputes, and market destabilization?
- Under what conditions are crop substitution programs effective at reducing the farming of illicit crops? What unintended consequences (e.g., recultivation, violence, displacement) can arise from crop substitutions programs? What implementation approaches or contextual factors determine whether these programs succeed or fail?
- How do drug seizures and other illicit substance interventions affect citizen security? What are other effective alternatives?

2.2 Supply Chains, Trafficking Routes, and International Cooperation

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- How do the organizational origins, structures, and capacities of different criminal groups shape their ability to participate in, organize, or innovate within various illicit supply chains?
- How can illicit supply chains of synthetic narcotics and their chemical precursors be mapped and analyzed? What are the dynamics, innovations, gaps, and weaknesses that allow them to persist? How can improved intelligence on these networks inform and support anti-trafficking efforts by governments and other stakeholders?
- How effective are regulatory and enforcement measures (e.g., pre-export notification systems, purchase quantity thresholds, licensing requirements) in drug-producing and transit countries at controlling precursor chemicals? What characteristics improve the effectiveness of these measures?
- How can partnerships with chemical suppliers, logistics firms, and customs authorities be designed to improve the detection and reporting of suspicious precursor transactions? What incentives, technologies, or coordination mechanisms most effectively increase compliance and information-sharing among firms and enforcement agencies involved in precursor chemical regulation? How can partnerships with logistics companies or warehouse operators improve early detection of illicit chemical uses?
- How do changes in drug supply (e.g., price, purity, or availability) affect demand patterns and user behaviors?
- What are the effects of criminal market disruptions (e.g., interdiction, arrests) on patterns of drug use and substitution among consumers?

Additional questions related to illicit trafficking (including drug trafficking and other forms of trafficking) are included in [Section 1.2](#).



2.3 Synthetic Drugs and Emerging Threats

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- How do small-scale producers, transporters, or distributors decide whether to enter synthetic drug markets compared to traditional drug markets?
- How do local enforcement efforts (e.g., targeted police operations, community policing) affect local market structures, dealer behavior, or geographic displacement of synthetic drug activity? How do changes in enforcement intensity, perceived risks, or input costs shape the adoption of synthetic drug production methods?
- How have synthetic drug markets transformed the organizational structures and business strategies of transnational criminal organizations? How do synthetic drug markets act as a source of rents for new products for transnational criminal organizations?
- What institutional, legal, or policy innovations would enhance the capacity to anticipate, adapt to, and respond to evolving synthetic opioid markets?

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RESEARCH AREAS

3. Preventing Crime and Violence



Violent crime costs tens of thousands of lives around the world every year (UNODC, 2023). Out of all global homicides, 22 percent are caused by organized crime, with another 16 percent being categorized as “other crime-related homicides” (UNODC, 2023). From 2015 to 2021, the number of deaths attributed to organized crime and other crime-related homicides numbered approximately 167,000 per year, significantly more than attributed to global conflicts in the same period (UNODC, 2023). In addition to the massive loss of life and associated trauma in communities around the world, crime and violence result in major losses of capital, with affected communities losing employment, income, and earning potential (Maloney et al., 2025). Additionally, crime and violence act as powerful drivers of migration, contributing to global displacement, and exposing migrant populations to greater risks and exploitation along their journeys (InSight Crime, 2024). Overall, the insecurity that results from crime and violence is a major hurdle to development and demands the immediate attention of policymakers (Maloney et al., 2025).

Research shows that enforcement and non-enforcement strategies produce varying results in reducing and preventing crime and violence. For instance, hot spots policing in Colombia demonstrated mixed outcomes: interventions in Medellín reduced car thefts and assaults in the least secure areas without displacing crime, though most crimes were unaffected (Collazos et al., 2021), while approaches in Bogotá either displaced property crimes or showed no impact (Blattman et al., 2021; Nussio and Norza

Céspedes, 2018). Military policing in Cali showed no crime reduction, with increases afterward (Blair and Weintraub, 2023). Surveillance cameras in Medellín decreased property and violent crimes without displacement (Gómez, Mejía, and Tobón, 2021), and surprise drunk driving checkpoints in India reduced traffic accidents and deaths (Banerjee et al., 2019).

As for non-enforcement approaches, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) programs reduced arrests and antisocial behavior among at-risk youth in the U.S., Liberia, and El Salvador (Heller et al., 2017; Blattman et al., 2023; Dinarte and Egana-delSol, 2023), while a prison-based behavioral program in Quebec reduced recidivism among first-time offenders (Arbour, 2021). Early childhood interventions, including nurse home visits, preschool programming, and early stimulation programs, reduced arrests and violent behavior in the U.S. and Jamaica, though some effects diminished over time (Eckenrode et al., 2010; Schweinhart, 2007; Walker et al., 2011). Ongoing studies are evaluating other potential non-enforcement approaches, including improving trauma care to reduce homicides (Weintraub et al., 2024).

While some of these findings are promising, large research gaps remain. Policymakers require more evidence on how to prevent individual participation in violence, as well as how to prevent future violence for individuals deemed high-risk (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2025). CSRI is dedicated to filling these critical gaps by identifying the following research questions:



3.1 Enforcement Strategies: Balancing Crime Reduction, Community Trust, and Accountability

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- How effective are enforcement strategies that have proven successful in high-income countries in preventing crime and violence in low- and middle-income countries? What types of adaptations are required to make them effective?
- How can enforcement strategies (e.g., focused deterrence, hotspot policing, intelligence-led policing, curfew and truancy enforcement, increased penalties for gang-related crimes) be implemented in ways that maximize effectiveness, cost-efficiency, and sustainability while minimizing negative spillover effects and social costs?
- How do enforcement strategies that reduce crime and violence within a specific country contribute to international security outcomes, including reductions in illicit migration and human smuggling?
- What policing models effectively balance public safety, accountability, and community trust across different contexts?
- What is the impact of elite policing units on public safety, accountability, human rights, or public trust?
- How does police militarization affect public safety and community trust? Under what conditions is the use of military-style tactics and equipment by police effective or counterproductive?

Non-enforcement approaches remain important tools for disrupting transnational criminal organizations' operations, including reducing criminal groups' recruitment pipelines and their revenue sources. Questions addressing non-enforcement strategies have been integrated into other relevant sections of this Research and Learning Agenda.

3.2 Emerging Forms of Crime

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- How do emerging technologies influence the nature and scope of transnational crime, including cybercrime?
- What interventions can effectively build public awareness of cybercrime? What strategies work best to ensure this information reaches the right people, especially those most at risk?
- What mechanisms or cooperative approaches can help strengthen prevention, detection, and response to technology-enabled transnational crimes?



RESEARCH AREAS

4. Strengthening Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Systems

Effective law enforcement and criminal justice systems are essential for citizen security. Yet many low- and middle-income countries face significant capacity constraints across the entire justice chain. Police forces often lack the resources, training, and institutional support needed to respond effectively. Court systems are undermined by delays, backlogs, and corruption, with limited reach in rural areas. Where criminal groups have established governance structures that compete with state authority, having effective and legitimate institutions becomes even more critical to prevent communities from turning to informal or vigilante justice systems.

Research shows that targeted interventions can strengthen both policing and courts. For law enforcement: investigative and interpersonal skills training in India increased crime victims' satisfaction (Banerjee et al., 2021), while soft skills training in Colombia reduced homicides and burglaries in high-crime areas (Garcia, Mejía, and Ortega, 2013). Procedural

justice training improved officer behavior in Mexico City (Canales et al., 2025), and body-worn cameras in São Paulo reduced police-caused fatalities (Monteiro et al., 2022). For criminal justice: redesigned summons letters with text reminders reduced court failures-to-appear by up to 26 percent in New York City (Fishbane, Ouss, and Shah, 2020). Village courts in Bangladesh improved perceptions of harmony and satisfaction with justice (Mattsson and Mobarak, 2020), while community paralegals in Liberia increased satisfaction, reduced bribery, and improved household wellbeing, with the strongest impacts among groups disadvantaged by customary justice practices (Sandefur and Siddiqi, 2015).

Yet critical gaps remain in understanding how to strengthen law enforcement and justice institutions in varied contexts. Sustainable impact requires political will, inter-institutional coordination, and solutions tailored to local conditions. CSRI targets these priorities through the following research questions:



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4.1 Strengthening Law Enforcement Institutions

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What interventions are most effective at improving law enforcement officers' knowledge, skills, and decision-making processes in criminal investigations and case management? How do these measures affect law enforcement performance and community outcomes?
- How can police training (including academy curricula, in-service training, and specialized programs) be designed or modified to improve law enforcement response to crime? What is the impact of tactical training and equipment support on police response to specific security threats? Does technical assistance and equipment provision to specialized units improve their operational effectiveness?
- How can technology (e.g., AI-driven case prioritization tools) improve law enforcement decision-making across different stages of investigation, case management, and prosecution?
- How can intelligence systems be designed and implemented to improve the identification, targeting, and disruption of organized criminal groups? How can non-state organizations contribute to these intelligence systems? What institutional and technological investments yield the greatest improvements in actionable intelligence for law enforcement operating in high-crime urban environments?
- How do organizational characteristics, managerial practices, leadership, and human resource management systems shape police force capacity and operational effectiveness? Which combinations of these organizational elements (including structural configurations, performance management, supervision practices, and recruitment and retention policies) are most critical for ensuring that institutional strengthening investments yield sustainable improvements in law enforcement performance?

4.2 Strengthening Justice Systems

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Do specialized training programs in complex crime areas (e.g., financial crimes, cybercrime, trafficking) improve prosecutors' ability to successfully prosecute these cases? Does training prosecutors in evidence handling, witness examination, and legal writing improve case quality and outcomes? How do different training delivery methods (e.g., short-term workshops vs. long-term mentoring programs) compare in their effectiveness?
- What is the impact of institutional strengthening strategies (e.g., case management systems, equipment, office infrastructure) on prosecution outcomes, including conviction rates, case dismissal rates, and case processing times?
- What is the effect of training programs on substantive criminal law, criminal procedure, or complex evidentiary issues on the quality and consistency of judicial decisions, case processing times, and rates of case overturns on appeal?
- What is the impact of joint training programs for prosecutors and police on evidence quality, case preparation, and conviction rates?
- How can judicial information systems be designed to facilitate data-driven decision-making and improve justice system performance? How can the modernization and digitalization of judicial information systems enhance efficiency and reduce bottlenecks in case management and decision-making?
- How can an international criminal record-sharing system be designed and implemented, and what impact would it have on crime prevention and the effectiveness of criminal justice systems?
- How can judicial performance be measured beyond efficiency metrics or quantity-based indicators (e.g., number of prosecutions, cases processed, rulings issued)? What alternative indicators can better capture the quality of judicial decisions?



MEASUREMENT AND DESIGN

5. Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Programming on Citizen Security

This cross-cutting section establishes research questions for research design, implementation, and evaluation that can be applied across all substantive research areas addressed in Sections 1 through 4. Rather than being pursued as standalone research questions, these measurement and design considerations will be embedded in projects that address the topical priorities identified in the preceding sections. This approach ensures that all CSRI-supported research adheres to rigorous methodological standards and generates actionable, policy-relevant evidence.

Learning about the design, implementation, and evaluation of citizen security programming is critical for achieving effective and sustainable outcomes. If programs and policies are not based on evidence, adapted to local contexts, and implemented with clear theories of change, they risk falling short of their goals or producing unintended harm.

The following questions identify key considerations for improving programming and policy across all areas encompassed in this agenda:

5.1 Targeting and Engagement

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- How can programs effectively identify and engage individuals and communities most at risk without causing stigmatization or unintended harm?
- What strategies most effectively sustain engagement of high-risk populations in programs over time?

5.2 Program Delivery and Long-Term Results

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What program design elements (including intervention timing, intensity, duration, sequencing, and service combinations) and delivery approaches are most effective at achieving sustained effects?
- How can multi-sectoral programming be coordinated and implemented to maximize effectiveness in addressing citizen security challenges? What coordination mechanisms and governance structures enable successful collaboration across agencies?
- What factors determine whether intervention effects persist, fade, or strengthen over time? How can programs be designed to maximize the durability of impacts?
- How do interventions affect non-participants, neighboring communities, and broader crime dynamics? How can program design leverage positive spillovers while minimizing displacement and other unintended consequences?



5.3 Program Monitoring and Evaluation

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Existing methods of measuring crime and violence are often flawed, incomplete, and subject to systematic biases. Given these limitations, what indicators best capture the effectiveness of citizen security interventions? How can measurement approaches be designed to reliably assess program impacts across different contexts?
- What types of data (e.g., administrative records, victimization surveys, ethnographic research, big data such as social media or mobility data) are most reliable and feasible for assessing program outcomes?

5.4 Cost-effectiveness and Scaling Pathways

EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Which interventions achieve the greatest impact in citizen security outcomes per dollar spent?
- How can programs be systematically adapted across different contexts while maintaining their core effectiveness? Which adaptation elements (such as modifying content, training providers on local contexts, or integrating community resources) are most critical for program effectiveness?
- What are the most efficient delivery mechanisms or incentives for adoption at scale across different contexts? How can interventions be delivered at scale while maintaining effectiveness?

Partnering with CSRI

If you are interested in collaborating with CSRI on the identification or production of evidence, please contact us at justice@poverty-action.org

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) is a research and policy nonprofit that discovers and promotes effective solutions to global poverty problems. IPA designs, rigorously evaluates, and refines these solutions and their applications together with researchers and local decision-makers, ensuring that evidence is used to improve the lives of the world's poor. Our well-established partnerships in the countries where we work, and a strong understanding of local contexts, enable us to conduct high-quality research. This research has informed hundreds of successful programs that now impact millions of individuals worldwide.



