Article

Comparative Political Studies
2025, Vol. 58(3) 608–642

DOI: 10.1177/00104140241252090
journals.sagepub.com/home/cps
Sage

Strengthening the Rule of Law Through Community Policing: Evidence From Liberia

Benjamin S. Morse[1]

Abstract

How to improve security and strengthen the rule of law in fragile states? Community policing programs have long been at the forefront of policymakers' efforts to address this challenge. These programs tend to be more expansive than those found in developed countries, focusing not only on building trust through meetings and foot patrols, but also on eliciting 'co-production' from communities to supplement scarce police capacity and provide alternatives to vigilantism. I partnered with the Liberian National Police (LNP) to experimentally evaluate the effectiveness of this approach in Monrovia, Liberia, one of sub-Saharan Africa's most crime-ridden cities. Drawing on a large-scale resident survey and administrative crime data, I find that the program improved relations between police and citizens, strengthened social norms against vigilantism, and mobilized communities to participate in the police's "Watch Forum" initiative by forming and sustaining local security groups designed to facilitate cooperation with police. These changes were accompanied by a roughly 40% reduction in the incidence of mob violence. Despite these improvements, the program did not reduce the overall incident of crime, improve perceptions of security, or increase crime reporting.

[1]Social Impact Inc, Arlington, VA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Benjamin S. Morse, Technical Director, Social Impact Inc, 4201 Wilson Blvd, Arlington, VA 222013382, USA.
Email: bensmorse@alum.mit.edu

Data Availability Statement included at the end of the article.

Keywords
African politics, conflict processes, experimental research, quantitative methods, state building

Introduction

Insecurity due to crime and violence is pervasive in many of the world's weakest states (Mack et al., 2013). To address this problem, donors and aid organizations invest millions of dollars annually in assistance programs designed to strengthen the capacity of state security forces and legitimate their authority in the eyes of citizens. This two-pronged approach has long dominated the practice of security sector reform, and is motivated by the idea that institutional capacity and citizen cooperation are "close complements" in the production of security and therefore must be built in tandem if countries are to escape fragility and violence (Baranyi et al., 2011).

Yet in recent years a growing number of scholars have begun to question whether this narrow, state-centric approach to security sector reform is optimal, and in particular, whether it adequately addresses short term security needs (Baker, 2009; Chirayath et al., 2005; Wisler & Onwudiwe, 2008). At the core of these concerns is a fundamental problem of sequencing: building strong, effective security forces takes decades; in the interim, encouraging citizens to rely on these institutions even as they remain fundamentally untrustworthy and unreliable is unlikely to lead to meaningful improvements in security, and could potentially backfire if engaging with corrupt and incompetent security forces serves to harden citizens' negative perceptions.

Traditional, state-centric models of security reform also struggle to provide a viable alternative to extrajudicial practices such as mob violence, lynching, and vigilantism. Instead, they address these problems with outreach and awareness programs designed to foster norms that support the rule of law and reject extrajudicial practices (Carothers, 2006). Yet because these interventions do little to address the deficiencies of state security forces and little to reduce citizens' security concerns, reliance on extrajudicial mechanisms tends to persist.

If building effective, legitimate security institutions takes decades, how can policymakers improve security and reduce reliance on extrajudicial practices in the short term? In this paper, I partner with the Liberian National Police (LNP) to test an approach rooted in "multidimensional" models of security reform, which call for policymakers to recognize that multiple non-state actors often play a role in security provision in countries with severe and deeply-rooted capacity deficits (Baker & Scheye, 2007; OECD, 2008). In these settings, "first-best" solutions founded on the Weberian ideal of the state as the sole legitimate provider of security are not always possible; instead, the best

way to "respond to the short-term needs of enhanced security and justice service delivery, while also building the medium-term needs of state capacity" may be for security forces to develop "productive partnerships" with local communities and non-state security actors (OECD, 2008, p. 7).

The challenge, of course, is to do so in a way "that builds on local networks and institutions *without* encouraging vigilantism" (Rose-Ackerman, 2004, p. 187, emphasis mine). Liberia's model of community policing responds to this challenge by expanding the scope of traditional, 'Weberian-style' community policing programs, to focus not only on encouraging reliance on the police, but also on providing communities with a lawful, human rights-respecting avenue through which they may 'coproduce' certain security functions in coordination with the police.

Coproductive models of community policing are increasingly common in fragile states, and often receive considerable support from aid agencies and international donors (Dinnen & Peake, 2013; Kagoro, 2019; Wisler & Onwudiwe, 2008). But there is little rigorous experimental evidence to inform whether these programs are effective. To address this gap, I partnered with the Liberian National Police to experimentally evaluate the effectiveness of their community policing program in Monrovia, one of sub-Saharan Africa's most crime-ridden cities and a place where authorities have long struggled to combat vigilantism and mob violence (Downie, 2013; Zanker, 2017). Across nine of Monrovia's ten police zones, police commanders identified a sample of 93 communities, 45 of which were randomly selected to received the program for a period of 10 months, from February to November 2018.

Using survey data, official crime reports, and qualitative field reports from research assistants assigned to shadow the police for the duration of the study, I provide four sets of results. First, I find that the program improved relations between police and citizens, making residents of treatment communities more likely to view the police was capable and well-intentioned, and more likely to personally know individual officers. Second, and more significantly, the program mobilized communities to more actively organize, support, and sustain local security groups. While such groups were common in control communities as well, groups in treatment communities were more likely to be registered with the police's Watch Forum initiative and were sustained by greater contributions of time and effort from residents.

A central concern for policymakers is whether coproduction models of community policing can re-orient communities' efforts to self-provide security towards more rights-respecting practices. My third set of findings strongly suggests they can. In addition to being more trusting of police, residents of treatment communities were more knowledgeable about the rules and guidelines governing local security groups (especially with regards to suspects' rights) and less willing to condone mob violence. Finally, and

perhaps most significantly, residents of treatment communities reported 40% fewer instances of mob violence in the year preceding the survey, as compared to residents of control communities. This result is replicated using mob violence event data from an independent survey of police officers not directly involved in the study.

Although the program made communities more trusting, better organized, and less supportive of mob violence, these improvements did not lead to statistically-significant reductions in the overall incidence of crime or the incidence of any particular category of crime, as measured by both the survey and crime reports from the police. The program also did not significantly increase crime reporting or individual forms of cooperation with police, such as the provision of crime tips or assistance with police investigations. And it did not significantly improve residents' perceptions of security or their overall satisfaction with police performance.

These null effects suggest that policymakers should remain clear-eyed about what community policing programs can achieve in countries like Liberia. They are not a solution to broader problems of crime, violence and police (in)capacity in fragile states, and they cannot "short-circuit" the long process of security sector reform by mobilizing coproduction from citizens. So long as the police remain incapable of responding effectively to crimes or thoroughly investigating cases, residents are likely to remain insecure, reluctant to report crimes, and unsatisfied with police performance.

This study makes two main contributions to the academic literature. First, this study contributes to the state-building literature on governance in "hybrid political orders" by showing that delegation to local communities need not undermine state authority, and may in some circumstances strengthen it by diverting communities away from extralegal practices (Boege et al., 2009).[1] This conclusion runs counter to traditional perspectives on state-building, which have long viewed hybrid spaces as a realm of conflict in which state and non-state actors confront each other in a zero-sum competition for social control (Migdal et al., 1994, 66). The findings reported here, by contrast, draw attention to the many forms of collaboration and accommodation that occur along the path to state centralization, and the role that these arrangements can play in strengthening the state and its rule of law in the short term.

This study also contributes to the literature on the causes of vigilantism and mob violence. Whereas scholars have historically viewed these practices as the "best response" of communities plagued by high levels of crime and weak or absent security institutions (Abrahams, 1998; Jung and Cohen, 2020; Rotberg, 2004), more recent research contests this view, arguing that violent, extralegal practices in fact do little to improve security, and are instead driven by emotive reactions to crime, such as anger, moral outrage, and desire for retribution (Darley et al., 2000; García-Ponce et al., 2023; Johnson, 2009). Mob violence is irrational, according to this perspective, and there is little

policymakers can do to combat it. My findings are inconsistent with this view, and instead suggest that coproductive models of community policing can redefine what communities view as their "best response" to crime in settings plagued by weak policing.

Community Policing in Fragile States

Community policing programs are premised on the idea that citizen cooperation is essential for effective policing (Moore, 1992; Tyler and Fagan, 2008). Because police cannot be everywhere all of the time, they must rely on citizens to learn about crimes that have occurred, identify potential suspects, and gather evidence to bring wrongdoers to justice. Recognizing the central role that citizens play in crime prevention, proponents of community policing have called for a shift in how police work is done, from strategies oriented around the exercise of coercive law enforcement power, to strategies focused on building and sustaining relationships with citizens, community leaders, and civil society organizations (Gill et al., 2014). The hope is that as residents' confidence and familiarity with the police improves, they will become more cooperative and more willing to provide information to the police. And as the police become more familiar with the communities they serve, they will tailor their strategies to more effectively address the drivers of crime. Together, greater cooperation from citizens and greater local knowledge among rank and file officers will improve the police's overall ability to prevent, detect, and solve crimes (Ferreira, 1996).

Although community policing programs originally came to prominence in the U.S. and UK during the 1970s and 1980s, in recent years they have become popular in fragile and conflict-affected states as policymakers search for cost-effective strategies to improve police legitimacy and strengthen the rule of law. Major donors such as the World Bank, DFID, USAID and others now spend millions of dollars annually to promote community-oriented policing programs (Denney & Jenkins, 2013). The UN, for its part, has made community policing a mainstay of its peacekeeping strategy, calling for "community-oriented policing and intelligence-led policing to guide all operational activities of the United Nations police in their support to host state police" (United Nations, 2016, p. 7).

To a significant degree, support for community policing in fragile states is based on the same premise that undergirds support in developed countries — namely, that greater cooperation from citizens will lead to greater effectiveness on behalf of the police. The UN's manual on community policing, for example, describes the logic behind community policing as follows: "greater public trust and confidence in the police leads to an enhanced flow of quality information from the public, which in turn fosters increased police effectiveness" (United Nations, 2018, p. 10). And greater police effectiveness, in

turn, creates a more positive public perception of the police, precipitating a "virtuous cycle" of trust and police effectiveness (United Nations, 2018, p. 11).

Yet scholars have increasingly begun to question whether this optimistic actually logic holds in fragile, low-capacity states, where security forces often face shortages of personnel, vehicles, and even basic supplies such as batons, radios and stationary (Baker, 2009; Downie, 2013). From a theoretical perspective, the same premise that motivates community policing — that citizen cooperation and police capacity are 'close complements' in the production of security — also implies that greater cooperation will be of little benefit when the police cannot reliably respond to incidents, investigate reported crimes, or follow-up on crime tips. Absent broader, more comprehensive reforms addressing police capacity constraints, community policing programs may be bound to fail.

There are other risks to community policing in these settings as well, beyond the risk of failure. The irony of promoting reliance on police who remain fundamentally unreliable is not likely to be lost on ordinary citizens, whose everyday interactions with the police often involve acts of incompetence or corruption — experiences which research suggests tend to have an outsize influence on citizens' perceptions of the police (Brunson, 2007; Sahin et al., 2017). Positive interactions during town hall meetings and foot patrols are unlikely to outweigh these experiences, and may be ignored altogether if citizens view these overtures as "cheap talk", with potentially lasting damage to police credibility (Steinberg, 2008, p. 36). Although research on the short-term impacts of police-community engagement in areas of limited statehood has found positive impacts on perceptions (Karim, 2020), research on the medium-term impacts finds no effect, consistent with the "cheap talk" hypothesis (Blair et al., 2019).

In addition to concerns about the ability of the police to follow-through on their promises, observers have expressed concerns about the fact that traditional models of community policing tend to view security in the Weberian sense, as "a non-negotiable state monopoly" (Wisler & Onwudiwe, 2008, p. 435), when in reality communities pursue security through a variety of avenues, ranging from private security firms, to neighborhood watch forums, to vigilante groups, to mob violence (Rose-Ackerman, 2004; Tapscott, 2021). Though these actors operate outside the law, they often enjoy considerable support among ordinary citizens, and they often serve as important providers of security, deterring crimes when the police are too weak or ineffective to do so themselves (Baker, 2009). In such settings, encouraging reliance on the police at the expense of local sources of security could exacerbate problems of crime and violence if the police prove to be 'imperfect substitutes' for non-state security providers, with potentially negative consequences for long-term efforts to promote reliance on formal-sector justice and security institutions.

Community Policing and 'Multi-Layered' Models of Security Reform

Concerns about the viability of community policing programs in fragile states are emblematic of what Andrews et al. (2017) refer to as the problem of "premature load bearing" in the field of development, which occurs when "institutions and organizations are required to perform tasks before they are actually capable of doing them" (Andrews et al., 2017, 54). The result, they argue, is akin to "putting too much weight on a structure before it is able to support it…not only does this not accomplish the task at hand, it also sets progress back" (54).

Premature load bearing is common in many sectors of states undergoing reform, but it may be especially common in the justice and security sectors because of the premium placed on the state as the *sole* legitimate provider of these services. In line with Weberian notions of state authority, efforts to improve security and strengthen the rule of law typically focus exclusively on *state* security institutions, and very much depend on citizen cooperation and reliance for success. Yet because these reforms take decades to materialize, policymakers often find themselves in the uncomfortable position of promoting reliance on security institutions which are still very much in the process of reform.

This contradiction is not lost on policymakers, however, and in recent years many have begun to advocate for a more "multi-layered" approach to security sector reform that builds on local networks and institutions in order to supplement police capacity and ease the demands placed on under-resourced police (Baker & Scheye, 2007; Chirayath et al., 2005; Denney, 2014). This approach calls for policymakers to recognize that "first-best" solutions involving state delivery of security and justice services may be unrealistic when the state faces significant capacity deficits and lacks legitimacy in the eyes of large segments of its population (OECD, 2008, p. 7). Rather than focus exclusively on state institutions, reforms should focus on developing partnerships between police and local leaders and communities, and empowering these actors to contribute to the provision of their own security within the confines of established rules and guidelines. In this way, the multi-layered approach to security reform aims to direct the collective action potential of communities towards activities which "complement rather than undermine the state's ability to provide security," and thereby help "respond to the short-term needs of enhanced security and justice service delivery, while also building the medium-term needs of state capacity" (OECD, 2008, p. 11).

In practice, multi-layered security reforms require a degree of the delegation on behalf of the police, as well as a corresponding amount of 'co-production' by communities (Ostrom, 1996; Wisler & Onwudiwe, 2008). For example, police may delegate authority over misdemeanor crimes to local leaders or chiefs, encouraging them to adjudicate these cases while referring

more serious ones to the police solving crimes. Similarly, police may delegate responsibility for nighttime vigilance patrols to neighborhood watch groups, freeing officers to focus on responding to crimes and incidents. In both of these arrangements, inputs from government are combined with complementary inputs from "citizen producers," resulting in an improvement over government production alone (Ostrom, 1996, p. 1082).

For those involved in tailoring traditional models of community policing to meet the needs of fragile states, the concept of coproduced policing has been influential (Baker, 2009; United Nations, 2018). Increasingly, these programs focus not only on building trust and compliance with the police, but also on encouraging communities to form coproductive partnerships with police. In urban settings, one of the principal ways that this approach has been put into practice is through community watch programs, wherein communities elect volunteers who, after being trained and vetted by the police, are tasked with keeping watch over their communities at night, assisting with police investigations, and providing information about potential criminal activity. More generally, members of these groups may serve as advocates for the police in their communities, encouraging their fellow citizens to remain vigilant, to contribute to community-wide efforts to combat crime, and to rely on and cooperate with the police.

This 'coproductive' approach to community policing holds the potential to address the risks and pitfalls of more traditional models of community policing in several important ways. First, by harnessing the collective action potential of communities to serve as a "force multiplier" for the police, the coproduction approach to community policing may help address the manpower constraints that so often prevent police from responding effectively to crime, and thereby may help reduce the risk that greater reliance on police alone will prove either ineffective or counterproductive in combatting crime. Second, coproduction stands to be a more effective way to manage expectations in the process of building trust and confidence: rather than focus exclusively on improving citizens' expectations of police competence and trustworthiness, only to risk being unable to meet them, the coproduction model requires that police openly acknowledge their constraints in their bid to elicit coproduction from citizens. And finally, the coproduction model recognizes that communities living in the shadow of the state will invariably seek to self-provide protection, and that, in the absence of lawful alternatives, the risk that these efforts will be directed towards practices that *substitute* for the state, such as vigilantism and mob violence, is high. Whereas traditional models largely ignore local forms of security, and thus do little to remedy their more problematic aspects, the coproduction model seeks to address extra-legal practices through diversion — i.e. by directing communities towards lawful, rights-respecting activities which complement, rather than substitute for, the police.

The coproduction model of community policing may help address the risks and pitfalls of traditional community policing programs, but it is not without risks of its own. Delegating security is inherently risky, and could potentially increase rights abuses if watch groups do not abide by established rules and guidelines. Watch Forums may strengthen police responsiveness to groups that participate at the expense of marginalized groups that don't (Gonzalez & Mayka, 2023). Alternatively, the level of collective action from communities required to sustain these groups may prove difficult to achieve in practice. Communities may view watch groups as nonviable and therefore not worth their time and effort, or they may lack the collective action capacity to sustain them overtime. Police, for their part, may lack the organizational capacity to mobilize, track, and manage these groups; they may find them to be difficult to manage or 'illegible', with constantly shifting memberships and unclear leadership structures; or they may view them as a threat to their authority (Tapscott, 2017). In light of these barriers, the coproduction approach to community policing may well fail to engender meaningful levels of coproduction or collective action from citizens.

Although coproductive models of community policing have become increasingly common in fragile states — and increasingly popular among the donors that support them — there remains little rigorous evidence to inform whether the potential benefits of this approach indeed outweigh the risks. And on the topic of vigilantism in particular, there exists an almost total lack of evidence on effective strategies to combat vigilantism. Existing research cast vigilantism as a phenomenon that arises in response to state weakness or absence (Dow et al., 2024; Jung & Kay Cohen, 2020), but few studies offer evidence on how to combat it. An important exception is the work of Wilke (2020), who shows that in-house alarms that improve police response capacity can increase reliance on the police and reduce support for vigilantism. This study expands on the work of Wilke (2020) by testing the impact of coproductive community policing, and by complementing attitudinal outcomes with multiple, independent measures of vigilantism in the real-world.

Setting

Liberia is a small West African nation of approximately 5 million people. Between 1989 and 2003, the country experienced two devastating civil wars that killed over two hundred thousand civilians, displaced a large majority of the population, and left the country's government in a state of collapse. Efforts to reform the security sector began in 2004 under the direction of the UN peacekeeping mission (UNMIL). Since then, the government and its international partners have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to train and equip Liberia's police force. Yet after more than a decade and a half of intensive reform, Liberia's police force still lacks effective presence in most neighborhoods and much of the country remains plagued by high levels of

crime and insecurity. This is especially true in Monrovia, Liberia's capital city and home to roughly 70% of the country's residents, many of whom live in densely-populated informal settlements. According to Round 7 Afrobarometer data collected in 2018, 52% of urban Liberians reported that they or someone they knew was a victim of theft in the past year, 24% reported that they or someone they knew was physically assaulted, and 28% said they felt unsafe in their neighborhood "several times", "many times", or "always" in the past year. Across all three sets of questions, these figures are considerably higher than the urban average for Africa as a whole.

While there are many factors that contribute to Monrovia's high crime rate, capacity constraints within the Liberian National Police (LNP) are widely seen as playing a central role. In 2009, the International Crisis Group described the LNP as "an institution that has serious management deficiencies, few working vehicles and scant communications equipment, often lacks even handcuffs or torchlights and still suffers from a widespread perception of malpractice" (International Crisis Group, 2009, p. 17). More than a decade later, this remains an accurate description of the force.

Among citizens, the police are widely perceived as "insufficiently motivated to adequately respond to crime," and "lacking the resources to patrol or be proactive in crime prevention" (Reeve and Speare, 2012, 8). This lack of confidence has made many citizens reluctant to cooperate with the police through activities like crime reporting, information sharing, and evidence provision, further hindering their ability to combat crime. According to survey data collected in 2012, fewer than half of crimes that occur are ever reported to the police (Gerber and Green, 2012). Among those that are reported, attending officers often complain of difficulty persuading citizens to come forward with information or evidence. As a result, only a small fraction of reported cases are ever solved or prosecuted (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

In relation to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Liberians' trust in their police force is low. According to the Round 8 Afrobarometer survey, just 25% of Liberians said they trusted the police "a lot" or "somewhat", as compared to 45% for the remaining 36 countries covered.

In addition to lacking confidence in the capacity of the police, many residents are unfamiliar with the law, the criminal justice system, and the procedures and costs associated with reporting crimes to the police. For victims of crime, this lack of awareness means they must spend considerable time and effort to learn about police procedures before reporting crimes, potentially deterring them from reporting at all.

Local Security Groups and Vigilantism in Urban Liberia

Exasperated by a lack of security and frustrated by poor police performance, many communities have elected to self-provide security by organizing local,

community-based security groups. The origins of these groups date to the period of crime and lawlessness that followed the end of the civil war in 2003, when communities formed vigilante groups to protect themselves from criminal gangs and armed robberies. Initially, these efforts were encouraged by the government as it sought to deliver on its campaign promise to crackdown on lawlessness (Rennie, 2006), though it never went so far as to provide material support or formal regulation.

Local security groups continued to operate independently until 2009, when the government sought to establish greater control over their activities as part of a larger effort to crackdown on mob violence and strengthen community/police partnerships (Zanker, 2017). With support from the UNDP, the Community Services Section of the LNP established the "Community Watch Forum" initiative, which sought to dispel extra-legal security groups and replace them with law-abiding Watch Forums that facilitate police work and encourage citizen-police cooperation and reliance in their communities. The initiative also outlined a strict set of rules to govern the conduct of these groups, established a formal application process to ensure that members properly trained and vetted, and assigned responsibility to local commanders for managing and overseeing group activities.

This initiative has not proven to be sustainable overtime, however, and today most Community Watch Forums are no longer active. In their place, local security groups with little or no connection to the LNP have again emerged. Supported by donations of food, tea, and sometimes money from community members, these groups tend to be very loosely organized and to activate only in response to specific incidents or during periods of peak criminal activity (e.g. during the rainy season).

Despite their lack of affiliation, these groups do not necessarily function as vigilante groups prone to violence, as in years past. To the contrary, many officers view them as an important source of support for the police — and an important alternative to extra-legal actions such as mob violence. Officers credit this shift in part to the Watch Forum Initiative, which although unsustainable, succeeded in widely publicizing that local security groups — whether affiliated with the police or not — must never engage in violence and must always immediately report suspects to police.

When vigilantism does occur, it is most often in direct reaction to an alleged crime and perpetrated by a spontaneously-organized group of residents.[2] In Bateson (2021)'s typology, vigilantism in this context is a collective act, implemented in public by spontaneously-organized individuals who perceive themselves to be defending their communities against crime. Vigilantism is thus a "high primacy" activity in the logic of Moncada (2017), with vigilantism being the primary force sustaining the collective perpetrators. Following Cohen et al. (2023)'s typology of collective vigilantism by aim (enforce social order vs. reduce crime) and extent of organization (spontaneous

vs. durable), vigilantism in urban Liberia is spontaneous and aimed at reducing crime, similar to acts of mob vigilantism in South Africa (Smith, 2015) or citizens punishing theieves in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (Jung and Cohen, 2020).

Community Policing in Urban Liberia

Recognizing the need to build trust, educate citizens about the criminal justice system, reign in local security groups with no police affiliation, and provide an alternative to vigilantism, the LNP with support from its international partners initiated a significant expansion of its community policing program in 2014. In Monrovia, two activities have been central this expansion. First, in each of Monrovia's ten administrative police zones, the LNP created outreach offices staffed by Community Policing Officers (CPOs) with special training in community outreach. In addition to their regular duties as patrol officers, the CPOs are responsible for organizing town hall meetings in communities on a semi-regular basis. During these meetings, officers educate residents about the criminal justice system, solicit information about security threats and brainstorm strategies to address them, and provide residents with the opportunity to ask questions or express concerns. Alongside these meetings, officers conduct foot patrols in which they interact with residents in small groups, solicit additional information about security concerns, and distribute informational pamphlets that reinforce the content communicated during the town hall meetings.

In the second component of the program, the CPOs use the town hall meetings as an opportunity to (re)introduce community leaders and residents to the Watch Forum initiative. The CPOs explain that Watch Forums are composed of groups of concerned citizens who assist the police by sharing information about security threats; meeting regularly with the police to design proactive, collaborative strategies to combat crime; facilitating police investigations in their communities; and conducting nighttime security patrols during periods of peak crime.

The LNP's support for this two-pronged approach to community policing is founded on the hope that town hall meetings, foot patrols and educational pamphlets will provide residents with the knowledge, familiarity, and confidence they need to rely on the police, while encouraging communities to form Watch Forums will help to direct them towards lawful, coproductive forms of security provision that strengthen rather than undermine state authority and help address police capacity constraints. This model remains untested, however, and comes with several potential limitations and risks, as discussed in Section 2.

Research Design

Sampling & Randomization

Monrovia is divided into ten administrative police zones, which are akin to police precincts in major U.S. cities and typically composed of between 15 and 40 communities or neighborhoods. Within each zone, local research assistants worked with the CPOs to identify any 'high priority' communities to be nominated for the intervention based on their assessments of high crime rates and/or strained police-community relations. This process identified 35 'high priority' communities. Because this sample size was smaller than anticipated and would have resulted in an under-powered study, an additional 65 communities were randomly sampled from the remaining population of communities to yield a target sample size of 100 communities. Half of the communities within each zone were then randomly assigned to treatment via block (i.e. zone) randomization. During the baseline survey, two communities were found to be duplicates of other communities and were dropped; during implementation, staffing constraints within the implementation monitoring team required that the smallest police zone be dropped. These two changes resulted in a final sample size of 93 communities, 45 of which were assigned to treatment. Appendix A.5 shows that treatment and control communities are well-balanced on baseline outcome indices and covariates: differences for only two out of twenty variables tested have a $p - value < 0.05$.

Further details on the sampling procedure for this study, including a discussion of minimum distances between communities that minimize the risk of spillover, are discussed in Appendix A.3.

Intervention & Implementation

Implementation began in February 2018 and continued for a period of ten months. In each of the 45 treatment communities, town hall meetings were held approximately every other month, usually on weekend afternoons, and were preceded by foot patrols during the week in which officers distributed informational pamphlets and alerted residents to the upcoming meeting. In total, each community hosted between 5 and 6 meetings and accompanying foot patrols. Attendance ranged from as little as 25 residents to as many as 80, but on average was 44 adult residents. Implementation of the program was monitored by research assistants from a local NGO who worked in close collaboration with the CPOs and accompanied them on all meetings and foot patrols, taking detailed notes on the proceedings, the topics covered during the meetings, and the questions raised during the Q&A.

The meetings covered a variety of topics, including: the Watch Forum initiative; the 'concept' of community policing and the importance of police/

community partnerships; the procedures for reporting crimes to the police; the Professional Standards Division of the LNP and its role in handling incidents of police misconduct; the Women and Children Protection Services division of the LNP and its role in handling domestic disputes and child endangerment; and the names and phone numbers of 'key contacts' at the local police station. Major themes from the research assistants' Observation Notes, along with the pamphlets used to summarize the messages communicated during the meetings, can be found in Appendix A.1.

Hypotheses

I pre-specified 16 hypotheses, 14 of which I test here.[3] My hypotheses centered on two broad pathways through which I expected the program to reduce crime and insecurity. First, I considered the program's potential impact on citizens' expectations of the costs and benefits of cooperation, and how changes in cooperation would in turn influence police effectiveness and crime. Second, I considered the program's potential impact on community coordination and collective action in coproductive forms of self-protection, and how these changes would in turn influence police effectiveness and crime. I organize these hypotheses into three mechanism categories — costs, benefits, and coproduction — as depicted in Table 1.

These three sets of mechanism hypotheses underlie the following primary hypotheses. First, as a result of lower costs and greater benefits to cooperation, I expected individual-level forms of cooperation to increase, as measured by information sharing (H1), crime reporting (H2), and willingness to report acts of police abuse (H3). Due to these changes as well as greater community coproduction, I expected the police to become more effective, leading to lower crime (H4), improved perceptions of security (H5), and greater satisfaction with police performance (H6).

In addition to these pre-specified hypotheses, this study tests whether the program reduced the incidence of mob violence (H7) and whether it improved knowledge of the rules governing community watch groups/forums (M3b). Although not pre-registered, these hypothesis are a direct corollary of my pre-specified hypotheses on coproduction and attitudes towards mob violence. In addition, construction of the M3b index follows the same procedure as all the other pre-specified index variables, and includes every variable relevant to knowledge of the rules governing watch groups, which was a standalone section in the survey. Similarly, the incidence of mob violence (H7) is measured using the single survey variable on this topic. And both M3b and H7 are tested using the same pre-specified estimation equation as the other indices. Taken together, these considerations leave little to no room for false positive results due to p-hacking.

Table 1. Hypotheses and Outcome Indices.

Mechanisms	Index name	Hypothesis	Pre-specified?
Costs of cooperation			
Increase familiarity with the police	know_pol_idx	M1a	Y
Increase knowledge of the criminal justice system	know_idx	M1b	Y
Improve perceptions of police intentions	intentions_idx	M1c	Y
Reduce social sanctions for reporting	norm_idx	M1d	Y
Benefits of cooperation			
Improve perceptions of police capacity	police_capacity_idx	M2a	Y
Improve perceptions of police responsiveness	pol_responsiveness	M2b	Y
Community coordination & coproduction			
Reduce norms supporting mob violence	sup_mobviol_idx	M3a	Y
Improve knowledge of rules governing watch groups/ forums	know_cwt_idx	M3b	N
Increase contributions to community coproduction	ca_sec_idx	M3c	Y
Primary hypotheses	Index name	Hypothesis	
Cooperation With police			
Increase reporting of crimes to the police	crime_reporting_idx	H1	Y
Increase crime tips & information sharing	tips_idx	H2	Y
Increase willingness to report police abuse	police_abuse_idx	H3	Y
Security			
Reduce the incidence of crime	crime_victim_idx	H4	Y
Improve perceptions of security	future_security_idx	H5	Y
Improve satisfaction with police performance	satis_idx	H6	Y
Reduce the incidence of mob violence	cmob_num	H7	N

Notes: Each index is a composite index constructed from several individual variables. For full details on the construction of the indices, see Appendix A.13.

Monitoring and Minimizing Risks to Human Subjects

This study was conducted with IRB approval and adheres to the American Political Science Association's Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research. Going beyond these basic requirements, the research team took extensive efforts to monitor and minimize risks to human subjects in this study. These topics are discussed in detail in Appendix A.2.

Empirical Analysis

The empirical analysis in this paper follows my pre-analysis plan, which described in complete detail the procedure for constructing outcome variables, the estimation equations, and the procedure used to account for multiple comparisons. Replication data for this article are available at the Comparative Political Studies Dataverse (Morse, 2024).

Data

This study draws on three sources of data. First, I draw on data from baseline and endline surveys administered to a random sample of 20 adults in July 2017 (eight months prior to the start of the intervention) and January 2019 (three months after the end of the intervention), respectively, in each of the 93 study communities. In addition to background information on demographics, the surveys measured outcomes pertaining to each of my 15 hypotheses, as detailed below. Second, I draw on the LNP's administrative data on crimes reported during the same 18 month period. However, because these data capture only a fraction of crimes that are actually reported to the police, and because they do not allow us to distinguish between crimes that occur and crimes that were reported, they are not used for testing the hypotheses above. Results for administrative crime data are reported in the Appendix.

I also draw on data from a survey of patrol officers and a review of police logbooks at each of Monrovia's 32 police stations designed to capture information on incidents of mob violence. These data were collected in March 2019 for purposes of informing and validating the results from the large-N survey. Further details on these data are provided in Section 6.4.

Outcome Variables

Table 1 summarizes the hypotheses tested in this study. Each hypothesis is linked to a cluster of between two and fourteen variables linked to individual survey questions. To mitigate the risk of false positives, I test each hypothesis using a single composite index constructed by i) standardizing each variable by its baseline mean and standard deviation, and then ii) taking the mean

across the individual variables in the cluster for each respondent. Appendix A.13 provides complete details on the construction of the composite indices and the corresponding variables and survey questions; Appendix A.4 reports summary statistics for each constituent variable, organized by outcome cluster.

Table 1 organizes the hypotheses and corresponding outcomes into two categories — mechanism hypotheses and primary hypotheses. When testing the primary hypotheses, I use the procedure outlined in Benjamini and Hochberg (1995) to adjust my *p*-values and control the risk of false discovery to 5%. In Appendix A.10, I report results individually for all the variables within each outcome cluster, also using the procedure outlined in Benjamini and Hochberg (1995) to control the within-cluster false discovery rate to 5%.

Estimation

The estimand in this study is the average treatment effect of the intervention on the sample communities (i.e. the SATE). To estimate this, I use weighted least squares (OLS) regression of the outcome on a dummy variable indicating whether or not the community was assigned to the treatment group, with weights constructed as the product of i) the inverse of the probability of assignment to treatment/control, and ii) the inverse of the probability that an individual was selected for the endline survey. The former accounts for the fact that the probability that a community is assigned to treatment or control varies across randomization blocks (i.e. police zones); the latter accounts for the fact that individuals from relatively large communities have a lower likelihood of being included in the endline sample compared to those from relatively small communities.

Standard errors are clustered at the community level to account for the cluster-randomized design, and all specifications include block fixed effects. For outcomes measured at both baseline and endline, I also include the community-level average outcome at baseline as a control variable (because the baseline-endline survey is not an individual-level panel, I cannot control for baseline outcomes at the individual level).

Threats to Inference

Measurement Error. Most of the outcomes in this study are self-reported. This introduces the possibility of response bias correlated with treatment. e.g., if respondents associate the endline survey with the intervention, this could cause them to underreport certain crimes or incidents, or to report attitudes consistent with messages conveyed during the program (e.g. opposition to mob violence), introducing bias. While I cannot rule out this possibility entirely, I can point out that, taken as a whole, the patterns reported below are inconsistent with social desireability bias: although some effects align with

social desirability bias towards program messages, effects on several of the outcomes most closely associated with program messages and the risk of bias are null. In addition, in Section 6.4, I replicate the main results on mob violence using a completely independent data source that is not subject to the risk of social desirability bias correlated with treatment.

Spillover. Because communities are large and populous, and because no two communities in the sample are adjacent, the risk of spillover is likely to be low. I discuss this risk in detail in Appendix A.3.

Results

Intensity of Treatment

From administrative implementation data, we know that treatment communities on average received 5.4 town hall meetings, with most meetings attended by between 20 and 30 people. Table 2 tests whether these activities resulted in a measurable increase in police presence in the eyes of citizens. The results indicate that community interactions with police were .70 standard deviations higher in treatment communities than in control communities (95% CI [.58, 82]), an effect that's driven by greater exposure to town hall meetings with police rather than by more frequent foot or vehicle patrols. Substantively, the proportion of residents reporting they had attended a meeting with the police in the past six months increased by 31 percentage points in treatment communities, to 40% from a mean of 10% in control communities.[4]

Table 2. Intensity of Treatment.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Intensity of treatment	Sees foot patrols	Sees vehicle patrols	Attended police
	Index (std)	Daily or weekly	Daily or weekly	mtg past 6m
Treatment	0.70***	0.01	0.02	0.31***
	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Covariates	Y	Y	Y	Y
Ctrl_mean	0.06	0.11	0.12	0.10
Observations	1836	1851	1851	1851

Weighted least squares with block fixed effects, following Section 5. Robust standard errors in parenthesis, clustered by community. Full results in Appendix A.6.
$^{+}$ $p < .10$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

These results suggest that the intervention's impacts on the primary and secondary outcomes in this study were driven primarily by changes precipitated by the town-hall meetings rather than by changes linked to police presence, such as deterrence during foot patrols or problem-oriented policing. They also suggest that whatever follow-up actions the police took in response to information acquired through the meetings did not involve a significant increase in police presence.

Impacts on Hypothesized Mechanisms

Figure 1 plots average treatment effects on composite indices for each of my hypothesized mechanisms. The program did not improve residents' overall familiarity with the police ($\beta = -.02$, 95% CI [−.08, .04]), as measured by the composite measure constructed from questions about the knowledge of police services (e.g. the existence of a women's and child protection unit) and personal familiarity with local police officers (e.g. knowing the name and

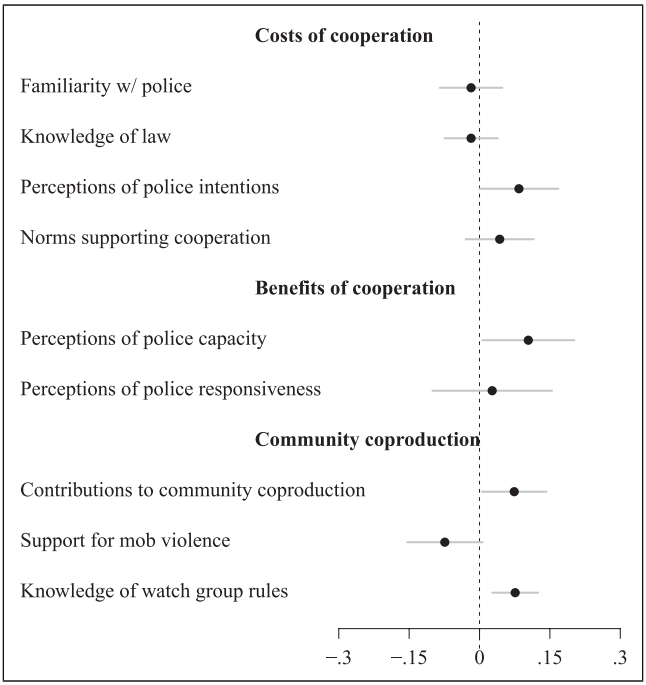

Figure 1. Effects on hypothesized mechanisms.
Notes: Average Treatment Effects on indices for hypothesized mechanisms. All indices standardized by baseline mean and standard deviation. $N = 1851$. See Appendix A.7 for results in regression table format.

phone number of an officer). It also did not improve knowledge of Liberia law ($\beta = -.02$, 95% CI [−.08, .04]), as measured by questions on habeas corpus, the right to legal counsel, the legality of "case registration fees," and laws on statutory rape and child abuse, among other basic legal questions.

Figure 1 also suggests the program did not strengthen social norms supporting cooperation with police ($\beta = .04$, 95% CI [−.04, .12]). Substantively, residents of treatment communities were roughly just as likely to say that community members become angry when you report burglaries, land disputes, or domestic violence to the police, as compared to residents of control communities. They were also comparably likely to say that providing the police with information to solve crimes can lead to backlash.

Despite these null effects, the program was successful at improving perceptions of police intentions ($\beta = .08$, 95% CI [.0, .16]) and capacity ($\beta = .10$, 95% CI [.0, .2]). Most notably, residents of treatment communities were six percentage points less likely to view the police as corrupt (a decrease of 12% relative to the control group mean); five percentage points more likely to say the police treat all citizens fairly (12%), six percentage points more likely to say the police care about the well-being of residents (9%), and seven percentage points (12%) more likely view the police as capable of responding to crimes in a timely manner. Changes in perceptions on other dimensions of intentions and capacity were modest and not statistically significant, but always positive (Appendix A.10).

The program's most significant and consistent impacts were on the set of outcomes targeted by the Community Watch Forum initiative. Here, I find large and substantively meaningful effects on community collective action and contributions to local security groups ($\beta = .07$, 95% CI [.01, .13]). As reported in Figure 2, residents of treatment communities were 13 percentage points more likely to attend a security meeting in the past month, four percentage points more likely to participate in a security patrol, six percentage points more likely to report that a community watch forum exists in their community, six percentage points more likely to report the watch forum meets at least monthly, and seven percentage points more likely to report the watch forum was registered or affiliated with the police, as compared to residents of control communities.[5] As a whole, these improvements amount to a .07 standard deviation increase in the community coordination and coproduction index. It is important to note that because the one-month recall period for these actions does not overlap with the intervention, which ended three to four months prior to the endline, these effects are not merely a function of participation in the intervention itself.

Importantly, greater coproduction by communities was accompanied by greater knowledge of the rules governing local security groups ($\beta = .08$, 95% CI [.04, .12]). As compared to residents of control communities, residents of treatment communities were: nine percentage points more likely to know security groups are not permitted to carry weapons, five percentage points more likely to know they cannot beat an uncooperative suspect into

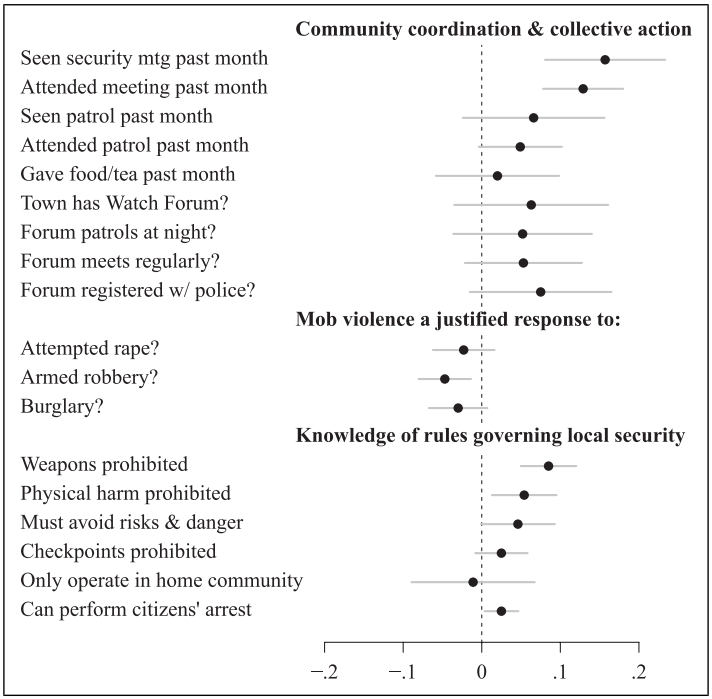

Figure 2. Effects on coproduction indices disaggregated by component variables. *Notes:* Average Treatment Effects on component variables for coproduction indices. All outcome variables are binary. See Appendix A.8 for results in regression table format.

submission, four percentage points more likely to know they should not enter into dangerous situations, and four percentage points more likely to know they *can* detain a suspect until police arrive provided they do not cause harm.

And finally, the program appears to have reduced support for mob violence, as measured by whether respondents believe mob violence would be "justified" or "somewhat justified" in response to three hypothetical scenarios of crime ($\beta = -.07$, 95% CI [.0, −.15]). While this effect is only marginally significant ($p < .1$), it is consistent with the findings reported above and below, lending credence to the assumption that it is not a Type I error.

Impacts on Primary Outcomes - Cooperation, Crime, and Security

The LNP's community policing program was designed to reduce the costs of cooperation, increase the expected benefits, and catalyze coproduction from citizens. These changes, in turn, were expected to increase cooperation, reduce

reliance on extralegal practices, and improve police effectiveness, potentially leading lower crime and greater security.

Thus far, the results suggest the program may have increased the expected the benefits of cooperation and reduced the expected costs by improving perceptions of police capacity and intentions, but that overall changes to individuals' cost-benefit calculations were likely modest due to the null effects on knowledge of Liberian law, familiarity with police services, and perceptions of police responsiveness. Improvements in coproduction, by contrast, were large and substantively meaningful, and could potentially have contributed to greater security either directly (e.g. by deterring crimes), indirectly (e.g. by facilitating police work), or by substituting legal forms of coproduction for violent, illegal practices.

This section tests for such downstream impacts. As above, I report average effects on the composite index for each hypothesis in the main text of the paper and effects on the individual variables that make up each index in the appendix.[6] The results, reported in Figure 3, indicate the program did not

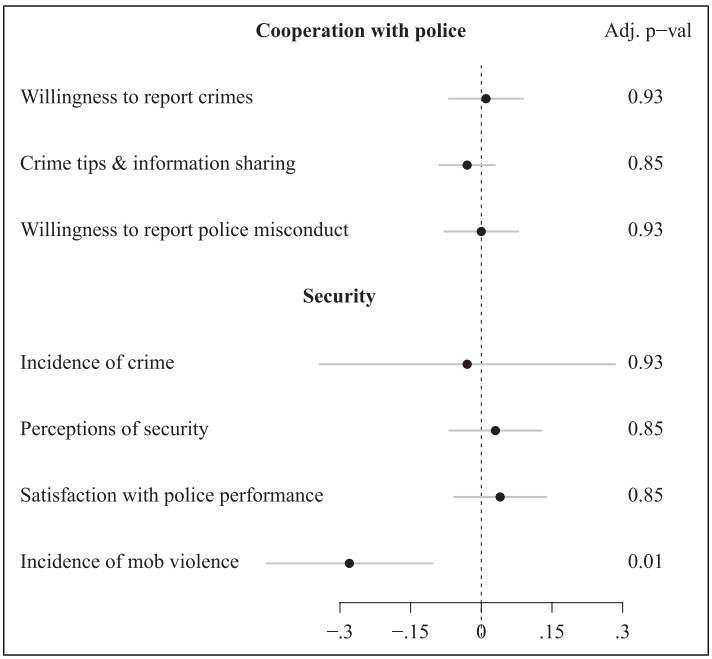

Figure 3. Effects on primary outcomes.
Notes: Average Treatment Effects on indices for primary outcomes. All indices standardized by baseline mean and standard deviation. *p*-values adjusted following Benjamini and Hochberg (1995). See Appendix A.9 for results in regression table format.

statistically-signficantly improve individual forms of cooperation with the police, as measured by i) willingness to report crimes to the police (β = .01, 95% CI [−.07, .09]), ii) provision of information or crime tips to police in the past six months (β = −.03, 95% CI [−.11, .05]), or iii) willingness to report police misconduct (β = .00, 95% CI [−.08, .08]). The program also did not significantly increase the likelihood that victims of crime subsequently reported their case to the police, as I show in the Appendix A.12).

As alluded to above, the absence of significant impacts on these outcomes may reflect the fact that changes to individuals' assessments of the costs and benefits of cooperation were too modest to influence cooperation or reliance. Indeed, during the town hall meetings, instances of police failing to follow-up on crime tips or adequately investigate crimes came up repeatedly, complaints which officers openly acknowledged as issues they struggle with. Given that the intervention did not materially change police capacity or resources, residents' grim assessments of the value of reliance may have (justifiably) remained unchanged.

The program also did not significantly reduce the overall incidence of crime (β = .01, 95% CI [−.31, .33]) or most of the particular categories of crime measured in the survey, including: armed robbery, burglary, aggravated assault, simple assault, sexual violence, domestic violence, and violent and non-violent land disputes. In the appendix, I replicate the null overall effect on crime using the LNP's administrative data on reported crimes, lending additional weight to the conclusion that the program did not reduce crime.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the null effects on crime, the program appears to have had little overall impact on perceptions of security. Substantively, residents of treatment communities were about as likely to fear violent or non-violent crime in the future or to have feared crime or felt unsafe walking in their community in the past six months, as compared to residents of control communities. They were, however, four and five percentage points, respectively, more likely to say they would feel safe leaving their generator or motorbike outside their home at night — modest though statistically significant effects that could potentially reflect greater nighttime activity by local security groups.

Perhaps the most important finding reported in Figure 3 is the .28 standard deviation reduction in the incidence of mob violence (β = −.28, 95% CI [−.44, −.12]). Substantively, residents of treatment communities reported an average of .34 fewer instances of mob violence in their communities in the past year, a reduction of 39% relative to the control group mean. Notably, these results do not appear to be a function of social desirability bias. Differences between treatment and control communities in the incidence of other types of crime that could potentially been seen as socially undesirable by respondents, such as riots, murders or any of the categories of crime measured in the crime index, are small and statistically insignificant. Moreover, we do

not observe positive effects on other sets of outcomes potentially seen as socially desirable, such as willingness to report crimes or the provision of information to police in the past 6 months, as reported above.

Robustness of Effects on Mob Violence

It is not possible to validate the mob violence finding using administrative crime reports from the LNP because incidents of mob violence are seldom recorded in official crime reports, even when reported to police. Indeed, of the 17,508 incidents included the LNP's database of crimes occurring between July 2017 and January 2019, there is only one report of mob violence, despite the fact that there were at least a dozen high-profile incidents during this timeframe that *did* involve a police response and were reported in the local press or on social media.

In light of the limitations to administrative data, I assigned a team of research assistants to visit each of Monrovia's 32 police stations in March 2019 — three weeks after the endline concluded and two weeks after my initial analysis — to collect independent information on incidents of mob violence from patrol officers. As street-level agents with a close working familiarity of communities, officers are well-positioned to serve as key-informants for incidents of mob violence, including those that never made it into police records. And because they did not participate in or know about the intervention, they are also not subject to the risk of social desirability bias correlated with treatment.[7]

The research assistants first reviewed the police station logbooks and met with on-duty patrol officers to inquire about any known incidents of mob violence in the past seven months (from August 2018 to February 2019). For any identified incident, an officer with first or reliable second-hand knowledge of incident was administered a short survey about the incident. The survey covered the approximate date and time of the incident, the events leading up to the incident, the outcome of the incident, and the location of the incident.[8]

The resulting dataset includes 41 incidents. All but two were precipitated by an act of petty theft, such as stealing a phone or handbag in a market, and about half occurred at or after dusk. None of the incidents resulted in death, but 73% (30/41) required treatment at a hospital. None of these incidents were recorded in the LNP's electronic database, and only 20% (8/41) were documented in police logbooks.

Of the 41 incidents documented by the key informant survey, 15 occurred in communities included in this study's sample – 11 in control communities and 4 in treatment communities. Table 3 reports these results in a community-level OLS regression framework, following the pre-specified estimation equation for community-level outcomes documented in my pre-analysis plan. The results show that treatment reduced the likelihood of mob violence

Table 3. Effect on mob Violence (police Survey).

	Acts of mob violence	
	In community, past 8 months	
Treatment	−0.14^{+}	−0.15^{+}
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Ctrl group mean	0.23	0.23
Block fixed effects	N	Y
N	93	93

Notes: Community-level regression of the # of mob violence incidents on treatment. Standard errors in parentheses.
$^{+}$ $p < .10$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

occurring in treatment communities by 14 percentage points ($p < .074$), or about 60% relative to the control group mean. The effect is only marginally significant, but it is consistent with the findings from the citizen survey in its direction and magnitude relative to the control group mean.

Discussion

Mechanisms Underlying Reductions in Mob Violence

What explanations might account for the intervention's negative effect on mob violence? While it is impossible to answer this question definitively, two potential explanations stand out as plausible.[9] First, the intervention may have altered the knowledge, attitudes, and norms of members of local security groups, making them more supportive of the rule of law and more integrated into formal policing practices. Related, the intervention may have removed members with a reputation for violence or criminal behavior (e.g. through the vetting process associated with the Watch Forum initiative). As a result of these changes, local security groups may have become less likely to perpetrate acts of vigilantism and more likely intervene to stop them from occurring.

A second potential explanation is that the intervention altered the knowledge, attitudes and norms among residents, making them more aware of how they can respond to crimes in a lawful manner by supporting or calling upon Watch Forums, more supportive of the rule of law, and less likely to resort to vigilantism.

One way to evaluate the plausibility of the first explanation is to test whether those who participate in the provision of local security differ across treatment and control communities in terms of their norms, attitudes, and orientation towards the police. To this end, I regress indices for the attitudinal and normative outcomes in this study — familiarity with police, knowledge of the law, norms against cooperation, perceptions of police capacity, intentions, and

responsiveness, support for mob violence, and knowledge of Watch Forum rules — on an indicator for treatment while subsetting to respondents who report either attending a security meeting in the past month or participating in a security patrol.[10] Because participation is post-treatment, the results of this analysis do not have a causal interpretation, but they can be interpreted descriptively as an indication of whether there are statistically significant differences between local security providers in treatment versus control communities.

The results, reported in Table 4, indicate that local security providers in treatment communities are more optimistic about police capacity and intentions, more knowledgeable of the rules governing their conduct, (weakly) less supportive of mob violence and (weakly) more supportive of cooperation with the police. Further support for the idea that the intervention made local security providers more supportive of the rule of law is found in the Observation Notes recorded by local research assistants during the town hall meetings, which document several instances in which members of Community Watch Forums acted to diffuse situations that otherwise could have escalated into mob violence (Appendix A.1).

The results reported in this paper are also consistent with the second explanation, whereby the intervention's impact on knowledge, norms, and attitudes among residents as a whole made them less likely to resort to vigilantism. Not only were residents of treatment communities less supportive of mob violence, they were also more aware of the presence of local groups

Table 4. Differences Between Members of local Security Groups in Treatment versus Control communities.

	Familiarity	Knowledge	Police	Norms against
	W/police	Of law	intentions_idx	Cooperation
Treatment	−0.07	−0.03	0.16*	−0.08
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)
N	581	581	581	581
	Perceptions Police capacity	Support for mob violence	Knowledge of Security rules	
Treatment	0.23**	−0.12	0.04*	
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.02)	
N	580	580	581	

Notes: Weighted least squares with block fixed effects, following Section 5.3. Outcome indices constructed according to pre-specified procedure outlined in Section 5. Standard errors in parentheses, clustered by community. Sample size varies across specifications due to "Do not know" responses, which are coded as NA.
+ p < 0.10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

operating in coordination with the police in their communities. In particular and as previously reported in Figure 2, they were considerably more likely to either participate in security meetings or group activities (30%) or to be aware of them happening (50%), relative to residents of control communities (at 18% and 35%, respectively). In addition, analysis of additional outcomes from the endline survey indicates they were: eight percentage points more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement "My community is well-organized in the fight against crime" ($p < .18$); thirteen percentage points more likely to agree or strongly agree that "Leaders in my community have a close working relationship with the police"($p < .03$); nine percentage points more likely to agree or strongly agree that "Members of my community do a good job of working together to help the police" ($p < .08$); and five percentage points more agree or strongly agree that "Leaders in my community do a good job of organizing my community to combat crime" ($p < .38$). While these differences do not constitute direct evidence of substitution away from vigilantism, they do suggest that residents of treatment communities became more aware of Watch Forums and their ability to respond to crimes in a lawful manner that complements rather than substitutes for the police, and that their perceptions of the efficacy and accessibility of these groups improved.

Coproduction and the Risk of Adverse Impact

Coproduction plays a central role in helping resource-constrained governments provide essential public services (Post et al., 2017). However, because it requires the state to delegate authority and concede direct control of service provision, coproduction can also compromise accountability and equity in access to services (Cammett & MacLean, 2014). This is especially true of coproduction in the security sector, where the power afforded to non-state actors has the potential to undermine informal sources of accountability and enable predatory behavior (Baranyi et al., 2011, 135). In extreme cases, collaboration with non-state security actors can give rise to vigilante groups or militias that become emboldened to acquire political power and resist states' efforts to reassert control (Hidalgo and Lessing, 2015; Krasner & Risse, 2014).

In the case of Liberia's model of community policing, these risks do not appear to have materialized. On the contrary and as presented in Table 4 above, local security providers in treatment communities became more supportive of the rule of law and more inclined to cooperate with police. As an additional test for potential adverse effects of coproduction models of community policing, I assess its impact on perceptions of community leaders, who were actively involved in facilitating the intervention and coordinating security groups, on the assumption that perceptions of leaders would decline if local security groups lacked accountability or became involved in predatory behavior.

Table 5. Effects on Perceptions of local Leaders.

	Perceptions	Leaders	Leaders	Leaders
	Index (std)	Treat all equal?	Corrupt?	Rule transparently?
Treatment	0.14*	0.13^{+}	−0.09	0.09
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Ctrl mean	−0.08	2.03	1.62	2.37
Block fixed effects	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	1851	1851	1851	1851

Weighted least squares with block fixed effects, following Section 5.3. Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by community. Outcomes in columns 2-4 measured on a four-point, agree-disagree scale.
$^{+}$ $p < .10$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table 5 reports the results of this analysis, following the same estimation procedure used for the main analysis and outlined in Section 5.3. Contrary to the idea that mobilizing communities to form local security groups empowers 'local despots', the results suggest the intervention actually *improved* perceptions of local leaders,[11] who played a central role in organizing the intervention and managing the Watch Forums. Substantively, residents of treatment communities were about 6% more likely to believe leaders treat all residents the same, 4% less likely to view leaders as corrupt, and 4% more likely to believe their leaders rule transparently, relative to residents in control communities. Not all of these differences are significant, but they all point in the same direction, and the effect on the composite index (Column 1) *is* statistically significant.

Conclusion

Police in weak states face many obstacles in trying to provide security, not least of which is a severe shortage of capacity. In the absence of effective policing, communities often resort to extralegal practices such as mob violence, lynching, and vigilantism. Community policing programs have been at the forefront of governments' efforts to address this challenge. These programs aim to do this by building confidence in the police, dissuading citizens from reliance on extralegal practices, and providing legal, rights-respecting pathways through which communities may coproduce security.

But there is little evidence on whether these programs work as intended. I address this gap by experimentally evaluating the Liberian National Police's coproduction model of community policing. I show that program improved familiarity and perceptions of police and mobilized communities to coproduce security by forming local security groups and incorporating them into the

police's Watch Forum initiative. I further show that these changes were accompanied by a roughly 40% reduction in the incidence of mob violence.

I also find, however, that despite improvements in trust and coproduction, the program did not reduce crime, improve perceptions of security or increase crime reporting. I argue that these null effects most likely reflect the fact that capacity constraints within the LNP remained unchanged by the intervention. As a result, efforts by communities and security groups to provide crime tips or facilitate police investigations were seldom met with an effective police response, and most residents remained skeptical of the value of reporting crimes or otherwise cooperating with police.

These findings have important implications for the literature on coproduction as a strategy to supplement weak state capacity in developing countries. Much of this literature assumes that coproductive strategies are most important precisely where capacity constraints are most severe, because states with low capacity can least afford to provide services on their own. My findings, on the other hand, suggest a certain baseline level of capacity may be a prerequisite for successful coproduction. When capacity is so low that government institutions cannot reciprocate citizens' contributions with contributions of their own, coproduction is unlikely to improve the quality of services.

My findings also suggest, however, that while coproduction cannot substitute for the shortcomings of weak states, it can be effective at drawing communities away from harmful or rights-abusing practices. This finding has important implications for other service sectors where provision by non-state actors may conflict with international standards or human rights, such as the justice, health, and education sectors. When designing policies in these and other sectors where non-state providers are prevalent, policymakers should consider coproduction not only for its potential to supplement state capacity, but also for its potential to divert non-state actors away from harmful practices.

Lastly, this study contributes to the broader literature on state-building, which has long equated the centralization and consolidation of state power with the ability to engender compliance with the law (Migdal & Schlichte, 2005). Contrary to this perspective, I show that *delegating* authority to local leaders and communities through coproduction can actually *strengthen* compliance with the law by converting potential rule-breakers into law-abiding coproducers. This finding is consistent with prior work on coproduction in more developed states, which shows that by bringing citizens and state officials together for a common cause, coproduction can build trust and social capital that spills-over into increased compliance (Cammett & MacLean, 2014; Tsai, 2011). I extend this literature by showing that coproduction can lead to a similar dynamic in the security sector in weak states, improving relations between police and citizens, engendering norms against vigilantism,

reducing extra-legal violence, and integrating otherwise peripheral communities into the state's process of providing public goods. While further research is needed to verify the scope and generalizability of this potential, the setting studied here has several defining features: a weak and ineffective police force, pervasive crime, low trust in the police, and a pattern of extra-legal violence by citizens exasperated by insecurity. In settings like this, co-production appears to be a promising strategy for building trust and compliance in the state and its rule of law.

Acknowledgments

For valuable comments I thank Lily Tsai, Daniel Hidalgo, Evan Lieberman, researchers in EGAP's Metaketa IV initiative, and seminar participants at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Special thanks to Miatta Konah, Zayzay Kolubah, Morlu Kpalle, Boye Pewu, and Prince Williams for excellent research assistance.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This project was supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the Experiments in Governance and Politics (EGAP) Network.

ORCID iD

Benjamin S. Morse https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5765-6110

Data Availability Statement

Data and replication materials for this article are available at the Comparative Political Studies Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VU2ZPQ) (Morse, 2024).

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Following Boege et al. (2009) and much of the literature on multi-layered models of security reform (Dinnen & Peake, 2013), I use the term *hybrid* to refer to

security systems in which both state and non-state actors contribute to the production of security.

2. According to the mob-violence events data collected for this study, 95% of events were preciptated by an act of theft, such as stealing a phone or handbag in a market.
3. My pre-analysis plan is available at: https://osf.io/t4eya Apart from the coproduction hypotheses, the hypotheses tested is this study were harmonized with the Metaketa initiative (Blair et al., 2021). The two that are excluded from this paper are not directly relevant to the topics covered here. Concretely, they pertain to secondary impacts on attitudes toward government, as well as officer-level changes of behavior, neither of which were expected in this study. Results for these hypotheses are reported in Appendix A.12.
4. This level of intensity was more than 3 times larger than the average standardized intensity of the interventions evaluated in Blair et al. (2021), reducing concerns that the results are influenced by weak intensity of treatment.
5. There is considerable variation across police zones in what it means for a Watch Forum to be "registered" with the police. The survey question on registration was not written on the assumption that respondents would necessarily be well-informed about the registration process or their Forum's registration status; rather it was meant to capture whether residents perceive the Forum to be working in coordination with the police (e.g. because they see police attend Forum meetings, or because they see group members walking or talking with police in their community).
6. Results on the indices for each of my primary hypotheses with multiple comparisons adjustments are also reported in the Appendix. Levels of statistical significance are unchanged from those reported here.
7. None of the officer informants overlapped with those participating in the intervention. In addition, because the intervention was organized from the headquarters station for each of the nine zones, officers from only nine of the 32 stations would have had colleagues that participated in the intervention. Lastly, even officers who conducted the intervention were not actually aware of the evaluation study — they were simply told by the CPO and their commanding officer when and where they would be participating.
8. In some cases, on-duty patrol officers reported that one of their off-duty colleagues was most knowledgeable about the incident, in which case the survey was scheduled for their next daytime shift.
9. Note that it is unlikely that the intervention had any deterrent effect on vigilantism, as police presence did not increase outside the town hall meetings.
10. 26% of respondents from control communities attended a meeting or participated in a security patrol in the past month, as compared to 37% in treatment communities.
11. In Monrovia, it is customary for each community to have a town chairperson, a leader for each neighborhood block, and various miscellaneous leaders such as the the women's group and youth group leaders. These persons are not government employees and are typically elected through informal community elections.

References

Abrahams, R. G. (1998). *Vigilant citizens: Vigilantism and the state*. Polity Press.

Andrews, M., Woolcock, M., & Pritchett, L. (2017). *Building state capability: Evidence, analysis, action*. Oxford University Press.

Baker, B. (2009). *Security in post-conflict Africa: The role of nonstate policing*. CRC Press.

Baker, B., & Scheye, E. (2007). Multi-layered justice and security delivery in post-conflict and fragile states: Analysis. *Conflict, Security and Development*, *7*(4), 503–528. https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800701692944

Baranyi, S., Beaudet, P., & Locher, U. (2011). *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development*. The World Bank.

Bateson, R. (2021). The politics of vigilantism. *Comparative Political Studies*, *54*(6), 923–955. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020957692

Benjamini, Y., & Hochberg, Y. (1995). Controlling the false discovery rate: A practical and powerful approach to multiple testing. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society - Series B: Statistical Methodology*, *57*(1), 289–300. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2517-6161.1995.tb02031.x

Blair, G., Weinstein, J. M., Christia, F., Arias, E., Badran, E., Blair, R. A., Cheema, A., Farooqui, A., Fetzer, T., Grossman, G., Haim, D., Hameed, Z., Hanson, R., Hasanain, A., Kronick, D., Morse, B. S., Muggah, R., Nadeem, F., Tsai, L. L., & Wilke, A. M. (2021). Community policing does not build citizen trust in police or reduce crime in the Global South. *Science*, *374*(6571), Article eabd3446. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abd3446

Blair, R., Karim, S., & Morse, B. (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. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000121

Boege, V., Brown, M. A., & Clements, K. P. (2009). Hybrid political orders, not fragile states. *Peace Review*, *21*(1), 13–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650802689997

Brunson, R. K. (2007). Police don't like black people? African-American young men's accumulated police experiences. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *6*(1), 71–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2007.00423.x

Cammett, M., & MacLean, L. M. (2014). *The politics of non-state social welfare*. Cornell University Press.

Carothers, T. (2006). *Promoting the rule of law abroad: In search of knowledge*. Brookings Institution Press.

Chirayath, L., Sage, C., & Woolcock, M. (2005). *Customary Law and Policy Reform: Engaging with the Plurality of Justice Systems*. The World Bank.

Cohen, D. K., Jung, D. F., & Weintraub, M. (2023). Special symposium, collective vigilantism in global comparative perspective introduction: collective vigilantism in global comparative perspective. *Comparative Politics*, *55*(2), 239–261. https://doi.org/10.5129/001041523x16630894935073

Darley, J. M., Carlsmith, K. M., & Robinson, P. H. (2000). Incapacitation and just deserts as motives for punishment. *Law and Human Behavior*, *24*(6), 659–683. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1005552203727

Denney, L. (2014). *Justice and security reform: Development agencies and informal institutions in Sierra Leone*. Routledge.

Denney, L., & Jenkins, S. (2013). *Securing communities: The what and the how of community policing*. Overseas Development Institute. Background Paper.

Dinnen, S., & Peake, G. (2013). More than just policing: Police reform in post-conflict Bougainville. *International peacekeeping*, *20*(5), 570–584. https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2013.853961

Dow, D. A., Levy, G., Romero, D., & Tellez, J. F. (2024). State absence, Vengeance, and the logic of vigilantism in Guatemala. *Comparative Political Studies*, *57*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140231169O2

Downie, R. (2013). *Building police institutions in fragile states: Case studies from Africa*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Ferreira, B. R. (1996). The use and effectiveness of community policing in a democracy. In *Policing in central and Eastern Europe: Comparing Firsthand knowledge with experience from the west*. College of Police and Security Studies.

García-Ponce, O., Young, L., & Zeitzoff, T. (2023). *Anger and Support for Retribution in Mexico's Drug war*. Journal of Peace Research.

Gerber, A. S., & Green, D. P. (2012). *Field Experiments: Design, analysis, and interpretation*. W. W. Norton.

Gill, C., Weisburd, D., Telep, C. W., Vitter, Z., & Bennett, T. (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. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-014-9210-y

Gonzalez, Y., & Mayka, L. (2023). Policing, Democratic participation, and the Reproduction of Asymmetric citizenship. *American Political Science Review*, *117*(1), 263–279. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055422000636.

Hidalgo, D., & Benjamin, L. (2015). *Endogenous state weakness in violent democracies: Paramilitaries at the polls*. Mass. Inst. Technol..Working Papers.

Human Rights Watch. (2013). *"No money, No justice": Police corruption and abuse in Liberia*. Human Rights Watch.

International Crisis Group. (2009). *Liberia: Uneven progress in security sector reform*. International Crisis Group. Number 148.

Johnson, D. (2009). Anger about crime and support for punitive criminal justice policies. *Punishment & Society*, *11*(1), 51–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474508098132

Jung, D. F., & Kay Cohen, D. (2020). *Lynching and local justice: Legitimacy and accountability in weak states*. Cambridge University Press.

Kagoro, J. (2019). The crime preventers scheme: A community policing initiative for Regime security in Uganda. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, *13*(1), 41–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2018.1501982

Karim, S. (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. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055419000716

Krasner, S. D., & Risse, T. (2014). External actors, state-building, and service provision in areas of limited statehood: Introduction. *Governance*, *27*(4), 545–567. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12065

Mack, A., Merz, S., Bui, M., & Cooper, T. (2013). *Human security report 2013: The decline in global violence: Evidence, explanation, and contestation. Human security report project*. Simon Fraser University.

Migdal, J. S., Kohli, A., & Shue, V. (1994). *State power and social forces: Domination and transformation in the third world*. Cambridge University Press.

Migdal, J. S., & Schlichte, K. (2005). *Rethinking the state. The dynamics of states: The formation and crises of state domination* (pp. 1–40). Ashgate Publishing.

Moncada, E. (2017). Varieties of vigilantism: Conceptual discord, meaning and strategies. *Global Crime*, *18*(4), 403–423. https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2017.1374183

Moore, M. H. (1992). Problem-solving and community policing. *Crime and justice*, *15*, 99–158. https://doi.org/10.1086/449194

Morse, B. (2024). *"Replication data for: Strengthening the rule of law through community policing: Evidence from Liberia"*. Comparative Political Studies. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VU2ZPQ

OECD. (2008). *OECD Handbook on security system reform: Supporting security and justice*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Ostrom, E. (1996). Crossing the great divide: Coproduction, synergy, and development. *World Development*, *24*(6), 1073–1087. https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750x(96)00023-x

Post, A. E., Bronsoler, V., & Salman, L. (2017). Hybrid regimes for local public goods provision: A framework for analysis. *Perspectives on Politics*, *15*(4), 952–966. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592717002109

Reeve, R., & Jackson, S. (2012). Human security in Liberia. Local perspectives on formal and informal security sectors. In *Accord: An international review of peace initiatives 23*. Conciliation Resources.

Rennie, L. (2006). *Vigilantes take on Liberian gangs*. British Broadcasting Corporation. https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5357718.stm

Rose-Ackerman, S. (2004). *When states fail: Causes and consequences* (pp. 182–221). Princeton University Press chapter Establishing the rule of law.

Rotberg, R. (2004). *The failure and Collapse of nation-states: Breakdown, prevention, and Collapse* (pp. 201–213). Princeton University Press. chapter 1.

Sahin, N., Braga, A. A., Apel, R., & Brunson, R. K. (2017). The impact of procedurally-just policing on citizen perceptions of police during Traffic stops: The Adana randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, *33*(4), 701–726. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-016-9308-7

Smith, N. R. (2015). Rejecting rights: Vigilantism and violence in post-apartheid South Africa. *African Affairs*, *114*(456), 341–360. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adv023

Steinberg, J. (2008). *Thin Blue Line — the unwritten rules of policing South Africa*. Jonathan Ball Publishers.

Tapscott, R. (2017). Local security and the (un) making of public authority in Gulu, Northern Uganda. *African Affairs*, *116*(462), 39–59. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adw040

Tapscott, R. (2021). Vigilantes and the state: Understanding violence through a security assemblages approach. *Perspectives on Politics*, *21*(1), 209–224. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592721001134

Tsai, L. L. (2011). Friends or foes? Nonstate public goods providers and local state authorities in nondemocratic and transitional systems. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *46*(1), 46–69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-010-9078-4

Tyler, T. R., & Jeffrey, F. (2008). Legitimacy and cooperation: Why do people help the police fight crime in their communities? *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law*, *6*(1), 231–275. https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/faculty_scholarship/414

United Nations. (2016). *Guidelines for police Operations in united nations peacekeeping Operations and special political missions*. United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

United Nations. (2018). *Community-oriented policing in united nations police Operations*. United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Wilke, A. M. (2020). How the state discourages vigilantism - Evidence from a Field Experiment in South Africa. *Unpublished Working Paper*.

Wisler, D., & Onwudiwe, I. D. (2008). Community policing in comparison. *Police Quarterly*, *11*(4), 427–446. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611108317820

Zanker, F. (2017). Moving beyond hybridity: The multi-scalar adaptation of community policing in Liberia. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, *11*(2), 166–185. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2016.1248619

Author Biography

Benjamin S. Morse is a Technical Director in the Evaluation, Research, and Analytics Division at Social Impact. His research has been published in top academic journals, including the American Political Science Review, Comparative Political Studies, Social Science and Medicine, and BMJ Global Health, among others. He has a PhD in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a BA in Government from Colby College.