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How Does Community Policing Affect Police Attitudes? An Experimental Test and a Theory of Bureaucrat-Citizen Contact

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In contrast to the expansive work on how community policing affects citizens' *attitudes toward police, existing research says little about how community policing affects* officers' *attitudes toward citizens. We examine officer-facing outcomes using an experiment in the Philippines, in which a random subset of a province's 705 officers were assigned to intensive community policing activities for seven months. Treatment officers saw improved understanding of citizen concerns, but did not develop greater empathy or trust toward civilians, nor an increased sense of accountability for citizen-facing misconduct. We build from the experiment to develop an inductive theory of bureaucrat-citizen contact, relying on qualitative observations and exploratory analyses of heterogeneous effects. We propose that contact with citizens is only likely to improve attitudes among frontline bureaucrats who are not ex-ante embedded in their communities. Moreover, contact may have negative effects when it reveals threats to bureaucrats' personal safety.*

INTRODUCTION

Tensions between police officers and citizens have reached historic highs in many places around the world. In the US, protests spread rapidly in response to high-profile deaths of Black citizens at the hands of the police. In the Philippines, a violent drug war left tens of thousands of people dead and eroded citizen trust. As a remedy to poor police–citizen relations, community advocates, police leadership, and politicians frequently call for "community policing." In this model, officers engage with citizens in informal settings to learn about community needs and build personal links that encourage trust (Skogan and Hartnett 1997). Existing studies of community policing focus almost exclusively on citizen-facing outcomes, finding mixed effects on citizen attitudes, crime reporting, and crime rates (Blair et al. 2021; Gill et al. 2014).

However, trust is a two-way street. Relatively little attention is paid to how *police officers* are affected by increased contact with community members, an omission that prevents a full understanding of how police-community relations can be sustainably improved. The guiding philosophy behind community policing requires that street-level police officers strengthen their understanding of local public safety concerns, reduce suspicions of citizens, and view officer misconduct as a serious issue for which they will be held accountable (Cordner 1995; Mastrofski, Worden, and Snipes 1995). These attitudinal changes are a critical step toward breaking the "us versus them" culture among officers that sets the stage for shirking, abuse, and discrimination (Ingram, Terril, and Pauline 2018; Sparrow, Moore, and Kennedy 1990).

More broadly, despite the abundance of work on street-level bureaucrats' role as de facto policymakers (Lipsky 1980; Pepinsky, Pierskalla, and Sacks 2017), we have limited evidence on how different governance strategies affect state agents' perceptions of citizens. Our work contributes to scholarship on frontline service delivery by individual bureaucrats at the local level, especially in contexts with weaker government capacity for oversight and a higher incidence of patronage (Brierley et al. 2023). Existing work in this area focuses on how bureaucrats' implementation decisions are shaped by institutional structure and oversight (Gulzar and Pasquale 2017; Mummolo 2018; Slough 2022), as well as a range of individual characteristics like bureaucrats' personality traits (Callen et al. 2015), local embeddedness (Bhavnani and Lee 2018; Haim, Nanes, and Davidson 2021), and shared identity with citizens on the dimensions like race, religion, and gender (Ba et al. 2021; Blair et al. 2022; Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006; Moser 1968; Pfaff et al. 2021; White, Nathan, and Faller 2015). The most common approach is to treat bureaucrats' characteristics as fixed traits that exogenously shape policy implementation. Instead, we test how one crucial characteristic of

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frontline bureaucrats *forms*.[1] In other words, we posit that bureaucrats' understanding of community concerns and their attitudes toward the community—key mechanisms through which "representative bureaucracy" and embeddedness are often argued to affect outcomes—are endogenous to the governance strategies and social contact with citizens that bureaucrats experience while on the job.

In this article, we develop and test our theory in two stages. In the first stage, we hypothesize that community policing will have positive effects on five officer-facing outcomes: (1) sharing citizens' public safety concerns, (2) trust in citizens, (3) empathy for citizens' concerns, (4) organizational accountability for citizen-facing misconduct, and (5) taking corruption seriously. We test these pre-registered hypotheses with a randomized community policing experiment in Sorsogon Province of the Philippines, a semi-rural province with a population of just under one million people. Of the 705 eligible officers in Sorsogon Province, a random subset of 245 officers were assigned to participate in the community policing program, while officers in the control group undertook only their regularly assigned duties. This experimental design helps overcome inferential challenges to estimating the effects of community policing in an observational setting, where officers' and departments' selection into community policing likely correlates with pre-existing officer attitudes. Zooming out, this is one of the first field experiments in political science aimed at uncovering the determinants of street-level bureaucrats' attitudes.[2]

We find that participation in community policing led to a 24% increase in overlapping safety concerns identified by both officers and citizens, but did not result in improvements in officers' empathy, trust, accountability, or views of corruption. Our model is sufficiently powered to rule out substantively large effects on officer attitudes: on our composite index of officer attitudes, the largest effect that falls within the 90% confidence interval is a 4% improvement in attitudes. These findings suggest promising evidence that officers can learn valuable information through community policing, but they also introduce an important puzzle regarding why this information did not translate to improved attitudes.

The second stage of our project addresses this puzzle. We develop an inductive theory of why, and under what conditions, officer-citizen interactions may fail to positively affect street-level officers' attitudes. Conversations with our field staff who attended thousands of community policing meetings, along with our own interviews with officers, led us to develop a better sense of how officer attitudes were shaped by the intervention, which we corroborated with exploratory analyses of heterogeneous effects. We theorize that officers' participation in community policing is a form of interpersonal contact with an outgroup. Consistent with the "contact hypothesis" literature, increased interactions with outgroups can generate different results depending on the context of those interactions (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998). Specifically, we posit that community policing can shape officers' attitudes in different ways depending on (1) their pre-existing "embeddedness" in the community and (2) whether their experiences raise the salience of threats to officer safety.

First, regarding embeddedness, we propose that increased contact with citizens is only likely to improve attitudes among officials who are not already highly familiar with the communities they are tasked with serving. Increased contact with community members will only change officers' attitudes when it provides information that contradicts misconceptions, reduces previously-held anxieties about interacting with citizens, and overcomes an inability to understand local citizens' perspectives. These conditions are less likely to be met for embedded officers, who already experience extensive contact with citizens during their daily lives. Our data show that participation in community policing did not change the attitudes of officers who lived in the same province where they served, but substantially improved attitudes among officers from outside the province.

Second, we contend that the safety context where officers are charged with implementing community policing can determine the direction of attitudinal shifts. Interpersonal contact with citizens in "safe" communities can help dispel officers' negative views, but these same interactions can have counterproductive effects in communities where they raise the salience of threats to officer safety. Consistent with this view, treatment officers who participated in community policing in places where insurgents were active saw reduced trust in citizens, while officers who participated in areas without insurgents experienced a marginally significant increase in trust. An important implication is that rather than *overcoming* the effects of neighborhood safety context as is commonly assumed, community policing can instead *heighten* the effects of neighborhood context on officer attitudes.

This project contributes to a more complete understanding of the way that contact between citizens and government agents affects government service provision. Our findings help explain why evidence of community policing's effectiveness is inconsistent at best, especially in the Global South (Blair et al. 2021; Weisburd and Eck 2004). By identifying contexts where community policing might backfire, we do not suggest that the solution is for the police to become less engaged, but rather that different police reforms may be more appropriate in these contexts, perhaps in combination with community policing. This research also contributes to literatures on other types of frontline government agents, including bureaucrats and military personnel. For example, if engaging in "hearts and

[1] Research on the origins of bureaucratic characteristics tends to focus on the process by which bureaucrats are selected (Kaufman 1956; Kuipers 2023; Toral 2024). A closer analogy to our approach is Mo and Conn (2018), who find that Teach for America participants developed more favorable attitudes toward minority communities.

[2] Blair et al. (2021) offers a notable exception. Before presenting our results, we elaborate on how our article builds on this work.

minds" style counterinsurgency in dangerous areas undercuts trust among the soldiers and development personnel charged with extending services, this may increase their propensity to use force against civilians or distribute services unfairly (Lyall, Blair, and Imai 2013). A key takeaway is that in order to understand the citizen-facing effects of strategies to improve governance, it is crucial to understand the effects on the state agents charged with implementing these strategies.

THEORY PART 1 (DEDUCTIVE)

Community policing generates frequent, informal interactions between police officers and citizens during town-hall meetings, citizen-facing foot patrols, and problem-solving sessions with community leaders, with the intent of generating mutual trust and understanding between both parties (Skogan 2004; Skogan and Hartnett 1997). In this section, we develop our theory for how participating in community policing should affect officer attitudes. We begin by defining five attitudinal outcomes, focusing on the attitudes that research shows are most likely to translate to officer behaviors that shape public safety.

Why Officer Attitudes Matter

Our work builds on a substantial body of research that examines the causes and effects of public servants' attitudes. Work in public administration focuses on two categories of attitudes that correlate with the quality of services bureaucrats provide: bureaucrats' assessment of clients and their adherence to bureaucratic mission (Keiser 2010; May and Winter 2009; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003). In political science, the most common approach is to treat these attitudes as *mechanisms* and proxy for their existence using data on bureaucrats' demographic characteristics, though some notable exceptions measure bureaucrats' attitudes directly (Kuipers 2023; Sabatier, Loomis, and McCarthy 1995; Toral 2024). Applied to the study of policing, research tends to focus on three aspects of client assessment that we label (1) *sharing citizen concerns*, (2) *trust* in citizens, and (3) *empathy* for citizens' concerns. When it comes to adherence to bureaucratic mission, policing scholars are especially attuned to officers' views on (4) organizational *accountability* for misconduct and (5) the seriousness of misconduct, especially *corruption.* Variation in these attitudes is important because patrol officers have substantial discretion over when to enforce laws and what sanctions to apply, similar to the discretion afforded other street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980). In particular, officers' attitudes correspond to policing practices such as the quality of communication, the amount of effort devoted to investigating citizen tips, the prioritization of some citizens over others, and the propensity to harass or harm citizens.

Understanding and *sharing citizen concerns* is often considered the first step toward officers being able to do their job effectively. When officers are in touch with the issues that are important to citizens, they can better allocate their time to activities that make a substantial dent in improving order and earning citizens' trust (Skogan and Hartnett 1997). Moreover, a better understanding of citizens' concerns is considered to be the key mechanism that leads to improvements in other officer attitudes (Paoline, Myers, and Worden 2000). When officers better understand citizens' perspective on public safety issues, they are less likely to resort to harmful stereotypes of civilians as being unpredictable and suspicious.

Next, research devotes substantial attention to officers' *trust* in citizens, a concept that is particularly prevalent in work on "police culture." We conceptualize trust as a range of officer beliefs that constitute an "us versus them" mentality, including perceptions of citizen intentions and the threat posed by citizens (Sparrow, Moore, and Kennedy 1990). For example, Paoline (2003, 203) defines a key aspect of police culture as the "prescription to be suspicious and maintain the edge over citizens." Trust in citizens varies greatly across officers, and this variation has strong links to officer behavior (Paoline 2003). For example, studies find that suspicion toward citizens is correlated with officer abuse and discrimination (Ingram, Terril, and Pauline 2018), as well as lower productivity (Moon and Zager 2007).

A third set of client-facing attitudes relates to officers' *empathy* for citizens' concerns, which we define as the belief that citizens' concerns and complaints are warranted. While this captures only a narrow subset of the overarching concept of empathy, it comports with the mechanisms theorized to link officer empathy with improved policing outcomes. Inzunza (2015) outlines two fundamental components of empathy that are salient in the policing literature. The first is whether officers place themselves in citizens' shoes when hearing their reports and complaints, which includes both affective (feeling what others feel) and cognitive (perspective-taking) dimensions of empathy (Todd and Galinsky 2014; Zaki 2014). This leads to a second, behavioral manifestation of empathy, whereby officers outwardly convey that they are receptive to citizen-provided information (Barrett-Lennard 1981). When officers convey that reports and complaints are justified and worth taking seriously, citizens—especially those from marginalized groups and those who experience sexual violence—are more likely to report positive contact with officers and follow through on initial reports (Birzer 2008; Maddox, Lee, and Barker 2011; Turgoose et al. 2017).

Finally, scholarship suggests that officer behavior is shaped by two aspects of their adherence to bureaucratic mission. The first regards officers' perception of organizational *accountability.* When officers believe that police leadership can monitor citizen-facing misconduct, takes citizen complaints seriously, and would seriously reprimand misbehavior, officers may begin treating citizens as partners rather than adversaries (Cordner 1995; Crank 2014). Accountability links to a second important concept, which is whether officers internalize that harming citizens constitutes serious

misconduct. This includes officers' views on the seriousness of activities like *corruption.* The perception of organizational accountability can make adversarial comments toward citizens a taboo topic, leading to a change in norms about the appropriateness of misconduct (Haarr 2001). The literature suggests that improvements in officer behavior are more sustainable when officers begin treating issues surrounding misconduct in accordance with a "logic of appropriateness," independently of whether they are worried about being punished for bad behavior (March, 1994; Sparrow, Moore, and Kennedy 1990).

How Community Policing Influences Officer Attitudes

In the absence of regular, informal contact with citizens, a reliance on reactive policing gives officers a skewed view of the community by disproportionately bringing them into contact with citizens when a crime has occurred. Officer attitudes tend to depend heavily on rough indicators of "neighborhood context," such as the demographic makeup, homocide rate, or reputation for citizen resistance to the police (Terrill and Reisig 2003). Prior research suggests that officers commonly underestimate the proportion of the community that supports their efforts to improve public safety (Skolnick 2011). These misperceptions can lead to alienation from the community and a feeling that citizens do not share the officer's values (Twersky-Glasner 2005). In short, it is easy for officers to resort to harmful stereotypes of the typical citizen's experiences, intentions, and behaviors.

A core tenet of community policing is that positive, informal interactions with citizens can overcome these misperceptions (Paoline, Myers, and Worden 2000). When it comes to client assessments, community policing should first and foremost provide officers with information that leads them to *share citizens' concerns.* Officers' priorities may shift as they understand that issues appearing relatively minor to them are actually significant problems for citizens. This should translate to improvements in officer *trust* by giving them a more accurate view of the prevalence of threats to officer safety and the proportion of citizens who support police efforts. These interactions should also allow officers to understand citizen motivations when they choose to report issues to the police, generating greater *empathy* and leading officers to take citizen reports more seriously (Schuck and Rosenbaum 2005).[3]

A second key goal of community policing is to signal increased organizational *accountability* and change officers' beliefs about the seriousness of misconduct like *corruption.* By implementing community policing, police leadership signals that they care about the quality of citizen engagement (Cordner 1995). Community policing also typically involves strengthening procedures by which officers can be held accountable for misconduct, including efforts to emphasize the importance of reporting fellow officers. Moreover, when officers are placed in more frequent contact with law-abiding citizens, the hope is that, over time, they will internalize the seriousness of misconduct and the importance of serving people rather than on "doing policing" (Bracey 1992).

Drawing from the literatures discussed above, we propose five hypotheses for how community policing should shape officer attitudes toward citizens:[4]

H1 (Shared Concerns): Officers who participate in community policing will become more likely to share an understanding of citizens' public safety concerns.

H2 (Trust): Officers who participate in community policing will become more likely to express trust in community members.

H3 (Empathy): Officers who participate in community policing will become more likely to express empathy for the seriousness of citizen reports.

H4 (Accountability): Officers who participate in community policing will feel more accountable for citizen-facing misconduct.

H5 (Corruption): Officers who participate in community policing will be more likely to view corruption as serious misconduct.

A small set of existing studies aims to empirically test a similar set of hypotheses regarding the effects of community policing on police attitudes. A first group of observational studies provides useful evidence that is nevertheless susceptible to various threats to causal inference. Paoline, Myers, and Worden (2000) compare attitudes between specialized community policing officers and regular beat officers in two US police departments. Hayeslip and Cordner (1987) and Rosenbaum, Yeh, and Wilkinson (1994) both use longitudinal research designs, tracking officer attitudes before and after they implemented community policing. All three studies find that community policing corresponded with improved officer attitudes toward citizens. However, these results may be biased if the same factors that drove officer and departmental decisions to adopt community policing are correlated with officer attitudes, or if other changes that occurred concurrently with community policing programs shaped officer attitudes.

Another relevant study is Blair et al. (2021), who implemented a set of community policing experiments

[3] The influential "Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing" (2015) advocates for community policing because it spurs officers to engage in perspective-taking and treat citizen reports with greater seriousness.

[4] The pre-analysis plans specifying these hypotheses are available at https://osf.io/tfpx7/ and https://osf.io/zxefj/. The *Trust* hypothesis is not included in our pre-analysis plan. We discuss this oversight, as well as evidence that we ex-ante intended to include this outcome, in a broader introductory memo to the PAP found in the Supplementary Material.

in the Global South and report null results of community policing on officer attitudes, including empathy, corruption, and accountability.[5] We see our work as building on (rather than contradicting) the results of Blair et al. (2021), which foregrounds the effects on crime and citizen-facing outcomes. At a basic level, we contribute to the advancement of research on this topic by elucidating the theory behind the predicted effects on officers and incorporating two additional outcomes (*Shared Concerns* and *Trust*) that are crucial to our interpretation of the results. More importantly, our inductive theory and the evidence we present in the latter half of the paper can help scholars and policymakers interpret *why* and *under what conditions* social contact with citizen may fail to translate into improved attitudes, both among police officers and bureaucrats more generally.

CONTEXT AND RESEARCH DESIGN

We evaluate the impact of community policing on police officers' attitudes toward citizens in Sorsogon Province of the Philippines. Sorsogon is one of 81 provinces in the country and it encompasses 541 "barangays," an administrative akin to a neighborhood or village. The population of about one million people lives in a few semi-urban centers, along with a range of coastal, lowland, and upland rural barangays. Sorsogon's poverty rate of 21.6% is just above the national average of 18%, and the province displays very little ethnic or religious diversity; 95% of the population is Roman Catholic.

Public safety provision is handled by two institutions. The Philippine National Police (PNP) is the national-level policing institution, though leadership at the provincial level is granted significant autonomy over policing practices and resource utilization. The PNP is relatively well-equipped compared to other lower middle-income countries, but they lack the manpower to fully patrol Sorsogon's broad and diverse geography. Before we implemented the community policing initiative described below, more than 45% of surveyed Sorsogon residents said they saw a PNP officer once per month or less. To fill these gaps, barangays employ a chief "tanod" and 8–20 regular tanods, semi-professional civilian safety officers responsible for preventing minor crimes, resolving disputes, and helping citizens communicate more serious issues to the PNP. Tanods are jointly appointed by the elected barangay captain and the barangay "kagawad" (councilor) in charge of peace and order.

Residents in Sorsogon face a variety of public safety issues. The most common are petty theft, neighborhood/family disputes, vehicle accidents, public intoxication, and juvenile delinquency, with the latter two issues often translating to harassment, trespassing, and property damage. More severe crimes like assault, armed robbery, rape, and murder occur at rates similar to other semi-rural provinces in the country. Finally, Sorsogon is a hotspot for the New People's Army (NPA), a nationwide communist insurgency that has been active in the province since the late 1960s. According to military intelligence reports, the NPA was active in every municipality in Sorsogon in 2013, but withdrew from about one-third of these municipalities by 2015. As we discuss below, practical and ethical considerations led us to narrow our sample to 298 barangays (out of 541) with limited NPA presence. NPA members still travel through these areas and attempt to identify potential sympathizers, but violence is rare. In these areas, the PNP, rather than the military, is the primary government security provider that attempts to deter NPA activity.

The "One Sorsogon" Community Policing Intervention

Sorsogon's community policing intervention began as a reform initiative led by the Provincial Police Chief. He wanted to implement a community-centered approach to contrast with the violent "War on Drugs" happening elsewhere in the country. Even though virtually no drug-war related violence occurred in Sorsogon, the Police Chief expressed concern that the PNP's local reputation was harmed by the national-level environment. Prior to the intervention, he implemented a number of small-scale programs aimed at bolstering the service-oriented side of policing, such as a program to engage with at-risk youth in schools. However, practically all community engagement activities prior to the intervention were under the domain of a designated "Police Community Relations" (PCR) Director at each municipal station, along with a handful of PCR officers at the Provincial Police Office, none of whom were eligible for our intervention. Regular beat officers in Sorsogon almost never engaged in the usual components of community policing, such as town halls or meetings with community leaders.

The new initiative, called "One Sorsogon," spanned seven months and centered on directing rank-and-file officers to work closely with barangay leaders and ordinary citizens to identify the issues that most threatened public safety in their communities, and to devise locally appropriate solutions together. We randomized the selection of PNP officers who participated in the community policing activities, which is the design feature we use to draw inferences in the present study.[6] Control officers did not participate in any of the activities described below, and experienced policing-as-usual for the duration of the study.

The program was a bundled treatment that kicked off with a two-day training on best practices for community policing led by a professional consultant.[7]

[5] Our outcome measures capturing H3–H5 are consistent with the measures used in Blair et al. (2021).

[6] We discuss intervention details, prior policing practices, and other aspects of the randomized trial in greater detail in the Supplementary Material.

[7] The community policing programs assessed in the literature tend to involve trainings with similar length and content (e.g., Paoline, Myers, and Worden 2000).

At the training, treatment officers were paired with the barangay leaders in their assigned barangay (who were also in attendance), practiced using crime reports and tanod logbooks to identify the most pressing local public safety issues, learned techniques for empathetic communication, and focused on recognizing and reporting officer misconduct, including corruption.

Treatment officers then attended six monthly meetings with leaders of their assigned barangay, lasting just under two hours on average, and held at the municipal police station. The first three meetings focused on identifying the most pressing local public safety problems, devising a plan to address those issues, and proposing a budget of up to 5,000 pesos (about USD $100) to help with implementation. The next three meetings focused on implementing this plan and monitoring its progress. This aspect of community policing is known as "Problem-Oriented Policing" (POP) (Goldstein 1990; Weisburd et al. 2010). In our case, POP teams were composed of two PNP officers, the barangay captain, the barangay councilor in charge of peace and order, the chief tanod, and 2–4 regular tanods. The POP aspect of the intervention was designed to enhance interactions with barangay leaders, first and foremost. We conceive of these leaders as being comparable to an important class of "community leaders" focused on by prior research on community policing, who typically have a more complete understanding of crime in their community and can better assist the police in implementing reforms. From the perspective of the PNP, barangay leaders were discussed as "citizen representatives," and they play a similar role to informal village leaders and community watch members in other parts of the Global South.

Between meetings, the officers assigned to One Sorsogon were directed to engage with a broader range of citizens in the communities where they were assigned. Officers regularly traveled to their assigned barangay to engage in citizen-facing foot patrols, gather citizen perspectives, and disseminate information about police activities. The implementation strategies of the POP teams also tended to directly involve officers, for example by building community gardens and passing out sports equipment with at-risk youth. Treatment officers met monthly with their station's police chief and PCR director to discuss the progress of the intervention, and were encouraged to surface reports of police misconduct during these meetings. Finally, the intervention concluded with a community town-hall in each barangay, during which PNP officers received input from the broader community and communicated their plans going forward. On average, each culminating town hall was attended by eighty citizens and lasted more than three hours.

Our study is best interpreted as an evaluation of community policing as it is actually implemented in many real world contexts, especially those outside of the US, Australia, and Europe, where most studies of community policing take place. Similar to many countries with moderate or weak police capacity, the Sorsogon PNP faces pressures associated with difficult terrain, weak infrastructure, under-staffing, decentralization of resources, and leadership rotations that disrupt policy continuity. Under these circumstances, community policing programs (including those supported by international donors like the UN Department of Peacekeeping) tend to be localized, limited to several months of intensive implementation, and involve officers who are also assigned to other duties. We note that One Sorsogon was a homegrown initiative, and we did not alter the duration of the program originally specified by the Provincial Chief. In this context, the intervention was relatively intensive, and many PNP officers expressed that One Sorsogon represented a wholesale change in the scope of their community-facing duties. That said, we acknowledge that community policing may produce different effects if paired with an overhaul in resources, staffing procedures, or long-term commitments from national leadership.

Ethics

By the time we approached the Sorsogon PNP about partnering on an evaluation of One Sorsogon, we had spent approximately one year conducting observational research on policing in the province. We previously conducted a large survey on policing and developed an extensive network of local academics, citizens, community leaders, police officers, and individuals with connections to the NPA, all of which helped us to better understand the risks of the study and the ways we could mitigate those risks. To briefly summarize three key points, we learned from our contacts in the area that the Sorsogon Police Chief was a well-known reformer who opposed the violent tactics of President Duterte's Drug War, which primarily took place in major urban areas. We confirmed the low rate of Drug War related violence in Sorsogon using surveys, conversations with local human rights activists, and data from ACLED's special project on the Philippine Drug War. We also relied heavily on our local network in each municipality to identify and exclude areas where NPA presence was strong enough to make the intervention unsafe. Finally, our research staff attended every POP meeting and town hall, and conducted extensive audits in each barangay to detect potential abuse. We expand on these points, as well as other aspects of research ethics and human subjects protections, in the Supplementary Material.

Experimental Design

The Provincial PNP Chief agreed to randomize several aspects of the One Sorsogon intervention, including the barangays where it was implemented: of the 298 study barangays, 99 were randomly selected to receive the PNP's community policing program. In the present study, we draw empirical leverage from the randomized assignment of *officers* to these barangays.[8] From the list

[8] The officer randomization only occurred within the treatment barangays in the larger study, meaning we cannot leverage the barangay-level randomization for analyzing effects on officers. Eligible officers included those with the rank Police Officer (PO) or Senior Police Officer (SPO). Non-uniformed personnel and upper-level police leadership were excluded.

of 705 eligible PNP officers serving in Sorsogon, we randomly selected 198 officers to participate in the community policing intervention, two for each participating barangay. Blocking took place at two levels. First, we blocked on police station (from among the 17 stations in the province) to assign treatment officers to a POP team in a barangay within their station's jurisdiction. We also blocked on rank, assigning one senior and one junior officer to each team.

A number of officers initially assigned to treatment later had to withdraw from their POP team, mostly due to being reassigned to national-level training programs or a different station. When an officer was reassigned, they were replaced by the next officer on our list of randomly selected officers (in the same station and of the same rank). In total, 47 randomly selected replacement officers were assigned to POP teams during the course of the intervention. Most replacements occurred during the first week of the intervention due to a region-wide training and replacement cycle. As a result, the average replacement officer was assigned to attend 5.5 of the 7 community policing meetings. Our main results focus on the Intent to Treat effect (ITT), meaning that 245 officers (198 original plus 47 replacements) are considered treated. Treatment officers displayed a high degree of balance with control officers on their demographic characteristics, as well as their baseline responses to the survey outcomes (Table A.3, in the Supplementary Material).

TABLE 1. Most Important Public Safety Issues According to Officers and Citizens

Issue	PNP	Citizens	Difference
Public intoxication	15.1%	37.2%	–22.1%
Theft	22.1%	36.5%	–14.4%
Illegal gambling	30.1%	39.5%	–9.4%
Police abuse	2.6%	4.3%	–1.7%
Sexual harassment	9.1%	10.7%	–1.6%
Robbery	4.7%	5.8%	–1.1%
Vehicle theft	2.8%	3.7%	–0.9%
Vehicle Accidents	55.5%	55.2%	0.3%
Illegal guns	6.1%	1.8%	4.3%
Domestic abuse	12.7%	4.6%	8.1%
Murder	36.6%	26.5%	10.1%
Illegal drug use	61.1%	48.7%	12.4%
Rape	41.5%	16.1%	25.4%
Observations	*773*	*2,983*	

Note: Citizens and officers were each presented with the above list of public safety issues and asked to choose which three were the most important concerns in their municipality. The listed percentages show how often each issue was included in a respondent's top three.

Outcomes

We surveyed officers before and after the intervention and constructed indices of *sharing citizen concerns* (H1), *trust* in citizens (H2), *empathy* for citizen concerns (H3), perceptions of organizational *accountability* for citizen misconduct (H4), and perceptions of *corruption* as serious misconduct (H5).[9]

Sharing citizens' concerns (H1) was measured by asking officers what they thought were the three most important public safety concerns (from a list of 13 items) in the municipality where they were assigned, and then matching these responses with the four most common responses to the same question among community leaders who lived in that municipality.[10] Table 1 shows that, at baseline, citizens were far more likely than the police to identify minor crimes like public intoxication, theft, and illegal gambling. The police, on the other hand, were more likely to identify crimes like rape, illegal drug use, and murder. We expect that the *Shared Concerns* measure is correlated with broader factual knowledge about the community, though limited survey space precluded asking additional questions measuring factual knowledge. For example, officers expressed to our research team that participating in the intervention gave them a better sense of which barangay leaders were the most effective local partners for motivating community action.

To capture the attitudinal outcomes in H2–H5, we used indices of several questions on the officer survey. Answers were captured using a slide bar that translated to a 100-point scale. The *Trust* index is composed of three questions: (1) citizens care about officer well-being, (2) citizen-provided information is likely to be accurate, and (3) how safe for officers is the municipality where you are assigned. We included the question on safety in the trust index based on literature that links officers' perceptions of safety to their suspicions of the citizenry. Acknowledging that other factors may shape officer perceptions of safety, we separately report results for the individual components of the *Trust* index. The *Empathy* index is composed of two questions: (1) when people complain about the police, it is because they have a good reason, and (2) most things people report to the police are worth taking seriously. With the recognition that empathy is a broader concept than what we measured here, these questions are intended to capture one theoretically important aspect of how empathy manifests in policing, described in our theory section.

The *Accountability* and *Corruption* indices are both composed of questions about two hypothetical scenarios involving police misconduct. In one scenario, an officer accepts a bribe in exchange for not issuing a citation; in the other, an officer routinely accepts unsolicited gifts while on patrol. After respondents are presented with these scenarios, they are asked whether (1) they would report this behavior themselves, (2) they think their peers would report this behavior, and (3) the

[9] The text of each survey item and details about index construction are located in the Supplementary Material. All outcome measures (including the umbrella *Officer Attitude Index* described later) were pre-registered except the *Trust* index, which was an unintentional omission we detail in our Supplementary Material memo introducing the PAP.

[10] In the Supplementary Material, we show that the results look similar when using several alternative versions of the *Shared Concerns* measure.

extent to which police leadership would punish this behavior. Along with a separate question (unrelated to the hypothetical scenarios) on (4) whether police leadership takes citizen complaints about officers seriously, these questions compose the *Accountability* index. Officers were also asked whether (1) they consider the behavior in the hypothetical scenario to be serious misconduct and (2) most other police officers consider it serious misconduct. These questions compose the *Corruption* index. Our focus on corrupt misconduct aligns with concepts raised during the community policing training and monthly check-ins with station leadership. It also accords with the PNP's nationwide focus on tackling corruption in the lead up to the intervention period.[11]

Finally, to capture officers' overall attitudes toward citizens, we construct a composite *Officer Attitude Index*, which is an "index of indices" incorporating all the attitudinal outcomes described above. To create each index, we standardized and summed all items, then divided by the number of constituent terms.[12] One major concern was that officers' answers about citizens could be biased upwards through social desirability bias. To mitigate this concern, surveys were self-enumerated on an iPad in a private location, which has been shown to reduce sensitivity bias (Nanes and Haim 2021).

Estimation

We analyze the average treatment effects using the following linear regression model:

$$Y_{i,endline} = \alpha + \beta_1 TREAT_i + \beta_2 Y_{i,baseline} + \beta_3 Blocks_i + \beta_4 MissBaseline_i + \epsilon_i. \quad (1)$$

We regressed each of our attitudinal outcome measures at endline ($Y_{i,endline}$) on an indicator for whether the officer was assigned to One Sorsogon ($TREAT_i$), controlled for the same attitudinal measure at baseline ($Y_{i,baseline}$), and included fixed effects for the blocking variables ($Blocks_i$). If there are missing data in the baseline outcome used as a control, we add an indicator variable for missingness ($MissBaseline_i$), and replace missing values with zeros (Gerber and Green 2012). Standard errors are clustered at the station level using White clustered-robust standard errors. As a robustness check, we run the regression using only the endline cross-section, which does not rely on the imputation of baseline values:

$$Y_{i,endline} = \alpha + \beta_1 TREAT_i + \beta_2 Blocks_i + \epsilon_i. \quad (2)$$

The structure of Equation 1 is preregistered; Equation 2 is not. To account for different treatment probability across blocks, which may introduce bias if treatment effects are not assumed to be the same across subjects (Gerber and Green 2012), we include robustness checks using weighted regression in the Supplementary Material. The number of clusters in our study (17) is relatively small, though simulations suggest that White cluster-robust standard errors tend to perform well in experimental studies with a similar number of clusters.[13]

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the results for our main hypotheses. Consistent with H1, participating in community policing caused officers to become significantly more likely to share the public safety concerns of civilians in their jurisdiction. The treatment effect is large in magnitude, representing a 24% increase in the number of public safety concerns officers matched with citizens (above an average of 1.07 matched issues in the control group). On the other hand, we find no evidence that participation in community policing impacted officers' attitudes toward civilians in terms of trust (H2), empathy (H3), accountability (H4), or corruption (H5). These null results are striking in light of the significant effects on *Shared Concerns*, a key mechanism the literature suggests should be driving attitudinal outcomes.

Before turning to our inductive theory, we address possible design-based explanations for the null results, including (1) power, (2) compliance, (3) ceiling effects, (4) attrition, and (5) spillovers. First, our model is sufficiently powered to rule out substantively large effects on officer attitudes. To assess this, we use the method in Rainey (2014) to calculate the bounds of the substantive effects on our combined *Officer Attitude Index* that fall within the 90% confidence interval. The largest substantive effect consistent with the cross-sectional model would be a negligible 2.5-point (or 4%) average increase, or a 2.7-point average decrease, on the 100-point outcome scale.

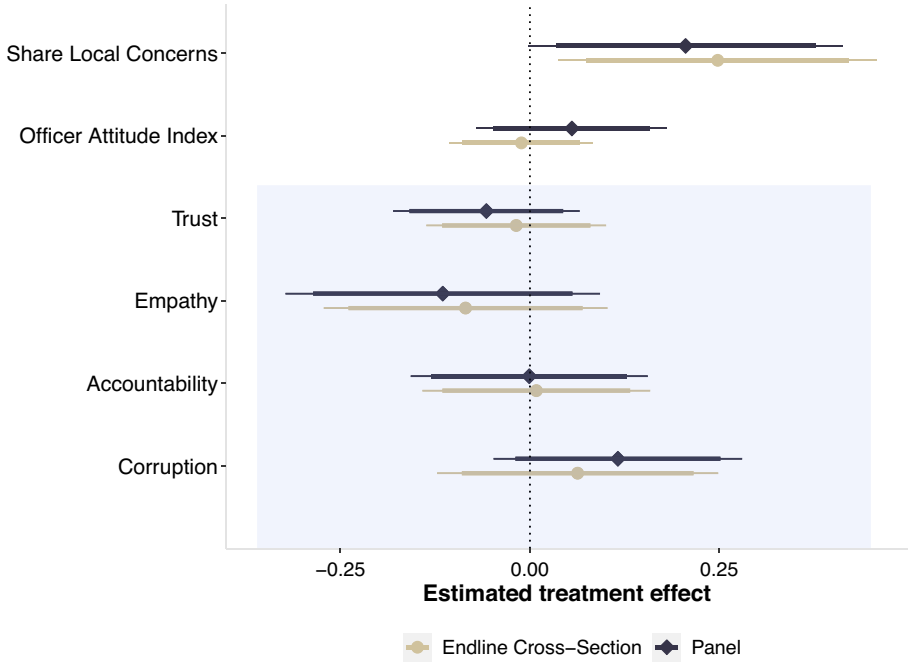
It is unlikely that the results are driven by low compliance. Treatment officers attended 84% of the POP meetings and over 90% of the town halls to which they were assigned, and our field staff reported that most officers visited their assigned barangay at least once between each meeting. Ceiling effects are another unlikely explanation for the majority of the null results. The average baseline answer to the raw survey questions (on the 100-point scale) was 73 for all items in the overall *Attitude Index*, including 74 for the *Trust* questions, 72 for the *Empathy* questions, and 55 for the *Accountability* questions, leaving plenty of room for

[11] See: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/1/30/philippine-police-suspend-drug-war-to-tackle-corruption. Our study does not include questions regarding a separate pre-registered hypothetical scenario about abusive behavior, which we discuss in the Supplementary Material memo introducing the PAP.

[12] In the Supplementary Material, we show that the results are robust to using a pre-registered alternative version of the indices that imputes missing responses to individual items.

[13] https://declaredesign.org/blog/posts/how-misleading-are-clustered-ses-in-designs-with-few-clusters.html. We acknowledge that this is dependent on a number of assumptions, including the intra-cluster correlation. In the Supplementary Material, we show that the results are robust to using block-bootstrapped standard errors.

FIGURE 1. Effects of Community Policing on Main Outcomes



Note: Estimates from the model controlling for baseline outcomes (Equation 1) are in black; estimates from the cross-sectional model (Equation 2) are in tan. Confidence intervals are displayed at the 95% level (thin bars) and 90% level (thick bars). Blue shading indicates results for the sub-indices that compose the Officer Attitude Index. Full regression results are in Table A.5, in the Supplementary Material.

movement in attitudes. The one index where we have substantial concerns about ceiling effects is *Corruption*, for which the average baseline value was 84.[14]

Fourth, regarding attrition: of the 705 eligible officers we surveyed at baseline, we were unable to survey 190 at endline, due mostly to transfers, trainings, and retirements. Between baseline and endline, 183 new officers who would otherwise have been eligible to participate on a community policing team were hired or transferred to Sorsogon. In the Supplementary Material, we show that there was no differential attrition between the treatment and control groups. The demographic characteristics and survey responses of "new" officers were highly balanced with the officers who dropped out of the study. Furthermore, the results of the model controlling for baseline outcomes and the endline cross-section are nearly identical, increasing our confidence that results are not driven by attrition.

A final concern is spillovers, which might bias toward null effects if treatment officers shared their experiences and opinions with control officers, or if control officers experienced an increased commitment to citizen engagement from their superiors. The first concern is mitigated by the fact that it would be surprising to find a large effect on the *Shared Concerns* outcome if treatment officers shared information with control officers. In addition, both types of spillovers would bias municipality-level heterogeneous effects toward null, which is contradicted by the patterns displayed in the following section. To further explore this issue, we conducted several analyses modeling spillovers, which we present in the Supplementary Material. We approximate control officers' "exposure" to treatment using data on (1) family ties between officers (using the method pioneered by Cruz, Labonne, and Querubin 2017) and (2) officers' beat patrol partner assignments. At the individual level, we find no evidence that control officers' attitudes differentially changed based on their family ties or beat partnerships with treatment officers. We also explored heterogeneous effects based on the size and family network density of police stations, leveraging the assumption that officers are more likely to interact with each other in smaller, denser stations. Treatment effects did not differ significantly within the range of these moderators where there was sufficient data to support a substantive interpretation of the marginal effects. Together, these analyses suggest that spillovers were weak, at best.

THEORY, PART 2 (INDUCTIVE) AND EXPLORATORY ANALYSES

Our main results suggest that community policing may be a good first step toward officers internalizing community concerns, but they also cast doubt on commonly-held assumptions about how community policing affects police officer attitudes. In the remainder of the paper, we

[14] See the Supplementary Material for a more detailed breakdown of compliance and ceiling effects, including a Figure that displays the baseline distribution of all indices.

endeavor to develop a theory that explains why, and under what conditions, community policing may change officers' attitudes toward citizens. To generate this theory, we rely on our own qualitative observations, as well as the observations of our field staff who attended each POP and town hall meeting. We asked our field staff to take detailed notes on each meeting and report back to us, with a particular focus on identifying mechanisms that might be driving the program's (in)effectiveness. After the intervention ended, we conducted informal interviews with police officers about their experiences during One Sorsogon. Finally, we conducted several exploratory analyses using our survey data to corroborate the insights garnered from these qualitative observations.[15]

The conventional wisdom motivating our pre-registered theory assumes that "officers' perceptions of danger are disproportionate to the objective risk because of the unpredictability and potential severity of the threats," and as a result, "greater knowledge of the people and places with which officers have contact could reduce… the perceived risk" (Paoline, Myers, and Worden 2000, 581). We came to believe that this assumption lacks sufficient nuance when it comes to (a) the nature of officers' prior beliefs and experiences, (b) the content of information generated by community policing, and (c) the narrow focus on information, as opposed to a wider range of mechanisms that moderate the effects of social contact.

In particular, we identified two sources of variation that challenge the universal applicability of this assumption. First, officers' pre-existing *embeddedness* in the community shaped the potential for community policing to effect changes in their beliefs. Officers from outside Sorsogon Province were more likely to hold negative stereotypes about local citizens that were attenuated by community policing, but additional contact with citizens was insufficient to change the attitudes of officers local to Sorsogon. Second, the local *security context* shaped whether officers' experiences during community policing heightened or lessened perceptions of threats to their personal safety. Officers' suspicions about citizens were reduced when they conducted community policing in municipalities where NPA presence was lower, but increased when NPA presence was higher.

Our qualitative observations led us to view the process by which community policing shapes officers' attitudes toward citizens through the lens of *intergroup contact theory* (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998). The "us versus them" outlook that many officers hold toward citizens is similar to the types of prejudices that individuals hold toward social outgroups. Scholars have previously adapted scope conditions of the "contact hypothesis" to better understand citizen views toward the police (Karim 2020; Rosenbaum et al. 2005), but not vice versa. In contrast to much of the conventional wisdom on community policing, the contact theory literature suggests that merely conveying knowledge about an outgroup has a weak effect on attitudes (Hopkins, Sides, and Citrin 2019; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). The effects of social contact are mediated by (1) the *content* of information about the outgroup, (2) whether the nature of interactions reduces *anxiety* about outgroup interactions, (3) whether contact induces an increase in *perspective-taking*, and (4) whether contact creates new *shared identities* with outgroup members (Allport 1954; Gaertner et al. 1999; Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis 2002; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008; Tajfel 1978).

These mechanisms help make sense of our observations about how officer embeddedness and the local safety context shaped the effect of community policing on officers. The effects of social contact should be muted among officers with existing local ties because they likely already have better information, less anxiety, existing shared perspectives, and shared identities with local citizens. Moreover, when citizens raise issues related to the NPA, it can heighten officers' perception of threats to their safety, thereby generating "negative contact" that increases anxiety, worsens stereotypes of citizens, and hardens officer identities. In the remainder of this section, we lay out the evidence we gathered on these conditions and refine our expectations about how increased contact with citizens can affect the attitudes of frontline state agents.

Embeddedness

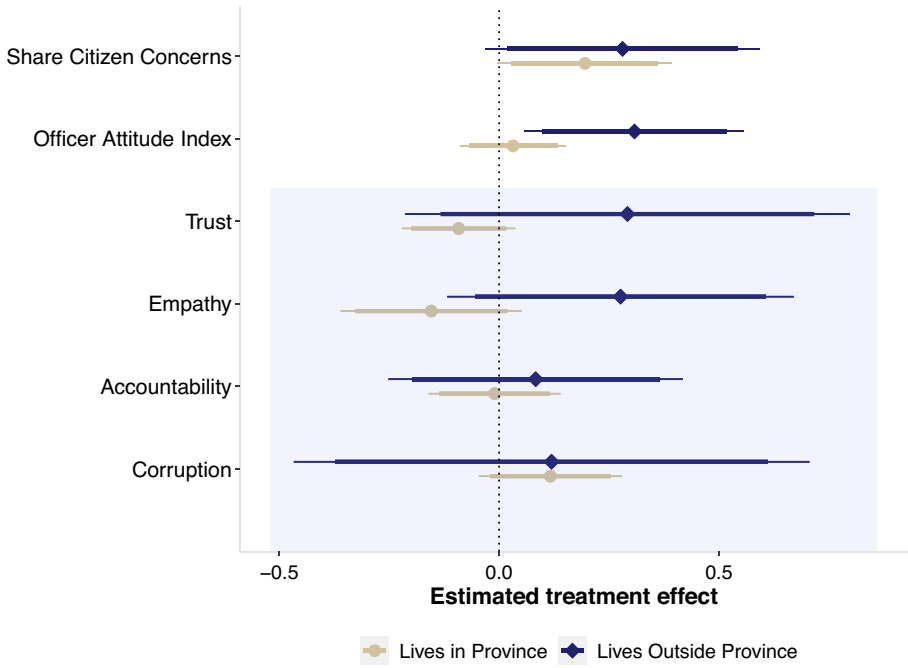
A first main takeaway from our field staff's observations was that officers from within Sorsogon responded differently to community policing than officers from outside the province. Early on, officers local to Sorsogon appeared more comfortable during the POP meetings and were quicker to understand citizens' perspectives when issues were raised. Yet some of these local officers expressed to us that they viewed community policing in similar terms to what Crank (2014, 311) characterizes as "departmental bullshit," stating that they already had enough prior experience in the community to do their job well. On the other hand, our field staff indicated that as the program progressed, non-local officers seemed increasingly at ease, displayed greater effort, and improved their communication style during the POP meetings, despite starting at a lower baseline on these metrics.[16] Our conversations with non-local officers indicated that community policing helped dispel some of their suspicions of citizens that stemmed from Sorsogon's reputation for being a hotbed of citizen resistance (manifesting in insurgency and drug trafficking).

To further explore these notions, we looked to the survey data, which confirmed that officers from outside Sorsogon had worse attitudes toward local citizens at

[15] The goal of this section is not hypotheses testing, and the heterogeneity analyses are not pre-registered. Additional details on our qualitative methodology are in the Supplementary Material.

[16] We observed this change in the period between the training and the culminating town halls, suggesting that officer outcomes were shaped by experiences during the POP meetings and intervening barangay visits.

FIGURE 2. Heterogeneous Effects of Community Policing, by Officer Embeddedness



Note: All estimates are from the specification controlling for baseline outcomes (Equation 1). Marginal effects displayed in blue are for officers from outside Sorsogon; estimates displayed in tan are for officers local to Sorsogon. Confidence intervals are displayed at the 95% level (thin bars) and 90% level (thick bars). Full regression results are in Table A.6 in the Supplementary Material.

the start of the intervention. Among non-local officers, there was 8% less overlap in *Shared Concerns* with issues deemed important by citizens. Average responses to the survey questions on *Trust* and *Empathy* were also eight points lower among officers from outside Sorsogon at baseline, though average answers of 75/100 among officers from Sorsogon left room for upwards movement for those officers as well. We then explored whether the patterns noted by our field staff were reflected in heterogeneous effects. Results for models interacting the treatment variable with an indicator of whether officers lived in Sorsogon at the start of the intervention are shown in Figure 2.

Corroborating our field team's observations, the intervention had large positive effects on the overall *Officer Attitude Index* among officers from outside Sorsogon, but no effect among officers who lived inside the province. By the end of the program, treatment officers from outside Sorsogon had virtually caught up to officers from inside the province in terms of their attitudes toward citizens. Consistent with our inductive theory, outlined below, the heterogeneous effects are driven primarily by officers' *Trust* and *Empathy*, the two outcomes most clearly linked to social contact with citizens. Our theory does not speak to whether top-down *Accountability* or views on the appropriateness of *Corruption* should be shaped by officer embeddedness, and we do not find significant heterogeneous effects for these outcomes.

We probe the robustness of these patterns in the Supplementary Material. Results hold when controlling for officer characteristics that may correlate with embeddedness, including rank, education, religion, age, gender, time in service, commute time, and public service motivation. They also hold when interacting control variables with the treatment indicator. The inclusion of station fixed effects mitigates concerns about the PNP disproportionately assigning non-embedded officers to municipalities where the program was more likely to succeed (for example, stations with higher leadership buy-in), because the model compares effects among embedded and non-embedded officers at the same station. Still, station assignments of officers from outside and inside Sorsogon are balanced on crime rate, NPA presence, and a range of socio-demographics, and the results hold when replacing the station effects with municipality-level controls. Finally, results are similar when using an alternative measure of embeddedness—whether officers live in the *municipality* where they are assigned.

Drawing from these observations, we posit that programs intended to enhance interactions with citizens will be more likely to improve attitudes among officers who are less embedded ex-ante, assuming that they hold more negative suspicions of citizens than local officers.[17] Our theory relies on two propositions that challenge common assumptions in the community policing literature. First, existing work largely assumes

[17] This effect depends on officers' prior perceptions. We would expect the opposite effect when unembedded officers hold disproportionately positive stereotypes.

that, under a system of reactive policing, informal and non-threatening interactions with citizens are rare for all officers. We contend that embedded officers are already more likely to have these types of interactions with local citizens during their daily lives, outside of work. Research suggests that prior contact can increase the likelihood that people will seek out future contact (Pettigrew 1998), meaning that embedded officers may also already be more likely to engage with citizens in the course of their regular policing duties. Simply put, community policing is less likely to generate new experiences with citizens for embedded officers, preventing the social contact mechanisms from taking hold.

Second, the canonical community policing literature places outsized emphasis on *information* about citizens as being the key mechanism that can unlock improvements in officer trust and empathy. The results displayed in Figure 2 suggest that *Shared Citizen Concerns* increased for both embedded and non-embedded officers, meaning it is unlikely that non-embedded officers saw improved attitudes solely because they benefited more in terms of information gained through contact. This is not to say that the informational mechanism is altogether unimportant. Rather, our claim is that information may need to be activated together with other mechanisms in order for contact with citizens to result in improved officer attitudes, and that these mechanisms may be blunted for embedded officers.

Consistent with our field staff's observations about local officers' comfort and communication style during the POP meetings, we theorize that embedded officers are already less likely to be *anxious* about interacting with citizens in the absence of community policing, as well as better able to take the *perspective* of local citizens. This translates to reduced potential to see movement in their attitudes. Anxiety-reduction is a crucial moderator shaping outgroup attitudes (Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008), and information has a bigger effect on outgroup attitudes when paired with improved perspective-taking (Adida et al. 2024; Kalla and Broockman 2023; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). It may also be the case that embedded officers already share aspects of their identity with local citizens, in this case, as a "Sorsogueño." When individuals share identity features, their attitudes are less malleable because they tend to see new information as "situational," rather than contributing to their views of an outgroup (Lyall 2010; Lyall, Blair, and Imai 2013; Paolini et al. 2014). In contrast, unembedded officers are more likely to develop a new common group identity shared with locals, a key mechanism through which social contact can trigger changes to outgroup attitudes (Gaertner et al. 1999; Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis 2002).

Our theory is important in light of the tremendous variation in police embeddedness around the world. This variation is driven by a debate about the tradeoff between officer effectiveness and partiality, highlighted by the literature on bureaucratic embeddedness (Pepinsky, Pierskalla, and Sacks 2017). Embedded bureaucrats often exhibit greater local knowledge, higher effort, and provide better services (Bhavnani and Lee 2018; Ricks 2016), but they are also prone to favoritism and further alienating marginalized populations (Fjeldstad 2005; Haim, Nanes, and Davidson 2021). Reflecting this tradeoff, police departments in the US differ in whether they require officers to live within the city boundaries where they serve (Kennedy et al. 2017), and officer embeddedness varies from 7% of officers living locally in Miami to 88% of officers living locally in Chicago (see Figure 3). This discussion is also salient in countries with weaker police capacity and a high risk of corruption. In Mexico, for example, policymakers debate whether to assign local officers who are better at identifying key actors in the drug trade, or non-local "Federales" who are less likely to collude with traffickers.

In light of this debate, we offer a few conjectures on where community policing might be most beneficial. Our results imply that community policing provides experiences similar to those embedded officers already hold, but this does not mean that community policing should be eschewed in favor of recruiting officers who are already embedded in their community. Optimistically, community engagement could help close the gap in trust and empathy between embedded and non-embedded officers, perhaps allowing communities to benefit from the upsides of police embeddedness without being subject to as many of the downsides. One idea would be to focus community policing efforts in places where police embeddedness is low, or to disproportionately assign unembedded officers to these programs, while focusing on other reforms to improve attitudes among officers with extensive local experience. That said, officer attitudes are not the only relevant policing outcomes; embedded officers may still be more effective at using the platform of community policing to improve citizen-facing outcomes. If this is the case, police departments may face a tradeoff, whereby they can either prioritize improving the attitudes of officers or citizens, but not both.

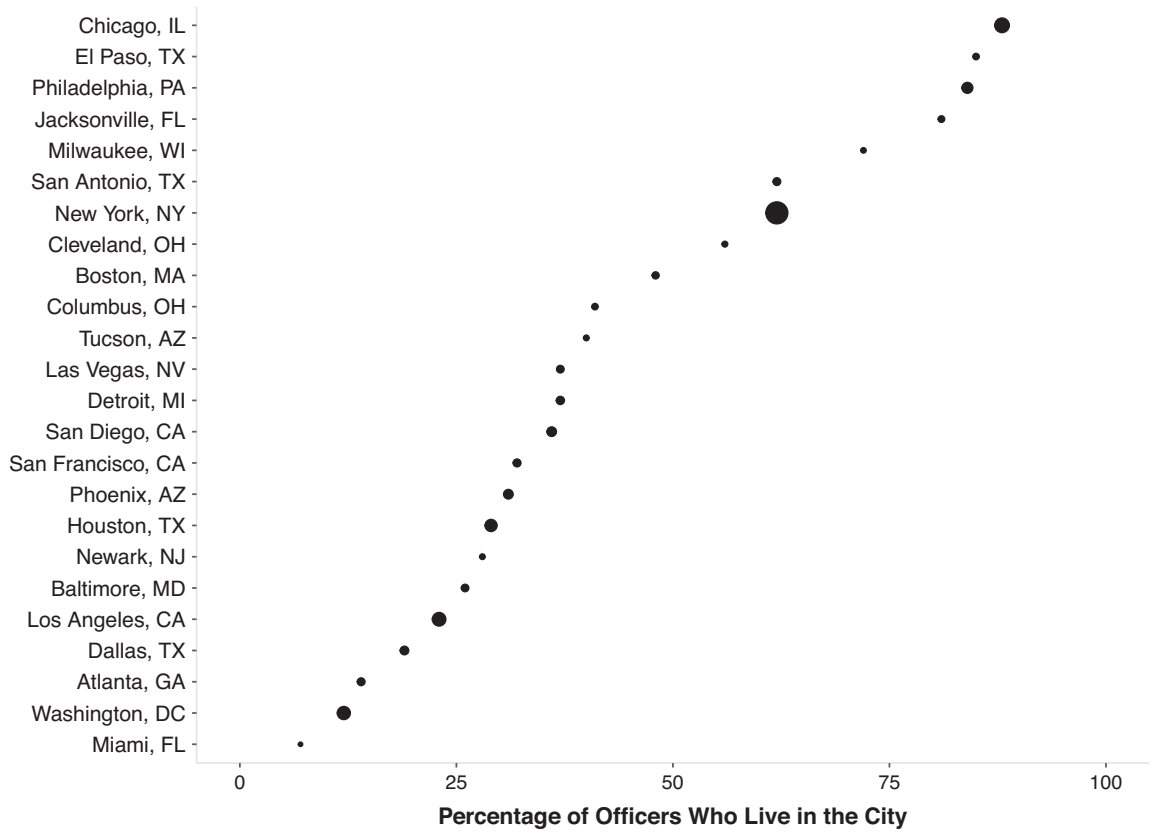
Safety Context and Threats to Personal Safety

A second major takeaway from our qualitative observations concerns how the local safety context shaped the content of information to which officers were exposed while participating in community policing. Learning more about the issues that citizens dealt with on a day-to-day basis shaped officers' understanding of citizen-facing public safety issues, but it also affected assessments of their own personal safety. Specifically, community policing heightened the salience of threats to officer safety in areas that were proximate to the NPA insurgency.

Although none of the POP teams officially designated the NPA threat as their focus issue, we found that barangay leaders in NPA-affected municipalities used the POP meetings to raise instances where NPA personnel were sighted or suspected of recruiting at-risk youth.[18] Our field staff reported that when these issues were raised, officers tended to act uncomfortable and

[18] We think the heterogeneous effects of NPA presence were driven almost entirely by the POP aspect of the program. Citizens virtually never raised the NPA issue during town halls, and it was not part of the initial training.

FIGURE 3. Distribution of Police Embeddedness in US Cities



Note: Data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Census Bureau. Displayed are the 25 largest US police forces—points are sized by the number of officers employed by the force. For an expanded description of these data, see https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/most-police-dont-live-in-the-cities-they-serve/.

express outward frustration that citizens were not more forthcoming with real-time information about NPA activities. This reaction was likely tied to officers' fears of NPA ambushes, which was the most common threat to officer safety mentioned in our interviews. Many officers told stories about someone they knew on the force who had been killed, injured, or kidnapped by the NPA. When ambushes occur, officers often blame the citizen population for alerting the NPA about police movements or, at the very least, failing to provide the police with information that would allow them to avoid unexpected encounters.

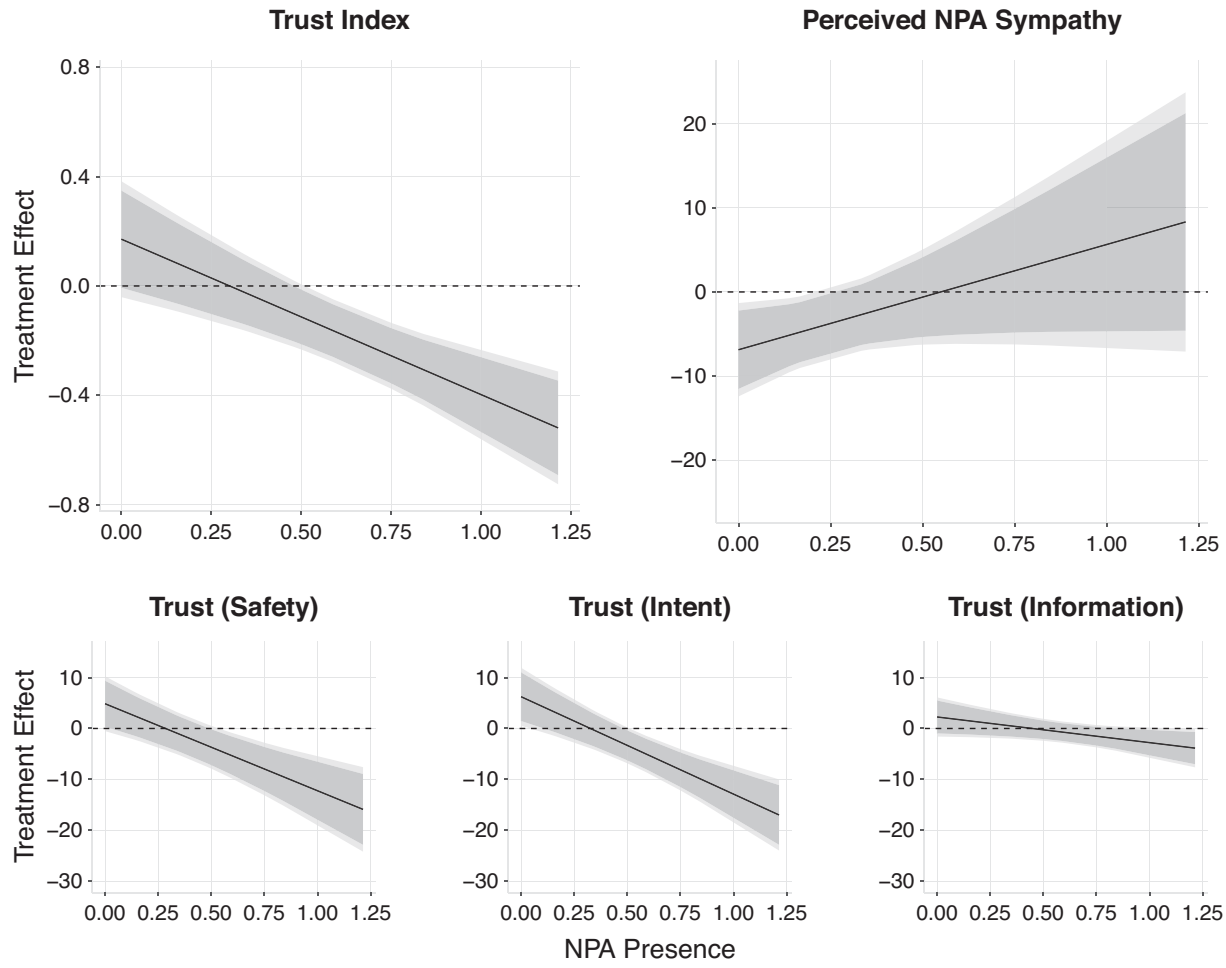
Notably, officers who conducted community policing in NPA-affected areas tended to express frustration with the broader citizenry, even though the individuals who attended community policing events were largely law-abiding, cooperative, and respectful (see Hanson, Kronick, and Slough Forthcoming). We think that information about insurgent activity led officers to infer that a larger proportion of citizens must be sympathetic to the NPA, given that the group survives by hiding amongst the population. Officers focused on citizen behavior being shaped by NPA propaganda while minimizing citizens' own fear of retaliation, a well-known factor that impedes citizen information-sharing about insurgents.

These observations led us to investigate whether the effect of community policing was conditioned by the baseline level of NPA presence in the municipality where officers were stationed. To measure NPA presence, we rely on internal military intelligence reports that code barangays on a 3-point scale of "cleared" (0), "influenced" (1), or "controlled" (2) by the NPA.[19] The latter two categories indicate that insurgents regularly take residence or have an active party organization in the barangay. Our measure proxies for NPA activity by calculating the mean value of the 3-point scale for all barangays in a given municipality. While our sample was restricted to "cleared" barangays, NPA personnel still interact with civilians and try to expand their presence into these barangays from their nearby areas of control.[20] In Figure 4, we begin by focusing on the heterogeneous effect of NPA presence on officer *Trust*, the citizen-facing outcome most directly tied to officer safety.

[19] We use reports from December 2015, the most recent year when they were made available to us. Similar data are used in Crost, Felter, and Johnston (2014) and Haim (2025).

[20] We speculate that the detrimental effects of police contact with citizens may be exaggerated in less secure areas.

FIGURE 4. Heterogeneous Effect of Community Policing on Officer Trust, by NPA Presence



Note: All plots display marginal effects of treatment by NPA (rebel) presence in the municipality, using the specification controlling for baseline outcomes (Equation 1). The top panel displays results for the main trust index and a separate outcome asking officers to rate civilians' sympathy toward the NPA in their assigned municipality. The bottom panel displays results for the individual survey items that compose the trust index. Confidence intervals are displayed at the 95% level (light gray) and 90% level (dark gray). Full regression results are in Table A.7 in the Supplementary Material.

Participation in community policing in NPA-adjacent areas substantially decreased officers' trust in civilians (see the *Trust* index in the top-left panel). On the other hand, in municipalities without an active NPA presence, community policing marginally increased trust in civilians. This pattern is especially pronounced for officers' perception of their own safety (*Trust–Safety*) and of citizens' concern for officer well-being (*Trust–Intent*), displayed in the bottom panel of Figure 4. In the Supplementary Material, we show that the interpretation of the marginal effects is consistent when using the Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu (2019) binning estimator, and when including a battery of municipal-level controls.

The heterogeneous effects for the remaining outcome indices are shown in the Supplementary Material. There was no significant heterogeneous effect on *Shared Citizen Concerns*, for which the average treatment effect is positive across the full range of the *NPA Presence* moderator. This is consistent with the idea that officers learned about the community's concerns regardless of where they were assigned, but the *content* of those concerns differed. To examine this mechanism, we looked to a separate survey item that asked officers to estimate the percentage of citizens in their municipality who are sympathetic to the NPA (top-right panel of Figure 4). Consistent with our qualitative observations, treatment officers in low-NPA areas perceived that citizens were less sympathetic to the NPA (relative to the control group), while treatment officers in high-NPA areas perceived that citizens were more sympathetic to the NPA.[21] We do not find significant heterogeneous effects on officer *Empathy*, the other citizen-facing

[21] Evidence for this pattern using the Equation 1 specification is marginal ($p = 0.12$ on the interaction term), but the results are significant at conventional levels when using weighted regression or cluster-bootstrapped standard errors.

outcome. This result is not surprising in light of the fact that we operationalized this concept to focus on the seriousness of crimes and complaints that citizens *did* report to the police. As described above, the most relevant aspect of empathy in the context of the NPA is whether officers understand citizens' choice *not* to report rebel activity.[22]

Based on these patterns, we challenge the idea that the information officers attain through community policing will uniformly improve officers' expectation of personal safety. Although this assumption may hold in "safe" areas, where citizens are likely to raise concerns that pose little threat to officers, we predict that additional information about citizen concerns in "dangerous" areas can increase officers' perceived risks to personal safety. This can generate anxiety and worsen trust in citizens. Our hypothesis is again rooted in intergroup contact theory: "positive" contact can improve outgroup attitudes, while "negative" contact has the reverse effect (Lowe 2021; Paolini, Harwood, and Rubin 2010; Schäfer et al. 2021). Even when officers experience both positive and negative contact during community policing, their overall trust may decrease because negative contact tends to be a more powerful predictor of outgroup attitudes (Barlow et al. 2012). Importantly, this process does not require that direct interactions with citizens during community policing are antagonistic. Rather, negative contact can occur from exposure to information that highlights threats posed by outgroup members, regardless of whether the threat comes from the individuals with whom one interacts (Schäfer et al. 2021). Negative information can raise intergroup anxiety and harden identity divides between officers and citizens, two of the strongest mediators linking negative contact to attitudinal change (Paolini, Harwood, and Rubin 2010; Pettigrew and Tropp 2011).

Our theory is particularly powerful when combined with insights on how "neighborhood context" affects police officers (Paoline, Myers, and Worden 2000; Terrill and Reisig 2003). The key insight is that rather than *overcoming* the effects of neighborhood context (as is commonly assumed), community policing can *heighten* the effects of neighborhood context on officers' attitudes and behaviors. This mechanism corresponds to Nix, Pickett, and Wolfe's (2020) claim that working in violent communities may condition officers to expect more noncompliance, disrespect, and violence from citizens. We contend that the information officers acquire during community policing can worsen harmful stereotypes of the citizenry, even if officers primarily interact with cooperative, law-abiding citizens. We focused on the threat posed by insurgency due to its relevance in Sorsogon. The literature on neighborhood context highlights additional threats like organized crime, high gun ownership rates, or a history of citizen antagonism toward the police, which are less relevant in Sorsogon but may yield similar effects in settings where they are present.

One troubling implication of our theory is that community policing may be most likely to fail in places where improvements to officer–citizen relations are most needed. Officers assigned to areas with high safety threats may become more guarded and more likely to think force is necessary, which suggests the need to explore alternative reforms in high risk areas. We do not suggest that the police should become less engaged or more militaristic, which could have negative effects on citizen-facing outcomes. Instead, departments may consider alternative modalities of community policing that retain a citizen-centered approach without immediately ramping up contact on a large scale. The police could also incorporate perspective-taking interventions into officer trainings, which may serve to set appropriate expectations and help officers see the world from citizens' perspectives.

DISCUSSION

This article highlights the importance of studying street-level officers' attitudes toward the communities they serve. We find that community policing can help officers better understand citizens' public safety needs, but it does not bring about overall improvements to officers' trust, empathy, or views on misconduct. This pattern suggests that much of the literature lacks important nuance when it presumes that community policing uniformly improves officer attitudes. Our inductive theory challenges the foundational assumption that "regular, informal contact with citizens" can consistently minimize officers' tendency "to think that citizens' intentions and safety risks are worse than they are in reality" (Paoline, Myers, and Worden 2000, 7). Although this may be true for officers who are not already embedded in the community, officers who have extensive local ties likely hold entrenched attitudes that are difficult to shift through additional contact with citizens. Moreover, contact with citizens (even in curated, cooperative settings) can raise the salience of threats to officers' personal safety, negatively affecting their views of the average citizen's trustworthiness. In this section, we describe several limitations of our study, then discuss implications for bureaucrats in other contexts.

First, we are limited in our ability to capture whether the intervention translated to changes in officers' *behavior* outside the community policing meetings. Our field staff's observations suggest that embeddedness and threats to officer safety shaped officers' effort and communication style during the POP meetings, but the PNP does not collect officer-level data that would allow us to reliably measure effort, discrimination, or abuse in their day-to-day tasks. For example, one outstanding question that speaks to the policy implications of our results is whether officers became more effective at their jobs as a result of internalizing local

[22] Our theory does not speak to whether NPA presence should affect *Accountability* or *Corruption*, though we did find a positive heterogeneous effect of NPA presence on *Accountability* ($p = 0.099$). From a purely speculative standpoint, police leaders may be more sensitive to officer misconduct when trying to win "hearts and minds" away from insurgents.

communities' needs, even in the absence of broader changes to officer attitudes. Our results are best understood as an important first step toward uncovering the behavioral implications of programs like community policing, given that frontline government agents' attitudes are often linked to their behaviors (Ingram, Terril, and Pauline 2018; Keiser 2010).

We also acknowledge that there are other moderators and contextual factors that could influence community policing's impact on officers, beyond those we chose to highlight in this piece. For instance, our inductive theory centers on two factors that determine whether the "bottom-up" mechanisms of community policing (driven by citizen contact) take hold. Evidence for how police leadership can instill a culture of respect and accountability toward citizens from the "top-down" is limited. The largely null top-down results could be explained in part by the powerful norm against "ratting out" fellow officers for misconduct. We caution that in order to change citizen-facing norms, high level leadership buy-in must be paired with broader institutional reforms that improve monitoring and ensure effective implementation by mid-level leadership.[23] In addition, the effects of community policing on officers may depend on the specific bundle of activities that are included in the program, though we reiterate that our intervention included a bundle of activities that is commonly implemented in the real-world.[24] For example, scholars and policymakers might consider whether some of the backlash effects we observed could be mitigated by weighting the intervention more heavily toward contact with "ordinary" citizens or community leaders. Finally, we note that our study was not designed to definitively decipher between the four mechanisms of social contact theory, and that our application of these concepts is an inductive exercise. Future work could test how officers' information acquisition, anxiety reduction, perspective-getting, and shared identity are shaped by citizen contact, and how these mechanisms ultimately shape bureaucrats' attitudes and behaviors.

With those limitations in mind, we now turn to the question of how this article speaks to research on street-level state agents more broadly. Social contact with citizens is a crucial aspect of the job for soldiers and many "conventional" bureaucrats like social workers, healthcare workers, and cadastral officers. Like police officers, these agents hold high discretion over implementing policy (Brierley et al. 2023; Lipsky 1980), and their actions are shaped by their attitudes toward clients and the bureaucratic mission (Keiser 2010). Yet existing studies tend to rely on static measures of embeddedness and identity to explain bureaucrats' local knowledge, motivations, and prejudices. We think it is instructive to treat bureaucrats' local knowledge and their attitudes toward citizens as being endogenous to the governance strategies they implement while on the job.

Future research could explore how bureaucrats' behavior is shaped by the interaction of their fixed traits and the ties they build with citizens while on the job. For example, variation in whether bureaucrats are racially, religiously, or socioeconomically representative of the communities they serve may shape the effects of community engagement. Perhaps bureaucrats who do not have prior experiences with minority populations will derive greater benefits from social contact with citizens from these groups. On the other hand, it may be the case that certain dimensions of representation cannot be artificially replicated, such as race in communities with deep-seated racial divisions. Since racial and religious divisions were largely absent from our study's context, we cannot speak directly to this dynamic, but we view this as a promising path for future research.

When it comes to applying our theory of local safety context, we note that many state agents face substantial threats to personal safety that can be revealed through citizen contact, though the particular nature of those threats may vary. Our theory might be most applicable to soldiers because, like police officers, they are part of the coercive arm of the state and are more likely to be targeted with violence by criminals or insurgents. "Hearts and minds" counterinsurgency often brings soldiers into contact with community leaders in insecure areas, raising the salience of threats that could increase soldiers' anxieties, stereotypes, and propensity to employ violence. This insight likely also applies to conventional bureaucrats assigned to areas with active non-state armed groups or criminal gangs, given that these groups often target violence at government workers who they view as encroaching into their territory.[25] Finally, our theory may apply beyond armed conflict and criminal violence. Although the nature and severity of the threat is different, social workers and teachers often report high risks of physical assault, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse, which could have a similar effect on trust toward the populations they serve.

Because the behavior of individual police officers, soldiers, and bureaucrats is crucial to jumpstarting virtuous cycles of citizen–state relations, we hope this study motivates new research on how government policies and political context affect the attitudes and behaviors of the people charged with implementing those policies. Creating the conditions for street-level state agents to develop a sense of trust, empathy, and accountability toward the communities they serve is a key step in building government legitimacy more broadly.

[23] Anecdotally, the intervention seemed to have a greater effect where station-level leaders were more engaged and did not just treat the program as additional "red tape."

[24] The fact that Blair et al. (2021) also found null results of "locally appropriate" bundles of community policing practices on officer attitudes in other settings suggests that our results are not an anomaly on this front.

[25] Indeed, an evaluation of the Philippines' flagship development program in conflict zones found that safety concerns caused development workers to shirk their duties, undercutting the program's implementation (Haim, Fernandez, and Cruz 2019).

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit https://doi.oeg/10.1017/S000305542400145X.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the American Political Science Review Dataverse: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/2LHT5U.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The authors declare the human subjects research in this article was reviewed and approved by UC San Diego IRB under protocols 170974 and 170415, with reliance agreements approved by the IRBs at Saint Louis University and Florida State University. The authors affirm that this article adheres to the principles concerning research with human participants laid out in APSA's Principles and Guidance on Human Subject Research (2020).

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