

Building trust in a reformed security sector

A field experiment in Liberia



In brief

- Researchers from Brown University, Emory University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology collaborated with the Ministry of Justice and the Liberian National Police (LNP) to conduct a rigorous impact evaluation of the LNP’s “Confidence Patrol” community policing programme. Designed to build trust in the police and raise awareness about institutional reforms in the justice and security sectors, the programme involved repeated visits from teams of 10-15 Police Support Unit (PSU) officers to 36 communities in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties over a period of 14 months.
- The study finds that the programme increased knowledge of the police and of Liberian law; increased security of property rights; reduced the incidence of some crimes, notably assault and domestic violence; and increased reporting of crimes to the LNP.
- The programme did not, however, improve trust in the LNP in general. In addition, the programme appears to have reduced satisfaction with the LNP’s handling of reported crimes, possibly because exposure to elite, newly-trained PSU officers raised expectations beyond the ordinary LNP’s capacity to meet them.
- Overall, the findings provide encouraging evidence about the efficacy of the Confidence Patrols programme, while also emphasising the need for continued improvements to the capacity of the regular LNP.

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Motivation

Restoring the rule of law is a prerequisite for economic development in countries recovering from civil war. Rule of law ensures the security of property rights, builds confidence among businesses and investors, and provides reliable and transparent mechanisms for resolving disputes without recourse to violence. Rule of law also protects the rights of women and other historically marginalised groups by, for example, increasing reporting and prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence — crimes that are often neglected in post-conflict settings.

Yet, restoring the rule of law after prolonged periods of conflict can often prove challenging or impossible. Citizen cooperation is necessary to ensure the efficient use of scarce resources for investigating and adjudicating crimes, but citizens often do not know how to contact the police or access the courts, and many assume that seeking redress through state security and justice institutions will prove prohibitively expensive. Many also fear that wartime patterns of corruption and abuse will persist into peacetime. As a result, witnesses often refuse to cooperate with the police, and victims often choose to bypass the police and courts altogether, relying instead on illegal or extra-judicial mechanisms of dispute resolution (e.g. lynchings, mob justice and trial by ordeal). These mechanisms can be effective, but they can also be idiosyncratic and biased against women and ethnic or religious minorities. Unpredictability and discrimination create a hostile environment for investment in property, business and human capital at both the micro and macro levels, stifling development and exacerbating the risk that conflict will recur.

Despite the importance of rule of law for economic growth, few studies have evaluated the effectiveness of specific policies designed to increase civilians' access to, trust in, and compliance with state security and justice institutions. While scholars have considered mechanisms for building trust in the police and courts in the US, lessons learned from this literature may not generalise to countries overcoming legacies of civil war. And while a number of studies have explored “best practices” in post-conflict security and justice sector reform, few have addressed whether or how these reforms affect the relationships between civilians and state institutions. Moreover, these studies are almost all observational, and tend to rely on anecdotal or purely qualitative evidence.

In this report we assess whether recurring “Confidence Patrols” by elite, newly-retrained subunits of Liberian National Police (LNP) officers can increase trust in the police, reduce crime and violence, and enhance security of property rights in rural Liberia. Our study is one of just a small handful of rigorous impact evaluations conducted in collaboration with state security personnel in the developing world. Our goal is not only to contribute to the academic literatures on rule of law and security sector reform, but also to inform policymaking in Liberia at an especially crucial moment, as UN peacekeepers withdraw and as the government extends its presence into rural areas long accustomed to state absence or abuse.

Background

Regional justice and security hubs

Despite over a decade of reform, many Liberians continue to perceive state security and justice institutions as ill-equipped, inaccessible, and ineffective. Rule of law is weak, and many citizens continue to rely on illegal or extrajudicial mechanisms (such as mob justice or trial by ordeal) to resolve disputes and adjudicate crimes.

Perhaps the most important barrier to improved rule of law in Liberia has been a lack of resources. With a limited budget and finite donor support, the Liberian government has struggled to capacitate the police and courts, which often lack basic necessities such as transportation, communications and stationary, especially in rural areas.

To address these challenges, the Liberian government has established five Regional Justice and Security Hubs at strategic locations throughout the country. Each Hub hosts joint deployments from the courts, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization and Police Support Unit (PSU) -- an elite subunit within the LNP. With improved infrastructure and better-trained, better-equipped personnel, the Hubs hold the potential to bring unprecedented improvements in the quantity and quality of justice and security provision in rural Liberia¹.

Confidence patrols programme

To raise awareness about the Hubs, the Liberian government instituted a “Confidence Patrols” programme through which teams of 10-15 PSU officers travel to towns and villages throughout rural Liberia to raise awareness of the Hubs, demonstrate the LNP’s improved capacity, and sensitise citizens to increased police presence in and around their communities.

During the patrols, PSU officers distributed informational posters about the Hubs; exchanged contact information with community leaders; held public meetings to discuss issues related to justice and security; and walked throughout the community in small groups to interact with citizens (see Figures 1 and 2). Each patrol typically lasted several hours, and in more distant communities, the officers sometimes spent the night.

1. For background on the Justice and Security Hubs program, see: Caparini, Marina. “Extending State Authority in Liberia: The Gbarnga Justice and Security Hub.” Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) Report 5 (2014), available at: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2448111 (Last accessed 08/01/2016).

Figure 1: PSU officers hold town meeting



Public meetings were an important component of the Confidence Patrols program. Common topics of discussion included land disputes, domestic violence, police corruption, accessibility of the police, and use of the courts.

Figure 2: PSU officers meeting with citizens



After the public meetings, the PSU officers walked through the community in small groups to engage with citizens.

Evaluation

Our evaluation of the programme began in June 2014. In collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and the LNP, we generated a list of beneficiary communities based on i) proximity to the Hub in Gbarnga, Bong County, ii) population size, and iii) prior exposure to the Confidence Patrols programme. This resulted in a sample of 74 communities located across Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties, ranging in population from 500 to 4,000, between roughly ½ and 3 hours from the Gbarnga Hub, and with limited prior experience of the programme. From this sample, we randomly assigned 36 “treatment” communities to receive the programme and the remaining 38 communities to serve as a comparison (or “control”) group, eligible to receive the programme after the evaluation ended.

On average, each community was patrolled three to four times over the 14 months of the evaluation. The programme was suspended between September 2014 and February 2015 due to the Ebola epidemic, but continued thereafter through September 2015.

We tested the impact of the programme on several clusters of outcomes, including knowledge of the police and of Liberian law generally; perceptions of the LNP and of the Liberian government more generally; incidence of crime and violence; willingness to report crimes to the LNP; satisfaction with the LNP’s response to reported crimes; reliance on illegal or extrajudicial mechanisms for dispute resolution; and security of property rights.

To do this, we relied on three sources of data. First, we conducted a population-based survey of all 74 communities in November and December 2015. The survey was implemented in collaboration with Parley Liberia, a research NGO based in Gbarnga, and consisted of two instruments, one administered to a sample of 18 randomly-selected residents, and a second administered to five purposively-selected local leaders—the town or village chief, two elders, a women’s group leader and a youth group leader. In total, the residents and local leaders’ surveys included 1,382 respondents and 383 respondents, respectively.

Second, we collected records of all crimes reported to the LNP by residents of our 74 communities at any time between January 2015 and June 2016. Because many of the LNP’s files are not digitised, this involved sending a Liberian research assistant to each of the 6 LNP depots with jurisdiction over the communities in our sample to collect and transcribe their records.

Finally, we hired a Liberian research assistant to accompany the PSU on each patrol and keep a log of the proceedings, including topics discussed by the patrolling officers and questions asked by residents and local leaders. We use these qualitative logs to contextualise and inform our quantitative results.

Limitations

Our research design offers several advantages over alternative approaches, but is not without limitations. First, because our sample size is relatively small, it is possible that we failed to detect small effects, particularly for outcomes that are relatively

rare (e.g. rape). Second, some of our outcomes are difficult to capture in a survey (e.g. willingness to cooperate with the police), and our proxies may be susceptible to social desirability bias and other forms of measurement error. This limitation afflicts all studies that rely on surveys, and ours is no exception. We have done our best to mitigate these limitations (e.g. by pre-testing our survey and complementing it with administrative and qualitative data collection), but they should nonetheless be kept in mind when interpreting our results.

Results

Summary statistics

Table 1 summarises the component variables for each cluster of outcomes. Knowledge of the police was mixed. Most respondents (90%) knew the location of the nearest police station, but only 12% knew the phone number of a police officer (though a greater proportion could likely access this information in the event of a crime). Awareness of the Hubs remains limited, with only 16% of respondents reporting that they've heard about the Hubs. This comes despite significant efforts by the government to raise awareness through radio, media and the Confidence Patrols programme.

Table 1: Summary of outcomes, by cluster

	N	Mean
Knowledge of police		
Know where nearest police station is?	1,316	90%
Know number of any police officer?	1,316	12%
Know about the Hub?	1,316	16%
Knowledge of Liberian law		
Law allows town to beat a criminal?	1,315	9%
Law requires reporting suspicious dead bodies?	1,315	68%
Law requires habeas corpus?	1,315	83%
Law proscribes taking case to police if chief disagrees?	1,314	37%
Law allows trial by ordeal?	1,315	23%
Perceptions of police		
Police will make you pay a bribe?	1,675	53%
Police will take your case seriously?	1,675	26%
Police will just make you pay a bribe?	1,675	23%
Police will verbally abuse you?	1,675	9%
Police will physically abuse you?	1,675	9%
Police will free a criminal for a bribe?	1,674	31%
Police are corrupt?	1,675	57%
Police treat all tribes equally?	1,675	81%
Police treat women and men the same?	1,675	67%

	N	Mean
Reliance on police		
Would prefer police response for burglary?	1,407	42%
Would prefer police response for domestic violence?	1,407	20%
Would prefer police response armed robbery?	1,407	68%
Would prefer police response for murder?	1,407	69%
Would prefer police response for mob violence?	1,407	45%
Would prefer police response for inter-ethnic violence?	1,407	60%
Reliance on extrajudicial resolution		
<i>Other members of your community would support trial by ordeal for:</i>		
Unsolved murder?	1,682	16%
Missing person?	1,682	18%
Unsolved burglary?	1,682	27%
<i>You yourself would support trial by ordeal for:</i>		
Unsolved murder?	1,682	16%
Missing person?	1,681	17%
Unsolved burglary?	1,680	22%
Incidence of crime		
<i>In the past year, have you or anyone in your community been a victim of:</i>		
Armed robbery?	1,669	2%
Theft or burglary?	1,669	32%
Aggravated assault?	1,669	3%
Simple assault?	1,669	9%
Domestic violence?	1,669	39%
Rape?	1,669	4%
Security of property rights		
House property is secure?	1,407	80%
Made improvements to your house property in past 12 months?	1,317	25%
Dispute over house spot land in past 12 months?	1,317	5%
Farm property is secure?	1,407	80%
Made major improvements to farm in past 12 months?	1,043	76%
Left farm fallow in 2015?	1,041	85%
Plan to leave farm fallow in 2016?	1,043	84%
Dispute over farm land in past 12 months?	1,044	11%

Sample size varies due because only a subset of questions was included in the leader survey.

Knowledge of Liberian law varied across topics. Respondents were almost unanimous in their understanding that Liberian law does not allow citizens to beat suspected criminals, but were more divided on whether or not Liberian law requires the LNP to investigate witnesses as suspects (it does not). More worrisome is the fact that 23% of respondents believed trial by ordeal is legal (it is not), and that 37% of respondents believed they have no legal right to report their town or village chief for wrongdoing (they do). Most respondents (83%) did, however, know that they have a legal right to habeas corpus if they are suspects in a criminal case.

Perceptions of the police were mixed, but generally unfavourable. Half of respondents believed they would have to pay for the police to investigate a crime, and only 25% believed the police would take their case seriously. Over half of respondents (56%) described the police as corrupt. That said, the majority (80%) believed the police treat all tribes equally, and only a small minority believed the police would verbally or physically abuse suspects in their custody (9% and 10% respectively). Perceptions of the government were similarly mixed, with 54% describing the government as corrupt and only 40% describing it as transparent, but 90% agreeing that it treats all tribes the same.

Respondents preferred to rely on the police in most hypothetical scenarios of crime and violence. Preferences for the police were strongest for robbery (67%) and murder (69%) and weakest for domestic violence (20%). Support for illegal or extrajudicial mechanisms of dispute resolution varied between 18% and 26%, depending on the question. Whether respondents referred actual cases to the police also varied. Only 5% reported taking a case to the police, whereas 15% reported taking a case to the town or village chief. But 29% of cases eventually went to court, suggesting that chiefs often referred victims' complaints to the formal sector.

We measured the incidence of crime by asking respondents whether they were victims of crime, as well as whether they knew anyone else in the community who was a victim of crime. For each reported incident, we asked respondents about where the case was taken (e.g. chief, police, courts, etc.) and, for each of those forums, whether respondent/victim was satisfied with how the case was handled. Overall, 53% of respondents reported at least one crime in their community in the past year (17% reported self-victimization). Domestic violence was the most commonly reported incident (34%), followed by burglaries and thefts (29% of respondents), simple assault (5%), rape (4%), armed robbery (3%), and aggravated assault (2%).

Although most respondents felt secure about both their house spots and farmland (80% and 76%, respectively), disputes were not uncommon. In the past year alone, 5% of respondents reported a dispute over their house spot and 11% reported a dispute over farmland. 45% of disputes involved acts or threats of violence, and 12% entailed destruction of property.

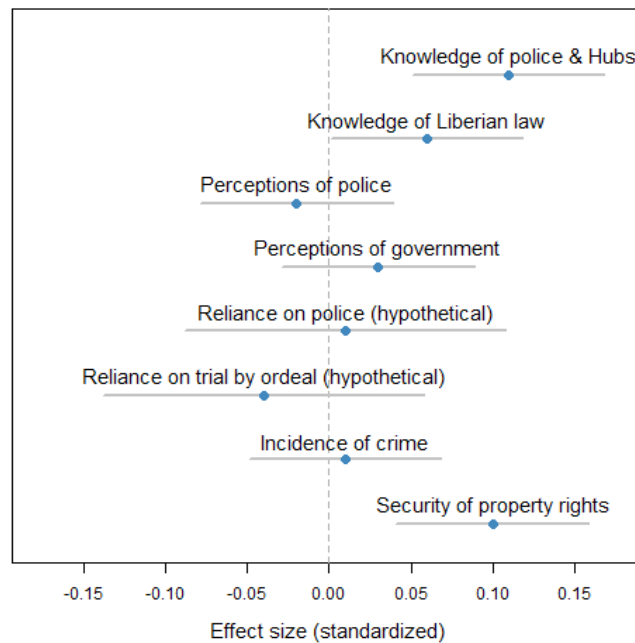
Main effects

We estimate the programme's aggregate effect on each of our seven outcome clusters using a procedure designed to minimise the possibility of both false positives and false negatives². Figure 3 summarises the results. Overall, the programme had substantively small and statistically insignificant effects on most outcomes. It did not reduce the incidence of most types of crime, nor did it improve

2. More specifically, we compute the "average effect size" for each cluster of outcomes following the procedure outlined in Kling et. al. (2007). At the individual-level, we control for gender, age, household size, tribe, religion, education and literacy. We also control for population, mobile phone coverage, distance from the nearest usable road, distance from the nearest police station, an indicator for whether or not there is an LNP depot in the community, and an index of public services (clinics, schools, wells, latrines and guesthouses) at the community level. Community-level controls are measured in the survey of local leaders and using census data.

perceptions of the police or of the government more generally. It did not increase preferences for the police in hypothetical scenarios of crime and violence and, perhaps relatedly, did not reduce reliance on illegal or extrajudicial mechanisms of dispute resolution.

Figure 3: Summary of programme impacts, by outcome cluster



The programme did, however, have a strong positive effect on knowledge of the police, driven largely by greater knowledge of the Hubs. Substantively, we find that residents of patrolled communities were 8% more likely to have heard of the Gbarnga Hub; 5% more likely to know where the Hub is located; and 5% more likely to be able to name at least one service available at the Hub. These effects are perhaps unsurprising, given that patrolling officers repeatedly emphasised the importance of the Hub in their conversations with civilians. Nonetheless, they are important insofar as they suggest increased awareness of new security and justice services available to citizens of these counties.

Alongside greater awareness of the police are modest but statistically significant improvements in knowledge of Liberian law. In particular, residents of patrolled communities were 5% more likely to know about habeas corpus, 5% more likely to know that trial by ordeal is illegal, and 3% more likely to know that Liberian law does not permit civilians to physically harm suspected criminals.

The programme also had strong positive effects on security of property rights. Residents of patrolled communities were 7% and 15% more likely to feel secure about their house spots and farmlands, respectively; 5% less likely to be involved in an ongoing dispute over their farmlands; 5% more likely to report making costly improvements to their house spots in the past year; and 5% more likely to report leaving their farmland fallow. We view these results as especially important given the continued prevalence of land disputes in rural Liberia, and given the

persistent threat of violence that land disputes pose.

Moreover, the null aggregate effect on crime masks important variation across different specific categories of crime. Table 2 disaggregates these results into their six component parts: armed robbery, burglary and theft, aggravated assault, simple assault, domestic violence, and rape. While the programme did not reduce the incidence of aggravated assault, armed robbery, rape or burglary, it did reduce simple assault by 5 percentage points and domestic violence by 7 percentage points. We view these latter effects as especially important given how pervasive a problem domestic violence remains. Moreover, the null effects on aggravated assault, armed robbery and rape may be an artefact of the relatively low incidence of these crimes in control communities, at least as reported by our survey respondents.

	Aggr. Assault	Armed robbery	Domestic violence	Rape	Simple assault	Burglary
Treatment	0.01 [0.01]	0 [0.01]	-0.07** [0.03]	0.02 [0.02]	-0.05*** [0.02]	0.01 [0.03]
Control group mean	0.02 [0.02]	0 [0.02]	0.34 [0.08]	0.01 [0.04]	0.09 [0.03]	0.26 [0.07]
Observations	1694	1694	1694	1668	1694	1694
Individual-level controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Community-level controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Stratum fixed effects	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Omitted individual-level controls include gender, age, ethnicity, education and literacy. Omitted community-level controls include population, cell phone coverage and social services, as well as an indicator for communities with LNP depots. Standard errors clustered by community. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

For crimes that did occur, Table 3 reports the programme's impact on i) reporting to the police, ii) adjudication in the court system, and iii) adjudication by local leaders. The programme increased reliance on the police and courts, particularly for violent crimes (i.e. aggravated assault, rape, and armed robbery). It does not appear to have increased reporting for domestic violence or petty crimes, perhaps because respondents do not believe these crimes justify the costs of reporting. Encouragingly, these results are consistent with our analysis of crime reports from the LNP's administrative records, which also indicate higher reporting as a result of the programme: 86% of patrolled communities reported one or more crimes to the police, compared to 60% of comparison communities.

Table 3: Programme impacts on crime reporting

	# of cases	Incident reported to police?			Incident adjusted in court?			Incident reported to town leaders?		
		Treatment	Control	Controlled difference	Treatment	Control	Controlled difference	Treatment	Control	Controlled difference
All crime	1830	23%	18%	0.05+ [0.03]	7%	5%	0.03** [0.01]	39%	38%	-0.01 [0.03]
Armed robbery	41	52%	30%	0.18 [0.22]	19%	0%	0.23* [0.12]	9%	0%	0.05 [0.09]
Armed assault	70	32%	25%	0.18** [0.09]	8%	6%	0.02 [0.06]	2%	16%	0.03 [0.09]
Rape	64	70%	50%	0.24* [0.12]	25%	12%	0.22* [0.13]	8%	8%	-0.05 [0.06]
Property dispute (violent)	88	5%	4%	0.02 [0.06]	39%	29%	0.1 [0.10]	39%	33%	0.08 [0.10]
Domestic violence	668	11%	12%	0 [0.03]	2%	1%	0 [0.01]	39%	39%	0 [0.04]
Property dispute	93	0%	2%	-0.03 [0.05]	9%	19%	-0.09 [0.07]	48%	33%	0.17+ [0.11]
Assault	148	13%	14%	0.05 [0.05]	0%	1%	0.03 [0.02]	2%	23%	0.06 [0.06]
Robbery	658	15%	16%	-0.01 [0.04]	0%	1%	0 [0.01]	21%	23%	-0.04 [0.03]

Controlled differences estimated using a dispute-level, OLS regression. Omitted dispute-level controls include the base category for each type of crime; omitted individual level controls include gender, age, ethnicity, education, and literacy. Omitted community-level controls include population, cell phone coverage and social services, strata, as well as an indicator for communities with LNP depots. Standard errors clustered by community. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01, + p<.15

Finally, Table 4 reports the effect of the programme on victims' satisfaction with the way the police, courts and local leaders handled their cases. Perhaps surprisingly, if anything, the programme appears to have decreased satisfaction with both the police and community leaders, though the effect on police is not statistically significant. We return to this finding in the discussion.

Table 4: Programme impacts on satisfaction with police, courts, and leaders for their handling of reported incidents

	Satisfied with police?	Satisfied with courts?	Satisfied with leaders?
Treatment	-0.10 [0.07]	0.04 [0.12]	-0.10 [0.04]**
Number of cases	284	87	529
Control group mean	60%	51%	78%

Estimates correspond to a dispute-level, OLS regression. Omitted dispute-level controls include the base category for each type of crime; omitted individual level controls include gender, age, ethnicity, education, and literacy. Omitted community-level controls include population, cell phone coverage and social services, strata, as well as an indicator for communities with LNP depots. Standard errors clustered by community. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01, + p<.15

Discussion

Overall, our results provide encouraging evidence about the effectiveness of the Confidence Patrols program. We find that the programme increased knowledge of the police and Liberian law, reduced the incidence of some crimes, increased reporting of crimes to the police and courts, and enhanced security of property rights. We do not, however, find that the programme increased trust in the police or strengthened preferences for police involvement in criminal cases (as measured through hypothetical scenarios). Indeed, if anything the programme seems to have reduced victims' satisfaction with the way the police (and local leaders) respond to reported crimes.

Why did the programme heighten dissatisfaction with the LNP among victims? Why did it increase reporting to the LNP without enhancing trust as well? There are several possibilities. One potential answer to the first question is that exposure to elite, newly-trained PSU officers raised expectations beyond the ordinary LNP's capacity to meet them. A possible answer to the second is that increased knowledge of the police (and of Liberian law) reduced uncertainty around the procedures associated with reporting crimes or adjudicating cases in court, thus increasing willingness to report without changing respondents' perceptions of the LNP more generally.

Alternatively, the programme may have altered social norms around the appropriateness of engaging with the police or courts to resolve disputes. In rural Liberia, the state security and justice sectors are often viewed as institutions of last resort, to be approached only when all other mechanisms of dispute resolution have failed. The programme may have changed this social norm, motivating residents to report crimes despite their continued

wariness of the police and courts. These explanations are speculative, of course, and we cannot know for sure whether they or other explanations account for the programme's disparate effects.

Whether these effects will persist remains an open question as well. It is possible, for example, that the programme's harmful impact on satisfaction with the LNP will reduce reporting in the future, potentially counteracting the programme's more beneficial effects on crime and security of property rights. Alternatively, dissatisfaction could motivate citizens to demand better performance from rank-and-file members of the LNP. Such bottom-up pressure, in turn, may serve as a valuable complement to top-down efforts to promote accountability and procedural fairness within the LNP's ranks.

Recommendations

Overall, our results suggest that the Confidence Patrols programme is a promising, inexpensive method for securing property rights, reducing certain types of crime, increasing reporting to the police, and disseminating knowledge about state laws and security sector reforms. In countries such as Liberia, where trust is already low and government resources are scarce, programmes like these can help restore citizen cooperation in a cost-effective manner. Based on these findings, **we recommend that the Liberian government and its international partners continue the Confidence Patrols programme in the future.**

Our study also provides insights into the Hubs approach to security sector reform. A key assumption underlying this approach is that well-trained, well-resourced deployments of elite subunits of the police can effectively deter crime, adjudicate disputes and improve citizens' sense of security, even when based several hours from most towns and villages and even with the limited resources available to regular LNP.

Despite some limitations, our results suggest this approach has considerable promise. The fact that the Confidence Patrols programme successfully reduced some types of crime, increased reporting of crimes, and enhanced security of property rights suggests that the services available at the Hub are indeed meaningful to citizens, even from a distance several hours away. However, the programme did not improve perceptions of the police in general and may even have increased dissatisfaction with the way they handle reported crimes. Moving forward, greater dissatisfaction could cause citizens to disengage with state security and justice institutions. **We therefore caution that the Hubs approach to security sector reform should not be viewed as a panacea for restoring citizens' trust and solidifying the rule of law.** The regular LNP continue to serve as citizens' main point of contact, their primary provider of "everyday" policing, and a central means by which they learn about and access the services at the Hub. Absent broader efforts to improve the LNP's capacity, distrust is likely to remain high, hindering citizen cooperation, exacerbating ineffectiveness in preventing or investigating crimes, and limiting uptake of the services at the Hub.

Our evaluation also provides more general lessons for the practice of community policing in post-conflict settings. First, we found that in many communities residents were initially fearful of the PSU³, but tended to become more comfortable over time. Repeatedly patrolling the same locations may seem like an inefficient use of resources, especially given the many communities that might benefit from programmes like these. **But we maintain that repetition is key to the success of community policing.** Repetition allowed patrolling officers to develop lasting relationships with community members, demonstrate their resolve to improve police-community relations, and reach a broader audience than otherwise would have been possible. To be successful, community policing may require repeated engagements with citizens over a sustained period of time.

We also recommend that police forces should avoid an overly “militarised” approach to community policing. While building confidence may require that some patrolling officers carry weapons, wear riot gear or otherwise convey a “show of force,” this approach should be balanced with the need to manage residents’ fears. Balance will be especially crucial in settings like rural Liberia, where the police have long been absent or abusive.

Achieving this balance may be easier with smaller, mixed-unit or mixed-gender teams. In a related randomised controlled trial conducted in Grand Kru County, one of the authors of this study (Karim) finds that door-to-door canvassing by small teams of male and female officers from the PSU and regular LNP reduces perceptions of police corruption, discrimination and abuse. In future, governments might consider these approaches to managing citizens’ fears.

3. According to our survey, half of respondents in patrolled communities reported feeling scared of the PSU on the first patrol. In contrast, only 4% reported feeling scared of the PSU now.