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CHAPTER 6

POLICE AND COMMUNITY TRUST IN CONTESTED URBAN SPACES

PITFALLS AND POLICY LESSONS

By Patrick Mutahi

Cities across the world are experiencing profound political, social, and security transformations. Urban centers have become frontline arenas in which global geopolitical shifts—declining democratic norms, rising authoritarian governance, shrinking civic space, and expanding securitized public-order practices—are most visibly felt. Over the last decade, global democracy indices have documented a sustained regression in civil liberties, political rights, and the rule of law. According to Freedom House, 2024 marked the nineteenth consecutive year of global democratic decline, while the V-Dem Institute describes this moment as part of a broader "third wave of autocratisation."[1] In these settings, police have become central actors in managing social unrest, migration, and political dissent, reshaping everyday policing, public safety in urban spaces, and police-community relations. As a result, the relationship between the police and the communities is evolving and expanding in scope and visibility. This has created opportunities for enhanced public safety, and in contexts where this expanded role is exercised through coercive or unaccountable practices, it often remains contested and fragile.

While police are formally mandated to provide safety and enforce the law, their authority is often experienced unevenly—protective in some neighborhoods, coercive in others. These divergences are not accidental. As this chapter notes, they are rooted in histories of colonial governance, racial control, political surveillance, and social regulation that continue to shape contemporary policing practices in the Global South and the North. Heavy-handed police responses in Kenya, Mozambique, Georgia, and Tanzania, for example, demonstrate how urban security governance continues to be framed through coercive rather than participatory logic.[2] Similar dynamics have emerged in the United Kingdom, which has expanded police powers over protests, and in the United States, where securitized policing has disproportionately affected minority communities.[3]

This chapter also situates policing within a contested terrain. In most of the cities, such as Rio de Janeiro, Johannesburg, Nairobi, and Butuan City in the Philippines, police both compete and collaborate with other actors—including municipal authorities, community actors, private security providers, and, at times, criminal or vigilante networks—for authority. Legitimacy is thus contested and fragmented; trust in state institutions, particularly the police, is conditional and often shaped by everyday experiences rather than long-standing confidence.

Policing in these settings can oscillate between engagement and enforcement, dialogue and intimidation. Allegations of corruption, excessive force, or selective enforcement may coexist with formal participatory structures such as community forums or neighborhood committees. As a result, official mechanisms for collaboration do not automatically translate into meaningful trust. Global democratic decline, characterized by shrinking civic space, politicized security institutions, and expanded coercive public-order practices, further intensifies the fragility of police–community relationships in these urban settings.

In response to strained relationships between police and communities, many cities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Africa, and Latin America have adopted a community policing approach to shift from reactive, enforcement-driven models toward partnership, problem-solving, and local engagement. Community policing seeks to embed police within neighborhoods through structured forums, patrol strategies, and information-sharing mechanisms. It promises greater police visibility, shared identification of safety priorities, and improved trust through regular interaction with the communities.

This chapter discusses community policing within the broader question of police-community relationships. Rather than assuming that community policing inherently produces trust, it examines the conditions under which it strengthens legitimacy and those under which it may instead function as a vehicle for expanded surveillance or the consolidation of territorial control. It approaches community policing as one pathway of addressing community-police mistrust, but its outcomes depend on accountability, democratic safeguards, and better everyday police practices. By doing this, the analysis aims to clarify the promise and limits of community policing in contemporary urban governance.

The community policing approach traveled from England (in the early 19th century) to the United States in the 1970s, and later into other countries.[4] In the Philippines, community policing is domiciled within the Philippine National Police and is mandated under Republic Act No. 6975.[5] In South Africa, the concept of community policing was imported from Western countries and introduced into the South African Police Service Act (SAPS Act) in 1995,[6] with core principles including service orientation, partnership, problem-solving, empowerment, and accountability. In Kenya, community policing is formally embedded in the National Police Service Act (2011), policies, and operational guidance.[7] Mutuma Ruteere and M. Pommerolle note that community policing was introduced in Kenya in 1999 by the Vera Institute of Justice, which worked with the Kenya Human Rights Commission and the Nairobi Central Business District Association on two projects.[8]

The global diffusion of the policing strategies within the community policing approach was framed as providing "promising models or successful public policies."[9] It is neither purely imposed nor a local innovation but a hybrid of the two. Where municipal authorities have the mandate to do so, they adopt community policing policy approaches and adapt them to local contexts, dynamics, and the nuances of insecurity. There are, however, various debates regarding community policing initiatives aimed at building relations, mostly related to the very idea of community and its lack of a uniform definition.[10] Scholars have questioned the applicability of concepts from the United States and the United Kingdom to the contexts of South Africa and Kenya, which are markedly different.[11] Their conclusions question the tendency to fail to incorporate community policing initiatives into local ideas and understandings. This is because countries have different political orientations, historical backgrounds, and local cultural and knowledge-producing systems. For instance, Ruteere and Pommerolle discuss how Kenya's community policing initiatives were unsuccessful because they largely "fail[ed] to address or deliberately ignore[d] the wider political context…[a]nd did not fully embrace the 'meaning of democratization in policing matters.'"[12] Despite this, the community policing approach has subsequently been adapted and translated by Kenyan policy actors.

Community policing is not a neutral or uniform intervention. As the chapter notes, in some cities, such as Rio de Janeiro, localized initiatives have contributed to improved communication, modest increases in crime reporting, or reductions in certain forms of violence. In other countries, for instance, Kenya, South Africa, and the Philippines, among others, community policing structures have coexisted with persistent extra-judicial killings, discriminatory police enforcement, or the politicization of security institutions. In highly securitized environments like Eastleigh in Kenya, Butuan, and Johannesburg, community policing forums risk functioning less as platforms for the coproduction of safety and more as infrastructures of territorial control. Ultimately, the same mechanisms designed to enhance trust—neighborhood committees, patrol visibility, local reporting systems—can also expand state surveillance into everyday social life, particularly in marginalized communities of refugees and internally displaced persons.

This tension shows that community policing does not operate on neutral institutional terrain. Its effectiveness is mediated by preexisting levels of trust, the consistency of procedural fairness, the presence or absence of accountability, and the broader political context within which police authority is exercised. Efforts to strengthen community-police relationships thus cannot be understated or understood as purely technical reforms. They are embedded in deeper struggles over legitimacy, accountability, and the boundaries of state power.

Drawing on empirical research from different cities, this chapter explores how community policing practices are shaped, what undermines them, and which practices have shown potential to rebuild trust and improve safety outcomes. By

analyzing the challenges, the chapter provides policymakers with a clearer understanding of why community policing initiatives often fail to deliver the promised outcomes of better community-police relations and how they can unintentionally reinforce the very inequalities they aim to address. It concludes by identifying practical measures, such as strengthening accountability mechanisms, embedding democratic safeguards, and improving everyday policing practices to enhance the effectiveness of community policing.

Police-Community Relations

Community–police relationships are shaped by the historical and political foundations of policing institutions, which in many contexts originated as mechanisms for governing populations and enforcing social order rather than providing equitable public safety. In the United States, modern policing institutions emerged partly from slave patrols and systems designed to control enslaved and later freed Black populations.[13] In the United Kingdom, policing was developed to protect property, manage urban unrest, and enforce colonial rule.[14] In France, it was closely tied to political surveillance and regime security, with early police institutions tasked not only with crime control but with monitoring dissent, regulating mobility, and protecting state authority.[15] These origins continue to shape patterns of policing and public trust, particularly among racialized and economically marginalized communities in the United States, United Kingdom, and France.

In the Global South, police practices are shaped by colonial legacies. The colonial police were established to govern populations, protect state authority, and manage dissent, rather than to provide accountable public safety services. These institutional origins continue to influence police behavior and public perceptions. In Kenya and Bangladesh, for example, police institutions remain widely associated with coercion, extraction, and political control, perceptions rooted in colonial-era policing practices.[16] In the informal settlements of Kaptembwo and Karagita in Nakuru, Kenya, police continue to be widely perceived not primarily as providers of protection but as actors exercising discretionary authority, often associated with harassment, extortion, profiling of young men, and selective enforcement. These practices undermine institutional legitimacy and create strong disincentives for communities to report crime or cooperate with police.[17] Likewise, the South African Police Service is implicated in corruption scandals, neglect of reported cases, and the use of heavy-handed tactics against protestors.[18] These practices undermine the credibility of police engagement and reinforce perceptions of police as coercive actors rather than providers of protection.

The experience of Rio de Janeiro during the "pacification" program implemented from 2008 to 2015 demonstrates how efforts to improve community-police relationships can be undermined when coercive practices persist. The Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) were introduced with the stated aim of rebuilding police legitimacy and improving relations with favela communities.[19] Their interventions aimed at reclaiming territory from criminal gangs in more than 160 favelas.[20] While the program achieved notable short-term gains, including a reduction of police fatal shootings by more than 40 percent and significant declines in common crime in many areas during the 2008–2015 implementation period, these successes were uneven. In approximately 40 percent of targeted territories, the militarized character of "pacification" generated negative spillover effects, eroding trust and legitimacy and, in some cases, reducing public safety.[21] Initially, the program led to an increase in perception of safety and trust in law enforcement, including an overall positive reaction from the majority of residents, positive perceptions of favelas, and increased crime reporting in the territories. However, old policing practices prevailed with the expansion of UPPs into more territories. UPP police brutality cases were recorded, and there was a disconnect between policing and the social or community component of the program.[22] Moreover, there were no strong police accountability mechanisms for the police violence.

Research from Sargodha City, Pakistan, presents a similar pattern. In some local areas, police engagement efforts have contributed to modest improvements in trust and responsiveness. Yet these localized gains coexist with persistent national-level patterns of arbitrary killings, enforced disappearances, and the continuation of "kill and dump" practices by state agents.[23] Human Rights Watch has documented the disproportionate targeting of marginalized ethnic communities

in Baluchistan Province, while the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has highlighted systemic shortcomings in investigations and due process.[24] In such environments, police risk being instrumentalized as extensions of state control rather than platforms for rights-based collaboration.

Nigeria's experience with the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) reinforces this dynamic. Between 2017 and 2020, SARS units were implicated in torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances, abuses that sparked nationwide #EndSARS protests.[25] The subsequent attempt to rebuild community trust illustrates how difficult reform becomes once policing institutions are associated with systemic violence. Even where community-oriented reforms are introduced after a crisis, deeply damaged legitimacy constrains their effectiveness.

Community–police relationships are fundamentally shaped by legitimacy, which emerges through consistent institutional behavior over time. Procedural fairness, restraint in the use of force, responsiveness to community concerns, and accountability for misconduct all influence whether communities view police authority as justified. In Nakuru, trust in police-community relations are often incremental, conditional, and reversible, shaped by recent experiences and the behavior of individual officers rather than stable institutional confidence.[26] These dynamics highlight that police-community relations are fundamentally relational and contingent, reflecting broader issues of legitimacy, accountability, and the everyday exercise of state authority. Where these conditions are absent, engagement efforts risk being perceived as symbolic rather than substantive. Public meetings, liaison committees, or outreach activities may occur, but they do not necessarily alter how communities experience policing in practice. This creates a situation in which formal engagement coexists with persistent mistrust.

Community policing is an institutional approach to reconfiguring police-community relations, centered on structured interaction, information exchange, and responsiveness to locally defined safety concerns. Moving beyond reactive enforcement, it seeks to embed policing within community contexts and enable greater community influence over policing practices. How are these practices reflected in different cities? This is a discussion we turn to now.

Urban Governance Lens—What Does Community Policing Do Inside the City?

Community policing establishes governance pathways and participatory infrastructures in security governance, enhancing police visibility and making community members more reachable. Implementation, however, is shaped by the level at which policing authority is exercised (municipal, state, or national), which determines how much influence communities can realistically have over policing decisions. In Butuan City, the implementation of community policing is primarily expressed through patrol activities, organizational work, and community interaction, increasing police visibility and collaboration.[27]

In Johannesburg, community policing operates through multiple channels. These include community partnership avenues and subforums focused on businesses, private security, youth, taxi and hawkers, and street patrols. They use social media and communication tools such as WhatsApp, the Zello app, radio shows, and printed materials.[28]

In Lamu and Nakuru, Kenya, community policing governance sits with the community policing committee.[29] In Kogi State, Nigeria, community policing has been experienced through neighborhood security groups and multistakeholder dialogue platforms.[30] At the same time, beat and town hall meetings, problem-oriented community policing practices, patrol routines (foot and night), door-to-door visits, and complaint and reporting pathways have been implemented in Munyega, Uganda; Sorsogon Province, Philippines; Sheikhupura and Nankana Sahib districts, Punjab Province, Pakistan; Monrovia, Liberia; and Santa Catarina State, Brazil.[31]

In England and Wales, the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee program, adopted as part of the Safer Street Mission, frames neighborhood policing teams as the basic units of local safety in every local area, with each having known and named contactable officers, dedicated antisocial behavior leads, police community support officers, special constables,

residents and businesses whose voices will shape their local police priorities.[32] These elements are designed to increase police visibility, familiarity, and accessibility, and to shift policing from reactive enforcement toward preventive, locally informed problem-solving.

Challenges and Constraints of Community Policing Programs

Outputs Versus Impact: The way community policing programs are monitored and evaluated often reveals a narrower administrative logic. In practice, many community policing initiatives are assessed using output-based performance indicators, such as the number of patrols conducted, meetings convened, committees formed, or trainings delivered.[33] The research literature increasingly recommends assessing community policing through legitimacy-centered and accountability-sensitive metrics. These include independent surveys of trust and procedural justice.[34]

Territorialization, Exclusion, and Surveillance: Community policing can facilitate local surveillance of nonlocal residents and create divisions across neighborhoods, thereby risking unfair treatment and identity-based discrimination. In Kenya, the institutionalized and legalized neighborhood-level surveillance requires residents to monitor and report to the police, local elders, local Chief, and community policing actors on those living around them, embedding intelligence functions within local social structures. In areas such as Eastleigh, security operations and community-based reporting systems were used to identify and screen nonlocal residents, particularly Somali migrants and refugees, reinforcing the territorialization of security and the monitoring of perceived outsiders.[35] This has blurred the line between community safety and social surveillance, with local belonging becoming an informal criterion for determining the legitimacy of presence.

In South Africa, community-based policing and neighborhood security structures have been associated with spatial exclusion and discrimination, reinforcing boundaries between insiders and outsiders.[36] Migrants and foreign nationals are frequently treated as security threats and excluded from local governance and security decision-making processes, illustrating how territorialized policing structures can reproduce exclusionary and discriminatory dynamics. Similar dynamics have been observed in Butuan, Philippines, where police adopted intensified surveillance and control measures, including physical inspections, identity checks, coordinated field operations, and checkpoint screening, particularly targeting internally displaced persons.[37] While these measures were justified as necessary for security, these more-coercive practices illustrate how community policing is embedded within broader policing institutions whose strategies and priorities may differ. Measures justified as necessary for security, when applied disproportionately to vulnerable populations, can intensify community tensions and erode public confidence, demonstrating how policing practices that prioritize surveillance and containment can undermine the relational foundations necessary for trust and cooperation.

Limits to Effective Intelligence Gathering: Within cities, community policing can serve as an information pipeline and knowledge system, integral to collecting local information on insecurity and converting it into actionable knowledge and intelligence. Mapped security issues in neighborhoods, community members' perceptions, hot spots, social networks, and informal intelligence are used to inform and enable early warning systems and to support proactive crime prevention and problem-solving. For instance, women in Bangladesh were found to be more-effective informants than men, providing valuable insights into various crimes and risks that intersect with violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. However, women have been disregarded, excluded, and underrepresented in community leadership positions.[38] This exclusion was attributed to the embedded patriarchal systems, cultural barriers, Bangladesh being predominantly a Muslim-majority nation, less economic empowerment, limited awareness of community policing forums among community women, and low leadership motivation for volunteerism.

In Lamu, Kenya, there still exists mistrust between police officers and community members, leading to reduced crime reporting and information sharing with police out of fear of retaliation and revictimization. Community members and members of community policing committees have accused police officers of disclosing information entrusted to them

for policing intelligence. Moreover, as in Bangladesh, sociocultural factors were cited as barriers to crime reporting. Lamu has a close-knit Muslim community whose sociocultural norms prohibit them from reporting incidents to police officers, as they believe in the effectiveness of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms.

Resource Gaps: In Johannesburg, challenges were noted with police-community-oriented initiatives, but they varied across settlement areas. Street patrolling was challenging in informal settlements with no proper roads or street lighting, and where dwellings were built so close together. Challenges of limited resources, including human resources and police vehicles, were also cited.[39] Likewise, a study conducted in the Global South, encompassing Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda, found uneven and incomplete implementation of community policing practices. Moreover, it was noted that there was a lack of sustained buy-in from police leadership, frequent rotation of police leadership and officers, and inadequate resources to sustainably implement community policing strategies.[40]

Operational Constraints: In Rio de Janeiro, the UPP program's survival was strained by coordination difficulties among relevant state authorities, community members, and other partners; a lack of permanent partnerships; and constant threats of discontinuity. As Ribeiro and Vilarouca note, the UPP program did not change the issues it was meant to address, as the police failed to improve police-community relations. Cases of excessive police brutality and abuse of young, Black, and pardo (mixed race/multiethnic) citizens continued, and procedural fairness was not respected as cases of police practice outside the expected parameters were noted.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, community-oriented policing has been associated with reduced homicides in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, as well as successes in some Colombian cities in the nonaggression and disarmament interventions. However, obstacles like cultural violence and social disorganization causing high crime rates have been identified to contribute to the failure of community policing initiatives in the region.[41]

Absence of Neutrality: Community policing frameworks may reproduce existing inequalities in police legitimacy. For instance, in New York City, a RAND study investigating the impact of the police department's neighborhood policing framework found that respondents living in lower-violence areas reported more positive attitudes toward police in their neighborhoods than those residing in higher-violence areas. The study found that in neighborhoods with high rates of violent crimes, most residents reported police officers did not address problems concerning people in their neighborhood, they did not think police could be trusted, and they felt police allowed racial biases to affect their responses.42 These cases raise a broader policy concern: Where policing is already perceived as fair and effective, relational engagement can strengthen trust. However, where policing is experienced as coercive or discriminatory, the same framework may have limited impact unless accompanied by substantive changes in enforcement practices.

Similar to New York's higher-violence neighborhoods, community engagement structures in Nakuru, Kenya, operate within environments where police presence is often associated with enforcement and control rather than protection. Under such conditions, community policing frameworks alone are unlikely to transform police-community relations unless accompanied by credible changes in police behavior, accountability, and responsiveness. This reinforces the broader point that community policing does not operate on a neutral institutional terrain; its effects are mediated by preexisting levels of trust, patterns of police conduct, and the structural conditions that shape how police authority is experienced.

Taken together, these cases reveal a broader pattern: Where coercive policing practices, impunity, and political repression persist, efforts to improve police-community relationships can be instrumentalized in ways that extend surveillance and control rather than build trust. Engagement mechanisms presented as participatory or partnership-based may function less as spaces for genuine dialogue and coproduction of safety and more as channels through which state authority is normalized and dissent is monitored. In such contexts, initiatives to strengthen police-community relations risk becoming symbolic gestures that legitimize securitized governance rather than transforming it. This underscores that sometimes the quality and outcomes of police-community relationships may reproduce rather than resolve the underlying drivers of mistrust.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Comparative cases in this chapter from Brazil, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, the Philippines, and the United States show that police-community relations remain fragile, conditional, and shaped by everyday experiences of policing. Community policing initiatives may facilitate communication, improve information flows, and produce localized improvements in safety and cooperation. However, they can also be undermined by coercive practices, weak accountability, and political instrumentalization of the police. In some cases, territorialized community policing structures extend state visibility into communities and facilitate surveillance and social control, particularly of racialized, migrant, or economically marginalized populations. The result is a growing gap between the promise of community policing as a vehicle for trust-building and its practical use as a mechanism for surveillance and control. The central challenge for urban policymakers is therefore not simply how to expand community policing programs but how to protect their democratic integrity in increasingly authoritarian contexts.

Across the diverse urban experiences reviewed in this chapter, from Nairobi to Johannesburg to Rio de Janeiro, several common principles emerge that cities should factor into policy, planning, and implementing community policing approaches to enhance police-community relations.

Accountability must be treated as the foundation of community policing: No amount of community engagement can compensate for abusive or unaccountable policing. Cities that have attempted to promote community policing while ignoring police misconduct have consistently seen trust erode. Johannesburg offers a clear example: Despite the existence of community police forums and structured participation mechanisms, persistent allegations of corruption and heavy-handed responses by the South African Police Service have undermined public confidence in these forums. Similarly, in Nairobi and other Kenyan cities, the community policing framework coexists with documented extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. In such contexts, community meetings and neighborhood committees risk becoming symbolic exercises rather than genuine partnerships. People expect protection without harm, fairness without discrimination, and consequences when police abuse their authority. Without these, community policing cannot function credibly.

Effective community policing requires genuine community ownership and autonomy: Participation cannot be meaningful if it is tightly controlled by police institutions. Rio de Janeiro's UPPs provide a cautionary lesson: Although presented as community-oriented initiatives, they were often perceived by residents as militarized projects of territorial control. By contrast, more-successful experiences, such as neighborhood safety forums in Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre, Brazil, and in Monrovia, Liberia, have allowed communities to set priorities, lead local initiatives, and hold police to account. Cities seeking to revitalize community policing should therefore provide legal recognition and protection for community safety forums, decentralize decision-making, and ensure that meetings and structures are not dominated by local political elites.

Cities must adopt transparent and ethical information governance: Community policing objectives such as problem solving, early warning, and crime prevention depend on voluntary information sharing between residents and police. In many settings, however, communication channels are undermined by mistrust, fear of reprisal, and entrenched social hierarchies. This causes information to be selectively shared or withheld, limiting the police ability to respond effectively to local safety concerns. Crucially, trust often precedes the flow of information rather than emerging from it. Urban authorities should therefore develop clear, publicly articulated rules governing the collection, storage, and use of community-provided information. Community forums must not be repurposed as covert platforms for intelligence-gathering. Robust protections for whistleblowers and informants are essential, alongside sanctions for officers who compromise confidentiality. Ethical information governance is not only a technical safeguard, it is a precondition for sustaining voluntary cooperation in environments where mistrust is historically grounded.

Cities need to invest in relational policing rather than simply creating new structures: Many governments have focused on establishing committees, hotlines, and reporting channels without addressing the everyday relationships that make these mechanisms meaningful. Trust grows not from the number of meetings held but from consistent, fair, and respectful daily interactions. Practical reforms should therefore prioritize continuity of neighborhood officers, training in mediation and conflict resolution, and performance metrics that reward trust-building rather than arrests.

Community policing must be understood as part of a broader urban governance system: Safety in cities is shaped as much by lighting, housing, transport, youth employment, and social services as by police patrols. Experiences from cities such as Butuan in the Philippines and Sargodha in Pakistan show that community policing delivers better outcomes when it is integrated with social programs and multiagency problem-solving. Urban planners, social services, schools, and health agencies must therefore be treated as partners in community safety rather than peripheral actors.

Approaches must be tailored to the realities of informal settlements and marginalized neighborhoods: Many community policing models imported from the Global North assume orderly streets, reliable lighting, and stable addresses—conditions that do not exist in large parts of Johannesburg, Nairobi, Lagos, and similar cities. More-flexible, community-led safety arrangements that work with existing local structures—such as elders' councils, women's groups, and youth networks—are likely to be more effective than standardized templates.

Cities must ensure that community policing is genuinely inclusive and protective of vulnerable groups: Women, young people, migrants, and racial and ethnic minorities are frequently those most affected by both crime and police abuse. Yet they are often underrepresented in safety forums. As this chapter shows, cultural and gender barriers can limit women's participation. Urban authorities should design participation mechanisms that deliberately amplify marginalized voices and create safe reporting pathways for victims of police misconduct.

Cities must rethink how they measure success: Too many community policing programs are evaluated by counting meetings, patrols, or committees formed. These indicators reveal little about whether residents feel safer or more respected. Effective evaluation should focus on outcomes rather than outputs, including whether residents feel safer, whether they trust and engage with police, and whether community priorities are reflected in policing practices. By adopting evaluation frameworks that capture relational and participatory dimensions, cities can better understand what works, adapt programs to local contexts, and ensure that community policing fulfils its promise of building both safety and trust.

Taken together, these principles point to a clear conclusion. Community policing can only function where certain minimum conditions are met: respect for human rights, protection of civic space, independent oversight, and genuine community autonomy. Where these foundations are absent, as seen in several of the cities examined, expanding community policing may inadvertently legitimize coercive governance rather than challenge it.

The lesson for policymakers is that urban security in the coming decade will be shaped by whether cities choose to govern through trust or through fear. The recommendations outlined above offer practical pathways for ensuring that community policing remains on the side of trust.

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About the Author

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Patrick Mutahi is a Kenyan researcher working at the intersection of security, human rights, and governance, with particular expertise in policing and security-sector governance. His work combines academic research, policy engagement, and practical programme development, with a strong focus on translating evidence into policy and institutional change.



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Peace in Our Cities (PiOC) is a unique global network of over 30 cities and more than 50 community-based and international partners.

PiOC seeks to reduce and prevent urban violence worldwide—preserving lives and helping cities thrive. It does so by creating concrete, participatory, and evidence-based platform exchanges to reduce and prevent severe violence in member cities, while also building a global movement of urban-violence-reduction advocates.

The PiOC approach is based on three lines of action:

- **Amplify** policymaker awareness of the genuine scope and scale of urban violence and opportunities available to help cities address it.
- **Advance** evidence-informed, balanced policy solutions and peacebuilding approaches to reduce the most severe forms of violence in urban contexts.
- **Accompany** city leaders, community partners, and civil society through peer exchanges and information access to realize ambitious targets for violence reduction.

Peace in Our Cities is co-facilitated by Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies at New York University's Center on International Cooperation; the Stanley Center for Peace and Security; Co-founder and Principal, Rachel Locke; and Expert Advisor and Membership Liaison, Flavia Carbonari. To learn more, donate, or join, please contact info@peaceinourcities.org or visit www.peaceinourcities.org.