

**PEACE  
IN OUR CITIES**



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# **Peace in Our Cities in a Time of Pandemic: Communities, Police and Relationships**



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## PEACE IN OUR CITIES

The Peace in Our Cities platform was launched on International Day of Peace in September 2019 out of an urgent demand to reverse trends of urban violence around the world. Peace in Our Cities (PiOC) brings together the political leadership of Mayors, local and international peacebuilders, the imperatives of the Sustainable Development Goals, and a bold assertion that we have the tools and knowledge to build peace and save lives in urban areas. With seventeen cities and more than two dozen organizing partners signed on to date, PiOC represents over 20 million people globally. Working together through evidence-based approaches, PiOC is committed to achieving a 50% reduction in urban violence by 2030.

Peace in Our Cities is co-facilitated by three organizations: Impact:Peace, Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego; +Peace Coalition; Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, Center on International Cooperation at New York University. Find out more about Peace in Our Cities: [www.sdg16.plus/peaceinourcities](http://www.sdg16.plus/peaceinourcities)



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# Peace in Our Cities in a Time of Pandemic: Communities, Police and Relationships

Across the world, in cities big and small, law enforcement officers are endowed with responsibilities concerning the rights of citizens and fostering safe communities — and thereby play a key role in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies and providing access to justice for all. Nonetheless, law enforcement officers and agencies in municipalities around the world struggle to live up to this promise, whether due to earnest mistakes from which they try to learn or to a long trajectory of pervasive, systemic abuse.

With the caveat that law enforcement institutions often are co-opted to serve an elite minority rather than the broader community, in those locales where community safety is mandated, building and sustaining healthy relationships between police and the communities they serve is crucial to their effectiveness. Such relationships allow officers to better understand communities; connect with local needs; conduct more effective patrols, investigations and intelligence work; expand the reach of preventive programming; and develop the trust vital to garner collaboration with citizens, for victims to seek assistance, and witnesses to assist — all of which contributes to preventing and reducing crime and violence in our cities.<sup>1</sup>

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed great pressure on law enforcement, worsened working conditions for officers, and thrown many citizens into greater uncertainty and vulnerability. In many places, these pressures have further strained the already fraught relationships between law enforcement and communities. This, in turn, has given way to an exacerbation of abuses, further undermining the prospects for fruitful partnerships between law enforcement and other actors committed to community safety.

This evidence brief examines the state of the art in our understanding of how to build stronger relationships between law enforcement and communities; it also tackles some common misconceptions about community policing and relationship-building and, crucially, recommends immediate actions that cities can take given the ongoing and residual effects of COVID-19. Despite the complexity of the challenges facing them, a number of cities are innovating in the midst of the pandemic in ways that may indeed forge healthier relationships between law enforcement organizations and communities in the longer term.

This brief suggests four cornerstones upon which law enforcement, supported by city leaders, should build their efforts to foster healthier relationships with communities:

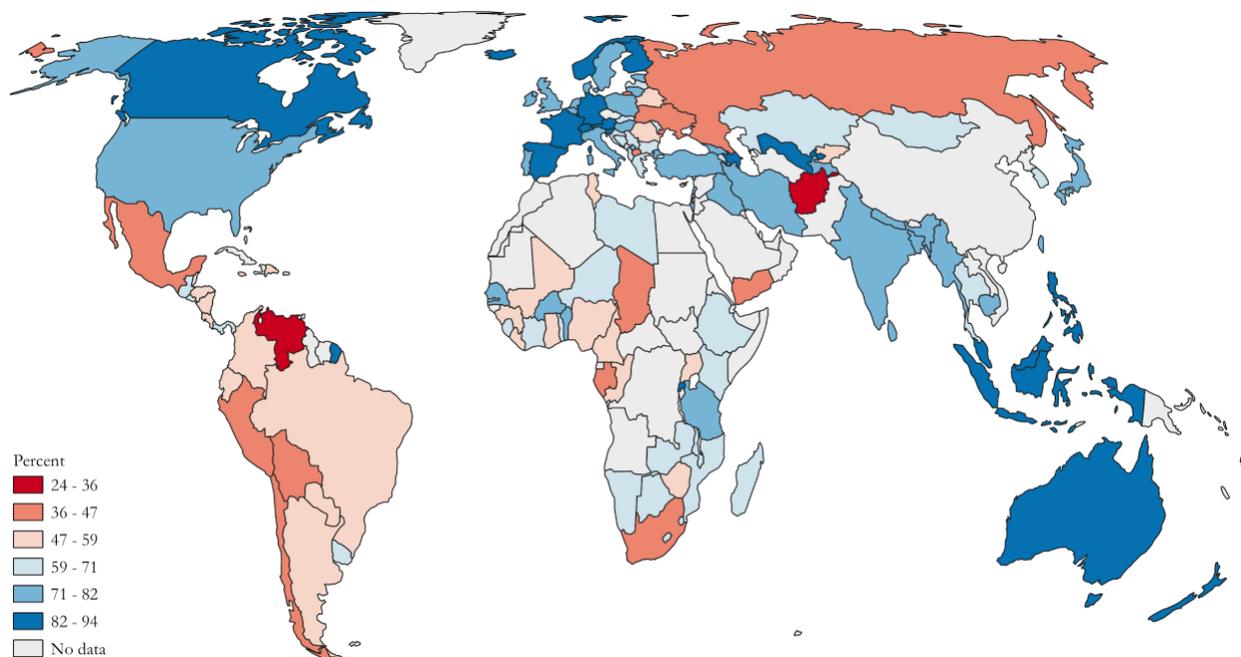
1. Proceed fairly
2. Narrow the focus of law enforcement
3. Engage with community partners
4. Take part in healing

# 1. Proceed Fairly

*Legality*—what is justifiable from the perspective of law—is central to law enforcement. However, equally important is *legitimacy*—what is justifiable from the perspective of the citizens and communities law enforcement is meant to serve. Relationships between law enforcement and communities that inspire trust and confidence lead not only to greater acceptance but also to increased efficacy. That is, there is overwhelming evidence that when law enforcement organizations and officers are seen to be respectful, accountable and responsive to the needs of communities, citizens’ compliance with the law and cooperation with law enforcement is boosted, which again yields reductions in crime and violence.<sup>2</sup>

However, in many parts of the world, citizens tend to lack confidence in law enforcement organizations and officers, and, unfortunately, distrust tends to be higher in the communities and populations that are in greatest need of good law enforcement, such as racial, ethnic, or religious minorities.

Perhaps most egregiously, recent research confirms that controversial use of force by law enforcement officers has a “remarkable effect on citizens’ beliefs about police, potentially undermining the perceived legitimacy of a major governmental institution.”<sup>3</sup> Today, a broad cross-section of citizens learn about police misconduct through text, video, messaging services and conversations with others—such as when four- and seven-year-old cousins Emily and Rebeca were shot and killed by police in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) on December 5, 2020, while they were playing on the street.<sup>4</sup> The implication of such technology being that one does not need to be immediately present in order to bear witness to abuse. Other citizens have even stronger impressions of use of force, hearing shots themselves or knowing of or seeing someone get killed by law enforcement officers.



## Citizen Confidence in Local Police around the World

The map reflects the share of respondents surveyed in 2019 that expressed confidence when asked, “In the city or area where you live, do you have confidence in the local police force, or not?”<sup>5</sup>

The notion of *procedural justice* focuses on how the fairness of interactions between law enforcement officers and citizens impacts community members' views of law enforcement but also their willingness to comply with the law and partner on crime prevention activities. According to a state-of-the-art review, "citizens' perceptions of procedural justice during interactions with the police positively affect their views of police legitimacy, satisfaction with police services, satisfaction with interaction disposition, trust in the police, and confidence in the police."<sup>6</sup>

To improve these interactions, it is important that law enforcement organizations work systematically to raise awareness among officers about their own implicit biases and how these may unconsciously shape their interactions with members of the public. Such biases commonly result in racially disparate law enforcement outcomes, even when an interaction is not overtly racist.<sup>7</sup> In the United States, the cities of Birmingham, Fort Worth, Gary, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh and Stockton joined together through the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice to engage in two processes aimed at addressing bias:

- ▶ Firstly, police engaged *inside* their organizations through policy reforms and training on implicit bias led by seasoned, respected officers.
- ▶ Secondly, police engaged *outside* their organizations through community-facing activities to recognize biased practices and their effects on citizens and communities—especially on minorities and vulnerable people.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, citizen perceptions of fairness are also linked to law enforcement organizations' transparency and accountability. As in other areas of life, openness about individual instances of failure or misconduct may be difficult, but in the long run can help foster trusting and healthy relationships.

Research shows that there is no silver bullet for fostering trust and legitimacy rather, doing so requires a comprehensive approach to professional, accountable law enforcement. This includes systematically collecting data on police misconduct, implementing restrictive use of force policies, raising awareness around procedural justice and implicit biases against groups and communities, training in de-escalation, diversifying the make-up of law enforcement personnel, empowering civilian review boards, and expanding the use of body-worn cameras.<sup>9</sup>

Not least for young people, encounters with law enforcement are teachable moments of legal socialization. Since most citizens do not study the laws themselves, they tend to learn about them through law enforcement officers—for better or worse. When law enforcement officers themselves break the rules, say, by soliciting a bribe or physically mistreating someone, citizens learn to distrust laws and the institutions meant to enforce them. In New York City (USA), researchers found a clear "association between the number of police stops they [young people] see or experience and a diminished sense of police legitimacy." The researchers add, however, that "the impact of involuntary contact with the police was mediated by evaluations of the fairness of police actions and judgments about whether the police were acting lawfully."<sup>10</sup>

Taking the above into account, processes to strengthen legitimacy tend to demand a clear, oftentimes renewed vision for law enforcement, its roles and relationships. Max Campos served as the founding national director of community policing at the National Police of Ecuador and recalls the process that the Ecuadorian police underwent throughout the 2000s as one of reconceiving the police "not only as a guarantor of security, but also as a guarantor of human rights."<sup>11</sup> Starting in Quito and later expanding across the country, this implied "decentralizing the police service to the neighborhood level, with

presence in every sector, whereby the police got closer to the community, by then with a focus more toward the prevention of crime.”<sup>12</sup> Without a clear vision for law enforcement, Campos believes it would have been difficult to reshape relationships with communities.

## 2. Narrow the Focus of Law Enforcement

Citizens call upon law enforcement agencies to deal with mental health crises, family conflicts and disputes between neighbors, traffic accidents and natural disasters, the presence of people who are homeless or begging, not to mention emergencies arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. To the extent that these situations imply any law enforcement responsibilities at all, officers are often ill-equipped to handle them effectively. All too typically they are the only public officials with capacity to respond when there is a need, pointing to the necessity of boosting other, more appropriate public services. What is more, strengthening non-law enforcement institutions is necessary for law enforcement to be able focus on their own core mandate and do that well.

Oakland (USA) is among the cities that have moved toward a narrowly targeted law enforcement response, focusing on the relatively few people who repeatedly engage in serious criminal and violent behavior and diverting others from criminal justice programming to other services. Key stakeholders hold that this greater specificity of approach has been key to the city’s recent success in reducing gun violence.<sup>13</sup>

Across much of the world, arrest numbers have long been considered indicators of effective law enforcement, yet ramping up arrests is consistently found not to reduce crime and violence even in the short term. Instead, overzealous responses to minor infractions—including month-long detention without trial for leaving one’s home during COVID-19 lockdowns in San Salvador (El Salvador)—tend to undermine the legitimacy of the law enforcement and criminal justice systems, as well as their relationships with the citizens and communities they are meant to serve.<sup>14</sup>

For individuals, even a brief arrest can lead to stigma, loss of income or employment, and a police record that follows them throughout life. As a rule, involvement in the criminal justice system—if sometimes warranted—is almost always harmful to people and relationships. For marginalized communities, a wave of hardline law enforcement can be traumatic, while also failing to provide them with protection against serious crime and violence. This paradox reduces the likelihood that citizens report crimes, cooperate with law enforcement, and serve as witnesses, which, in turn, frustrates efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and prevent future crime and violence.

All the while, the scientific evidence is strong that problem-solving, person-focused, place-based and community-based approaches to policing can, for one, strengthen law enforcement legitimacy and, at the same time, effectively address the crime and violence that affects communities the most.<sup>15</sup> For this to happen, these approaches must be inclusive of citizens and informed by meaningful, sustained engagement with communities.

The relationship between law enforcement and young people merits special attention. Evidence from sixteen cities, ranging from Hamilton (Canada) and Kansas City (USA) to Wolverhampton (England) and Canberra (Australia), shows that police-led diversion of low-risk youth who come into contact with law enforcement is more effective in reducing a young person’s future contact with the criminal justice

system compared to traditional processing.<sup>16</sup> Diversion responses include referral of youth to needed and effective services inside or outside the criminal justice system. This avoids labeling young people as “criminals” while also limiting their contact with others in detention involved in more serious crime, which may aggravate their own involvement. At the same time, police-led diversion offers law enforcement officers a viable alternative to, on the one hand, simply ignoring and, on the other, criminally charging youth engaged in minor wrongdoing.

The relationship between youth and law enforcement also goes two ways. In Quito, the cultural expressions of many young people, such as graffiti and hip-hop artists, have long been stigmatized. Up to the 2010s, these and other countercultural and border-testing behaviors regularly prompted responses from law enforcement officers. Correspondingly, many young people came to see the police as abusive. Campos—the retired national director of community policing—recounts how he was able to sow the seeds of a sustained conversation between local police officers and youth, including gang members in communities, slowly fostering a degree of mutual empathy. Diego Carrillo, retired gang leader of the Sacred Tribe Atahualpa of Ecuador, recalls that, “before, the police acted in a repressive way and detained youth just because of the way they dressed. Now, that is changing and there is an understanding and respect for our urban cultural identity.”<sup>17</sup> Campos mentions as an indicator of improved relations that, “today, there are far more young people applying to become police officers than ten or fifteen years ago.”<sup>18</sup>

### **3. Engage with Community Partners**

Law enforcement institutions cannot resolve the justice and safety needs of citizens and communities by working alone. Building healthy relationships entails extensive engagement between law enforcement officers and other actors, and “partnerships between the police and the wider community to tackle safety issues are a cornerstone of contemporary thinking about policing.”<sup>19</sup>

For well over a decade, community activists, social workers, police officers and other residents of Los Angeles (USA) have worked together to transform the city’s approach to community safety and gang violence, garnering significant results. In July 2020, amid the global pandemic and harsh criticism over handling of the #BlackLivesMatter protests, Mayor Eric Garcetti further cemented this approach by unveiling the creation of a new bureau of the city’s police department, the Community Safety Partnership Bureau (CSP), as an anchor for its continued commitment to community outreach, community policing and social media engagement. At the launch, police chief Michel Moore said, “Our CSP officers are measured by the trust they build and the relationships made, rather than arrests or citations,” adding that “this commitment to creating safe and healthy communities saves lives.”<sup>20</sup>

Over the years, different, context-specific community safety partnerships have developed everywhere from Edinburgh (Scotland) to Maiduguri (Nigeria), where citizens work alongside law enforcement officers to reduce crime by developing sports, recreation, and other programs tailored specifically to their communities. Moreover, they put a heightened focus on tackling quality of life issues, and seek to bridge communication and trust gaps between community members and the police. Not least, partners focus on connecting people in need with resources and support, ranging from work skills training and medical programs to counseling and legal aid.

Community-oriented policing strategies vary vastly from city to city, continent to continent. However, a comprehensive review of existing research on such strategies found that they have positive effects on

citizen satisfaction, perceptions of disorder and police legitimacy. However, in isolation, they have limited effects on the prevalence of crime and fear of crime.<sup>21</sup> That is, community-oriented approaches to policing are best understood as laying the groundwork and fostering the conditions for longer-term impact on crime and violence.

Understanding that law enforcement is only one piece in a broader partnership for community safety also creates space to substitute law enforcement with more appropriate responses where any infraction of law is a subsidiary issue. In New South Wales (Australia), for instance, there are communities that have embraced “crisis intervention teams” made up of police officers who have received extra training to understand and respond to mental health emergencies, or teams composed of mental health professionals along with or instead of police officers.<sup>22</sup> In Stockholm (Sweden), mental health professionals have been deployed since 2015 onto the streets without police officers,<sup>23</sup> while Toronto (Canada) reports success with co-responding police-mental health teams.<sup>24</sup>

While partnership-based approaches such as these may present law enforcement institutions and officers with new challenges, research from England and Wales highlights that, rather than experiencing a conflict with established police culture, “police officers involved in partnerships find them effective, crucial to their work and, at times, enjoyable.”<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, in Conakry and N’Zérékoré (Guinea), councils for security and crime prevention made up of local citizens—common in much of the world—are valuable focal points for locally led efforts to understand and prioritize crime and violence-related dynamics and needs in communities, especially in a context of very limited state resources. Moreover, in Guinea, the councils have contributed to the transition from military to civilian governance and leadership in preventing and responding to crime and violence.<sup>26</sup>

In war and postwar cities where centralized state services are far less developed, additional sets of challenges present themselves—yet efforts to pioneer community-oriented approaches to law enforcement are possible. Reconstituting the police in the midst of war, in Zaranj (Afghanistan), police did not seek to displace or substitute the existing community institutions for managing local conflicts but rather to build upon, connect with and support them. By tying into tradition-bound councils for collective decision-making and dispute resolution, as well as a watchman system, police have recently been able to develop relationships with communities that allow them to better do their job.<sup>27</sup>

Modern technologies also power innovations in community engagement for safety. *Safecity* is an online platform that collects and analyzes anonymous, crowd-sourced information relevant to the safety of girls and women in Indian cities. The insights generated through the platform allow law enforcement and policymakers to better establish priorities for patrols as well as resource allocation, so as to foster safer spaces.

## 4. Take Part in Healing

Be it political ideology or war, religious strife or racial injustice, law enforcement officers routinely find themselves policing long-standing fault lines in our societies—and sometimes exacerbating them. Where relevant, law enforcement institutions should be encouraged to engage in frank conversations about their complicity in past and present-day harms and injustices, and do their part to repair relationships and foster trust in the communities they serve. This is particularly true for cities emerging from war.

Belfast (Northern Ireland) is a notoriously divided city, both socially and physically, with walls up to eight meters tall separating communities of majority Catholic and Protestant residents. Under the terms of the 1998 peace accord, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was transformed into the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), addressing the safety and wellbeing of citizens in the present but also the contentious history of law enforcement, as well as crimes of the past.<sup>28</sup> In 2014, the head of the Northern Irish police, George Hamilton, warned that “to continue to ignore, hesitate or procrastinate on the past will have unpredictable and far-reaching consequences.” He added, “It would be both unfair and irresponsible not to make clear the significant strain that the current piecemeal approach to our history is placing on the organisation I have responsibility for leading.”<sup>29</sup> Here, Belfast fits into a broader pattern where delegitimized law enforcement institutions are oftentimes replaced by new institutions, without substantially dealing with past abuses—neither those committed by law enforcement officers nor those committed by previously powerful actors. While such a trade-off may be seen as necessary for police or military forces to concede to losing power, the legacy of injustice persists lest it is dealt with—some instances of which are addressed below, in the context of the present pandemic.

Another common challenge of law enforcement organizations relates to their diversity and inclusiveness, as seen with the RUC, which was composed of largely Protestant officers and perceived by many Catholics as a tool of state oppression: While some 40 percent of the Northern Irish population identifies as Catholic, in 2001, a mere eight percent of police officers did the same. This gave way to the PSNI introducing the “50:50 Rule” of Catholic and Protestant recruits, and, ten years later, thirty percent of PSNI officers identified as Catholic.<sup>30</sup> A number of Israeli cities, meanwhile, committed to work systematically for “inclusiveness in the police rank-and-file,” so that the police force would better reflect the cities’ cultural diversity. Research shows that this served “to foster legitimacy and cooperation from the Arab population.”<sup>31</sup>

Another divided city, Beirut (Lebanon), has also made recent efforts to improve relations between communities and law enforcement, focusing on engagement between youth and police, with some success. However, their strides have ultimately been undermined by continued abuses by other branches of the police, especially against sex workers, persons with alcohol or drug addiction, the LGBTIQ community, and other stigmatized groups.<sup>32</sup> This experience points to the importance of proper oversight and accountability, as well as a sufficiently comprehensive and inclusive approach to ensure broad progress.

While these paths are seldom straightforward, law enforcement institutions in several other postwar societies, including Timor-Leste, Bougainville, and Solomon Islands,<sup>33</sup> Liberia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone,<sup>34</sup> have realized at least at some level that to reduce and prevent crime and violence, emphasis should not concentrate only on existing state law enforcement capacity. Rather, beyond conventional law enforcement, existing community-based groups can make major contributions to the everyday safety of citizens. What is more, such engagement with community-based and tradition-bound practices can aid in making amends for past harms and promote healthy relationships going forward.

## The Pandemic as Crisis and Opportunity

The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating long-standing tensions between law enforcement and communities around the world, as seen with #EndSARS in Lagos (Nigeria), #ChileDespertó in Santiago (Chile), and #BlackLivesMatter and #DefundThePolice across much of the United States. However, the crisis is also spurring innovations in law enforcement practice and relationships with communities, suggesting that this can also be an opportunity for transformation moving forward.

2020 saw many instances of harsh—even lethal—law enforcement carried out to enforce COVID-19 restrictions, from beating and shooting a 13-year-old boy in Nairobi (Kenya) to spraying Indian migrant workers with chemicals, trapping curfew breakers in dog cages in Manila (Philippines), deploying teargas against commuters in Mombasa (Kenya), and unlawfully detaining huge numbers of people in San Salvador (El Salvador).<sup>35</sup> Minorities have often been subject to special vulnerability, and these abuses risk undermining the long-term relationships between law enforcement and citizens.

“The pandemic has amplified challenges that were already there,” says Kemi Okenyodo, executive director at the Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative in Abuja (Nigeria), be it with regard to arrests, conditions of imprisonment, law enforcement misconduct or lack of trust on the part of citizens. Between the COVID-19 pandemic and months of #EndSARS protests against the infamous Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), Okenyodo describes the relationship between law enforcement and citizens as “strained to the limit.”<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, Nigerians’ grassroots activism led not only to the disbandment of the SARS but also to most states ushering in judicial panels of inquiry into police brutality, prominently made up of representatives from the legal and religious communities, youth and women’s organizations.<sup>37</sup> While this does not resolve the deep-seated issues related to law enforcement in the country, it constitutes a step toward greater accountability.

Among the long-standing challenges brought to light by COVID-19 is the health and wellbeing of law enforcement officers, who generally suffer higher infection rates than other professions and face tremendous, ongoing pressure to support COVID-19 public health measures in addition to their ordinary duties. As such, the pandemic constitutes a call for law enforcement institutions as employers to boost efforts to ensure the long-term wellbeing of officers through measures ranging from alleviating stressors and promoting physical and mental health to debt relief and child care assistance.

Because community safety is a shared responsibility, the well-being of others in the constellation of essential actors must also be considered. In Los Angeles (USA), Ronald Noblet, senior consultant on conflict and violence at the Urban Peace Institute, explains that the city’s robust institutional and community capacity to prevent and reduce violence has been effectively mobilized—but at some cost to individual health. For many years, the city has trained and hired community intervention workers, trusted, credible members of the community who work proactively to de-escalate tensions, prevent revenge violence, and channel necessary services. During the pandemic, he says, “community intervention workers have taken on the roles of social worker, health worker, community helper, and dispenser of food, while still trying to keep violence down—and a larger share of the community is seeing that, as well as the police. I think that has been good for the way the community intervention worker is seen,” Noblet says, adding, “but it’s bad for the community intervention worker—because they’re burned out.”<sup>38</sup> That is, community intervention workers—not unlike many law enforcement officers, health workers, and other frontline workers around the world—require proper support in these extraordinary times.

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, since early on in the pandemic, the indigenous Māori of New Zealand set up approximately fifty roadside checkpoints to manage access to areas with significant Māori populations, strongly encouraging travelers to limit their movements and return home, so as to protect communities against the impact of COVID-19. New Zealand's police commissioner noted that, "With minor exceptions, police were satisfied that the action being taken in these communities was strongly aligned to the controls that the Government had put in place, and community interactions were positive and enhancing community safety."<sup>39</sup> As such, Elizabeth Stanley and Trevor Bradley find that the COVID-19 crisis generated an opportunity for Māori communities to "reestablish some degree of community control" and self-determination as regards local law enforcement and safety provision. "These spontaneous actions to a global pandemic reflect an opportunity to not merely 'fine tune' or improve existing partnerships between Māori and NZ [New Zealand] Police but to reimagine and recast those relationships."<sup>40</sup>

During the pandemic, it is especially important for law enforcement to communicate effectively with citizens. Especially as guidance may change quickly, mass sending of text messages may be useful. Police in Bangalore and Mumbai (India) are among those who have found more creative ways of raising awareness about the importance of reducing movement outside the home, practicing proper hygiene, and following public health guidelines, including songs, a popular online video of officers doing a "handwashing dance," and traffic police dressing up as a virus.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, the city of Singapore fought the spread of disinformation about COVID-19 by law enforcement continuously monitoring online content and prosecuting people who disseminated inaccurate information. The active monitoring also served to dispel false rumors about police intrusion in residential homes and excessive roadblocks to enforce safe distancing measures.<sup>42</sup>

Another significant challenge for law enforcement during the pandemic, has been to address gender-based violence in the home, especially against women and children, which for many has been aggravated by a mix of factors including increased economic hardship and more time spent at home during the pandemic.<sup>43</sup> As similar to other types of violence, higher levels of legitimacy and trust in law enforcement are significantly associated with more positive police responses to intimate partner violence.<sup>44</sup> During the pandemic women's police stations were established in some locales to help address violence against women, resulting in higher trust in the police among women, driven by improved perceptions of personal safety.<sup>45</sup> Amritsar, Bhopal, Gandhi Nagar, and Lucknow in northern India are among the cities that report evidence that citizen perceptions of police effectiveness and corruption improve where all-women police stations operate.<sup>46</sup> Across a number of cities in Brazil, evidence suggests that these stations contribute to reducing intimate partner violence, and especially homicides of women, with the strongest reduction found in urban municipalities among women aged 15 to 29 years.<sup>47</sup> Although originating from an awful set of circumstances, the pandemic shed light on steps that can be taken to address long-term challenges concerning violence against women.

All the while, a survey of police agencies in 10 large cities across Latin America uncovered a number of police-initiated activities to address new challenges presented by the pandemic. Many of them relate to internal challenges, from the persistent need for equipment, training and clear protocols to protect law enforcement officers against infection to significant adjustments to shift schedules. In terms of practices that directly affect relationships with communities, many police agencies have ordered officers to reduce the number of arrests for minor offenses and have adapted patrols to respond to changed social activity and criminal dynamics. Moreover, they have diversified channels of communication with the

public, with greater use of social media and videos, while also relaying messages to communities using megaphones, giant screens and music, in part to inform about COVID-19-related restrictions but also to assist in the distribution of food, medicines and other essential goods to vulnerable populations.

While the pandemic entails great risks to law enforcement officers and to their relationships with communities, especially through increased abuses, it is clearly also a practical and symbolic opportunity to stand with communities in a time of great need: Already in April 2020, three in four of the Latin American police agencies surveyed “reported having implemented innovative ideas to show gratitude internally to the officers and externally to citizens for their behavior during the pandemic.”<sup>48</sup> Law enforcement officers all around the world have been responding to needs—providing food to those experiencing homelessness and essential medicines to those who are sick, along with songs and dances to boost morale. Inspector Munish Pratap Singh recalls bringing a birthday cake to a boy under lockdown in Noida (India): “The happiness on the boy’s face made everything worthwhile. My team and I forgot how tired we were.”<sup>49</sup>

To turn such sparks of hope, innovations and attempts to repair relationships into durable partnerships for community safety, however, these efforts to improve law enforcement must be part of broader transformative efforts. Law enforcement cannot, on its own, satisfy community safety needs but instead must rely on political commitment and broad coalitions of social actors in cities to sustain transformations over time. At the same time, broader initiatives to boost community safety are usually doomed to failure unless law enforcement agencies are on board and take part in leading the way in addressing community concerns.

As the COVID-19 pandemic fuels social, economic, and political transformations across the globe—for both good and bad—the relationships between law enforcement and communities are also changing. For these to be more conducive to peaceful and just cities, the scientific evidence and experiences from around the world stress the importance of ensuring that law enforcement institutions act both legally and in ways that are perceived as fair, in order to promote trust and cooperation. Moreover, the focus of law enforcement should be narrowed to target the relatively few people who repeatedly engage in serious criminal and violent behavior, in order to significantly reduce crime and violence. These endeavors gain strength not least through the partnerships that law enforcement institutions are able to develop with citizens, as well as other public and private institutions, to build local solutions for community safety. Finally, reckoning with a legacy of injustice, abuse, and trauma is difficult, and law enforcement institutions have often been played a part in perpetrating harm. This is a legacy they must acknowledge and own up to so as to get on the path to healing and building new relationships in the wake of the pandemic.

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