

Community Policing Forums and Participatory Governance

Crime Reporting and Police Relations in Khayelitsha, 2000–2026.

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ABSTRACT

Community policing forums (CPFs) are a central participatory governance mechanism in post-apartheid South Africa, intended to rebuild trust between police and historically marginalised communities and improve public safety. Their long-term efficacy in high-crime, low-resource settlements remains contested. This working paper analyses the longitudinal effect of CPFs on crime reporting behaviours and police-community relations in Khayelitsha, a major township in Cape Town. It assesses whether CPF functions have shifted from initial conflict to collaborative governance. The analysis employs a mixed-methods longitudinal design, synthesising administrative crime data, repeated surveys of household victimisation and reporting attitudes, and archival analysis of CPF meeting minutes and local media reports. CPF presence correlated with a significant increase in the reporting of non-violent property crimes, but had negligible impact on reporting rates for violent and inter-personal crimes. A dominant theme from qualitative data is the persistent community perception of police as unresponsive, which CPFs have mitigated but not resolved. CPFs have achieved partial success in facilitating the reporting of certain crime categories, acting as a crucial intermediary. However, they have been unable to fundamentally transform deeply entrenched distrust in police operational capacity, limiting their role in participatory governance. Policy should focus on integrating CPF reporting channels directly into police performance metrics and providing CPF members with formal mediation training to handle sensitive inter-personal crime reports that communities are reluctant to take directly to police stations. community policing, participatory governance, crime reporting, police legitimacy, township, South Africa This paper provides a novel longitudinal dataset tracing CPF activities and community perceptions over more than two decades, uniquely capturing their evolving role from adversarial watchdogs to strained partners.

Keywords: *Community policing, participatory governance, police-community relations, Khayelitsha, crime reporting, post-apartheid South Africa*

Article Highlights

- Longitudinal study reveals CPFs increased reporting for non-violent property crimes.
- Persistent community perception of police as unresponsive limits CPF efficacy.
- CPFs function as crucial intermediaries but cannot transform deep-seated distrust.
- Policy recommendations include formal mediation training

Core Finding

Community Policing Forums have achieved partial success as reporting intermediaries but have been unable to fundamentally transform entrenched distrust in police operational capacity.

This analysis provides a novel longitudinal dataset tracing CPF activities over more than two decades.

for CPF members.	
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