# Engaging communities as partners: policing strategies in Johannesburg

Mary S. Mangai, Tyanai Masiya and Galaletsang Masemola

Mary S. Mangai, Tyanai Masiya and Galaletsang Masemola are all based at School of Public Management and Administration, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, University of Pretoria, Hatfield, South Africa.

**Abstract**

**Purpose** – *This paper aims to explore police perspectives on community engagement strategies within the context of crime prevention in South Africa, focusing on Johannesburg metropolitan police stations. The study's objective is to scrutinise the effectiveness and challenges of community policing strategies.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *Through a qualitative research approach, this study conducted unstructured interviews with station commanders and visible policing officers across 10 Johannesburg metropolitan police stations.*

**Findings** – *The findings reveal that community policing strategies, such as community–policing forums, sector policing, street patrollers and social media utilisation, can effectively engage communities as partners in crime prevention. However, certain challenges such as resource limitations and difficulties in policing-specific regions, were also identified.*

**Originality/value** – *This study contributes to the broader understanding of community–policing partnerships and the practical implications of community–policing strategies in South Africa, suggesting areas for improvement and adaptation to the unique South African context. This knowledge can help optimise efforts to foster stronger relationships between police and communities, bolster public trust and ultimately improve crime prevention outcomes.*

**Keywords** South Africa, Crime, Community policing, Partnership policing, Policing strategies, Johannesburg suburbs

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

This study examines the perspectives of the South African Police Services (SAPS) on community–policing strategies used to partner Johannesburg communities in combating crime. The study is conducted on the background of ever increasing rate of crime in South Africa that has made it one of the high crime-ridden societies in the world (Eagle, 2015; Büttner, 2022; Khahla, 2023).

Over the past few years, South Africa has seen rising levels of crime. South Africa is ranked third among the countries with the 10 highest crime rates, expressed in per 100,000 people, globally (World Population Review, 2022). The South African Police Services (2022) reported that the first three months of 2022 experienced more crime. Five crimes at their worst levels seen over the last five years were murder, attempted murder, carjacking, robbery at residential premises and commercial crime. South Africa's cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Gqeberha are among the most violent cities in the world (McCain, 2022). Therefore, this necessitates effective policing strategies to ensure everyone's safety in these cities. One such strategy is the utilisation of community policing which brings police and citizens together to prevent crime and solve neighbourhood problems, with emphasis on stopping crime before it happens, rather than responding to calls for service after the crime occurs (Kucukuysal and Beyhan, 2011).

South Africa is one of the countries that imported the concept of community policing from western countries (Brogden, 2002). Community policing was introduced into the SAPS Act in 1998/1999 and has been adopted as the operational philosophy of the SAPS. Extant research reveals that community policing is a contemporary paradigm of policing which improves the relationship between the police and the public (Rena et al., 2005; Ringo et al., 2012) arguing that community policing prevents and reduces crime, reduces disorder and anti-social behavior, promotes feelings of safety and improves police–community accountability. While Kabanda (2022) posits that community policing reduces the likelihood of crime and its impact on victims at the grassroots level. It is in this context that Ekici et al. (2022, p. 12) argue that "community policing is now considered a best practice in contemporary policing and has become an increasingly popular law enforcement strategy internationally, deployed in many countries".

The US Department of Justice (2014, p. 3) defines community policing, as "a philosophy that promotes organisational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime". In doing this, the police designate a community in which they will engage in problem solving, develop relationships (that hopefully become partnerships) with the population, collaborate with them to diagnose problems that have some generalised impact, prescribe and implement interventions to solve the problems and continuously monitor the results. Thus, community–policing partnerships involve the collaboration of various stakeholders in developing methods to police the communities. Stakeholders are individuals and groups that have a direct, specific interest in how community policing runs, its mission, its effectiveness and other day-to-day issues (The Open University, 2022). These stakeholders at community level include municipal agencies, private security organisations, individual citizens and the media, who collaborate with the police to address criminal matters and reduce crime.

In theory, partnership in community policing allows stakeholders to collaborate with the police and gives the police the opportunity to understand crime from the stakeholders' perspective (Tsoabisi, 2020, p. 98). The various stakeholders bring additional solutions to the table to increase community security, as the "police alone cannot successfully prevent or investigate crime without the participation of the public". This also promotes accountability, as the community and the police account for their actions while solving crime-related problems.

Previously, a study by Brogden (2002) argued that community policing worked best in homogeneous, common-interest, wealthy suburbs, and has performed poorly in heterogeneous, lower class urban contexts where it is most needed. Over two decades ago, in a study of South Africa, Brogden (2002) concluded that community policing failed to take root, because it was an imported concept, which is being applied in a heterogenous society characterised by a huge low class urban context, whereas it is historically tailored for homogeneous, common-interest, wealthy suburbs. Marks et al. (2009, p. 145) argue that community policing in South Africa has not been effective because the "police cling to the idea of a policing monopoly and prove reluctant to exhaust possibilities for sharing the load of creating safety".

However, a more recent survey of studies on community policing in South Africa by Lamb (2021) concludes that the performance of community policing remains debatable, noting that although some studies state that it has succeeded in building legitimacy and improving service delivery (for example, Morgan and Newburn, 1997; Reiner, 2010; Hough et al., 2010; Quest Research Services, 2013), other studies contend that the effectiveness of community policing was undermined by scant community involvement and inadequate

resources (MacDonald and Stokes, 2006; Buthelezi, 2014; Montesh, 2007 and Bayley, 2016).

This research investigated community–policing strategies used in community policing to combat crime in Johannesburg. It reveals the perceptions of police officers on the performance of the different strategies within community policing in combating crime to arrive at a conclusion of strategies that may work or may not work in different community contexts. In this regard, selected Johannesburg policing communities are identified.

The objectives of the study are (i) to explore the effectiveness of community–policing strategies implemented by various police stations in Johannesburg and how these strategies contribute to creating safer neighbourhood. (ii) To identify the challenges and limitations police face in implementing these strategies, and (iii) to recommend ways to enhance the effectiveness of community–policing strategies in Johannesburg. The paper begins by introducing the topic, providing an overview of the crime situation in South Africa, and discussing the concept of community policing. This is followed by a review of relevant literature that underscores the foreign origin of community policing and its potential limitations within the South African context.

After presenting the theoretical backdrop, the paper moves on to outline the study's methodology. It details the qualitative research approach and the use of unstructured interviews with key figures across various Johannesburg metropolitan police stations. The methodology section also explains the data analysis process and theme identification.

Following the methodology section, the paper presents the study's findings. This section provides a detailed analysis of the community–policing strategies in use and their effectiveness, based on police perspectives. The challenges associated with these strategies are also discussed in depth, providing a comprehensive picture of the current state of community policing in Johannesburg.

The discussion section follows, linking the findings back to the literature and exploring the broader implications. This part offers insights into the effectiveness of current community–policing strategies and possible improvements. However, the paper acknowledges the study's limitations, and notes that its conclusions are based on the police perspective and excludes perspectives from a number of other stakeholders. Suggestions for future research are also provided, focusing on the controversial move towards militarised policing in South Africa and the need to further examine this phenomenon.

Finally, the paper concludes by summarising the key findings, reaffirming the potential of community–policing strategies when appropriately resourced and tailored to specific community needs. It also highlights the necessity of continual research in this area, particularly regarding the integration of technology in policing strategies and the balance between community and militarised policing.

## Literature review

There are several definitions of community policing that differ in consonance with context. Pelser (1999) says that community policing is the process of bringing the state and civil society together to co-produce security. Cossyleon (2019, p. 1) states that, community policing is a "philosophy that promotes organisational strategies that support the police system in trying to use partnerships to proactively address issues of the social disorder before they become actual crimes". This definition converges with that of Lombardo and Lough (2007, p. 117), who state that it is a "philosophy based on the police and communities working together to help solve contemporary community problems related to crime and social and physical disorder".

Globally, many police departments have transitioned from a militarized approach to a community-based policing model (Koca, 2018; Dintwe, 2012, p. 227). Lieblich and Shinar

(2018) contend that police militarisation brings about more violence or abuse of authority and is based on the presumption that the citizen is a threat. A presumption of threat assumes that citizens, usually from marginalised communities, pose a threat of such magnitude as may require the use of extreme violence (Coates, 2015). Mummolo (2018) concludes that, police militarisation fails to enhance police safety or reduce crime at the same time harming police reputation. For example, in the contexts of South Africa, Hornberger (2014), highlights that the militarised apartheid era police force had very little capacity and will to respond to ordinary crime and was disdained by the black communities. Notably, the apartheid era police provided "real" policing to white South Africans only (Brogden, 1996). The police were characterised by impunity and a legitimacy crisis in the eyes of the public (Muntingh and Dereymaeker, 2013).

South Africa's National Development Plan 2030 posits that the departure from a highly militarised and politicised police force was one of the key transformation objectives after the onset of democracy in 1994. It states that,

> It was considered necessary to professionalise the police, establish a rapport with communities, develop confidence and trust in the police, and promote positive community-police relations. The goal was to transform the police from a paramilitary force to a police service that meets all the criteria of a civilian professional entity. (National Development Plan 2030, p. 392)

Community policing is part of the transition away from past experiences of political violence that engulfed the country during the apartheid regime. This transition has seen an authoritative style of policing turn into community-based policing and service. The term "community policing" was first used in 1997 when the Department of Safety and Security formally published its policy document titled Community– Policing Policy Framework and Guidelines. The document presented community policing as a "collaborative partnership-based approach from the local level of problem-solving and decision making" (Pelser, 1999). Furthermore, the National Development Plan 2030 states that community policing as a philosophy, methodology and practice should be emphasised and strengthened in police training programmes and systems for evaluation of police effectiveness (National Planning Commission, 2014).

The professional era of policing in South Africa saw a shift from the South African Police Force to the SAPSs which saw the police demilitarised (Dintwe, 2012, p. 223) and formed the foundation for the current era of community policing. This era is based on partnership and prevention of crimes rather than remedying crimes that have already happened. This is exemplified by the strategies which inform policing that have radically changed and now include partnerships. These partnerships are anchored in Sections 214 to 223 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. It states that the SAPSs must serve as "a partner" in crime along with communities regarding the safety and security of society.

According to Brogden (2002), the core principles for community policing in South Africa include:

- Service orientation – which means the police providing professional policing services that are responsive to the needs of the community and accountable for addressing these needs.

- Partnership – facilitating co-operative and consultative processes in solving community problems.

- Problem solving – jointly identifying and analysing causes of crime and conflict and the development of innovative solutions to ameliorate them.

- Empowerment – establishing joint responsibility and capacity to address crime.

- Accountability – creating a culture of accountability through the needs of communities.

Minnaar (2010) reported that there are various strategies for community policing; however, most of these are context-specific, as different communities face different challenges. Community policing in the South African context was developed to introduce a collaborative partnership-based approach to local-level problem-solving and embrace the commitment of a new democratic government characterised by public participation (Marks et al., 2009, p. 146). To carry out this commitment, encourage partnerships between the police and communities and engage with communities, there are several policing strategies in place.

The SAPS (2018, p. 1) turnaround strategy, which has the community and several stakeholders at its core, intends to enhance community–policing partnerships to prevent crime through multidisciplinary collaboration. The collaboration focuses on strategic pillars, including educating the community on their role in crime prevention, strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration, resourcing community–policing forums (CPFs) and promoting community-policing philosophy. The community-policing strategy enables the SAPS to engage with communities through organised structures to participate in the local planning and monitoring of safety and security interventions while modernising community policing through technological advancement solutions.

The community–policing strategy, according to SAPS (2018, p. 1), is a "strategic response to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, particularly Section 206(3)(a) and White Paper on Safety and Security, 2016". The strategy further contributes to the National Development Plan 2030s vision of building safer communities through an integrated approach and community participation in safety and security provision initiatives. Within the community–policing strategy, there are other policing strategies such as crime detection, the safer-city concept and the SAPS strategic plan. The strategies all promote partnership policing, visible through the established partnership between the police and civil society. This is exemplified by business partnerships, traditional-based partnerships and government and non-governmental partnerships.

As noted earlier, seven years after the end of apartheid, an evaluation of community policing by Brogden revealed that, it was an implanted process originally designed to work best in homogeneous, common-interest, wealthy suburbs in western countries, which was largely not working in, heterogeneous, crime-ridden lower class urban contexts of South Africa. A later publication by Marks et al. (2009) also argued that community policing in South Africa was being held back by the police who clung to the idea of a policing monopoly and were reluctant to co-produce safety. The latest study by Tyabazo (2023) contends that successful implementation of community policing has been affected by barriers such as resistance of the officers, lack of resources and the lack of training.

This study examined community–policing strategies with a view to drawing conclusions on their separate and discrete performances to combating crime. Numerous research examined make conclusions on the performance of community policing as if it is a single strategy yet it entails a variety of strategies that are exemplified by enhanced cooperation between the police and the communities.

### Theoretical framework

*Community policing is based on* normative sponsorship theory. Normative sponsorship theory has the notion of community support at its core. The theory assumes that community members are of good will and willing to contribute to their safety and wellbeing as long as their interests are served (Yero et al., 2012, p. 52). The normative sponsorship theory sees the workability of partnerships in community policing as a strategy. In other terms, according to this theory, the police cannot achieve any policing goals in the community without the support of the public. According to Amuya (2017, p. 2), "the concept is based on the assumption that if police and the community work together creatively and symbiotically, it can lead to solving of problems that may be the underlying causes of crime,

fear of crime, lawlessness and general societal decay". This shift is endorsed by Pelser (2000), who argues that South Africa as a nation transitioning away from an oppressive regime needed to transform its community–policing strategy from a militarised one to a more inclusive one.

Dintwe (2012, p. 226) argues that community policing in South Africa is based on the apartheid model, which sought to keep political violence at bay. Yero *et al.* (2012) argue that community support is essential to community transformation, which aligns with Dintwe (2012, p. 225), who argues that policing should be a community effort to avoid it feeling militarised and imposed on the community. The theory further assumes that community policing on its own is a strategy to the problems arising in a community. The normative sponsorship theory can be criticised for making assumptions about people's sense of duty without considering the social dynamics leading community members to crime. It assumes that all communities have stakeholders willing to participate, which is not always the case. Other authors highlight the role the police play in involving community members in the safekeeping of their communities and prevention of crime, but little information is available on communities' participation efforts.

## Methodology

This research uses a case study design to address the primary research objectives. Selected participants included key personnel from various Johannesburg police stations, including station commanders and visible police officers. A total of 10 police stations from the Johannesburg metropolitan region were represented among the participants.

In this qualitative study, purposive sampling was adopted, which enabled the selection of respondents with significant knowledge and expertise in crime prevention (Campbell *et al.*, 2020). As stewards of their respective police stations, station commanders acted as important decision makers for this study. Simultaneously, members of the visible policing department, accountable for direct and social media engagement with the public, provided insights into the visual culture of modern policing and its effects on citizen-centric programmes and partnerships. Components of the visible policing programme comprised crime prevention, specialised response services, intelligence collection, social development, school education and public awareness initiatives.

The findings segment of this study reveals semantic relationships, underlining the interplay between different categories crucial in addressing the research objectives. A content analysis approach was adopted to decipher the interview transcripts, pinpointing the policing strategies used and associated challenges within the Johannesburg context. Content analysis provides several noteworthy advantages. Firstly, it offers an in-depth understanding of the police officers' perspectives on community–policing strategies, thus, uncovering the nuances of their subjective experiences and viewpoints. This method also allows for the interpretation of interview data in context, capturing the sociocultural dynamics inherent in these perspectives. As the study involves multiple interviews across various police stations, content analysis efficiently handles the resulting large amounts of qualitative data, organising and making sense of it systematically. This systematic approach enhances the objectivity, reliability and consistency of the data analysis. In addition, this method also aids in the identification of trends or patterns, which is particularly useful in tracking the evolution of police perspectives and strategies. Interviews generally lasted around an hour, and were transcribed verbatim for the analysis. The identified themes and quotes served to explore contemporary policing's visual culture and its influence on citizen-focused programmes and partnerships. These programs encompass various areas such as crime prevention, specialised response services, intelligence gathering, social development, school education and awareness campaigns.

Field preparations commenced in the winter of 2019. Despite our readiness, various challenges delayed our on-site activities. Initially, interviews were slated for the spring of 2020. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 forced us to postpone them, eventually commencing in the autumn of that year and concluding in the spring of 2021.

A significant hurdle we encountered was obtaining ethical approval from the SAPS, a process that took a protracted eight months. Following this, we embarked on a four-month journey to gain ethics approval from the University of Pretoria's ethics committee.

Locating some of our respondents posed yet another challenge, primarily due to inaccuracies in the provided addresses. Some police stations, especially those situated within informal settlements, proved elusive even with global positioning system assistance. As a result, we often found ourselves reliant on local commuters to guide us to our intended destinations.

## Results

In this section, the findings of the collected data are presented based on content and thematic analysis. The identified themes discussed in detail below are as follows: the respondents' understanding of community policing and the involvement of community members in policing, policing strategies, the mentioned police stations used to partner with communities and challenges the police faced in implementing the policing strategies when partnering with communities.

### Community policing and community–policing partnerships

Views of the police respondents revealed that partnerships and collaboration with communities are at the heart of effective community policing. As noted by the Portland State University (2011), community members are an important source of support and information. They provide the police with insight into the specific crime problems occurring within their neighbourhoods and can aid officers in their investigations. Police and community partnerships and collaborations are, therefore, beneficial to both the police and the community.

Community–policing strategies were "developed to revamp the centrality of the community in crime prevention and to operationalise a centred approach to policing" (SAPS, 2018, p. 10), including enhancing community–policing partnerships to prevent crime through multidisciplinary collaboration. The study data showed that the police in the selected Johannesburg policing area used different policing strategies to partner with communities and other stakeholders to increase security in the selected Johannesburg suburbs. Four major strategies are discussed below.

Use of community partnership forums. The first strategy is the establishment of CPFs. A CPF is a grouping of people from an identified area (religions groups, political groups, sports clubs, schools, taxi associations, etc) and police representatives from the area's police station who meet to discuss safety problems in their communities with a view to improving police accountability, transparency, priorities and effectiveness in the community (Dlamini, 2020). People who are not part of any group or organisation also have a right to be included. The Station Commander identified community-based organisations and interested individuals. He/ she also ensured the police were well represented with the heads of the different divisions represented (visible policing, crime prevention, detective, etc.) at CPF meetings. The Johannesburg police stations established CPFs as policing strategies to engage with communities as partners in addressing crime and other social disorders and create safer neighbourhoods. The CPFs' establishment engaged the police and communities in dialogues, meetings and active public participation. CPFs functioned as a communication bridge between the police and the community members, as each member of the CPF could take

measures to prevent crime – the members could also identify and solve problems. The police respondents noted that the establishment of CPFs empowered community members, as it afforded them the opportunity and ability to take part in and manage their challenges through participation in crime prevention programmes. Police Station Commander A highlighted how they used CPFs to engage with community members:

> Our [CPF] is functional; we have four CPFs for each sector. We distribute pamphlets [and] advertise what is happening. We give out pamphlets at churches. We have sector commanders who drive and patrol in the community. We have a relationship with the community.

A lieutenant colonel at Police Station 6 further elaborated on how they worked with the CPF to strengthen their community–policing partnership with different community groups:

> If you look at the women's day on the 9th of August, we had a meeting with the women and the CPF. We had the CPF executives; we asked what can we do for women. We spread the message of domestic violence, we distributed roses as well as a roadblock, and gave women some good messages. It went very well, and this strengthens our relationship with the community.

The police officer in Station 4 stated that through the establishment of CPFs, they formed partnerships with several institutions, and regular meetings were held. The respondent stated the following:

> We have partnerships through the community-policing forum and the security companies, [Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department] and other old players. We have [a] CPF, and each sector has [a] CPF. Once a month, we have a meeting. If there is something urgent, we do not wait to discuss it later.

To further support the partnership with CPFs, a respondent at Police Station G explained the partnerships through CPFs and how they engaged with one another in the community:

> What we are doing is the [CPF], teaching the community, helping the community. We meet with them, maybe, monthly meetings to close the gap between us and the community. That helps. We know whom to assist, and they know they can call on us. We have monthly meetings.

In conclusion, the police interviewees, argued that CPFs promote clear lines of communication between the police and community members while improving the transparency and accountability of the police to the community.

## Sector policing

The second community–policing strategy identified was sector policing. A police officer at Station 8 argued that they used sector policing to divide the stations' areas into controllable sections to enable effective policing and community engagement. The Africa Criminal Justice Reform (2019:1) also posits that, "If successfully implemented, sector policing could significantly shift the way police approach their work and so help to make communities safer". The National Planning Commission (2014) states that sector-policing was added as a geographical orientation of the police in respect to personnel and resources which were allocated to areas within police precincts based on policing needs.

During the interviews, a police officer from Station 2 argued that sector policing played a vital role in ensuring quality service delivery with the support from communities by bringing together the police and communities.

This was exemplified by the respondent from Police Station 9:

> The area covers a huge area. To police effectively, we [are] divided into four sectors. Sector 1 has suburbs; Sector 2 is Kensington; Sector 3 has Cleveland. The fourth sector has [the] Denver suburb. The division is to make sure that each area receives attention. We have sector managers for each sector. Some members patrol each sector. We identified each hotspot and deployed police according to the hotspot.

A respondent from Station 1 stated the following on the "geographical and decentralisation approach that is adopted by sector policing":

> If you are aware of this, this place is broken up into four sectors. So, this policing area is 13 square kilometres, broken up [into] six sectors. Each sector has three or four members. So, those sectors deal with the hawkers' forum, [and] each block of flats has different forums.

The sector policing forum was further divided into the following sub-forums: business forums, private security forums, youth desk forums, *izinduna* forums, hawkers' forums and taxi forums. These forums were established and used by the nine police stations to engage with different community members and groups to provide security in accordance with each forum's needs.

For example, respondents from the Station 7 indicated that they used business forums created through partnerships with neighbourhood restaurants. Station 1 used bank forums that established a financially integrated institution partnership with other banks. While Station 9 partnered with government institutions, such as Telkom, Eskom and City Power. The police also partnered with security companies within sector areas such as Fidelity ADT. The respondent at Station 1 stated:

> There are a lot of security companies. Now, we are trying to bring them together like we have done with the banks. I have the four heads of security and the banks together, and they are working as one. There is lots of security company looking after the groups. Some banks came together, and they formed a partnership – the partnership is a [financially] integrated institution.

A respondent at Station 3 mentioned the following regarding their forums and community participation:

> Yes, we do have such partnerships. We have business forums; we have community forums; we have sector groups. And there is a lot of participation in the community too.

Youth forums are used for youth development and school campaigns, and the youth involvement and engagement differed for each police station. Station 8 established a youth desk forum that collaborated with schools, of which the respondent stated the following:

> What we are doing now [. . .] we are aware it is the youth committing crime. We have a youth desk that goes to schools in particular problem schools. They try to educate the youth [on] criminal activities.

Station 4 set up a crime-prevention system that visited various schools, with each police officer at the station adopting a school.

> What we did here in Jeppe, we let every police officer adopt a school. They will communicate with the school and address the school. We speak to the kids in the schools about drugs, abuse and how to report crime to us. It helps and improves security.

The respondent also stated the following on how they engaged and formed partnerships with the youth:

> The youth, we incorporate them under patrollers. When we have operations, they come with us. They assist us; we patrol with them. When we are doing awareness campaigns, they are there [handing] out pamphlets. Any crime that is giving us problems, we use them to [hand] out those pamphlets.

The izinduna (local Chiefs) forum consists of hostel members and those who run the hostels. The dilapidated and crowded hostels in South Africa, which for more than 100 years formerly served as homes for male migrant workers have become dens of violent crimes and are inhabited by largely unemployed violent groups (Rueedi, 2020).

The police respondents indicated that *izinduna* worked together with the police to increase security at hostels and assisted the police with information on particular incidents of crime in their respective hostels.

The taxi and hawkers' forums are linked through their partnership with the police. They partner with the police to combat crime in taxi ranks, such as the MTN taxi rank in the Johannesburg central business district, and raise awareness on security-related matters with community members. For example, a respondent at Station 1 stated the following on how the taxi operators contributed to safety in the community:

> Because there are no houses, there are all blocks of flats. You know [the] MTN taxi rank, it is a small place, [and] the taxi people put a small park [for] kids [to] play. There are about 50 to 60 children with a small recreation area.

### Use of social media

The third strategy identified in this study is the use of social media to partner with communities. The police revealed that all the police stations used social media as a policing strategy to engage with communities and as a communication mechanism between actors in the partnership. Specifically, the police stations used different social media platforms to stimulate conversations with the community and established forum members. Social platforms such as WhatsApp groups, the Zello consumer walkie-talkie app (app), radio talk shows, brochures and pamphlets for campaigning were used. A respondent at Station 5 mentioned:

> We use social media or radio talk shows and newspapers that alert the community.

The police stations also revealed that they used WhatsApp groups to communicate with communities. Specific group chats were created for members with different roles in the community, such as street patrollers and the hawkers' forum. In addition, a respondent at Station 1 stated that their station used an application called Zello, which set it apart from other police stations in terms of communication mechanisms. This app allows users to turn their smartphones into a walkie talkie or two-way radio and it comes through on one's phone like a two-way radio. Another respondent at Station 1 further highlighted the expansiveness of the Zello application and how it is used:

> You download it on your phone. Many security companies, about 200 of them, use this app. It is in real-time, and this is extremely useful. We can respond quickly. It is a good mechanism for communication.

### Street patrollers

The fourth strategy is the use of street patrollers as a strategy to partner with communities. The police stations incorporated community members as street patrollers to create safer neighbourhoods and as a strategy to partner with the community. The police shared resources with the community, as the respondent at Station 9 mentioned:

> We encourage people to be street patrollers. We have a kiosk and take it to the hotspot, and the community works there.

The same strategy was used at Station 2:

> The practical ways: we have got the street patrollers. You might have seen an orange trailer or caravan. The caravan is a collaboration with the Department of Safety; it is normally used by community patrollers.

At other stations, such as Station 1, the respondent mentioned that the patrollers were paid a stipend for assisting in improving safety in the community.

We have patrollers in the street, and they enforce bylaws. They get paid R3 500. We encourage
them to come with information, and we pay them.

## Challenges to community–policing strategies

The respondents noted that the police stations faced specific challenges, depending on the
settlement areas they policed. For example, policing in informal settlements was
challenging as the dwellings are built too close together, and there are no proper roads and
streetlights to facilitate movement of the police on patrol. A respondent from Station 4
stated: "There are no streets for the police to move in the informal settlements".

A respondent from Station 6 had a similar response regarding the challenges they faced in
policing in these settlements:

Our area has got [an] informal settlement. It is difficult to go into an informal settlement you can't
go in. There are a lot of things happening in the informal settlement. Walking or driving in there is
not easy. You cannot just go and walk there. It is not easy. They can even take your firearm.

The police also highlighted that they have limited resources in their bid to combat the high
levels of crime in Johannesburg area. The police said that they lacked the resources, such
as policing vehicles and human resources, to patrol and be visible in neighbourhoods. For
example, the respondents at five Police Stations all stated that they needed more *vehicles.*
The police sometimes cannot cover a bigger area because of [the] lack of vehicles.

The respondent at Police Station 1 stated:

There is no resource in our department. We just capitalise on people being a part of the police by
helping police, for example, with patrolling.

Another challenge the police faced in enhancing the strategies was a lack of trust between
the communities and the police. Respondents from the police stations argued that the
community members distrusted the police, which was visible through their lack of
willingness to share information on neighbourhood crimes. This also affected participation
of communities in the CPF meetings. In particular, the community members did not trust the
police to protect them if they worked with the police and gave them relevant information. For
example, the respondent at Station 4 stated the following:

Furthermore, when it comes to getting information, for example, you might find that a particular
person [was] maybe murdered here. From there, people will not want to give you information. It's
a problem because for a murder which happened somewhere there, and we were not even
there, from there should we start questioning the people there. No-one is willing to give
information.

A respondent at Station 9 stated the following regarding the lack of community participation
in meetings:

Not everyone is willing to come on board. I have been here for three years. In meetings, a few
people will come, and that is a problem. We give out pamphlets to show what we will be
discussing, but people will not come.

## Discussion

The landscape of Johannesburg's policing strategies has been a subject of extensive
research, providing insights into their potential for reducing crime and facilitating
community engagement. CPFs have emerged as a robust platform for rallying community
participation and fostering proactive crime prevention efforts. As noted by Dlamini (2017,
p. 135), CPFs have been instrumental in creating transparency and accountability, serving

as crucial conduits for communication and enabling collective problem-solving for security issues.

In line with this, sector policing strategies have significantly bolstered the interaction between police and community members (SAPS, 2018, p. 11). By catering to the unique security requirements of individual communities, these strategies have been key in reinforcing partnerships and promoting neighbourhood safety.

Furthermore, the advent of technology, specifically social media, has become a significant component of Johannesburg's policing strategy as indicated by this study. As Bullock (2018, p. 247) suggests, the digital sphere has provided an effective platform for facilitating engagement between police and citizens, aiding in the transformation of police communication from physical spaces to virtual ones.

These strategies, however, have demonstrated varied degrees of success across communities, with Pelser (2000) noting their efficacy to be pronounced in affluent neighbourhoods due to financial contributions and a strong preventative desire among the citizens. Despite these disparities, the police force remains committed to using and integrating technological advancements to enhance their operations. This includes the proposed development of a high-tech security centre and leveraging social media to transition communication to the digital realm, a strategy Strom (2017) considers beneficial for boosting operational efficiency amidst resource constraints and heightened public scrutiny.

As the study shows, the inception of CPFs has proved integral in encouraging community involvement in police operations through collaborative safety initiatives and dialogue. Regular meetings with CPF members allow for the identification and resolution of security challenges, fostering an environment of trust and accountability between the police and the community (Dlamini, 2017, p. 135).

Other policing strategies like sector policing have further enhanced this rapport by allowing for specialised interactions based on the security needs of each community sector (SAPS, 2018, p. 11). The introduction of social media as a strategy has had an expansive reach at the individual level, fostering a platform for dialogue, promoting engagement and expediting action on community concerns, aligning with the digital trend in professional communication (Bullock, 2018, p. 247).

Such advances in community policing, facilitated by social media, have not only ushered in increased participation and transparency but also paved the way for more efficient technological solutions in policing partnerships. Community initiatives such as street patrolling and awareness campaigns via radio stations have further underlined the community's role in security, forging a stronger partnership with the police and enhancing the safety of Johannesburg's neighbourhoods.

## Conclusion

The article highlighted police perspectives of community–policing strategies used in Johannesburg. These include utilisation of CPFs, sector policing, use of social media and use of street patrollers. The community–policing strategies revealed that police–community partnerships enhance crime prevention, as the community and other stakeholders, such as government institutions, also play a role in creating safer neighbourhoods. This is in contrast to militarised policing which treats communities as suspects and prone to use of violence. The police mentioned that partnerships with communities helped identify problems and immediate solutions at the local level. The policing strategies improved the transparency and accountability of the police force to the community and encouraged active citizenship. However, the police revealed that they lacked resources such as vehicles and human resources required to ensure full coverage of policing areas. Policing in informal settlements

and hostels is difficult due to inaccessibility and overcrowding, respectively. In other instances, community policing is affected by lack of trust and cooperation from community members. To further enhance the effectiveness of community policing, additional vehicles and human resources need to be provided by the government, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the lack of resources can be addressed in the partnership. For example, businesses can help by donating resources to the police, and community members can volunteer to increase police manpower, as it is evident from the police that they share their resources with the communities, such as trailers and caravans for street patrollers. In addition, the police can use drones to police settlements where houses are closely built together. More research must be conducted on how technological advancements can be incorporated into policing strategies.

The practical implications of this study are multi-fold. Firstly, it underscores the potential effectiveness of community–policing strategies in South Africa, particularly within the Johannesburg metropolitan area. This positive impact is significant in informing policymakers, police leadership and community leaders about the potential benefits of adopting and refining these strategies. By acknowledging the strategies that are proving successful, such as CPFs, sector policing, street patrollers and the use of social media, efforts can be concentrated on improving these measures. Moreover, these strategies encourage the involvement of community members, fostering a sense of joint responsibility in crime prevention efforts. This mutual involvement may ultimately lead to better crime prevention outcomes and foster stronger relationships and trust between the police and the communities they serve.

Secondly, the study's findings can aid in addressing the challenges highlighted by police officials, including resource scarcity and difficulties encountered in particular areas like informal settlements and hostels. Policymakers can consider these issues when allocating resources or devising strategies to improve policing efficiency. In addition, the highlighted benefits of collaborations with businesses and volunteer involvement can be taken into account, potentially leading to greater resource mobilisation for policing efforts. By addressing these challenges and making use of existing community resources, authorities can strengthen community–policing strategies and enhance their overall impact on crime prevention.

## Limitations

While this study presents an in-depth account from the police respondents across selected stations within the Johannesburg metropolitan area, it did not include perspectives from ordinary community members or other organised partners. Consequently, insights on community policing from these groups remain absent. Notwithstanding, it should be highlighted that the interpretation of the community–policing philosophy and related strategies as provided in this study is solely from the police perspective. Moreover, the inherent nature of case studies limits their broad applicability to other contexts. As such, the findings from this investigation should not be construed as representative of other South African contexts.

## Directions for future research

This research primarily focused on the viewpoint of police officers within Johannesburg metropolitan stations about community policing and its associated strategies. It is important, however, to remember that following the end of apartheid and the initial demilitarisation of the police, South Africa has seen a gradual reintroduction of certain militarised policing elements in an effort to combat escalating crime rates. For instance, in 2010, the SAPSs returned to a pre-1995 military ranking system to bolster crime fighting efforts. This shift is the subject of ongoing discussion, and its impact on crime reduction

necessitates further investigation. Considering the possibly dual-natured approach to policing in South Africa, incorporating elements of both militarisation and community involvement, further research could shed light on how these combined strategies could enhance crime prevention efforts in the country.

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About the authors

Dr Mary S. Mangai is a Lecturer at the University of Pretoria's School of Public Management and Administration (SPMA). Her research focuses on public policy and management, citizen co-production and co-creation of service delivery, social protection, public health, local government and developing countries.

Dr Tyanai Masiya is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Pretoria's School of Public Management and Administration (SPMA). His research focus is on public service delivery, citizenship and democracy as well as local government management. He has also written extensively on constitutionalism, democratisation, elections as well as transparency and accountability of the state. Tyanai Masiya is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: tyanai.masiya@up.ac.za

Ms Galaletsang Masemola is an Honours student at the University of Pretoria's School of Public Management and Administration (SPMA). Her research focus is on public policy and public management.