

**Bridges to Babylon?**  
**Building State Legitimacy through Community Policing in Kingston, Jamaica**

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***Abstract***— Rapid urbanization around the world has been accompanied, in many cities, by high levels of informality, marginalization, and violence; factors that are said to have weakened the citizen’s ties to the state and created a “crisis of legitimacy” for the police. In recent decades, community policing has emerged as an innovative strategy to counteract these trends by establishing relations of trust between marginalized urban dwellers and the police. Though empirical work has been done in the United States, little evidence exists of the transferability of the policy and its potential impacts in the Global South, where issues of violence and marginalization tend to be more acute. By interviewing residents, police officers, and local experts this paper documents the implementation and perceived impact of the policy in two high-crime communities in Kingston, Jamaica. The interviews show that community policing has failed to improve citizen’s levels of trust in the police or their views regarding the legitimacy of the state. Using the polycentric systems approach the paper demonstrates how the influence and interplay of a multiplicity of both legal and extra-legal governance centers can undermine the implementation of police reforms. These findings highlight the need to involve all stakeholders, including extra-legal governance actors, in a coordinated process in order for the state to achieve its policy objectives.

***Keywords***— Urban violence; community policing; police reform; polycentric governance; policy transfer; state legitimacy