

Pre-Analysis Plan for:  
Citizen Participation and Trust in the Police: Evaluation of the  
*Foros de Seguridad Pública* of the City of Buenos Aires

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**Abstract**

The City of Buenos Aires government organizes town hall meetings to discuss security issues with citizens every trimester. The present study aims to test the efficacy of this program on citizens' trust in the police. Our treatment will consist in an information provision to a random subset of participants. In this plan we pre-register some key decisions to follow once we collect the data.

**Keywords:** trust in the police, community policing, field experiment

*JEL Classification:* C93, H56

# 1 Introduction

Community policing is a set of practices which aim to strengthen the ties between the police and the population by emphasizing their involvement in crime prevention efforts (Skogan, 2019). These practices often involve “increasing the frequency of beat patrols, decentralized decision making, community engagement programs such as town halls, and problem-oriented policing programs to act on information from citizens to prevent crime” (Blair et al., 2021). The central hypothesis is that community policing efforts will result in higher trust in the police and improve security.

The existing evidence on the evaluation of community policing initiatives has been mixed. While some evidence points to improved feelings of legitimacy of the police, especially in the US, there is a lack of evidence in developing and emerging economies (Gill et al., 2014). A recent analysis of six field experiments in developing countries found that community policing initiatives failed to improve police-citizens relations, and had no impact on crime (Blair et al., 2021). Regarding the Latin American context, some experimental evidence has been put forward recently, especially in Colombia (Frühling, 2007; Desmond Arias and Ungar, 2013; García et al., 2013; Blattman et al., 2021; Collazos et al., 2021).

To understand why community policing initiatives are sometimes effective at improving citizens’ trust, and sometimes not, in this study we intend to disentangle the numerous components of community policing, and focus on a single one, which is often a core component of community policing (Skogan, 2019): town hall meetings between security forces and the population.

In this study, by cooperating with the Buenos Aires City government (through the *Ministerio de la Justicia y de la Seguridad*), we intend to carry out a framed-field experiment to test the effect of the “Foros de Seguridad Pública” (FOSEP) on trust in the police. The FOSEP are town hall meetings organized by the City of Buenos Aires every three months in each "Comuna" (administrative district) of the Buenos Aires City. These meetings involve the head of the local police as well as elected officials both from the Comuna and the broader Buenos Aires City government, and have the objective of exchanging information to improve the delivery of security services.

To evaluate the FOSEP program, we will randomly assign households into either a treatment or a control group. Prior to the event, we intend to measure each respondent’s trust in the police by means of a questionnaire.

The treatment will consist in the provision of information about the next FOSEP and a reminder card. This intervention is aimed to increase participation in the meeting in the treatment group.

Following the FOSEP, we will visit each household a second time and measure trust in the police

within both groups. Since inclusion within each group is decided at random, any difference in the difference in trust in the police between groups can be attributed to our intervention.

Furthermore, the individual respondent to our survey might vary within the household. By exploiting any random variation in *which* member of the household answers the survey between baseline and end-line, we can measure intra-household diffusion effects. In particular, we can compare differences in trust in the police between the study units of the treatment group in which a different respondent answered the questionnaire during the second visit, with its counterpart in the control group. This is relevant because diffusion effects should be included in a full assessment of the impact of the intervention.

In addition, we will be able to identify clearly who attends the FOSEP from information provided by the City government, as attendees have to register for the event. By knowing with certainty who attended the event, we could easily disentangle the reasons why the FOSEP did not have any effect on trust in the police, if we happen to find that is the case. In particular, we would be able to say whether or not the treatment was successful in bringing people to the FOSEP and, if the information provided was indeed successful, we would be able to say whether the FOSEP per se had a positive effect on trust in the police.

This study would contribute to the literature on community policing applications in Latin America by specifically analyzing the effectiveness of town halls in increasing trust in the police. Increased levels of trust in the police should be a by-product of the interactions that take place at town hall meetings, which are intended to provide a platform for the public to assist the police in combating crime and addressing community problems (Tyler, 2004). Town hall meetings are also standard in many community-police interventions. Although the evidence about these types of interventions in the context of Latin America is relatively scarce, there exist some articles that explore the issue. For example, Blattman et al. (2022) find that a community policing intervention consisting of an increase in the civilian apparatus dealing with disorder and crime had positive effects on indicators of crime and state legitimacy only in neighborhoods where the state presence was relatively strong. By breaking down impacts by initial level of trust in different institutions, including trust in the police, we could test for the existence of a similar effect in our context.

Additionally, this study would contribute to the literature about the characteristics of citizens who are more likely to participate in local government events (Einstein et al., 2019; Kang and Kwak, 2003; Kittilson, 2023). By looking at the characteristics of respondents, we could provide evidence about *who* actually attends town halls. In other words, we could provide government agencies with information about who these events should be targeted to.

Finally, this study would contribute to the broader literature on trust in the police. While some efforts has been made to evaluate *changes* in trust in the police, the bulk of the literature is still focused on finding determinants of trust in the police (Brown and Benedict, 2002; Hagan et al., 2005; Bolger et al., 2021). In an example specific to Buenos Aires, Bergman and Flom (2012) found that citizens' perception of police performance is the biggest driver in trust in the police. This study would contribute by analyzing the effects of town hall meetings on citizens' perception of the police.

## 2 Experiment and sample

**Sample** The sample will consist of households and businesses from each of the 15 Comunas (administrative districts) of the City of Buenos Aires. It will consist of between 500 and 1000 households in total. The baseline survey for each Comuna will be carried out one week prior to its respective Foro de Seguridad, i.e., around the Fall/Winter 2023. The endline survey will be carried out one week after the event.

**Experimental Design** The sample will be randomly divided into either a treatment or a control group. We will measure trust at baseline for all participants using a questionnaire.

The questionnaire will be divided into two sections. In the first section, we will ask questions about trust in different institutions, especially in trust in the police. In the second section, we will ask demographic questions (age, education).<sup>1</sup>

To keep track of participants, we will ask for the respondent's last 3 or 4 digits of their national ID number. This could serve to identify the respondent at baseline and endline, as well as at the FOSEP registry, and we will keep record of the address in which the interview was performed. We will go to the same address for the endline survey. The identifying information will be collected using pen and paper, and will never be matched with the participants' answers.

Regarding the treatment, this will consist in the provision of information about the FOSEP of the Comuna of the respondent. First, we will add to the questionnaire a question about whether the respondent knows about the FOSEP program and, if yes, whether he/she thinks it is a positive program. Second, we will handle the respondent a small information sheet about the next FOSEP in their Comuna, with the date and location and some information about the context of the experiment.

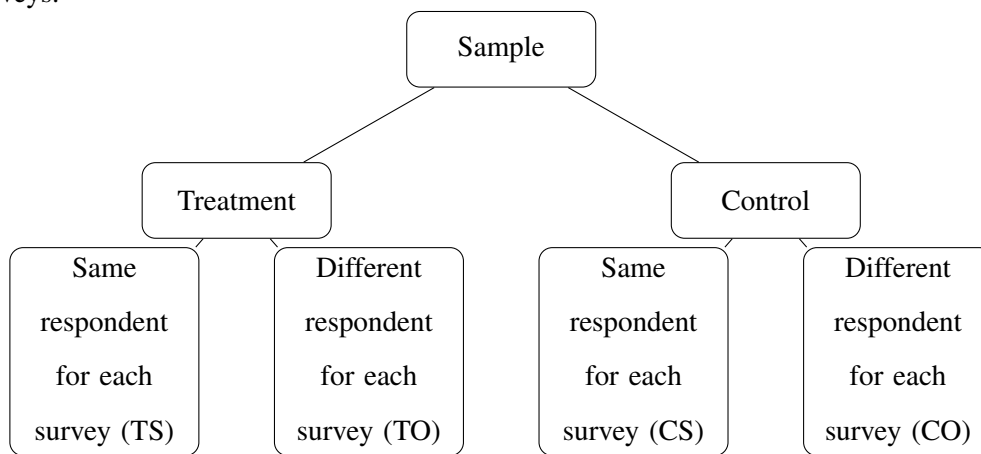
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<sup>1</sup>A copy of the actual questionnaire can be found in the Appendix A.

We will use the treatment to perform an intent-to-treat analysis. Our hypothesis is that the treatment will increase participation in the FOSEP and in turn, will lead to a change in trust in the police.

Once each Foro de Seguridad is over, we will return to each surveyed household or business to conduct the endline survey. In this part, we will again measure each respondent's trust in the police. The aim is basically to measure the difference before and after the intervention's implementation in the difference in trust in the police between the treatment and the control group.

Interestingly, we will be able to perform an analysis of the diffusion of information, because the respondent in the household or business we will interview might change between the baseline and endline surveys.



Due to the fact that the treatment and the control group will be selected at random from the sample, any difference in the difference in trust in the police between TS and CS can be attributed to the intervention. The same is true for TO and CO. We will therefore have two main outcomes: the difference in the difference in trust in the police between TS and CS, as well as the same measure for TO and CO. Any result different from zero for this second outcome can be attributed to diffusion effects within each household or business.

**Decision rules for dropping observations** If participants do not complete the experiment, we will exclude their observation.

**Decision rules for dropping variables** If 90 percent or more of the sample answers the same value on a given variable, we will define this as limited variation, and therefore will drop the variables in question from the analysis.

**Missing values** If more than 30 percent of the respondents do not answer a particular question, we will drop this variable for the analysis.

### 3 Data and coding of main variables

**Treatment variables** The treatment variable will be a dummy variable, *Information* whether the household/business receives the information treatment.

Additionally, we will split the sample between households/businesses for which the respondent is the same at baseline and endline, and households/businesses for which the respondent is different. This is not a treatment variable, as there will not be a random allocation between the two.

**Outcome variable** The main outcome variable will be *Trust Police*, which is going to be measured using a Likert scale for the following question: “What is your level of trust in the police?”. The available responses will range from 0 (Very low) to 4 (very high). The variable will then be coded from 0 to 1.

**Controls** As controls, we will use a composite index of the level of trust in other institutions, such as the Federal and City governments, the health and education sectors, the army, the press and the justice system. We will also add a dummy variable for whether the respondent believes the main issue in Argentina to be security/delinquency.

**Heterogeneity** We will not be testing for heterogeneity of treatment effects.

### 4 Empirical Strategy

We will use an intent-to-treat analysis.

$$\begin{aligned} Trust\ Police_{it} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 Information_i + \beta_2 Post_t \\ & + \beta_3 Information_i \times Post_t + \gamma X_{it} + \epsilon_{it} \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

We will estimate the same equation for the two samples (those in the *same* group and those in the *other* group). The variable of interest is  $\beta_3$ .

## 5 Hypotheses

**Main hypotheses** The main hypothesis for our study is that providing information about the FOSEP program increases one’s trust in the police, i.e.,  $\beta_3 > 0$ . We expect this effect to be driven by an increase, in the treatment group, of the number of people going to the FOSEP.

For this to happen, it must be true that the provision of information about FOSEP actually increases the chance of attending the event. This constitutes the underlying hypothesis of our study.

Additionally, we hypothesize that there would be an intra-household/business diffusion effect. That is to say that there would be an increase in trust in the police in treated households as a whole, not just in the person who actually responds the baseline questionnaire, i.e.,  $\beta_3$  would also be positive for the sub-sample *other*.

**Exploratory analysis** We will then add an exploratory hypothesis, by analyzing whether the treatment has more or less impact depending on the baseline level of trust. For instance, it is not clear whether the FOSEP would have more impact, if any, on people with an initially low perception of trust in the police; or if the opposite will be the case. On the one hand, there could be decreasing marginal returns, so people with low trust in the police would experience a larger increase in their trust in the police. On the other hand, those same people might be less willing to attend the FOSEP or, even if they do attend the meeting, they might be less prone to change their attitudes towards that institution. Thus, these people would experience less of an effect on their trust in the police.

## 6 Power Calculation

Power calculations were made using the Optimal Design software ([Spybrook et al., 2011](#)). Because we will be testing for two main hypotheses, we used Bonferroni’s correction and used the significance level  $\alpha = 0.025$ . We used a value  $\beta = 0.80$  as power, and baseline  $R^2$  explained by covariates of 0.10. We used two values of sample size, which will give us a lower and upper bound of the sample we are hoping for:  $N = 500$  and  $N = 1000$ .

These power calculations indicate that the Minimum Detectable Effect for the analysis ranges between  $\delta \in [0.18; 0.26]$ .

## **7 IRB Approval and consent**

The proposal has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Institute for Social and Economic Research of Osaka University on the 25th of September, 2023 (Approval No. 20230904).

## **8 Archive**

The present pre-analysis plan is archived before any data is collected. We archived it at the registry for randomized controlled trials in economics held by the American Economic Association: <https://www.socialscienceregistry.org/> on Sep.26 2023.



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# Appendix

## A Questionnaire (the questions will be asked in Spanish)

### Section 1: Trust in Institutions

1. Do you live in the City of Buenos Aires (CABA)?
  - Yes
  - No
2. Do you feel unsafe in this neighborhood?
  - Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - I don't know
3. What are the three most pressing issues in Argentinian society today?
  - 1) \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Which one is the most worrying, according to you? (select only the three selected before)
5. How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?
  - The president and the federal government
  - The Buenos Aires Mayor and city government
  - Professors and workers of the education system
  - Doctors and workers of the health system
  - The army
  - The police
  - The press
  - The justice system
6. Imagine someone steals your bag in the street. How likely would you be to report it to the police?
  - Not likely at all
  - Somewhat likely
  - Very likely
  - I don't know
7. How satisfied are you with the quality of police service in your neighborhood?
  - Very unsatisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat unsatisfied
  - Very unsatisfied
  - I don't know
  - I don't wish to answer
8. How much do you agree with the following statement: "The police provides services that citizens want"?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neutral
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know
- I don't wish to answer

**Section 2 (Treatment)**

1. Do you know the Foros de Seguridad (FOSEP)?
  - Yes
  - No
2. (If yes) Do you think Foros de Seguridad is a positive program?
  - Yes
  - No
  - No opinion / Don't know

**Section 3: Demographics**

1. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary
  - Other
  - I don't know
  - I do not wish to answer
2. What is your age group?
  - 18-24
  - 25-34
  - 35-44
  - 45-59
  - 60+
  - I do not wish to answer
3. What is your education level?
  - Nursery to university
  - Postgraduate
  - I don't know
  - I do not wish to answer
4. Comparing your living conditions to other people in Argentina, which of the following best describes your opinion?
  - Much worse
  - Worse
  - Same
  - Better
  - Much better
  - I don't know
  - I do not wish to answer