



The Takeaway

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Police Officers as Service Providers and Agents of Change

The Impact of an Ethics Training Program in Ghana

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Police officers play a crucial role in enforcing laws and promoting citizen trust in government institutions. In many countries around the globe, however, the police are perceived as the most corrupt branch of government. This brief reports on the implementation and evaluation of a two-day in-person ethics training program that targeted traffic police officers in Ghana.

According to Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Barometer for Africa, a survey of over 47,000 citizens in 35 African countries, African citizens perceive the police as the most corrupt sector of the government.¹ In Ghana, 59% of interviewed citizens believe that most or all police officers are corrupt. Motivating and incentivizing police officers is challenging for a number of reasons. First and foremost, officers have a uniquely high degree of power over private citizens, being able to fine, physically harm, or imprison them.



WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Police officers are important service providers, but are perceived as highly corrupt in Ghana.

A two-day training program for traffic police in Ghana attempted to both reactivate officers' motivations to serve the public and create a new shared identity of "agents of change."

The program improved officers' values and beliefs, and reduced their willingness to engage in unethical behavior nearly two years later.

Second, reporting police officers for misbehavior is difficult, since complaints need to be filed with the police itself. Third, the highly hierarchical nature of the police force—often due to links to the military—makes it hard for lower-rank officials to refrain from illegal or unethical behavior if that goes against orders coming from higher-ranked officials.

In Ghana, previous measures aimed at curbing police corruption, including the doubling of police officers' salaries in 2010, proved ineffective overall.² We designed and implemented an ethics training program targeting traffic police officers employed in all traffic police districts in the Greater Accra Region, one of 11 distinct Police Regions of Ghana.³ The program aimed to first (re-)activate officers' intrinsic motivations to serve the public, and then to affect their beliefs about other officers' willingness to join forces to change corrupt organizational norms.

THE STUDY

After establishing a collaborative relationship with the Head of Research of the Inspectorate General of Police, we first conducted a survey of the traffic police officers employed in the 32 traffic police districts under study. The survey recorded demographics and elicited beliefs and attitudes regarding unethical behavior of police officers in Ghana. We also asked officers why they originally joined the police. About 60% stated they did so “to help the community,” suggesting that the majority of the officers had intrinsic motivations to serve the public when they first joined the police. We hypothesize that such motivations likely got weakened by on-the-job experience.

About six months after the survey, we implemented the ethics training. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program we randomly

selected 21 of the 32 districts to have their officers invited to participate in the training (we refer to them as officers from Treatment districts),⁴ and 11 to act as our control group. The training lasted two days over two weeks. Officers participated in groups of 30 to 40, from different districts. The same group of officers participated on a given day of the week the first week and on the same day during the second week. About half of the officers employed in the Treatment districts participated in the training. Participation depended on officer availability the two weeks of the training, which was based on pre-determined duty rosters following a work rota system. Therefore, we consider participation in the training within the Treatment districts as good as random.

In designing the ethics program, we drew from the literature on identity in organizations⁵ and consulted with social psychologists. The training relied on small group discussions, role playing exercises, and problem-solving brainstorming activities. The program's primary objectives were to:

- 1) Reactivate officers' identities as “service providers” and their intrinsic motivations to help their communities (first day of training).
- 2) Generate a new “agents of change” group identity to change the trained officers' beliefs and facilitate collective action for change (second day).

To reinforce the message of the training, and cement the new group identity, we created WhatsApp chat groups for the officers who participated in each training day. Moreover, nine months after the intervention, all trained officers were invited to an official ceremony, held by the Police, where they were awarded an “Agent of Change” lapel pin.

OUTCOMES OF INTEREST

We conducted an endline survey by phone 20 months after the training, giving us baseline and endline data for 412 officers (about 70% of all officers employed in those districts). Our primary outcome variables are survey-generated measures of officers' values, identities, and beliefs about change in organizational norms, and survey-generated measures of attitudes toward and relationship with citizens. We aggregated the corresponding survey measures into a Value Index and a Citizen Relationship Index.

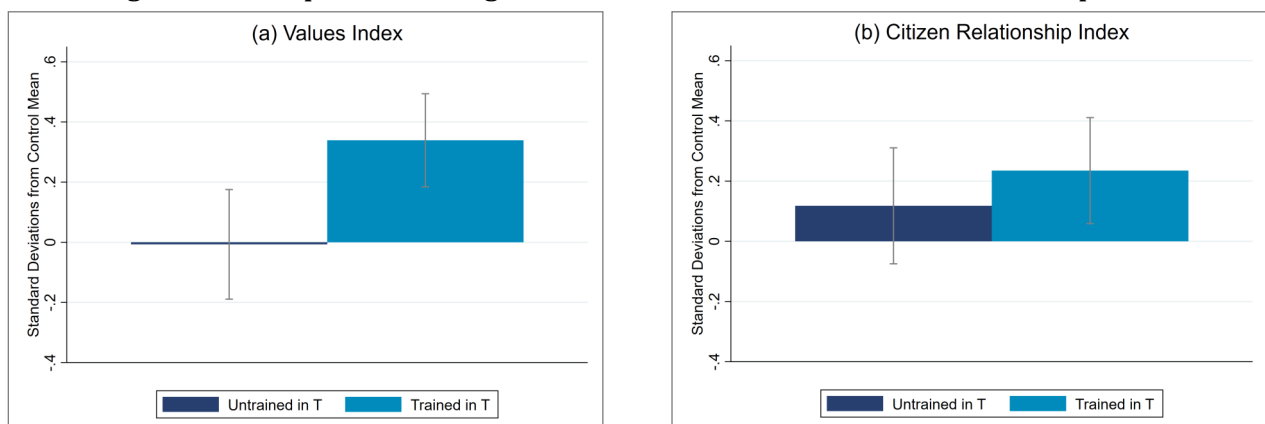
An important challenge when studying unethical behavior is the measurement of such behavior. This is an important constraint especially in countries like Ghana, which lack high quality administrative data on the behavior of public officials, e.g., data on use of force or internal reports against officers. In order to measure individual willingness to engage in unethical behavior, we included in the survey an incentivized cheating game, consisting of tossing a coin (while on the phone) four times and reporting the number of obtained tails. Officers received monetary compensation for each tail they reported,⁶ which created an incentive to lie. Since coin tossing happened in private and could not be verified, officer decision-making was shield-

ed from surveyor scrutiny, and social desirability bias was minimized. We analyze the coin tossing data by comparing the distribution of coin tosses in control and treatment districts, and for trained and untrained officers in treatment districts, to the theoretical binomial distribution. An empirical distribution skewed to the right of the theoretical distribution would be an indication of lying by officers.

THE IMPACT OF ETHICS TRAINING

Figure 1 displays the survey-generated outcomes of interest for Untrained and Trained officers in the Treatment districts. Each index is standardized around the mean observed in the Control districts. The figures show the indexes in standard deviations from the Control group mean. We report the raw means obtained for Trained and Untrained officers in the Treatment districts, and the 95% confidence intervals. The figures show that Trained officers scored significantly higher in the Value Index and the Citizenship Relationship Index as compared to Control district officers, 20 months after the training program. The Indexes are not statistically significantly higher for Untrained officers in Treatment districts than for officers in Control districts. This suggests that the ethics training impacted officers' values and attitudes toward citi-

Figure 1: The Impact of Training on the Values Index and the Citizen Relationship Index



Source: Authors' survey.

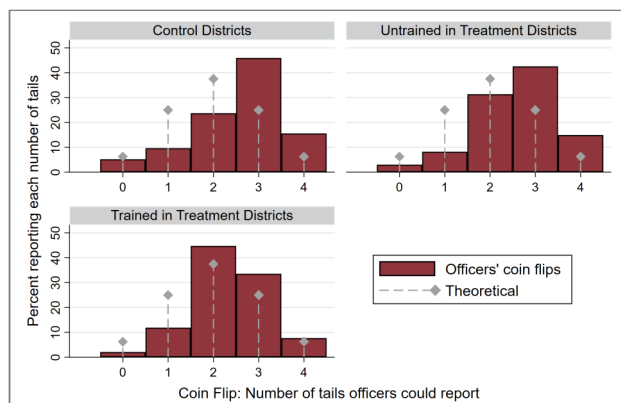
zens. Regression analysis shows that the training increased the Values Index by 0.33 standard deviations, and the Citizen Relationship Index by 0.24 standard deviations.

Next, we assess the impact of the training on willingness to cheat in the coin toss game. Figure 2 displays the distributions of coin tosses for Control officers, Untrained officers in Treatment districts, and Trained officers in Treatment districts, compared to the theoretical distribution. The distributions of tails reported by Control officers and Untrained officers in Treatment districts are heavily right-skewed, providing evidence of cheating. Both Control and Untrained officers (in T) far over-reported three and four tails. By contrast, the distribution generated by the Trained officers is closer to the theoretical distribution, indicating significantly less cheating. This is confirmed by regression analysis, which shows that the training reduced the reporting of more than 2 tails by about 18 percentage points, a nearly 30% decrease.

CONCLUSION

Overall, we find that our two-day training program, centered around individual and shared identities, had a significant impact on police officers' values, beliefs and propensity to engage in unethical behavior in Ghana, as measured through survey questions and an incentivized cheating game implemented nearly two years after the training program.

Figure 2: The Impact of Training on the Incentivized Cheating Game



Source: Authors' coin tossing incentivized game

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Notes:

¹ <https://www.transparency.org/en/gcb/africa/africa-2019>

² Foltz, J.D. & Opoku-Agyemang, K.A. (2015). Do higher salaries lower petty corruption? A policy experiment on West Africa's highways. *Unpublished Working Paper, University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of California, Berkeley.*

³ Harris, D., Borcan, O., Serra, D., Telli, H., Schettini, B. & Dercon, S. (2022). Proud to belong: The impact of ethics training on police officers. *CSAE working paper*, 2022. https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:ea7bcad5-af6e-49d1-9a00-ff20f9c57569/download_file?safe_filename=Harris+et+al+2022+Proud+to+belong.pdf&file_format=pdf&type_of_work=Working+paper

⁴ Invitations came directly from the Inspectorate General of Police.

⁵ See: Akerlof, G.A. & Kranton, R.E. (2010). *Identity economics*. Princeton University Press.

⁶ They received 10 GHS for each tail reported. This means that they could earn a maximum of 40 GHS if they reported four tails. Based on our survey data, the average hourly wage was 12 GHS.

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