Police–Civilian Fatal Encounters and State Trust*

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Abstract

We study how violent encounters between police and civilians shape citizens' trust in the state. We combine nearly 750,000 survey responses from seventeen Latin American countries with a new dataset of high-profile police–civilian fatalities. Exploiting the timing of these events relative to survey interviews, we provide causal evidence on their effects. Civilian deaths caused by police reduce trust in state institutions, while police-officer deaths caused by civilians increase it, with no effects on interpersonal trust. These effects arise only when events are covered by the media, indicating that information diffusion—rather than violence per se—drives changes in trust.

Keywords. state, police, trust, Latin America.

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1 Introduction

Trust in the state is crucial for a thriving society (Arrow, 1972). It supports sustainable economic interactions and encourages collaboration with public institutions (Guiso et al., 2004; Ang et al., 2025). Yet trust is fragile, and state interventions—especially when exercising coercive force—can strengthen or undermine it (Rohner et al., 2013; Bauer et al., 2016). Public debates around police violence have intensified across many countries in recent decades, often following highly publicized fatal encounters that raise questions about the conduct and accountability of state agents.[1] We study how violent interactions between police and civilians shape trust in the state. On the one hand, the state's capacity to maintain public order through the use of force is a core responsibility that citizens may value (Atkinson and Stiglitz, 2015). On the other hand, the use of armed force carries the risk of unintended civilian fatalities, which may be perceived as abuse or incompetence. Crucially, the impact of these events depends not only on their occurrence, but also on how information about them reaches the public. When fatalities become highly visible through media coverage, they can quickly influence beliefs about the behavior and quality of state institutions.

We combine two decades of nationally representative survey data—nearly 750,000 individual responses—from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and Latinobarómetro with a new dataset of high-profile police–civilian fatalities across seventeen Latin American countries. The harmonized surveys provide consistent measures of institutional trust and exact interview dates, which allow us to link respondents precisely to contemporaneous events. To measure violent encounters between civilians and the police, we construct a dataset of high-profile fatal encounters covered by major national newspapers in each country. We conduct a systematic manual search of leading media outlets and verify each event by reading the corresponding articles. This process yields 196 events with civilian deaths caused by police officers and 1,071 events with police-officer deaths caused by civilians between 2000 and 2021. The combination of large-scale survey data with precise information on the timing and circumstances of these fatalities allows us to study how citizens update their views of the state following highly visible police–civilian encounters.

Beyond identifying the timing of these incidents, we also characterize their circumstances

[1] Recent high-profile cases include the deaths of George Floyd in the United States (2020) and Nahel Merzouk in France (2023), both widely covered by the media (e.g., *New York Times*, *Le Monde*). In Latin America, cases such as the killing of Javier Ordóñez in Colombia (2020) and João Pedro Matos Pinto in Brazil (2020) also received broad media coverage (e.g., *El Tiempo*, *Folha de S. Paulo*).

and how they are presented in the media. Events with civilian deaths caused by police often involve multiple victims and arise during public law-enforcement operations, while events with police-officer deaths are more associated with organized crime and involve single victims. Across both types of events, most incidents occur while officers are on duty and receive coverage from multiple major national news outlets. We also construct a dataset of the headlines of all news articles reporting these events and analyze their semantic structure. The evidence shows that incidents involving the police are systematically framed around the actors involved and frequently reference the state, suggesting that these events convey salient information to the public about the behavior of state agents and threats to public order.

Identifying the causal effect of exposure to these fatalities on trust in the state is challenging because both violence and attitudes toward the state are shaped by underlying economic and political conditions. We address this challenge by exploiting the timing of high-profile deaths relative to ongoing survey interviews. The surveys in our dataset are implemented over several weeks, during which respondents are interviewed continuously. When a fatality occurs while a survey is being conducted, it naturally divides respondents into those interviewed before the event and those interviewed after it. Because the timing of these incidents is unrelated to the survey schedule, the two groups are comparable (e.g. Depetris-Chauvin et al. 2020). Our empirical strategy therefore compares individuals interviewed just before and just after a fatality within the same country and survey, allowing us to isolate the causal effect of exposure to a high-profile civilian or police-officer death on trust in state institutions.

To guide the interpretation of the empirical analysis, we use a simple conceptual framework (Appendix A) in which fatalities affect beliefs only once they become publicly observed signals about the behavior of state agents. Civilian deaths caused by police are informative about institutional quality and therefore reduce trust, while police-officer deaths signal unrest and increase the demand for order, raising trust in state institutions. The framework highlights the role of the information environment in shaping these effects, as the impact of a given event depends on how and when it becomes observed by the public.

We find that events with civilian deaths caused by police reduce trust in state institutions, particularly in the armed forces, while events with police-officer deaths caused by civilians increase it. Both effects are statistically robust and absent for interpersonal trust, suggesting that they reflect shifts in perceptions of the state rather than broader social attitudes. We then show that these effects operate through the diffusion of information. For civilian deaths, events that are rapidly covered by major media outlets generate effects similar to

our baseline estimates, while events with delayed media coverage have no detectable impact on trust at the aggregate level and only affect respondents residing in the same municipality as the fatality. When media coverage is timely, these local effects are substantially amplified. Supporting this interpretation, events with early and delayed coverage are similar along several observable dimensions, although early-covered events are more likely to occur during protests. Importantly, our results are robust to excluding periods of protest activity, indicating that this difference does not drive the estimated effects. Together, these patterns indicate that exposure to violence affects trust primarily through the public information environment rather than through direct exposure alone.

Our work relates to the literature studying trust. Since the seminal work by Arrow (1972), many have documented the importance of trust for economic activities and development (e.g., Guiso et al. 2004, 2009; Tabellini 2010; Algan and Cahuc 2010; Lowes and Montero 2021). Moreover, a growing agenda has shown that trust also explains political cycles (Algan et al., 2017; Nunn et al., 2026). Recent work further highlights how trust and social capital improve the functioning of political institutions by facilitating the diffusion of information among citizens and strengthening electoral accountability (Ponzetto and Troiano, 2025). Given the importance of trust, researchers have devoted significant attention to understanding how it is built. Major focuses have been the role of domestic conflict (Rohner et al., 2013; Bauer et al., 2016), income or financial security (Butler et al., 2016; Ananyev and Guriev, 2019; Beltramo et al., 2024), information (Acemoglu et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Braccioli et al., 2025), and historical episodes (Nunn and Wantchekon, 2011; Buggle and Durante, 2021).

We also contribute to a recent literature examining the consequences of the state's use of force to ensure public safety. Perhaps the most salient strand of this growing work studies the effects of exposure to violent interactions between civilians and the police. Exposure to police violent activities (e.g., patrolling, shootings) has been linked to lower community engagement (Baumer, 2002; Desmond et al., 2016; Zoorob, 2020; Mikdash and Zaiour, 2024; Ang et al., 2025), increased political mobilization (Ang and Tebes, 2024), and deterioration of academic performance among nearby students (Legewie and Fagan, 2019; Ang, 2021; González and Prem, 2024). Our research relates primarily to the literature showing lower community engagement, such as cooperation with the police or electoral participation. Recent work shows that exposure to police violence in the United States decreases future cooperation with the state, with authors arguing that trust in the state decreases after exposure to these violent interactions. However, credibly identifying the causal effect of violent civilian–police

interactions remains challenging given the endogenous nature of violence.[2]

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first multi-country study providing causal evidence on how exposure to violent interactions between civilians and the police affects trust in the state. We make four contributions. First, we present novel causal evidence of changes in state trust after informational exposure to police killings. Our results support previous claims of lower trust when exposed to police killings (Ang et al., 2025). Second, we provide novel evidence of changes in state trust after police officers are killed on duty. Research on the impact of police-officer deaths is notably more limited, and we are not aware of any work studying state trust in relation to these fatalities.[3] Third, we show that these effects operate through the information environment: fatalities affect trust only when they become publicly observed through media coverage, highlighting the role of information diffusion in shaping perceptions of the state. Fourth, we shift the focus from the United States, where most economics research on police interactions has taken place, to Latin America. The countries in our dataset host over 700 million people, approximately 8% of the world's population, and are characterized by higher levels of violence and weaker institutional capacity, allowing us to study these dynamics in settings where such events are more frequent and salient.

2 Data Construction

2.1 Cross-national representative surveys

We measure trust in state institutions using two major public opinion surveys across Latin America. The first is the *Latin American Public Opinion Project* (LAPOP). These nationally representative surveys are conducted approximately every two years since the early 2000s and includes detailed questions on citizens' experiences with and perceptions of institutions, public security, and the police. The second is *Latinobarómetro*, an annual survey carried out since the mid-1990s and covering Latin America also with nationally representative samples. It offers consistent indicators of political attitudes and institutional trust. Crucially for our research design, in both cases the survey interviews take place over the span of several weeks.

[2]Moreno-Medina et al. (2025) show that linguistic features of news coverage, such as passive voice or omission of the perpetrator, shape perceived responsibility for police killings. Motivated by this insight, we also examine how headlines frame police–civilian fatalities.

[3]Previous work has shown that when a police officer dies on duty, their peers adjust their arresting behavior in a way that is consistent with increased fear (Cho et al., 2023).

We harmonized survey data from all available waves of LAPOP and Latinobarómetro between 2000 and 2023. Given our focus on trust in state institutions, we aligned all main questions related to institutional trust, socioeconomic characteristics, and geographic identifiers to make them comparable across countries and years. We standardized variables with response scales and recoded variables for consistent formats. Some survey questions are asked in most waves, and others appear only sporadically. We also collected the exact interview date for each respondent, which allowed us to link responses precisely to contemporaneous events and to construct time-sensitive measures of exposure to police–civilian fatalities.

Overall, we observe close to 750,000 survey responses across seventeen countries. That is, our final dataset presents information that is comparable to observing one survey with 2,000 respondents for every Latin American country in every year between 2000 and 2023. Figure 1 displays the temporal distribution of surveys for all countries. The average survey respondent is 40 years old, 51% are women, and one-third has more than 12 years of education.

2.2 High-profile civilian and police-officer deaths

We compiled a new dataset of high-profile incidents in which either civilians are killed by police officers or police officers are killed by civilians. We refer to the former as "civilian deaths" and to the latter as "police-officer deaths." Our focus on high-profile incidents reflects the fact that these events typically receive extensive media coverage and therefore become widely known to the public. Because our empirical strategy relies on linking the timing of these events to ongoing survey interviews, identifying the precise date and circumstances of each fatality is essential. We constructed this dataset through a standardized multi-step protocol based on manual searches of national news sources. For each country–year, we searched Google News using keywords related to fatalities involving police officers or civilians, adapting the keywords to country-specific terminology used to describe police and security forces. We then reviewed every retrieved article and recorded an event when it corresponded to one of the two categories of fatalities.[4] For each event, we recorded the exact date of the fatality, the location, the circumstances surrounding the incident (e.g., protest, robbery, police operation), and links to the original articles documenting the event.

A key feature of our data is that it relies on manual verification rather than automated scraping. Automated datasets (e.g. GDELT) often rely on media sources that can be

[4]To ensure that incidents were widely visible to the public, we retained only cases reported by at least one of the five major national media outlets in each country, which we defined ex ante.

easily scraped and therefore omit many of the largest national newspapers in Latin America. Moreover, these datasets frequently misclassify the timing of events, recording the date when an article is published rather than the date when the fatality actually occurred. For our research design, which exploits variation in the timing of deaths relative to survey interviews at the daily level, such measurement error would be particularly problematic. As a result, we manually read and verified each article to identify the correct event date and to ensure that the incident corresponds to a police–civilian fatality. We validated all recorded events through a battery of consistency checks.[5] Overall, we identify 196 events with civilian deaths and 1,071 events with police-officer deaths across seventeen countries between 2000 and 2021.

An immediate feature of the data is that we observe substantially more police-officer death events than civilian death events, reflecting both differences in incident frequency and how events enter the public information environment. Events with police-officer deaths typically involve a single victim (1.49 deaths per event), while events with civilian deaths caused by police involve multiple victims (3.43 on average), suggesting that the threshold for widespread media coverage may differ across event types. Consistent with the broader security environment in Latin America, police are also more frequently exposed to violence.[6]

We emphasize that our data construction strategy focuses deliberately on high-profile events that receive coverage in major national media outlets. As a result, the sample captures fatalities that become part of the public information environment, rather than the full universe of police–civilian interactions. This selection is central to our research design: our estimates identify the effect of exposure to salient, widely observed events on trust in the state. The likelihood that an incident becomes high-profile may vary across countries and over time, reflecting differences in media penetration, reporting practices, the expansion of online news, or characteristics of the incident.[7] To account for this heterogeneity, we include country-by-survey fixed effects, which absorb cross-country differences in media environments and time variation in the visibility of events driven by changes in media coverage,

[5]Each fatality was cross-verified across multiple sources to confirm the date and nature of the incident, and ambiguous or duplicate entries were excluded. When discrepancies appeared, we retained only cases with consistent information in at least two independent outlets. We also verified that the date of the fatality preceded or matched the publication date of the article and that the location corresponded to an identifiable administrative unit. These steps ensure that the dataset includes only verified and well-documented cases.

[6]Figure A1 shows that this pattern is present across most countries, although it is more pronounced in Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina; but results are not driven by these countries. Excluding them, the ratio of police-officer to civilian death events is 2.7 compared to 5.4 in the full sample.

[7]Online news gradually replaced traditional media outlets as the main source of information in the early 2000s, making it more likely that we observe recent fatal encounters between civilians and the police.

including the expansion of online news. We also systematically study the characteristics of the fatal encounters in our data to understand selection and external validity more broadly.

3 Description of Fatal Encounters

Fatal encounters between civilians and police officers are particularly frequent in Latin America, a region characterized by high levels of violent crime and frequent confrontations involving police forces, criminal organizations, and protesters (UNODC, 2023). Official statistics on these incidents are often incomplete, and there is little comparable evidence describing how police–civilian fatalities occur across countries or how they are reported in major media outlets. Countries in our dataset span a wide range of institutional and security environments, generating meaningful variation in the causes and context of these events.[8]

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the recorded events. Civilian deaths caused by police officers involve an average of 3.4 fatalities and frequently occur during protests (38%), while organized crime plays a limited role (7%). In contrast, police-officer deaths typically involve a single victim (1.5 fatalities on average) and are more closely linked to organized crime (60%), with protests playing a minor role. In most cases, officers are on duty. Both types of events receive substantial media attention, though coverage is broader for civilian deaths. Differences also emerge in media portrayal: headlines describing police-officer deaths are more likely to mention the state and emphasize the perpetrator, while those describing civilian deaths more often focus on the victim.

To characterize how these events enter the public information environment, we construct a dataset of headlines from the news articles used to document each fatality. We code grammatical structure, focus (victim or perpetrator), whether the state is mentioned, and headline length. Table A1 shows systematic differences in framing. Headlines describing civilian deaths caused by police more often focus on the victim (63%) and mention the state in about one third of cases. In contrast, headlines describing police-officer deaths emphasize the perpetrator (73%) and mention the state in nearly four out of five cases. Relative to civilian-on-civilian killings, police-related events are substantially more likely to reference the state and to frame the event around the actors involved. These patterns indicate that fatal encounters involving the police are highly visible and convey distinct information about

[8]For example, police violence in Brazil and Mexico often occurs in the context of operations against organized crime, while in Chile it is more closely linked to episodes of mass protest.

the role and behavior of state agents.

4 Research Design

To estimate the impact of high-profile fatalities on trust, we exploit variation in the timing of deaths relative to survey fieldwork. When a survey is conducted in a country, a fatality occurring during the fieldwork period divides respondents into those interviewed before and after the event, allowing us to compare otherwise similar individuals exposed to the same shock within a short time window. Figure 1 illustrates this design. Across all surveys, we observe 23 civilian deaths and 96 police-officer deaths occurring during fieldwork. To assess whether this overlap is consistent with random timing, we conduct a simulation exercise using a daily country-level panel. We randomly reassign fatalities within countries across days 1,000 times and compute how many events would overlap with survey fieldwork under our sampling rules, retaining only the first event within each survey spell. Figure A2 shows that the observed number of overlaps lies well within the simulated distribution for both civilian and police-officer deaths. This evidence suggests that the timing of fatalities relative to survey implementation is not systematically different from what would arise under random timing, supporting the assumption that exposure to these events is plausibly exogenous.

Figure 2 further supports the validity of the design by comparing characteristics of respondents and municipalities before and after each event. Differences are small, and only two variables are statistically significant at the 10% level, consistent with random variation.[9] Table 1 shows that events occurring within and outside survey fieldwork have similar observable characteristics, including the number of fatalities, event context, media coverage, and headline features. Table A2 complements this evidence by showing that headline structure and framing are also comparable across events. Together, these results indicate that events occurring during survey fieldwork are broadly similar to the full set of recorded fatalities.

To estimate the impact of fatalities, we focus on respondents interviewed within a narrow window around each event. Specifically, we construct an estimating sample of individuals surveyed within ± 12 days of a high-profile fatality, ensuring comparisons between respon-

[9]Figure A3 also shows balance in survey implementation across included and excluded surveys and before and after events.

dents interviewed just before and just after the event.[10] We estimate:

$$Y_{icrt} = \beta T_{icrt} + \gamma X_i + \phi_{ct} + \varepsilon_{icrt}, \quad (1)$$

where Y_{icrt} is a measure of trust for individual i in region r, country c, at time t. The indicator T_{icrt} equals one if the individual was interviewed after a high-profile fatality in country c. We include individual controls X_i (gender, age, education, and computer ownership) and country-by-survey fixed effects ϕ_{ct}, so identification comes from within-survey variation in interview timing around the event. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level, where regions are the (harmonized) first sub-level administrative units.

We measure trust using a standardized index (mean zero, standard deviation one). Our main outcome is trust in state institutions (government and armed forces), though we also report results separately and examine interpersonal trust as a placebo outcome. Under the assumption that, conditional on controls and fixed effects, the timing of fatalities is as good as random, β captures the causal effect of exposure to a high-profile fatality on state trust.

5 Police–Civilian Fatalities and Trust in the State

Table 2 reports our estimates of the effect of high-profile fatalities on trust in the state. Panel A presents results for civilian deaths caused by police officers, and Panel B for police-officer deaths caused by civilians. Each panel reports estimates for three measures of trust—state institutions, the armed forces, and the government. Columns 1–3 present baseline estimates, while columns 4–6 incorporate heterogeneity by whether the respondent resides in the same municipality as the fatality. Across panels, the results reveal a clear asymmetry: civilian deaths reduce trust in the state, while police-officer deaths increase it, with substantially stronger effects for individuals more directly exposed to the event.

Panel A shows that civilian deaths lead to a statistically significant decline in trust in the state. Following a high-profile civilian fatality, trust in state institutions decreases by 0.071 standard deviations, and trust in the armed forces falls by 0.098. The effect on trust in the government is smaller (-0.056) but still statistically significant. These effects are substantially larger for respondents residing in the same municipality as the fatality. The

[10] Table A4 compares events included in the estimation sample with those excluded due to overlapping events—i.e. two events within the same survey fieldwork, in which case we use the first—or insufficient observations before or after the event. The two sets are similar across observable characteristics.

interaction coefficients range from −0.184 to −0.247, implying that local exposure amplifies the decline in trust by a factor of roughly three relative to the baseline estimates. These results indicate that high-profile civilian deaths significantly erode confidence in the state, particularly among individuals more directly exposed to the event. This strong local amplification suggests that proximity increases exposure to information about the event.

Panel B shows the opposite pattern for police-officer deaths. Following a police fatality, trust in state institutions increases by 0.033 standard deviations, with similar estimates for trust in the armed forces (0.029) and in the government (0.036). In contrast to civilian deaths, these effects are smaller in magnitude and exhibit more limited heterogeneity across locations. The interaction with the same-municipality indicator is negative and only weakly significant, suggesting that the increase in trust is less concentrated among individuals living near the event.[11] Overall, these findings are consistent with the predictions of the framework outlined in Appendix A: civilian killings by police reduce confidence in state institutions, while police deaths at the hands of civilians increase it.

We also examine the effect of fatalities on interpersonal trust, which serves as a placebo outcome since there is no clear reason why these events should affect trust among citizens. Table A5 shows that neither civilian nor police-officer deaths have a statistically significant effect on interpersonal trust, with coefficients close to zero across both standardized measures and indicators for no trust. This absence of spillovers suggests that the estimated effects are specific to perceptions of the state rather than reflecting broader changes in social attitudes.

Robustness. Importantly, results in Table 2 are robust to alternative specifications, the influence of individual fatalities, and potential biases in survey responses. We obtain similar estimates when using narrower (±6 days) or wider (±120 days) windows around events (Figures A4–A5). The results are also not driven by any single fatality (Figures A6–A7) or countries with high levels of police-officer deaths (Table A6). We also find consistent results when using an alternative measure of trust based on an indicator for the lowest level of trust (Table A7), which yields effects of similar magnitude. In addition, both types of fatalities are unrelated to missing survey responses (Table A8), and the results remain very similar when applying survey weights (Table A9).[12] We also implement randomization

[11] Results are statistically similar when using Cameron et al. (2008) wild bootstrap to cluster at the survey-country level (Table A3). For simplicity, we proceed with clustered standard errors by survey-country-region.

[12] Given that the quality of survey implementation likely improves over time due to learning, checking for patterns in missing responses is important. In addition, survey weights are unfortunately missing for some waves, which is why we consider this estimation a robustness check instead of our main specification.

inference following Cattaneo et al. (2015), which yields p-values consistent with conventional inference and confirms the statistical significance of the main estimates (Table A10). Finally, two placebo exercises further support the identification strategy. First, randomly assigning the observed number of fatalities within each country's survey period produces coefficients centered around zero (Figures A8–A9). Second, assigning the fatality to the subsequent survey wave—keeping its timing—yields no detectable effects on trust (Table A11). Taken together, these results indicate that the estimated effects are not driven by functional form assumptions, particular events, survey design features, or spurious timing correlations.

We also assess the potential role of contemporaneous protest activity as a confounding factor. Large protests may simultaneously increase the likelihood of civilian deaths and reduce trust in the state, biasing our estimates. To address this concern, we re-estimate our baseline specification separately for (i) events occurring in country-weeks without protests and (ii) events occurring during protest episodes. Protest activity is identified using media coverage. As shown in Table A12, the estimated effects of civilian deaths on trust are similar across both samples. This suggests that our results are not driven by broader protest dynamics, but rather by the information conveyed by the fatalities themselves.

Heterogeneity. We also explore heterogeneity in the effects of fatalities across institutional and local characteristics (Table A13). Overall, the effects of police–civilian fatalities are relatively stable across contexts. For civilian deaths, most interaction terms—including those with democracy quality, recent violence, and baseline trust—are small and statistically insignificant, indicating limited systematic variation across institutional environments. There is, however, some suggestive evidence of smaller effects in the presence of more violence (column 2) and larger effects when trust is higher (column 7), but estimates display inconsistent statistical significance. The exception is geographic proximity: the decline in trust is larger when the fatality occurs in the same municipality as the respondent, with interaction coefficients of approximately -0.18 for trust in the armed forces and -0.25 for trust in the government. For police-officer deaths, the increase in trust is similarly homogeneous across settings, with little evidence that institutional characteristics moderate the effect and only weak evidence of stronger responses at the local level. Additional heterogeneity analyses based on event characteristics and media content are reported in Tables A14 and A15, and show limited systematic variation beyond differences in media salience.

6 Media Coverage and Information Transmission

A key feature of our setting is that exposure to fatalities operates through the information environment. In the conceptual framework in Appendix A, fatalities affect beliefs only once they become publicly observed signals about the behavior and quality of state agents. In practice, however, there may be a lag between the occurrence of a fatality and its coverage by major media outlets. If such delays are substantial, our baseline specification—based on the date of the event—may mismeasure the timing of information arrival. To assess the importance of this issue, we exploit variation in the timing of media coverage. Empirically, we compare regression estimates across events which are and are not covered by major national media within four days of their occurrence. A total of 12 (48) out of 18 (55) events in the estimating sample of civilian (police) deaths were covered within four days.

To assess whether the timing of media coverage is systematically related to the characteristics of the events, Table A16 compares fatalities that are covered within four days to those with delayed coverage. The two groups are similar across several observable dimensions, including the involvement of organized crime, whether the officer was on duty, and measures of media visibility and headline content. While some differences arise—most notably, events occurring during protests are more likely to receive early coverage and late-covered events involve a larger number of fatalities on average—these patterns do not point to a consistent relationship between event severity or context and the timing of coverage. Complementing this evidence, Figure A10 shows that respondents residing in the same municipality as a fatality are observably similar to other respondents, indicating that local exposure is not driven by compositional differences. Taken together, these patterns suggest that the timing of media coverage is not fully determined by observable characteristics of the events or the populations they affect. Instead, variation in when fatalities enter the public information environment appears to be influenced in part by idiosyncratic factors, such as media congestion or competing news. Consistent with this interpretation, several cases with delayed coverage occur during periods of intense national news activity, in which individual events may receive less immediate attention.[13] This variation provides a source of plausibly exogenous differences in the timing of information arrival, which we exploit in the analysis below.

[13]Several cases with delayed coverage coincide with periods of intense national news activity which likely congested major media outlets. For example, delayed coverage in Guatemala in March 2017 coincided with the Hogar Seguro fire, a major national tragedy (*The Guardian*). In Panama, a fatality during the Ngäbe-Buglé protests in 2012 occurred amid widespread demonstrations and clashes (*Amnesty International*).

Table 3 shows that the effects are similar when restricting to events covered by major media within four days. For example, civilian deaths reduce trust in state institutions by 0.085 standard deviations, compared to 0.071 in the full sample. In contrast, events that are not covered within four days have no detectable effect on trust outside of the municipality of the event, with smaller and statistically insignificant point estimates. However, they generate sizable and statistically significant effects for respondents residing in the same municipality as the fatality, on the order of 0.06–0.18 standard deviations. In the language of the framework in Appendix A, these events remain locally observed signals, affecting beliefs primarily among individuals directly exposed to the incident. Finally, when focusing on events with rapid media coverage, local effects are substantially larger. The interaction coefficients are 0.34 standard deviations, roughly three times larger than in the absence of media coverage. This amplification is consistent with the idea that public signals conveyed through the media interact with local exposure to generate stronger belief updating.[14]

Taken together, these results support the interpretation that the effects of fatal police–civilian encounters on trust in the state that we document are driven by the diffusion of information through the media rather than by the physical occurrence of violence alone.

7 Conclusion

Violent encounters between police and civilians shape citizens' confidence in the state in systematic and asymmetric ways. Using data from seventeen Latin American countries, we show that civilian deaths caused by police reduce trust in state institutions, while police-officer deaths caused by civilians increase it. These results highlight that state legitimacy depends not only on the capacity to enforce order, but also on how the use of force is perceived by the public. Our work stresses that these effects operate through the diffusion of information. Fatalities affect beliefs only once they become publicly observed. Consistent with this mechanism, events that are rapidly covered by major media outlets generate effects similar to our baseline estimates, while events that are not covered have no detectable impact on trust at the aggregate level and only affect individuals locally exposed to the incident. When coverage is timely, these local effects are substantially amplified.

[14]Table A17 reports the corresponding estimates for police-officer deaths when restricting to events covered within four days. The coefficients are close to the baseline. We do not estimate heterogeneity by same municipality due to insufficient local observations under this restriction.

These findings have clear policy implications. Strengthening accountability mechanisms, professionalizing policing, and improving transparency in the investigation of civilian deaths may help sustain public trust without weakening the state's capacity to enforce security. More broadly, our results suggest that salient interactions between citizens and the state can quickly reshape perceptions of institutional legitimacy.

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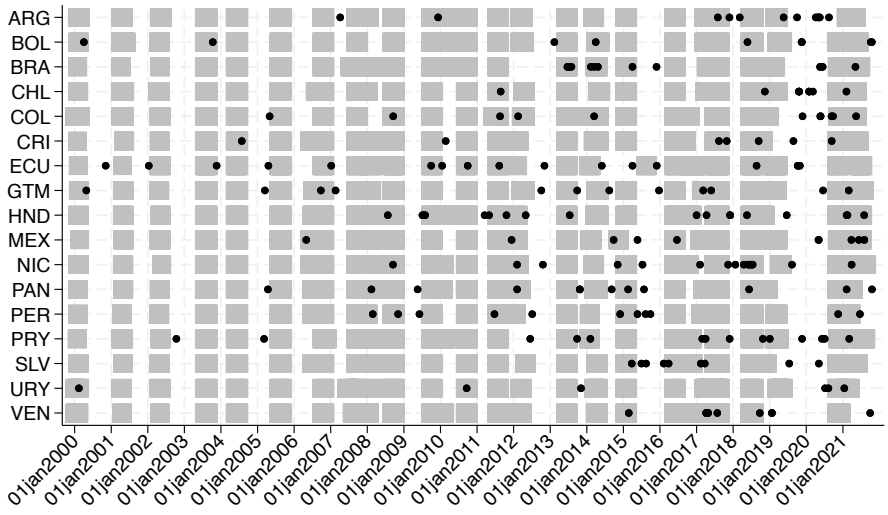
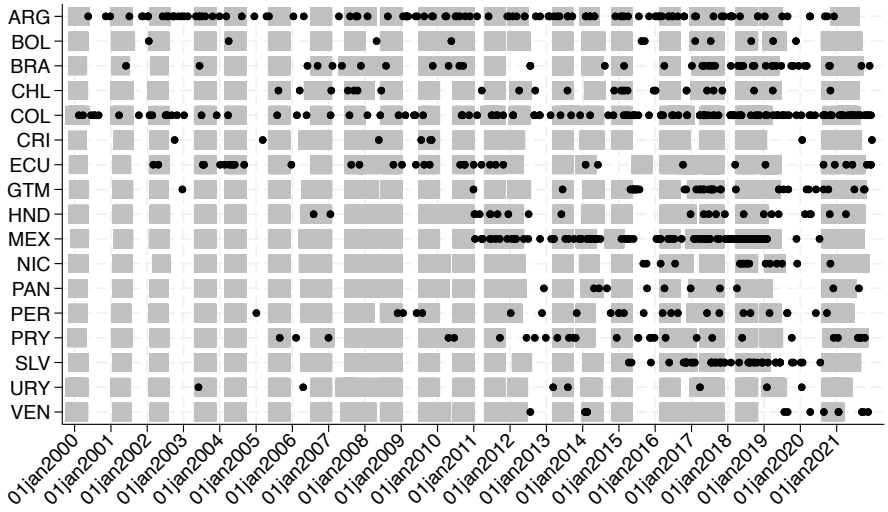
Figure 1: Timing of survey fieldwork and high-profile fatalities



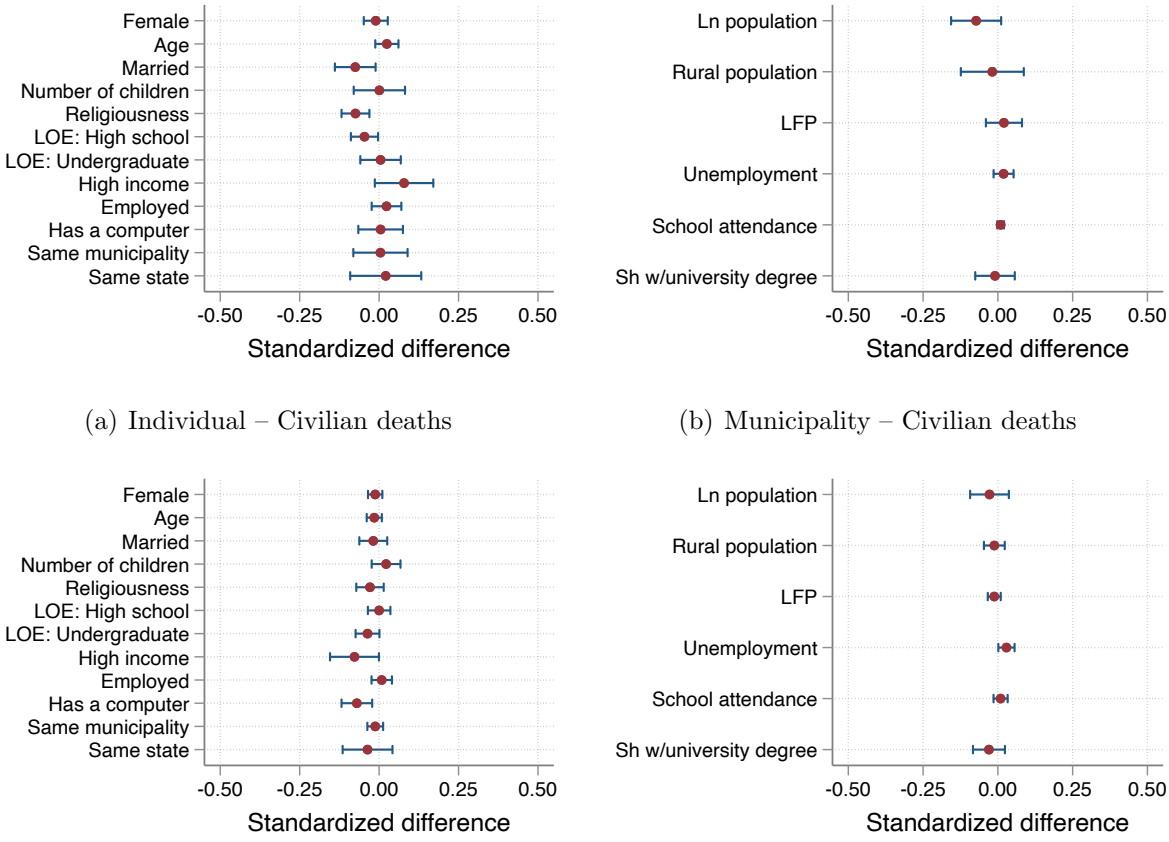
(a) Civilian deaths (N =196)



(b) Police deaths (N =1,071)

Notes: The figure shows the timing of survey fieldwork and high-profile police–civilian fatalities in the 17 countries included in the sample between 2000 and 2021. The y-axis lists countries and the x-axis shows calendar time. Gray bars indicate periods during which survey interviews were conducted in Latinobarómetro or LAPOP. Black dots denote high-profile fatalities. Panel (a) reports civilian deaths caused by police officers ($N = 196$), and panel (b) reports police-officer deaths caused by civilians ($N = 1{,}071$). For police-officer deaths, we include only incidents that received coverage in major national newspapers and that satisfy at least one of the following criteria: (i) the officer was on duty, (ii) the event was a targeted attack on police, (iii) organized crime was involved, or (iv) the incident occurred during a mass gathering or public protest.

Figure 2: Balance in individual and municipality characteristics



(a) Individual – Civilian deaths

(b) Municipality – Civilian deaths

(c) Individual – Police deaths

(d) Municipality – Police deaths

Notes: The figure reports balance tests comparing respondents interviewed before and after high-profile fatalities. Each point shows the estimated coefficient from an OLS regression of the indicated individual or municipality characteristic on the treatment indicator (interviewed after the fatality), controlling for survey-by-country fixed effects. Horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals. All characteristics are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level. Panels (a) and (b) correspond to civilian deaths caused by police officers, while panels (c) and (d) correspond to police-officer deaths caused by civilians.

Table 1: Characteristics of high-profile fatalities

	All	Outside survey	Within survey	Difference (3)–(2)
Panel A: Civilian deaths	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Number of deaths	3.429	3.405	3.609	0.204
	(7.718)	(7.639)	(8.473)	[0.906]
Occurred during protest	0.383	0.358	0.565	0.207
	(0.487)	(0.481)	(0.507)	[0.056]
Organized crime was involved	0.071	0.075	0.043	-0.032
	(0.258)	(0.264)	(0.209)	[0.582]
Police officer was on duty	0.842	0.838	0.870	0.031
	(0.366)	(0.369)	(0.344)	[0.700]
Number of media outlets covering event	3.474	3.503	3.261	-0.242
	(1.341)	(1.315)	(1.544)	[0.418]
State mentioned in headlines	0.404	0.411	0.347	-0.064
	(0.370)	(0.368)	(0.388)	[0.436]
Perpetrator focus in headlines	0.379	0.385	0.336	-0.049
	(0.370)	(0.368)	(0.394)	[0.553]
Observations	196	173	23	196
Panel B: Police-officer deaths				
Number of deaths	1.493	1.504	1.385	-0.118
	(1.648)	(1.698)	(1.019)	[0.503]
Occurred during protest	0.013	0.010	0.042	0.031
	(0.114)	(0.101)	(0.201)	[0.010]
Organized crime was involved	0.600	0.596	0.646	0.050
	(0.490)	(0.491)	(0.481)	[0.341]
Police officer was on duty	0.719	0.720	0.708	-0.012
	(0.450)	(0.449)	(0.457)	[0.809]
Number of media outlets covering event	2.202	2.182	2.406	0.225
	(1.220)	(1.217)	(1.236)	[0.085]
State mentioned in headlines	0.796	0.795	0.804	0.009
	(0.344)	(0.347)	(0.322)	[0.806]
Perpetrator focus in headlines	0.722	0.722	0.729	0.007
	(0.384)	(0.386)	(0.364)	[0.862]
Observations	1,071	975	96	1,071

Notes: Summary statistics for high-profile police–civilian fatalities. Panel A reports civilian deaths caused by police; Panel B reports police-officer deaths caused by civilians. Columns (1)–(3) report means with standard deviations in parentheses for all events, events outside survey fieldwork, and events within survey fieldwork. Column (4) reports differences in means (within minus outside), with p-values in brackets. Media coverage measures the number of major national newspaper outlets reporting the event. Headline variables are computed as the share of articles covering the event that mention the state or focus on the perpetrator. For civilian deaths, 23 events occur during survey fieldwork (18 used in estimation); for police-officer deaths, 96 events occur (55 used in estimation). Remaining events are excluded due to overlap within surveys or insufficient observations within the ±12-day window.

Table 2: High-profile police–civilian fatalities and trust in the state

	Standardized trust in ...					
	State institutions	Armed forces	Government	State institutions	Armed forces	Government
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A. Civilian deaths						
After *civilian death*	-0.071***	-0.098***	-0.056**	-0.068***	-0.096***	-0.054**
	(0.021)	(0.028)	(0.023)	(0.021)	(0.028)	(0.023)
× Same municipality of death				-0.220***	-0.184*	-0.247***
				(0.067)	(0.093)	(0.051)
Panel B. Police-officer deaths						
After *police-officer death*	0.033**	0.029*	0.036**	0.034**	0.029*	0.037**
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)
× Same municipality of death				-0.091*	-0.046	-0.145*
				(0.054)	(0.059)	(0.077)
Observations (panel A)	12,927	12,927	12,859	12,927	12,927	12,859
Observations (panel B)	32,696	32,696	32,453	32,696	32,696	32,453
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1). The variable *After civilian death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a high-profile civilian death caused by police officers and zero otherwise. The variable *After police-officer death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a police officer was killed by civilians. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. All specifications include country-by-survey fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level and reported in parentheses. The standardized trust variables have mean zero and standard deviation one. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table 3: Media coverage and the effects of fatalities on trust

	Sample includes fatalities covered (or not covered) by media:								
	Covered within 4 days			Not covered within 4 days			Covered within 4 days		
Dep. var. is standardized trust in:	State institutions	Armed forces	Government	State institutions	Armed forces	Government	State institutions	Armed forces	Government
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
After *civilian death*	-0.085***	-0.117***	-0.065***	-0.025	-0.041	-0.032	-0.084***	-0.115***	-0.063***
	(0.021)	(0.031)	(0.022)	(0.057)	(0.061)	(0.067)	(0.020)	(0.031)	(0.021)
× Same municipality of death				-0.096***	-0.015	-0.149***	-0.342***	-0.353***	-0.342***
				(0.015)	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.025)	(0.046)	(0.023)
Observations	9,470	9,470	9,419	3,457	3,457	3,440	9,470	9,470	9,419
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1) using subsamples defined by the timing of media coverage relative to the civilian death. Columns 1–3 restrict the sample to events covered by major national media within four days. The remaining columns examine heterogeneity by whether the respondent resides in the same municipality as the fatality. Columns 4–6 focus on events not covered within four days, and columns 7–9 return to events covered within four days. The variable *After civilian death* equals one for respondents interviewed after the event. The interaction *Same municipality of death* equals one if the respondent resides in the same municipality as the fatality. All specifications include country-by-survey fixed effects and individual controls. Standard errors are clustered by survey-country-region. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

ONLINE APPENDIX

Police–Civilian Fatal Encounters and State Trust

Renata Canini *Felipe González* *Mounu Prem*

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A Theoretical Framework

This appendix presents a simple framework that guides the empirical analysis. The goal of the model is not to provide a complete theory of police–civilian violence, but rather to clarify how different types of fatalities affect citizens' trust in the state through the information they convey. The key idea is that deaths occurring during police–civilian interactions influence beliefs only once they become publicly observed signals about the behavior of state agents and the level of unrest in society.

Consider a setting in which civilian deaths (C) are informative about institutional quality, while police deaths (P) are informative about unrest. Two latent primitives govern the environment. First, institutional quality $s \in \{G, B\}$ captures whether the state operates under relatively good or bad institutions. Second, $\tau \in \{L, H\}$ captures the level of unrest in society. Citizens hold prior beliefs $\Pr(s = G) = \pi_0$ and $\Pr(\tau = H) = \rho_0$. An exogenous shock increases the intensity of police–civilian interactions $\lambda \geq 0$ (for instance during protests or crackdowns), generating casualties.

A key feature of the framework is that casualties may not be immediately or universally observed. Let $\tilde{C}$ and $\tilde{P}$ denote the signals observed by citizens, which depend on both the realization of fatalities and the information environment (e.g., media coverage). When coverage is timely and widespread, $\tilde{C} = C$ and $\tilde{P} = P$ are public signals. When coverage is delayed or absent, these signals may be only partially observed or remain local. Belief updating—and therefore changes in trust—depends on $\tilde{C}$ and $\tilde{P}$ rather than on the underlying realizations alone.

Conditional on λ and the relevant primitive, we assume that civilian deaths and police deaths follow Poisson processes with expected values $\lambda\mu_c(s)$ and $\lambda\mu_p(\tau)$ respectively. Institutional quality therefore governs the expected number of civilians killed by police, while unrest governs the expected number of police officers killed by civilians. We impose two natural inequalities: $\mu_c(G) < \mu_c(B)$, meaning that better institutions reduce civilian fatalities, and $\mu_p(H) > \mu_p(L)$, meaning that higher unrest increases the likelihood that police officers are killed. For simplicity, we assume that C depends on institutional quality but not on unrest, and that P depends on unrest but not on institutional quality.

Citizens form beliefs about the state after observing signals. We model trust in the state as a composite of two Bayesian components,

$$T \;=\; w_s \Pr(s = G \mid \tilde{C}) + w_\tau \, E[\phi(\tau) \mid \tilde{P}], \tag{2}$$

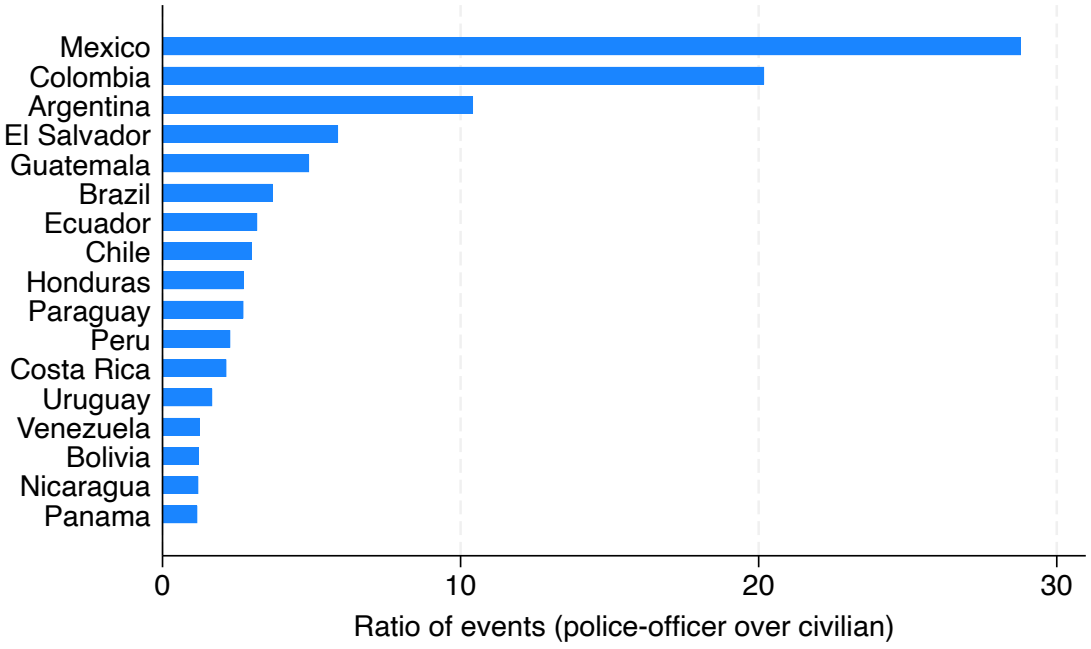
where $w_s, w_\tau > 0$. The first term captures updating about institutional quality after observing civilian deaths. The second term captures a demand-for-order channel in which police deaths signal unrest and increase the value citizens place on state authority. The function $\phi(\tau)$ is increasing in τ, so that higher unrest generates stronger demand for order. A convenient normalization is $\phi(L) = 0$ and $\phi(H) = 1$, in which case the second term reduces to $w_\tau \Pr(\tau = H \mid \tilde{P})$.

Under these assumptions, the model yields two main predictions. First, civilian deaths

reduce trust in the state because observing more civilian fatalities makes the bad institutional state more likely. Second, police deaths increase trust in the state because they signal higher unrest and therefore raise the demand for order. Formally, if $\beta_c = \partial T/\partial \tilde{C}$ and $\beta_p = \partial T/\partial \tilde{P}$, then $\beta_c < 0$ and $\beta_p > 0$. Importantly, these effects depend on the extent to which fatalities are observed: when signals are public, changes in trust occur broadly across the population, whereas when signals are only locally observed, belief updating—and therefore changes in trust—are correspondingly localized.

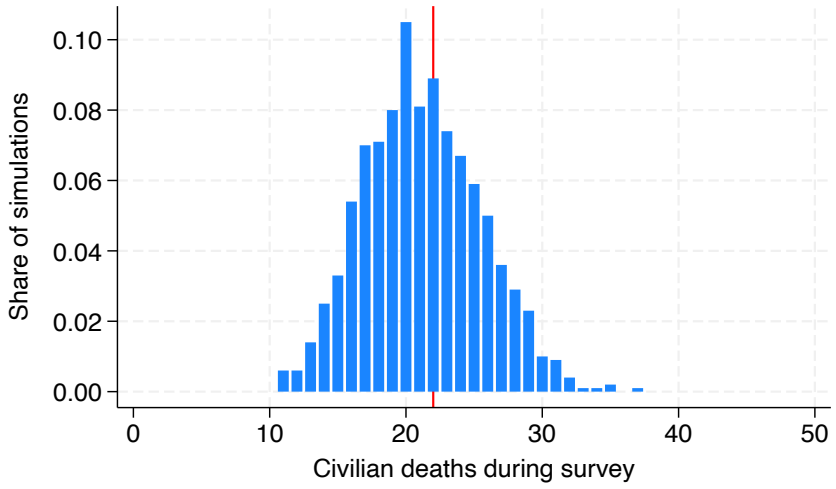
Finally, the monotonicity of the main predictions follows directly from the likelihood ratios of the Poisson processes. Because $\mu_c(G) < \mu_c(B)$, the log-likelihood ratio for the good institutional state decreases in C, implying $\partial \Pr(s = G \mid \tilde{C})/\partial \tilde{C} < 0$. Likewise, because $\mu_p(H) > \mu_p(L)$, the posterior probability of high unrest increases with P, implying $\partial E[\phi(\tau) \mid \tilde{P}]/\partial \tilde{P} > 0$. Combining these results with the definition of trust yields $\partial T/\partial \tilde{C} < 0$ and $\partial T/\partial \tilde{P} > 0$. These predictions motivate the empirical analysis in the main text.

Figure A1: Ratio of police to civilian events

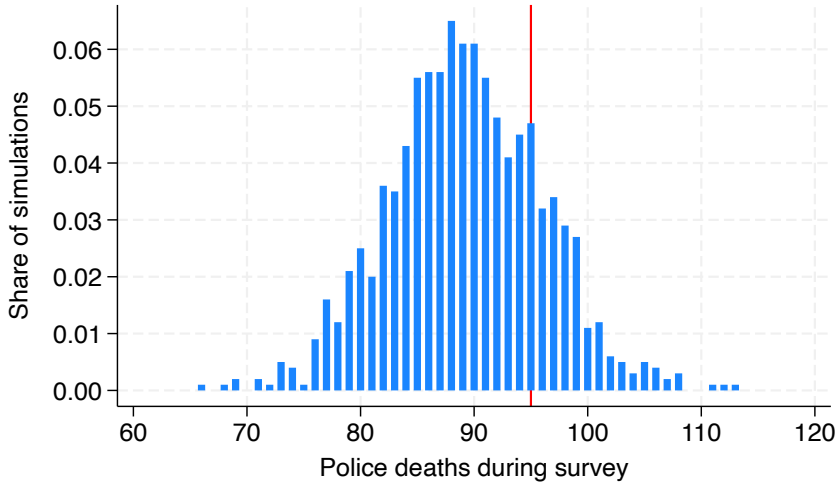


Notes: The figure reports, for each country in the sample, the ratio of police-officer death events to civilian death events. Countries are ordered by this ratio from lowest to highest. Each event corresponds to a distinct high-profile fatality recorded in our dataset. The figure highlights substantial cross-country variation in the relative frequency of these events, with higher ratios in countries characterized by more intense criminal activity.

Figure A2: Test for random timing of events



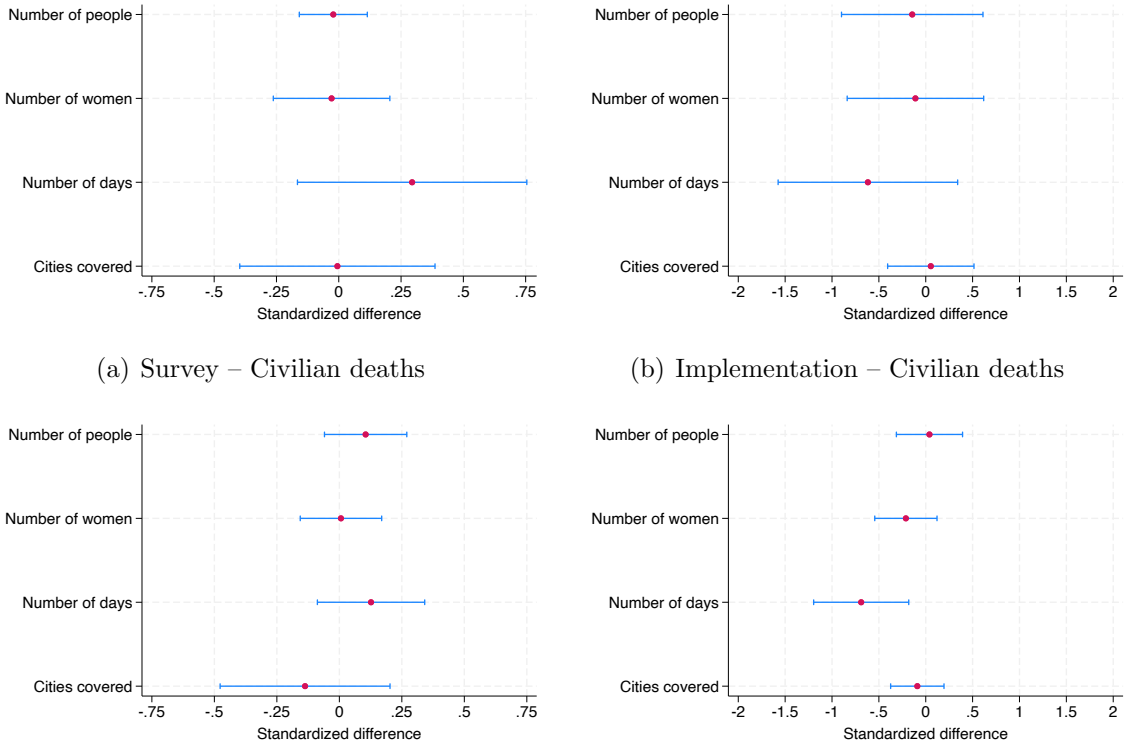
(a) Civilian deaths



(b) Police deaths

Notes: The figure tests whether the timing of high-profile fatalities relative to survey fieldwork is consistent with random timing. For each panel, we construct a daily country-level panel for the 17 countries in the sample and identify the days during which survey interviews were conducted. Panel (a) reports results for civilian deaths caused by police officers, and panel (b) for police-officer deaths caused by civilians. We then randomly reassign the observed number of fatalities within countries across days 1,000 times and count how many simulated events would overlap with survey fieldwork under the same rules used in the empirical analysis. In particular, an event is considered to overlap with a survey if it occurs during an ongoing survey spell, and only the first event within a survey spell is retained. The figure plots the distribution of simulated overlaps, while the vertical line indicates the observed number of overlaps in the data.

Figure A3: Balance in survey implementation



(a) Survey – Civilian deaths

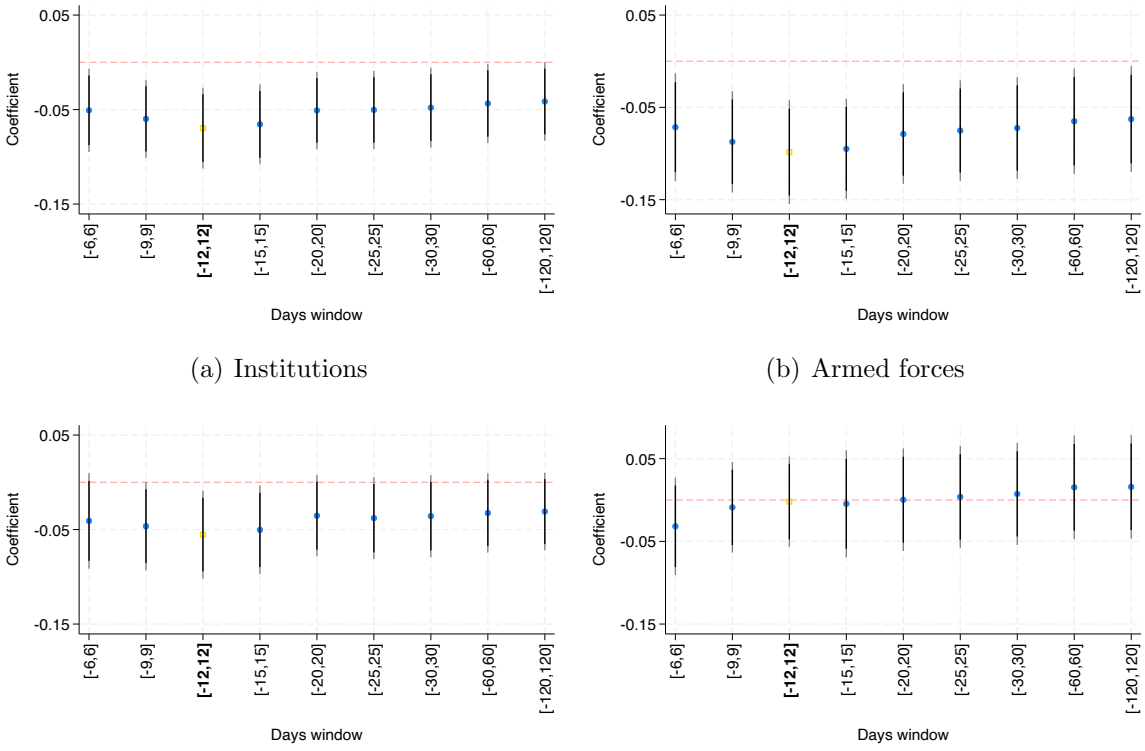
(b) Implementation – Civilian deaths

(c) Survey – Police deaths

(d) Implementation – Police deaths

Notes: The figure reports balance tests for survey implementation characteristics around high-profile fatalities. In panels (a) and (c), we use observations at the survey-country level and regress each of four survey characteristics on an indicator for whether the survey coincides with a civilian death event or a police-officer death event, reporting coefficients that control for country fixed effects and survey-year fixed effects. In panels (b) and (d), we compute each of the four characteristics using only the portion of the survey following the time of the event through the end of the survey. For surveys without a death, we compute each characteristic using the days after the date on which a death occurred in a survey conducted in the same country. When more than one survey in a given country was affected by a death, we repeat the procedure for the second event date. We then run a regression at the country-survey level on an indicator for whether a death occurred during the survey, including country fixed effects. Horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors. All characteristics are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Panels (a) and (b) correspond to events with civilian deaths caused by police officers, while panels (c) and (d) correspond to events with police-officer deaths caused by civilians.

Figure A4: Robustness to bandwidth – Civilian deaths



(a) Institutions

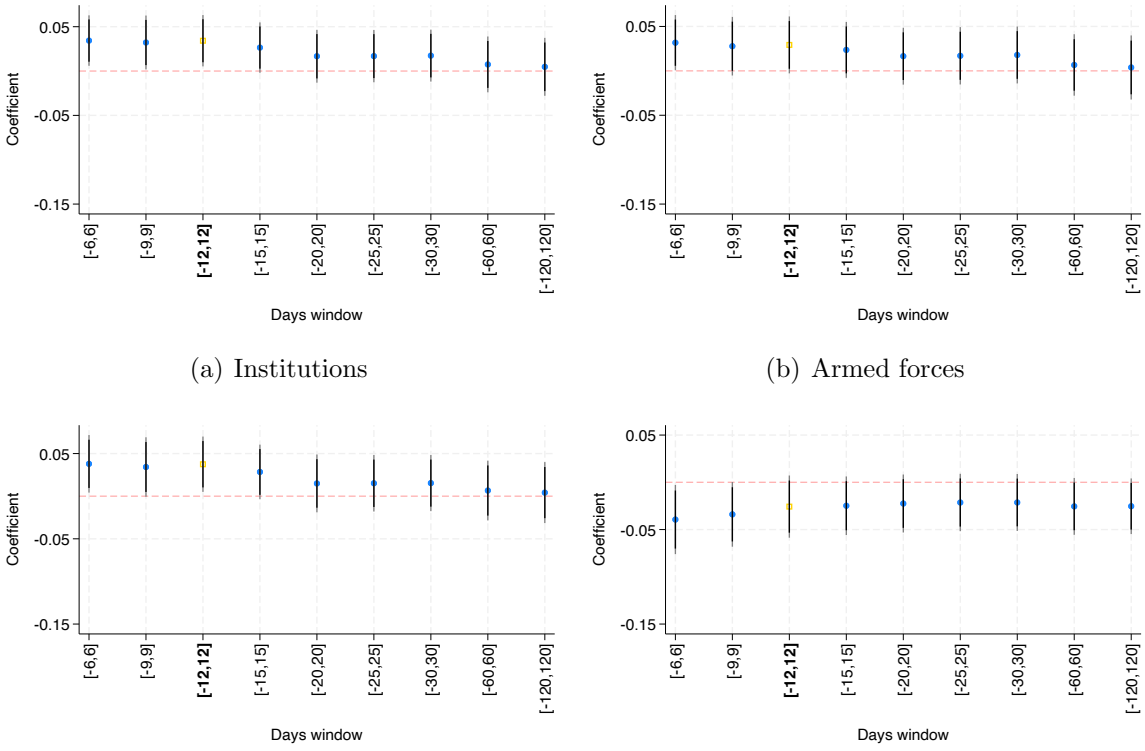
(b) Armed forces

(c) Government

(d) Interpersonal

Notes: The figure reports robustness of the estimated treatment effects to alternative time windows around high-profile civilian deaths caused by police officers. Each point shows the estimated coefficient from the baseline specification in Table 2, Panel A, using different symmetric interview windows around the event date. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level. Vertical lines represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals. The baseline specification uses a ±12-day window.

Figure A5: Robustness to bandwidth – Police-officer deaths



(a) Institutions

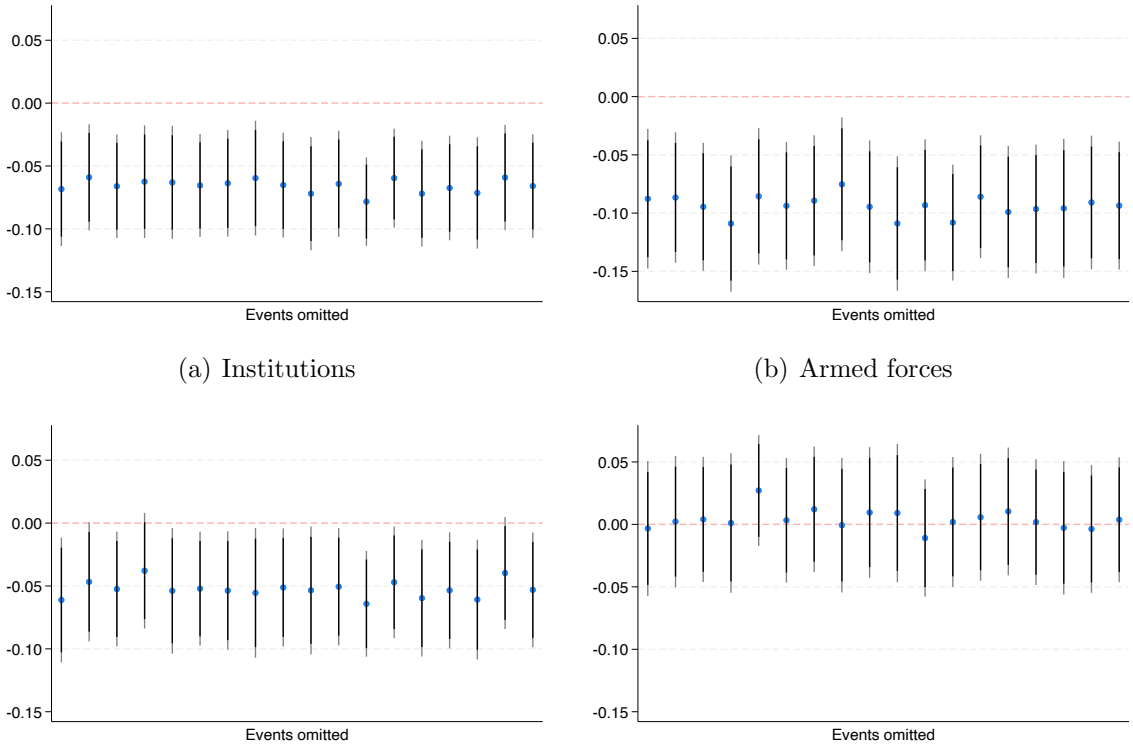
(b) Armed forces

(c) Government

(d) Interpersonal

Notes: The figure reports robustness of the estimated treatment effects to alternative time windows around high-profile police-officer deaths caused by civilians. Each point shows the estimated coefficient from the baseline specification in Table 2, Panel B, using different symmetric interview windows around the event date. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level. Vertical lines represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals. The baseline specification uses a ±12-day window.

Figure A6: Robustness to exclusion of individual events – Civilian deaths



(a) Institutions

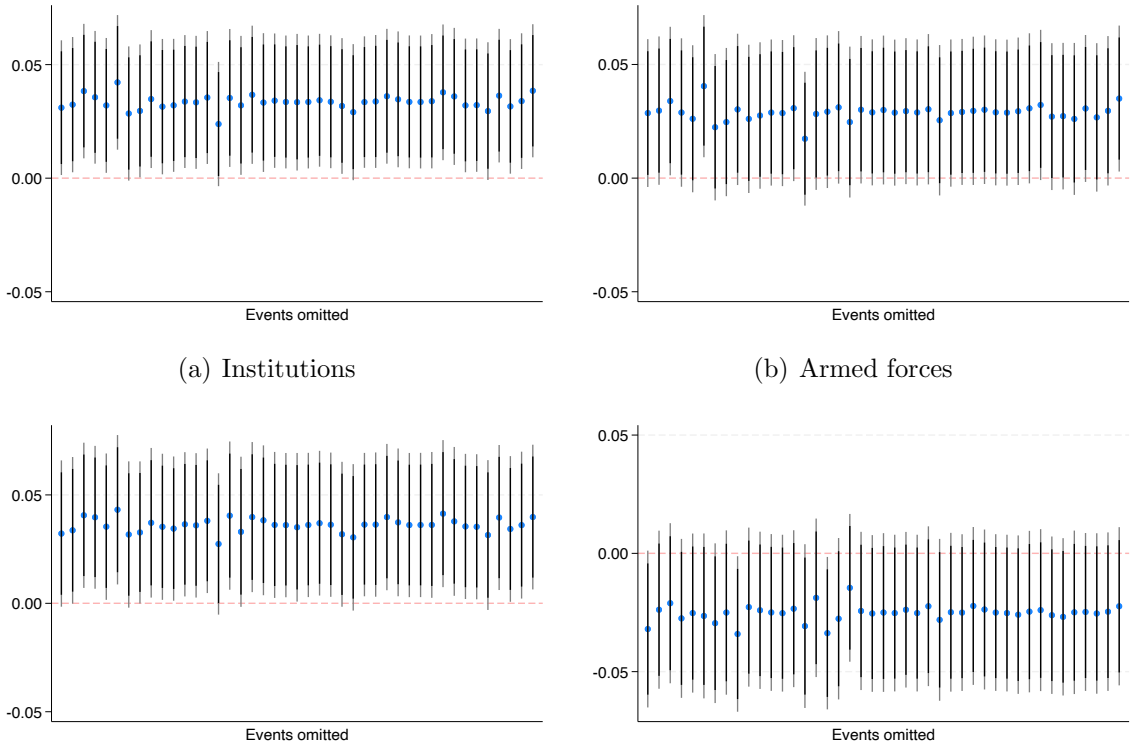
(b) Armed forces

(c) Government

(d) Interpersonal

Notes: The figure reports robustness of the estimated treatment effects to the exclusion of individual high-profile civilian deaths caused by police officers. Each point shows the estimated coefficient from the baseline specification in Table 2, Panel A, obtained after excluding one event at a time from the estimation sample. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level. Vertical lines represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals. The results show that the estimated effects are not driven by any single event.

Figure A7: Robustness to exclusion of individual events – Police-officer deaths



(a) Institutions

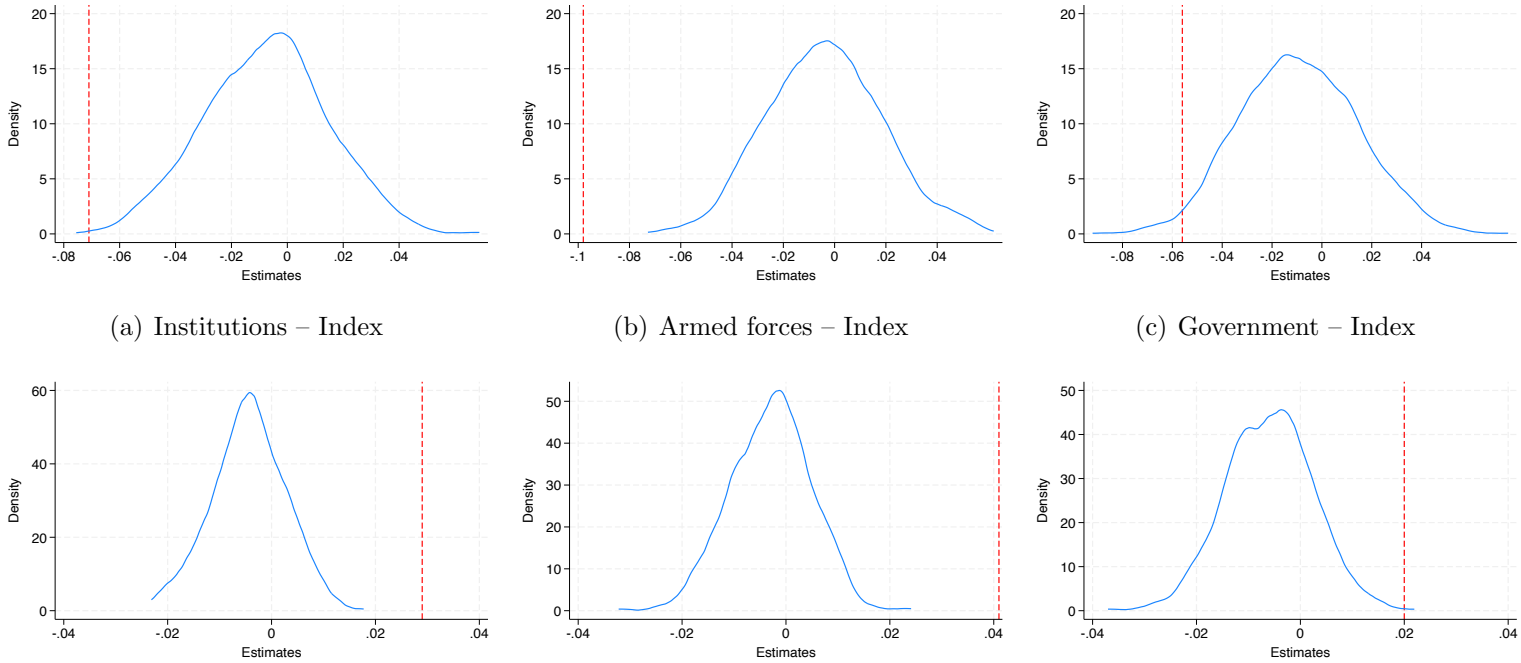
(b) Armed forces

(c) Government

(d) Interpersonal

Notes: The figure reports robustness of the estimated treatment effects to the exclusion of individual high-profile police-officer deaths caused by civilians. Each point shows the estimated coefficient from the baseline specification in Table 2, Panel B, obtained after excluding one event at a time from the estimation sample. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level.Vertical lines represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals. The results show that the estimated effects are not driven by any single event.

Figure A8: Placebo test using surveys without fatalities – Civilian deaths

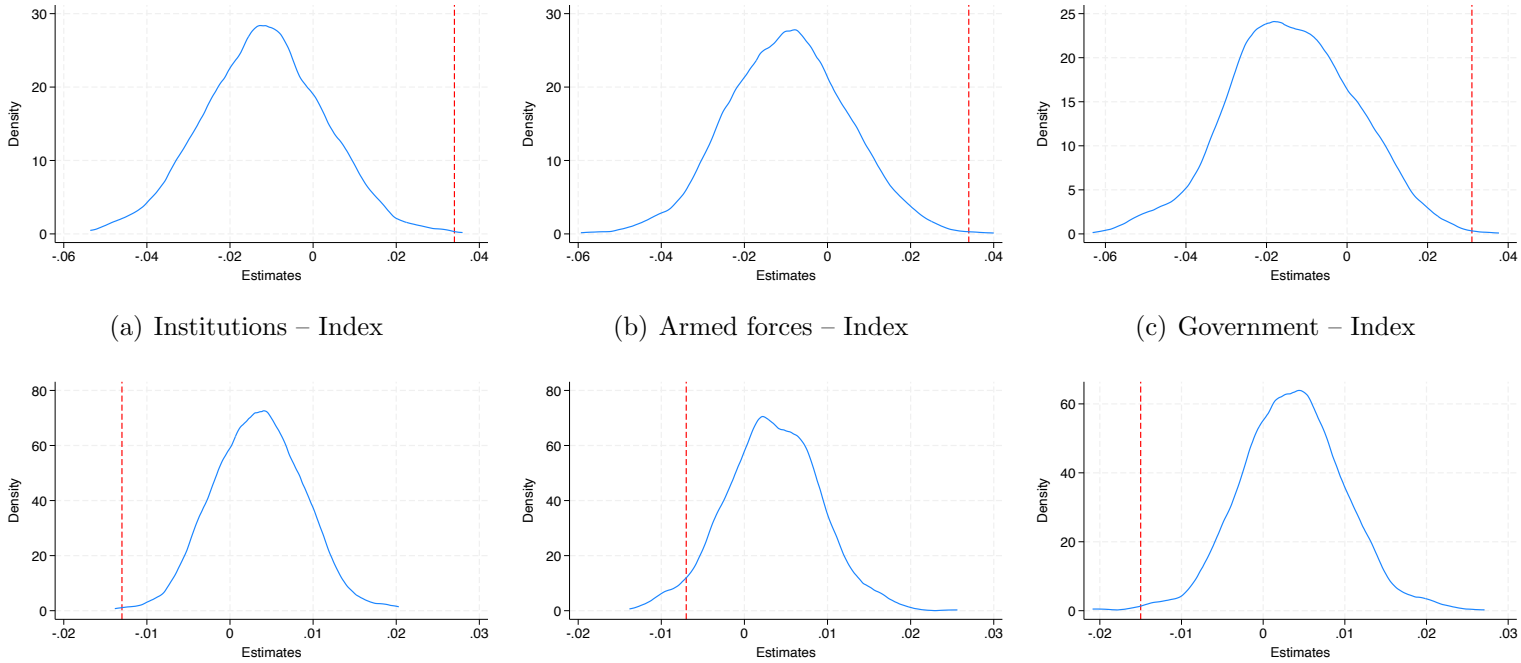


(a) Institutions – Index (b) Armed forces – Index (c) Government – Index

(d) Institutions – No trust (e) Armed forces – No trust (f) Government – No trust

Notes: The figure reports placebo tests based on surveys in which no high-profile civilian death occurred. For each iteration, we randomly select 18 surveys without fatalities and randomly assign a placebo event date within the survey period. We then estimate the baseline specification used in Table 2, Panel A. The plots show the distribution of the resulting placebo estimates across simulations. The vertical red line indicates the corresponding estimate from the main specification. Reported p-values correspond to randomization inference tests comparing the observed estimate with the simulated distribution: Panel A ($p = 0.001$), Panel B ($p < 0.001$), Panel C ($p = 0.02$), Panel D ($p < 0.001$), Panel E ($p < 0.001$), and Panel F ($p = 0.002$).

Figure A9: Placebo test using surveys without fatalities – Police-officer deaths

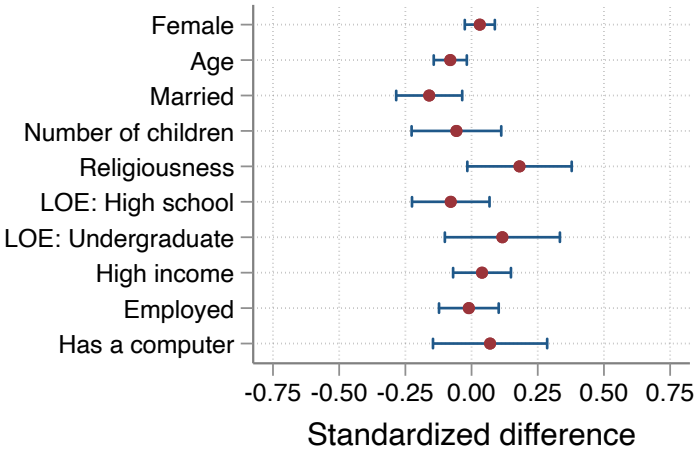


(a) Institutions – Index (b) Armed forces – Index (c) Government – Index

(d) Institutions – No trust (e) Armed forces – No trust (f) Government – No trust

Notes: The figure reports placebo tests based on surveys in which no high-profile police-officer death occurred. For each iteration, we randomly select 55 surveys without fatalities and randomly assign a placebo event date within the survey period. We then estimate the baseline specification used in Table 2, Panel B. The plots show the distribution of the resulting placebo estimates across simulations. The vertical red line indicates the corresponding estimate from the main specification. Reported p-values correspond to randomization inference tests comparing the observed estimate with the simulated distribution: Panel A ($p = 0.001$), Panel B ($p < 0.001$), Panel C ($p = 0.002$), Panel D ($p = 0.001$), Panel E ($p = 0.039$), and Panel F ($p = 0.003$).

Figure A10: Similarity of individuals in same municipality of civilian death



Notes: The figure reports balance tests comparing respondents who live in the same municipality of a civilian death and the rest of survey respondents. Each point shows the estimated coefficient from an OLS regression of the indicated individual characteristic on an indicator for the same municipality of a civilian death, controlling for survey-by-country fixed effects. Horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals. All characteristics are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level.

Table A1: Semantic characteristics of newspaper headlines

	Police-officer is involved		
	Police kills civilian	Civilian kills police	Comparison with civilian only GDELT
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Active voice without subject	0.17	0.35	0.20
Active voice with subject	0.46	0.35	0.34
Non-verbal voice	0.28	0.16	0.30
Passive voice	0.09	0.14	0.16
Focus: Victim	0.63	0.27	0.98
Focus: Perpetrator	0.35	0.73	0.01
State is mentioned	0.37	0.79	0.02
Number of words	11.05	10.55	10.53
Headlines	681	2,299	158

Notes: The table reports descriptive statistics for semantic characteristics of newspaper headlines describing police–civilian fatalities. Column (1) corresponds to incidents in which police officers kill civilians, and column (2) to incidents in which civilians kill police officers. Column (3) reports a comparison sample of headlines referring to civilian killings drawn from the GDELT database. The first four rows classify headlines according to grammatical structure. "Active voice without subject" refers to headlines where the verb appears without an explicit subject (e.g., "Kill police officer in attack"), while "active voice with subject" includes headlines where the perpetrator is explicitly stated. "Non-verbal voice" refers to headlines without a verb, and "passive voice" includes constructions where the victim is the grammatical subject. The rows labeled "Focus: Victim" and "Focus: Perpetrator" identify whether the headline emphasizes the victim or the perpetrator. "State is mentioned" indicates whether the state or its security forces are explicitly referenced (e.g. "Police brutality in Flores" or "Police officer who shot and killed young man has been identified"; own translation and underlined). "Number of words" reports the average headline length. All headlines were originally written in Spanish or Portuguese. Semantic classification was conducted separately for each language.

Table A2: Balance in headline semantics around survey fieldwork

	All		Outside survey		Within survey		Pairwise t-test	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Difference
Panel A: Civilian deaths		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)
Active voice without subject	681	0.167	606	0.165	75	0.187	681	0.022
		(0.374)		(0.372)		(0.392)		
Active voice with subject	681	0.455	606	0.464	75	0.387	681	-0.077
		(0.498)		(0.499)		(0.490)		
Non-verbal voice	681	0.283	606	0.276	75	0.347	681	0.071
		(0.451)		(0.447)		(0.479)		
Passive voice	681	0.094	606	0.096	75	0.080	681	-0.016
		(0.292)		(0.294)		(0.273)		
Focus: Victim	681	0.631	606	0.620	75	0.720	681	0.100*
		(0.483)		(0.486)		(0.452)		
Focus: Perpetrator	681	0.348	606	0.360	75	0.253	681	-0.106*
		(0.477)		(0.480)		(0.438)		
State is mentioned	681	0.373	606	0.386	75	0.267	681	-0.119**
		(0.484)		(0.487)		(0.445)		
Number of words	681	11.051	606	11.140	75	10.333	681	-0.807
		(4.029)		(4.105)		(3.281)		
Panel B: Police deaths								
Active voice without subject	2307	0.346	2084	0.347	223	0.336	2307	-0.011
		(0.476)		(0.476)		(0.474)		
Active voice with subject	2307	0.355	2084	0.357	223	0.336	2307	-0.020
		(0.478)		(0.479)		(0.474)		
Non-verbal voice	2307	0.160	2084	0.157	223	0.184	2307	0.026
		(0.367)		(0.364)		(0.388)		
Passive voice	2307	0.140	2084	0.139	223	0.143	2307	0.004
		(0.347)		(0.346)		(0.351)		
Focus: Victim	2307	0.271	2084	0.271	223	0.274	2307	0.002
		(0.445)		(0.445)		(0.447)		
Focus: Perpetrator	2307	0.726	2084	0.726	223	0.726	2307	-0.000
		(0.446)		(0.446)		(0.447)		
State is mentioned	2307	0.791	2084	0.790	223	0.798	2307	0.008
		(0.407)		(0.407)		(0.402)		
Number of words	2307	10.547	2084	10.575	223	10.278	2307	-0.297
		(3.331)		(3.355)		(3.089)		

Notes: The table reports descriptive statistics for semantic characteristics of newspaper headlines covering police–civilian fatalities. Panel A refers to incidents in which police officers kill civilians, and Panel B to incidents in which civilians kill police officers. Columns (1)–(3) report the number of headlines and mean values for all events, events outside survey fieldwork, and events occurring during survey fieldwork. Column (4) reports the difference in means between headlines covering events within and outside survey periods. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses. Statistical significance: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A3: Alternative clustering method

	Standardized trust in ...					
	State institutions	Armed forces	Government	State institutions	Armed forces	Government
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A. Civilian deaths						
After *civilian death*	-0.071***	-0.098**	-0.056**	-0.068***	-0.096**	-0.054*
p-value wild boostrap	0.010	0.022	0.043	0.013	0.024	0.054
× Same municipality of death				-0.220**	-0.184	-0.247**
p-value wild boostrap				0.038	0.339	0.047
Panel B. Police-officer deaths						
After *police-officer death*	0.033*	0.029	0.036*	0.034*	0.029	0.037*
p-value wild boostrap	0.087	0.177	0.072	0.080	0.171	0.061
× Same municipality of death				-0.091	-0.046	-0.145
p-value wild boostrap				0.335	0.535	0.108
Observations (panel A)	12,927	12,927	12,859	12,927	12,927	12,859
Observations (panel B)	32,696	32,696	32,453	32,696	32,696	32,453
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1). The variable *After civilian death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a high-profile civilian death caused by police officers and zero otherwise. The variable *After police-officer death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a police officer was killed by civilians. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. We report *p*-values using standard errors that are clustered at the survey-country level using the wild boostrap proposed by Cameron et al. (2008). The standardized trust variables have mean zero and standard deviation one. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A4: Balance of events in estimation sample selection

		Within survey		Difference	
	Outside survey	Estimating sample	Not in estimating sample	(2) - (1)	(2) - (3)
Panel A: Civilian deaths	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Number of deaths	3.405	3.833	2.800	0.429	1.033
	(7.639)	(9.426)	(4.025)	[0.825]	[0.816]
During protest	0.358	0.556	0.600	0.197	-0.044
	(0.481)	(0.511)	(0.548)	[0.101]	[0.867]
Organized crime involved	0.075	0.056	0.000	-0.020	0.056
	(0.264)	(0.236)	(0.000)	[0.763]	[0.610]
Police officer on duty	0.838	0.889	0.800	0.051	0.089
	(0.369)	(0.323)	(0.447)	[0.576]	[0.621]
Media coverage	3.503	3.167	3.600	-0.336	-0.433
	(1.315)	(1.543)	(1.673)	[0.311]	[0.591]
Observations	173	18	5	191	23
Panel B: Police officer deaths					
Number of deaths	1.504	1.345	1.439	-0.158	-0.094
	(1.698)	(0.821)	(1.246)	[0.493]	[0.659]
During protest	0.010	0.036	0.049	0.026	-0.012
	(0.101)	(0.189)	(0.218)	[0.079]	[0.766]
Organized crime involved	0.596	0.564	0.756	-0.032	-0.192
	(0.491)	(0.501)	(0.435)	[0.636]	[0.052]
Police officer on duty	0.720	0.745	0.659	0.025	0.087
	(0.449)	(0.440)	(0.480)	[0.682]	[0.359]
Media coverage	2.182	2.291	2.561	0.109	-0.270
	(1.217)	(1.242)	(1.226)	[0.517]	[0.292]
Observations	975	55	41	1030	96

Notes: Summary statistics for high-profile fatalities. Column (1) reports events occurring outside survey fieldwork. Columns (2) and (3) report events occurring during survey fieldwork that are included in the estimation sample and those excluded, respectively. Columns (4) and (5) report differences in means, with p-values in brackets. For civilian deaths, 23 events occur during survey fieldwork, of which 18 are used for estimation. The remaining events are excluded because they occur after another event within the same survey wave (2 cases) or too close to the beginning or end of fieldwork to generate sufficient observations within the $\pm$12-day window (3 cases). For police-officer deaths, 96 events occur during survey fieldwork, of which 55 are used for estimation. The remaining events are excluded because an earlier event occurs in the same survey (25 cases), the event falls on the first or last day of fieldwork (1 case), or too few interviews fall within the usable window (15 cases).

Table A5: Interpersonal trust

Dependent variable:	Civilian death		Police officer death	
	Standardized trust index	Indicator for no trust	Standardized trust index	Indicator for no trust
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
After death	-0.004	0.001	-0.024	0.001
	(0.028)	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.006)
Observations	12,677	12,677	31,989	32,414
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Avg. dependent variable	0	0.626	0	0.556

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1). The variable *After death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a high-profile civilian/police death and zero otherwise. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level and reported in parentheses. The standardized trust variables in columns 1 and 3 have mean zero and standard deviation one. The indicator for no trust in columns 2 and 4 equals one if the respondent reports the lowest possible level of trust in the state. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A6: Excluding countries with high police-officer deaths

	Standardized trust in ...		
	State institutions	Armed forces	Government
	(1)	(2)	(3)
After *police-officer* death	0.050**	0.065***	0.040*
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.023)
Observations	15,550	15,550	15,452
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1). The variable *After police-officer death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a police officer was killed by civilians. We exclude from the estimating sample the 3 countries with the largest ratio of police-officer to civilian death events (Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico). The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level and reported in parentheses. The standardized trust variables have mean zero and standard deviation one. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A7: Indicator for no trust in the state

	Dep. variable: Indicator for no trust in...					
	State institutions	Armed forces	Government	State institutions	Armed forces	Government
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
After *civilian death*	0.029***	0.041***	0.020**			
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.009)			
After *police-officer death*				-0.011*	-0.004	-0.015**
				(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Observations	12,927	12,927	12,859	32,696	32,696	32,553
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Avg. dependent variable	0.241	0.192	0.279	0.262	0.213	0.302

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1). The variable *After civilian death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a high-profile civilian death caused by police officers and zero otherwise. The variable *After police-officer death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a police officer was killed by civilians. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level and reported in parentheses. The indicator for no trust equals one if the respondent reports the lowest possible level of trust in the state. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A8: Missing survey responses

	All missing				At least on missing		
	Institutions	Armed forces	Government	Interpersonal	Institutions	Armed forces	Government
Panel A	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
After *civilian* death	-0.000	-0.001	-0.001	-0.010**	-0.003	-0.005	0.002
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Panel B							
After *police-officer* death	0.001	0.002	-0.000	0.001	0.009**	0.004	0.007*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Observations (panel A)	13,021	13,021	13,021	13,021	13,021	13,021	13,021
Observations (panel B)	32,840	32,840	32,840	32,840	32,840	32,840	32,840
Avg. dependent variable (panel A)	0.004	0.006	0.010	0.024	0.384	0.068	0.366
Avg. dependent variable (panel B)	0.003	0.005	0.009	0.022	0.388	0.029	0.379
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1) using indicators for missing responses to the corresponding trust variables as dependent variables. Columns (1)–(4) equal one if the response to the indicated trust question is missing. Columns (5)–(7) equal one if at least one of the corresponding trust variables is missing. Panel A reports results for civilian deaths caused by police officers and Panel B for police-officer deaths caused by civilians. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level and reported in parentheses. Statistical significance: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A9: Baseline results using survey sampling weights

Dependent variable:	Standardized measure of trust in...				Indicator for no trust in...			
	State institutions	Armed forces	Government	Interpersonal	State institutions	Armed forces	Government	Interpersonal
Panel A	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
After *civilian death*	-0.059**	-0.084***	-0.047*	-0.005	0.026***	0.038***	0.018*	0.010
	(0.022)	(0.029)	(0.025)	(0.027)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Panel B								
After *police-officer death*	0.039***	0.032*	0.044***	-0.021	-0.010	-0.004	-0.015*	0.001
	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)
Observations (panel A)	11,759	11,733	11,695	11,523	11,759	11,753	11,732	11,708
Observations (panel B)	30,656	30,599	30,419	29,980	30,656	30,650	30,520	30,410
Avg. dependent variable (panel A)	0	0	0	0	0.242	0.193	0.280	0.618
Avg. dependent variable (panel B)	0	0	0	0	0.270	0.217	0.313	0.586
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1) using survey sampling weights provided by Latinobarómetro and LAPOP. The variable *After civilian death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a high-profile civilian death caused by police officers, and zero otherwise. The variable *After police-officer death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a police officer was killed by civilians. Panel A reports results for civilian deaths and Panel B for police-officer deaths. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level and reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A10: Randomization inference

Dependent variable:	Standardized measure of trust in...		
	State institutions	Armed forces	Government
Panel A	(1)	(2)	(3)
After *civilian death*	-0.071***	-0.098***	-0.056***
randomization p-value	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Panel B			
After *police-officer death*	0.033***	0.029**	0.036***
randomization p-value	<0.01	0.036	0.010
Observations (panel A)	12,927	12,927	12,859
Observations (panel B)	32,696	32,696	32,453
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1) together with p-values obtained using randomization inference following Cattaneo et al. (2015). Panel A reports results for civilian deaths caused by police officers and Panel B for police-officer deaths caused by civilians. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A11: Placebo killing based on subsequent survey

Dependent variable: Standardized measure of trust in...			
	State institutions	Armed forces	Government
Panel A	(1)	(2)	(3)
After *placebo civilian death*	-0.018	-0.021	-0.013
	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Panel B			
After *placebo police-officer death*	0.004	0.003	0.008
	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Observations (panel A)	15,130	14,906	14,706
Observations (panel B)	36,015	35,935	35,348
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1) using placebo events defined by fatalities occurring during the subsequent survey wave. The variables *After placebo civilian death* and *After placebo police-officer death* equal one for respondents interviewed after these placebo events and zero otherwise. Panel A reports results for civilian deaths and Panel B for police-officer deaths. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the placebo event. Standard errors clustered by survey-country-region are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A12: Protests are unrelated to main result

Sample:	No protest in previous week			Event occurs during protest		
	Dep. variable: Standardized trust in ...					
	State institutions	Armed forces	Government	State institutions	Armed forces	Government
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
After *civilian death*	-0.083***	-0.109***	-0.072**	-0.070***	-0.096***	-0.059*
	(0.029)	(0.036)	(0.031)	(0.025)	(0.034)	(0.031)
Observations	8,192	8,192	8,158	5,779	5,779	5,754
Survey-by-country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1). The variable *After civilian death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a high-profile civilian death caused by police officers and zero otherwise. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level and reported in parentheses. The standardized trust variables have mean zero and standard deviation one. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A13: Heterogeneous effects by context characteristics

	Dependent variable: Standardized trust in ...							
	Armed forces				Government			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A. Civilian deaths								
After *civilian death*	-0.098***	-0.098***	-0.101***	-0.096***	-0.041	-0.056**	-0.061**	-0.054**
	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.037)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)
× Quality of democracy	-0.013				-0.031			
	(0.025)				(0.045)			
× Recent killings		0.034*				-0.000		
		(0.019)				(0.016)		
× Baseline trust			-0.012				-0.030**	
			(0.028)				(0.014)	
× Same municipality				-0.184*				-0.247***
				(0.093)				(0.051)
Panel B. Police-officer deaths								
After *police-officer death*	0.029*	0.029*	0.029*	0.030*	-0.001	0.037**	0.038**	0.038**
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.017)
× Quality of democracy	-0.001				0.077**			
	(0.012)				(0.032)			
× Recent killings		-0.000				0.001		
		(0.001)				(0.001)		
× Baseline trust			0.002				-0.034*	
			(0.016)				(0.020)	
× Same municipality				-0.046				-0.145*
				(0.059)				(0.077)
Observations (panel A)	12,927	12,927	12,927	12,927	12,859	12,859	12,859	12,859
Observations (panel B)	32,649	32,649	32,649	32,649	32,405	32,405	32,405	32,405
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1) allowing the effect of high-profile fatalities to vary with country and local characteristics. The variable *After civilian death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a high-profile civilian death caused by police officers and zero otherwise. The variable *After police-officer death* equals one if the respondent was interviewed after a police officer was killed by civilians. Interaction terms allow the treatment effect to vary with (i) the quality of democracy (standardized), (ii) recent killings, (iii) baseline trust in the corresponding institution, and (iv) whether the fatality occurred in the same municipality as the respondent. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level and reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A14: Heterogeneity by event characteristics – Civilian deaths

	Dependent variable: Standardized trust in ...											
	Armed forces						Government					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
After *civilian death*	-0.093***	-0.101**	-0.101***	-0.100***	-0.094***	-0.097***	-0.054**	-0.067*	-0.049**	-0.051**	-0.054**	-0.053**
	(0.024)	(0.045)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.022)	(0.036)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.022)
× Number of outlets	-0.047***						-0.018					
	(0.013)						(0.013)					
× During crime		0.005						0.022				
		(0.056)						(0.045)				
× Headline: State mentioned			-0.026						0.083			
			(0.064)						(0.053)			
× Headline: Perpetrator focus				-0.026						0.082		
				(0.064)						(0.053)		
× Headline: Active voice					0.093						0.044	
					(0.081)						(0.066)	
Observations	12,927	12,927	12,927	12,927	12,927	12,927	12,859	12,859	12,859	12,859	12,859	12,859
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1) allowing the effect of civilian deaths caused by police officers to vary with characteristics of the event and its media coverage. The variable *After civilian death* equals one for respondents interviewed after a high-profile civilian fatality caused by police officers. Interaction terms capture heterogeneity with respect to the number of major media outlets reporting the event, whether the encounter occurs during a crime, and several semantic characteristics of the headline describing the incident. Headline characteristics indicate whether the state is mentioned, whether the perpetrator is emphasized, whether the headline uses active voice, and whether the wording assigns blame to the state. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. All specifications include country-by-survey fixed effects. Standard errors clustered by survey-country-region are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A15: Heterogeneity by event characteristics – Police-officer deaths

	Dependent variable: Standardized trust in ...											
	Armed forces						Government					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
After *police-officer death*	0.029*	0.028	0.009	0.058	0.029	0.034	0.037**	0.043**	-0.012	0.052	0.028	0.034
	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.045)	(0.039)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.063)	(0.051)	(0.024)	(0.023)
× Number of outlets	-0.013						-0.005					
	(0.011)						(0.013)					
× During crime		0.011						-0.052				
		(0.034)						(0.035)				
× Headline: State mentioned			0.025						0.059			
			(0.057)						(0.070)			
× Headline: Perpetrator focus				-0.035						-0.018		
				(0.052)						(0.060)		
× Headline: Active voice					0.006						0.034	
					(0.044)						(0.046)	
Observations	32,649	32,649	31,509	31,509	31,509	31,509	32,405	32,405	31,265	31,265	31,265	31,265
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1) allowing the effect of police-officer deaths caused by civilians to vary with characteristics of the event and its media coverage. The variable *After police-officer death* equals one for respondents interviewed after a police officer is killed by civilians. Interaction terms capture heterogeneity with respect to the number of major media outlets reporting the event, whether the encounter occurs during a crime, and several semantic characteristics of the headline describing the incident. Headline characteristics indicate whether the state is mentioned, whether the perpetrator is emphasized, whether the headline uses active voice, and whether the wording assigns blame to the state. The sample includes respondents interviewed within ±12 days of the corresponding fatality. All specifications include country-survey-region fixed effects. Standard errors clustered by survey and country are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A16: Balance of events by early media coverage

Civilian deaths	All	Early coverage	Late coverage	Difference (3)–(2)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Number of deaths	3.833	1.917	7.667	5.750
	(9.426)	(2.021)	(16.330)	[0.233]
Occurred during protest	0.556	0.750	0.167	-0.583
	(0.511)	(0.452)	(0.408)	[0.017]
Organized crime was involved	0.056	0.083	0.000	-0.083
	(0.236)	(0.289)	(0.000)	[0.496]
Police officer was on duty	0.889	0.917	0.833	-0.083
	(0.323)	(0.289)	(0.408)	[0.621]
Number of media outlets covering event	3.167	3.583	2.333	-1.250
	(1.543)	(1.311)	(1.751)	[0.107]
State mentioned in headlines	0.361	0.271	0.542	0.271
	(0.413)	(0.345)	(0.208)	[0.199]
Perpetrator focus in headlines	0.347	0.250	0.542	0.292
	(0.421)	(0.354)	(0.510)	[0.173]
Observations	18	12	6	18

Notes: Summary statistics for civilian deaths caused by police. Columns (1)–(3) report means with standard deviations in parentheses for all events in the estimating sample, events with early media coverage, and events with late media coverage. Column (4) reports differences in means (late minus early), with p-values in brackets. Media coverage measures the number of major national newspaper outlets reporting the event. The bottom two headline variables are computed as the share of articles covering the event that mention the state or focus on the perpetrator.

Table A17: Police-officer deaths with early media coverage

Dependent variable: Standardized trust in ...			
	State institutions	Armed forces	Government
	(1)	(2)	(3)
After *police-officer death*	0.032*	0.024	0.039**
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Observations	29,646	29,646	29,436
Country-by-survey fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column reports estimates of equation (1) for police-officer deaths, restricting the sample to events covered by major national media within four days. Due to data limitations, there is insufficient variation to estimate local effects for these events. All specifications include country-by-survey fixed effects and individual controls. Standard errors are clustered at the survey-country-region level and reported in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.