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# Community Policing Solutions for Religion-on-Religion Conflict: Lessons from an Indian Case Study

**Vineet Kapoor** [1], **William Flavin** [2], **Peter Ochs** [3],*[ID], **Thomas Matyók** [4] and **Essam Fahim** [5]

1   State Police Academy of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal 462001, India
2   US Army Peacekeeping Institute, Carlisle, PA 17013, USA
3   Religious Studies, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22904, USA
4   Joint Civil-Military Interaction, Middle Georgia State University, Macon, GA 31206, USA
5   Humanities and Social Science, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore 54792, Pakistan
*   Correspondence: pochs@virginia.edu

**Abstract:** UN peacekeepers face new conditions of conflict today, which call for expanded peacekeeping strategies. Among these new conditions is the increasing localization of violent conflict, especially among extra-state forces that are mobilized by ideological and religious passions. Responding to such challenges, the UN and its multinational partners attend increasingly to regional and local settings of intergroup tension and conflict. Among the consequences are greater emphasis on relations between UN peacekeeping and local police forces and on community policing. In this essay, we argue that these new peacekeeping directions are promising but lack one key dimension: attention to unique behavioral features of local, religion-on-religion conflict. Because such conflict plays an increasing role in location-specific tension and violence, it is increasingly important for peacekeepers to learn how to identify and analyze these unique features in real time and then reshape peacekeeping strategies accordingly. To illustrate how it is possible to do so, we introduce a detailed case study of successful community policing of religion-on-religion conflict: Muslim-Hindu intergroup conflict in Madhya Pradesh India.

## 1. Introduction

World governments face new challenges today: the stresses of population growth, rapid changes in the global economy, the persistent migration of rural populations into cities, environmental degradation, and rapid social change overall, amplified through social media. Violent conflict becomes increasingly localized, and regionalized, especially among extra-state forces that are mobilized by ideological or religious passions. Contemporary conflicts are hybrid by nature, involving a persistent mixed state of no-peace no-conflict with punctuations of violence targeting civilians and creating public disorder. More recently, the intersection of conflict with criminal, and in some instances ideological and religious, actors, has become pronounced. Societies with institutions, rules, or norms for managing conflict and well-established traditional governance are under stress. Fragile states with weak and often illegitimate institutions of governance are especially unable to cope with the world's new stresses. Social bonds fray and consensus around values and traditions is shaken.

Responding to such challenges, the UN and its multinational partners attend increasingly to regional and local settings of intergroup tension and conflict. Among the consequences are greater emphasis on relations between UN peacekeeping and local police forces and on community policing. These are bi-directional relations. On the one hand, international forces may encourage local police to pay attention to unusual intergroup behavior that may signal emerging tensions that may emerge, as well, in other locations

domestically and internationally. Social and environmental conditions that appear to stimulate tensions in one locality may potentially correspond to conditions that could stimulate tensions in other localities. Here the goal is to coordinate information sources that may alert local and international peacekeepers to new types of conflict they would not otherwise notice. On the other hand, international forces addressing cross-border or multistate conflicts may identify some peacekeeping efforts as achievable only in local settings, deferring to local police forces as the appropriate agents of peacekeeping activity. The UN may recognize that only local community police have the requisite knowledge and civic support to respond appropriately and effectively to certain types of intergroup conflict. (There is also a potential dark side to this information sharing. As noted in a 2021 Stimson report, "There are important opportunities for UN member states to strengthen the FoRB agenda through the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, and the General Assembly. But UN action on this issue also comes with important risks that apply to all three bodies. FoRB experts consulted for this study identified two key risks as critical for UN member states to manage: (a) Undermining other human rights, including rights related to gender and sexuality. Some member states have pitted FoRB against other human rights, dealing serious damage to both. In particular, FoRB has been misused to justify discrimination or violence against women, girls, and LGBTQ+ persons in the name of religious freedom . . . (b) Marginalizing non-Abrahamic religions and beliefs. There is a widespread perception, particularly within the Global South, that FoRB has been championed largely by Global North countries with a specific interest in protecting Christian minorities. This perceived bias creates understandable suspicion and sensitivities around actions that place special attention on FoRB compared to other human rights—particularly in the context of growing nationalist movements in Europe and North America linked to Christianity [1]".

In this essay, we argue that these new peacekeeping directions are promising but lack one key dimension: attention to unique behavioral features of local, religion-on-religion conflict. Because such conflict plays an increasing role in location-specific tension and violence, it is increasingly important for peacekeepers to learn how to identify and analyze these unique features in real time and then reshape peacekeeping strategies accordingly. To illustrate how it is possible to do so, we introduce a detailed case study of successful community policing of religion-on-religion conflict: Muslim-Hindu intergroup conflict in Madhya Pradesh India. We argue (a) that the case study contributes directly to recent UN and multinational efforts to re-value the unique strengths of local community policing, and (b) that lessons learned from the case study may encourage strategists and policymakers to treat "religion-on-religion conflict" as an appropriate subject of examination and of community policing.

Madhya Pradesh (MP) offers a model of conflict transformation/conflict calming in the face of religion-on-religion violence. This essay features a detailed report by the Superintendent of Police (SP) on how the MP police anticipated such conflict, planned strategies for conflict avoidance, and then applied those strategies in real time to avert what could have been an extensive Muslim-Hindu riot in 2017. The SP's report describes each stage in the process of planning and executing the conflict avoidance measures. The SP provides a detailed summary of interviews and focus group engagements that both contributed to the calming activity and enabled him, after these events, to assemble the report that is published here for the first time. Based on the interviews and report, the SP then diagrams what he perceives to be the signal elements of the entire process of conflict-threat-and-resolution. The essay concludes with an extensive summary of lessons learned from the SP's report. These Lessons are of use, first, to the MP police district itself for future efforts to plan and coordinate interreligious conflict transformation. More broadly, they could also contribute to the Indian government's future efforts to educate every police district's officers and strategists on best practices for inter-religious conflict transformation. Of urgent importance for the state of India at the present time, the Lessons may prove to be of urgent importance to police districts internationally. The Lessons, therefore, contribute

in two ways to current UN policy: illustrating best practices for community policing and introducing effective procedures for calming inter-religious conflict.

This essay is the product of a unique collaboration. Vineet Kapoor, the former superintendent of police in Madhya Pradesh, contributes a detailed case-study of successful interreligious community policing in the town of Vidisha. Dr. Kapoor has served as Chief Police Training Coordinator in MP, as Deputy Director of the MP Police Academy, as UN police coordinator in Kosovo, and as a member of the Doctrine Development group at the UNDPKO (UN Dept for Peacekeeping Operations). William Flavin is a former Assistant Director of the US Army Peacekeeping Institute and professor of the global history of peacekeeping. For two decades, he wrote peacekeeping doctrine for the UN and for NATO. Thomas Matyók, professor of military-civilian relations, previously served as the US Air Force instructor in military negotiations. Peter Ochs is a scholar of religion-on-religion conflict. Essam Fahim is a scholar of religion and modernity in South Asia.

Our overall argument is that: (1) The community police force in Madhya Pradesh India has developed a highly significant strategy for reducing the likelihood of religion-on-religion violent conflict in its locality. (2) In recent years, the UN has advocated local community policing as an effective response to the increasing localization of extra- and intra-state sources of violent conflict across the globe. (3) Religious conflict is a significant and unique factor in localized conflict. (4) Recent reports from Madhya Pradesh demonstrate the effectiveness of local community policing in dealing with localized religious conflict. (5) UN policymakers, therefore, have reason to include religious conflict as a distinct focus within UN sponsored local community policing. (6) While peacekeeping experts have urged the UN to address the topic of religion and violence, UN policymakers have not addressed the significance of religion as a factor in localized conflict and, therefore, as a focus of local community policing. (7) This essay's case study from Madhya Pradesh illustrates how religion plays a unique role in localized conflict and how community policing can reduce the likelihood of localized religion-on-religion conflict.

The essay has six sections: (1) A review of the UN's recent efforts to inter-relate multinational peacekeeping and local community policing. (2) Calls for the UN to address the topic of religion and violence. (3) An introduction to interreligious community policing in Madhya Pradesh (MP). (4) Our primary focus: a detailed account of successful religion-on-religion community policing in Vidisha, MP. (5) Key Features of the Community Police Operation. (6) Lessons Learned for UN policy.

## 2. Recent UN Attention to Local Community Policing

In recent years, the UN has advocated local community policing as an effective response to the increasing localization of extra- and intra-state sources of violent conflict across the globe. When requested by a member nation, the UN's mandate is to provide peacekeeping support when civil war or insurgency overwhelms the security capacities of local authorities. The UN may assign military or police peacekeepers from contributing nations to provide conflict mitigation and peace administration services at the site of conflict. In this section, we illustrate three of the UN's emergent strategies for nurturing local community police contributions to UN and multinational efforts.

1. The UN has published guidelines for adopting community policing as the overall model for UN Police forces. The 2018 Manual, *Community-Oriented Policing in United Nations Peace Operations*, sets the standard for this strategy, which is to "Develop and publish a plan for making community-oriented policing the core strategy of policing to which police leaders and other stakeholders are formally committed [2], p. 25" The detailed guidelines apply strictly to UN police practice, with minimal reference to a partnership with local community-based policing (A typical reference is that "United Nations police may organize conferences in schools and education institutes together with host-State police [2], p. 21"). Until very recently this is the primary approach in UN documents. Other examples include UN and multinational efforts to develop and expand CIVPOL: the importation of Civilian

Police to add UN and multinational peacekeeping efforts (There is an extensive literature on CIVPOL. See, for example, [3,4]).

2. There is evidence that, when following these guidelines, the UN has successfully promoted intergroup communication among rival stakeholder groups. In a 2020 paper, Hannah Smidt provides statistical evidence that "UN PKOs' local intergroup dialogue activities help decrease communal violence [5]. A 2016 document from the "United Nations University" argues that, indeed, "Conflicts are not only national or transnational, but above all local. This means that simply considering the international or national perspective in mission mandates will never be enough; policies have to be translated into concrete workable programs at a community level. The best way to ensure the lasting effectiveness of peacekeeping operations is to build inclusive partnerships with civil actors [6]" Numerous recent publications give comparable attention to community institutions and local conditions (For example [7–9]. According to a 2017 policy briefing, Civil Affairs Officers should be deployed to assist in local conflict management [10].

3. The UN has published guidelines for coordinating UN peacekeeping with local community partners. For example, the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operation's (UNDPKO) 2015 booklet, *On Engagement with Civil Society*, offers guidelines on how to manage peacekeeping through a partnership with community members [11]. See also [12]. National peacekeeping missions reiterate these guidelines. For example, the UN Peacekeeping Missions in Sudan, Cambodia, Darfur, and Liberia prescribe strategies of non-partisan engagement with community partners. Other pertinent examples include The *2020 Challenges Forum* 12 [13], a 2017 report on multilateral peacekeeping in Liberia [14], and SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), which reports on multilateral peacekeeping efforts in Africa, Asia, Europe, and MENA [15,16]. These reports highlight the critical importance of community-oriented practice. and additional, nation-specific studies [17–20].

## 3. Drawing the UN's Attention to Religion and Violence

By now, the UN has institutionalized community policing as a central feature of its policy, but it has not yet attended to localized religious conflict as a significant focus of community policing. On four previous occasions, peacekeeping experts have urged the UN, successively: (1) to introduce religion as a serious focus for peacekeeping; (2) to recognize the unique characteristics of each religious group and of each case of religion-on-religion conflict; (3) to safeguard the enduring legacies of these ancient traditions; and (4) to protect communities from violence based on religion or belief. In this section, we review these recommendations and introduce SP Kapoor's case-study as evidence of how the recommendations could be integrated into UN policy on community policing.

(1) Peacekeeping policymakers inherit over two decades of reports on the powerful role of religion in peacekeeping. One of the most influential is the collected work, *Religion*: *The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, which argues that diplomats need to address the influence of religions and interreligious conflict on global policy [21]. According to the collection's authors, diplomats in the modern West tend to misread inter-religious conflicts as comparable to territorial disputes that are resolved only through compromise and social engineering. The authors argue that many conflicts are driven by religious beliefs, values, and passions that cannot be resolved this way, but only through extensive interaction with each religious group on its own terms. At its best, such interaction enables each group to voice its religious arguments in addition to claims that can be reduced to property, territory, and power. A case in point is the Christian-Muslim conflict in Lebanon, which diplomats tend to misread as a political and territorial conflict of "rightists" (nationalists) versus leftists (liberal universalists). Barry Rubin argues that the conflicts are influenced more strongly by interreligious mistrust and suspicion [21], pp. 24–26. Edward Luttwak argues that, during the Iranian revolution of 1989, American diplomats presumed that "the revolt was motivated . . . by conventional, political, and economic dissatisfactions, when in fact

it was motivated primarily by religious hatred for [the forces of] Westernization (always perceived as Christianization)" [21], p. 13.

Another influential source is "*Mapping the Terrain*: *The Role of Religion in Peacemaking*" [22]. Prepared for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this paper helped introduce "religion" as a serious topic for peacebuilding institutes, with helpful insights into unique features of religious behavior and of religious groups as resources as well as challenges for peacemakers. Other early sources address religion-related peacebuilding as a subset of inter-cultural peacebuilding: for example, [23]. Among the few early sources that address religion in its own terms are [24,25]. And, more recently [26,27].

In *War on Sacred Grounds*, Ron Hassner offers evidence that violent conflict over sacred places cannot be resolved by seeking compromise on matters of land, power, and political control over such sites. Such efforts consistently fail, because the antagonists perceive the sacred environment as indivisibly integrating sacrality and land [28]. "All sacred spaces fulfill the three conditions for indivisibility. [They are] integrated monolithic spaces that cannot be subdivided because they have clearly defined and inflexible boundaries. They are unique sites for which no substitute is available . . . [They] represent the believer's cosmos and any division of the sacred site . . . is perceived as a direct threat to the believer". If no compromise is possible, standard diplomacy fails (Hassner offers extensive evidence from unsuccessful negotiations, for example, failed efforts to resolve the Jewish/Muslim conflict in Hebron and Jerusalem from 1967 through 1998 and the Muslim-Hindu conflict over the Babri Masjid (mosque) of Babur in Ayodhiya, India in 1992. See many more examples in [29].

(2) Agencies that address issues of religious violence need to foster long-term communicative relations with representatives of religious groups, including local groups and the regional and international organizations that provide resources for such groups. For more than a decade, peacebuilding experts have urged the UN to cultivate such relations. A prime example is *Religion, Development, and the United Nations* [30]. The study expands on earlier work [31]. Noting the changing conditions for peacekeeping today, the report shows that it is time for the UN to work with Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) as it works with other development NGOs. The report's primary focus is on the need to integrate some UN development work with complementary FBO funding and charitable organizations, while recognizing the irreducibly unique characteristics of each faith-based group ("What is required is a balanced outreach to communities of faith, predicated on common principles and constantly double-checked by a proven track record in delivering on services, shared commitments, and promises. The standards of delivery cannot be uniform across the UN system except in one area: human rights, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" [30] As practical evidence in this report, the study of religion and multinational policy grew in detail and sophistication since 2000.

(3) Over the past five years, the UN has begun to accept these recommendations. A signal achievement is the policy paper, The United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites: In Unity and Solidarity for Safe and Peaceful Worship [32]. The Plan of Action is followed by a 2020 call to action by The High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos: "The global call to action #forSafeWorship aims to create personal, emotional connections with religious sites. It celebrates the universality of religious sites as symbols of our shared humanity, history, and traditions of people worldwide. It emphasizes the need to safeguard religious sites and underscores the role of individuals in protecting all sacred sites, regardless of religions or beliefs" [33]. The Plan directs the UN, for example, to "develop a mapping of religious sites around the world which will produce an online interactive tool to capture the universality of religious sites and contribute to fostering respect and understanding of their profound significance for individuals and communities on every continent" (p. 14); to "strengthen national mechanisms to promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts, including efforts to prevent violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism, which can have an impact on the protection of religious sites" (p. 15); and to "develop coalitions

of civil society organizations to work with individuals and communities vulnerable to radicalization" (p. 16).

(4) Most recently, the Stimson Center has urged the UN to take concrete action on the question of violence based on "religion and belief" [1], p. 2. The authors cite the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion and Belief. The Stimson Center brief warns that rights defined by the UN "are being tested by rising or sustained violence against persons on the basis of religion and belief–a threat that is largely underrecognized by the international community, even as new data show increases in many types of such violence. As a result, there has been a noticeable gap in response from the UN Security Council and international human rights mechanisms" [1], p. 5. The brief summarizes abuses by both state and non-state actors, suggesting that "religion may be used as an identity marker", especially when this marker overlaps with other social identity markers, concerning economics, security, justice, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, and minority status. While recognizing signs of UN attention to this matter, the brief documents the lack of significant progress in strategic planning. The brief concludes with a list of seven categories of action that UN members states should consider.

We look to Kapoor's police work in MP as contributing directly to one of those categories: "Take country-specific actions to protect civilians in contexts with high levels of violence based on religion or belief". Our study of Kapoor's work contributes, secondarily, to three additional categories: "Highlight the issue of violence based on religion or belief and call attention to an upward trend", "Reinforce reporting on member states' progress on domestic action", and "Integrate language on preventing and combating violence based on religion or belief into related agendas" [1], pp. 11–14. The remaining categories are: "Enhance Freedom of Religious Belief capacities within the UN system", "Introduce a thematic resolution at the Security Council", and "Encourage the Security Council to stay engaged on these Issues".

## 4. Interreligious Community Policing in Madhya Pradesh

Our case study is drawn from the community policing narratives of Vineet Kapoor, then SP in the city of Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh (MP). Our study addresses community policing efforts to anticipate and–in this case—successfully mitigate Muslim-Hindu tensions raised by the communities' simultaneous observance of competing for religious festivals.

*Institutional Infrastructure*

In Madhya Pradesh, community policing is built on an institutional response to the long history of interreligious conflict in India. The prototype of such conflict immediately preceded and followed the cessation of British colonial rule and the partition of its empire into the rival states of India and Pakistan. India opted to become a secular state (Pantham, 1997) [34]. The multi-religious populations in independent India sought to live in harmony, but the harmony was often disrupted by communal violence [35]. In the 1950′s and 1960′s, serious tensions and, at times, violence, emerged among populations following the majority religion of Hinduism and the minority religions, especially Islam [36]. Communal mistrust and violence have emerged from claims and counterclaims over places of worship, the celebration of festivals, and competing for religious traditions, customs, and ways of life. The most prominent example is from the 1990′s, when the disputed site of Babri Masjid was demolished by Hindu mobs claiming their right to an ancient Hindu temple. This incident generated widespread riots and inter-communal strife.

There is ample evidence over the past 100 years that inter-religious tensions correspond to weeks of religious festivals and the passionate celebratory activity that accompanies them. Tensions are highest when Muslim, Hindu, and/or Christian festival times overlap. Even in relatively peaceful towns or cities, these times of calendrical overlap may lead to significant intergroup tensions and conflict. In recent years, the rise of communal

politics has exacerbated these tensions, challenging governmental peacekeeping efforts [37]. Reactive police work often fails at such times, because it comes too late to interrupt the long-term evolution of rigid polarities. Madhya Pradesh has, instead, built a community policing infrastructure that anticipates probable tensions before they arise.

Based on police reform commission recommendations over the past fifty years, the government of India issued guidelines for police and civic responses to recurrent interreligious conflicts. The guidelines provide legal and regulatory instruments for managing public events and festivals [38], discouraging coercive policing, and setting standards for non-coercive, persuasive policing (these guidelines are derived from such federal laws as The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act (1988), the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act (1991), and rules and standard operating procedures laid out by the *Government of India Ministry of Home Affairs National Policy on Communal Harmony* [39]). Police and district administrators are responsible for promoting intercommunal dialogue as a strategy for mitigating violent conflict. From the 1980s through the 1990′s, the legislature of Madhya Pradesh passed laws to institutionalize community policing, requiring the formation of peace committees at the level of the district as well as neighborhood committees under the direction of the police. The policing infrastructure of Madhya Pradesh is built to anticipate the annual cycle of religious festivals.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the *Madhya Pradesh State Community Police Act 1999* designates the primary institutions for community policing at the district and city level [40].
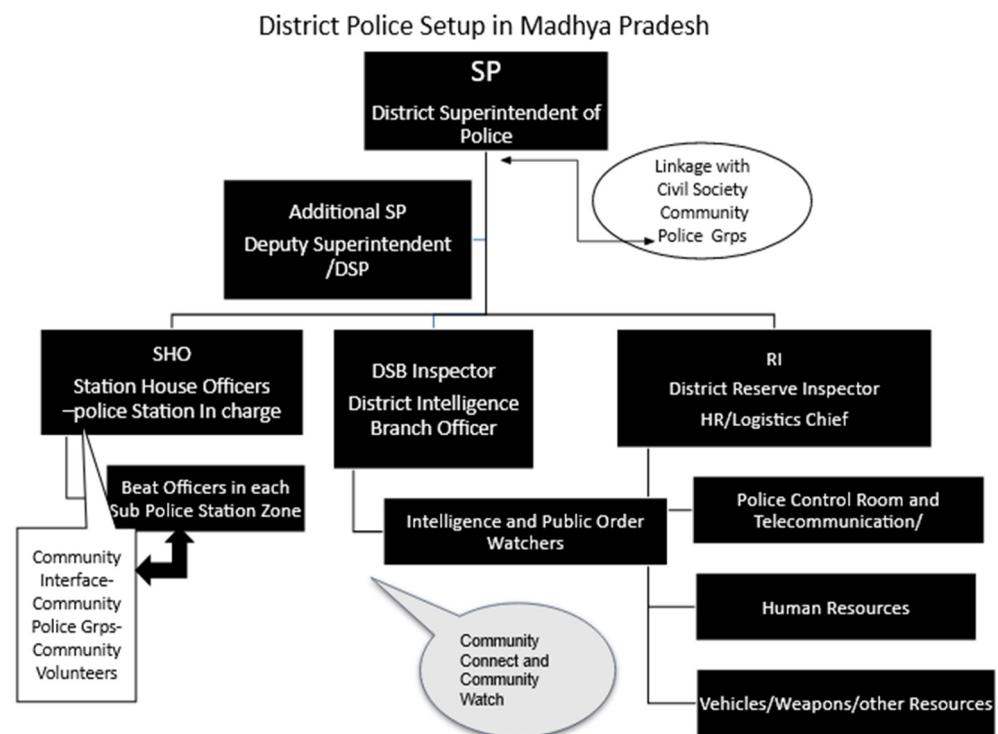


**Figure 1.** District Level Police Structure.

*District Magistrate* (*DM*): Senior most executive magistrate and chief in charge of general administration in a district. The DM is assisted by a number of subordinate magistrates who hold executive legal power and are responsible for maintaining administration and public order management.
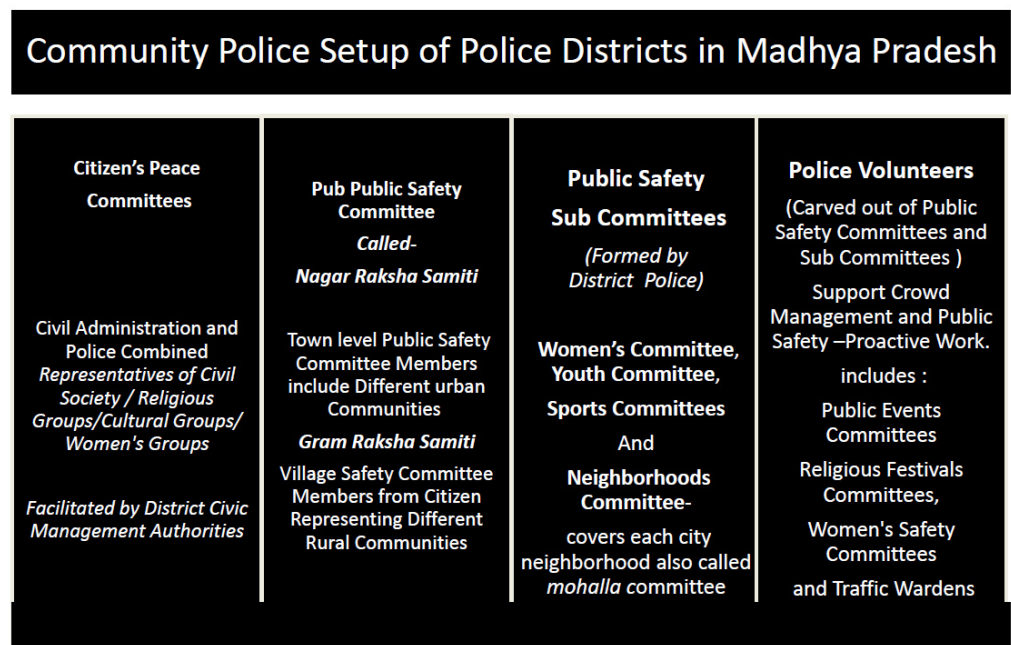
*Police Superintendent* (*SP*): Head of police in a district responsible for maintenance of law and order. SP is the chief manager of security administration, crime prevention, investigation, and control.

*Additional Superintendent* (*Add-SP*) *and City Superintendent*: Add-SP is a senior management officer who aids the SP and occasionally acts on his behalf. The CSP is a senior management officer delegated by the SP to supervise a cluster of police stations.

*Station House Officers* (*SHO*): Officers in charge of a police station, responsible for overseeing police performance in a particular jurisdiction. An SHO's primary duties are crime control, crime investigation, and maintenance of public order. The SHO also cultivates community partnership strategies. In a typical city of 200,000 people, there may be three to four police stations, each having a specific geographical jurisdiction with a standing force and permanent staff.

*Beat Police*: A police subunit within a police station jurisdiction responsible for crime prevention, area patrol, and cultivation of community relations. All localities in a town have beat police patrols. Beat Police officials are assigned a cluster of neighborhoods, known as their beat area; they are expected to be thoroughly aware of the crime patterns and community life of that area. Most importantly, they are the primary source of police contact with the communities and engage in intelligence observation.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the Policing Act also designates the following Community Based Institutions:



**Community Police Setup of Police Districts in Madhya Pradesh**

| Citizen's Peace Committees | Pub Public Safety Committee | Public Safety Sub Committees | Police Volunteers |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Called- *Nagar Raksha Samiti* | (Formed by District Police) | (Carved out of Public Safety Committees and Sub Committees ) |
| Civil Administration and Police Combined *Representatives of Civil Society / Religious Groups/Cultural Groups/ Women's Groups* | Town level Public Safety Committee Members include Different urban Communities | **Women's Committee, Youth Committee, Sports Committees** | Support Crowd Management and Public Safety –Proactive Work. includes : Public Events Committees |
| | *Gram Raksha Samiti* | And | Religious Festivals Committees, |
| *Facilitated by District Civic Management Authorities* | Village Safety Committee Members from Citizen Representing Different Rural Communities | **Neighborhoods Committee-** covers each city neighborhood also called *mohalla* committee | Women's Safety Committees and Traffic Wardens |

**Figure 2.** District Policing and Community-based Police Structure.

*Citizens' Peace Committee*: A civic body consisting of representatives from community groups (religious, cultural, civil, professional, and political), formed to address communal issues in an engaging, cooperative manner. The DM is the president, and the SP is the secretary of the committee. Elected executives such as the mayor of a town and members of the state legislature appoint officials to represent them in committee meetings. Committee meetings are held at least monthly to provide a platform for community members to discuss significant matters of law and order and to communicate their concerns to the district administration and police. Important festivals, events, and emergent situations may lead to special meetings. The press regularly reports on the results of these meetings.

*Public Safety Committees*: Under the direction of the police, neighborhood-level public safety committees participate in peacekeeping and civilian safety/protection efforts. Separate community police forums for women and youths ensure the representation of all community members. The peace committees recruit volunteers to serve on *Festival Committees*, which contribute to crowd management and serve as spokespersons for religious groups during festival times. The public safety committees also appoint *community*

*police volunteers*, civilians who help manage crowds during religious processions, act as mediators between the civilian committees and the police and serve as official beat police officers when the police administration requires more manpower. According to the Indian Police Act, these volunteers are given special police powers during public events. Both men and women are made special police officers by the executive magistrates through the endorsement of Station House Officers under the permission of the SP of the district (Indian Police Act, 1861) [41].

## 5. Community Policing in Vidisha: A Case Study

In September 2018, the Superintendent of Police in Vidisha MP coordinated an operation of community policing that successfully mitigated a case of potential Muslim-Hindu conflict. The setting of the conflict was a rare event in the annual calendar of religious festivals: the Ashura festival mourning the death of Hussain for the Muslims and the Dol Gyaras festival of the Hindus happened to fall on the same night. In South Asia, festival observances typically conclude with an evening-long procession, where religious emotion plays a vital role in building a grand display of religious fervor. In this case, hundreds of devotees proceed through the narrow winding streets of Vidisha. Even in typical years, when worshippers from only a single religious tradition proceed through the streets, there is always a potential for at least minor conflict when they pass by members of another tradition. If left uncontained, a conflict that begins in one corner of the city can quickly spread to the rest of the city. For example, a major communal riot took place in 2016 in the Kotwali police station area. A Hindu youth was killed by Muslim youth, over a clash related to business matters unrelated to religious issues. Once the communities got involved, an interreligious riot ensued. A number of Muslim houses and slums were burned, and youths from both communities were beaten up. Police eventually controlled the situation and arrested offenders from both sides. But intercommunal tensions continued for a long time. In 2018, there was therefore a much greater potential for significant conflict since devotees of two different traditions might hope to proceed down the same streets at the same time. The SP narrates how Vidisha's police force succeeded, nonetheless, to maintain civil order.

### 5.1. Urban Setting of the Event: Local Streets and Monuments (Names of Streets and Localities Have Been Anonymized)

In memory of the Sufi saint, Pir Phoolwalay Shah, a shrine was erected in Vidisha, which came to be revered by both Muslims and Hindus. Over three centuries, a thickly populated bazaar grew around the shrine. The shrine is located near a narrow road that divides the Bajaj Khaana locality (predominantly Hindu) and the Tope Khaana locality (predominantly Muslim). Adjacent to the shrine is a mosque. A Krishna temple is located in Bajaj Khana, five hundred meters apart from the mosque. This road is one of the most communally sensitive areas of the town and has seen many communal riots between Hindus and Muslims. The police and the civic administration are required to keep the road under constant surveillance since it becomes the hub of a group conflict if left unguarded.

### 5.2. Cultural Setting of the Event: Religious Festival Observance

Our case concerns overlapping communal observances of the Hindu festival of Dol Gyaras (the 11th day of the lunar Hindu calendar) and the Muslim festival of Ashura (the 10th day of Muharram in the Islamic calendar). While the Hindu and Muslim festivals typically occur on different dates of the Gregorian calendar, they could still, on the rare occasion, fall on the same dates, as happens in our case study. In 2018, Dol Gyaras and Ashura happened to occur on the same night. 10th Muharram, the first month in the Islamic lunar calendar, marks the death anniversary of Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, observed by Shia Muslims through public mourning ceremonies, carrying *tazias* throughout the city, culminating in a large procession through late night. The Hindu

festival of Dol Gyaras celebrates the 18th day after the birth of the god Krishna, and similarly involves carrying an idol of Krishna around the city in a procession.

*5.3. Stages of the Police Operation*

5.3.1. Trigger Stage

In the summer of 2018, in its annual review of festival calendars, the state police discovered that the dates of certain Hindu and Muslim religious festivals would overlap during the month of September. The state police administration alerted the SP of Vidisha that this overlap might stimulate intercommunal conflict. This alert triggered police preparation in Vidisha.

The SP ordered his officers to take stock of the situation in early August, one and a half months before the festival dates. Senior officers managing Vidishawere told to survey the current law and order situation in their command areas, hold citizens' peace committee meetings, cultivate dialogue with religious groups, and activate public safety and neighborhood peace committees to prepare their towns for the peaceful celebration of each community's religious festivities. The senior officers were also instructed to refer to the communal climate of the district over the past five years and activate the district intelligence branch to observe communal elements that might potentially disrupt the current peacefully coexisting communities. The officers were also asked to review old criminal cases involving communal clashes and check previously charged persons who had been involved in communal violence according to police records.

5.3.2. Preparation

*Police Administration Meeting* (*10 August*): The SP called an initial meeting of senior police officers to share instructions about the coming festival. The intelligence chief reported on the past five years' interreligious incidents, including a major communal riot in 2016, which was the cause of ongoing Hindu-Muslim tensions over unsettled claims of compensation and justice. The SP strictly instructed his officers to resolve all such outstanding police investigations involving prior complaints that the Hindu community had against the Muslims and the Muslim community had against the Hindus. The police were concerned that, if these investigations were not completed, members of either community might retain their grievances and nurture suspicions that the police may favor the other community. Senior police officers were further instructed to contact significant religious leaders from both communities to build rapport and assess which of them would cooperate with police leadership. The SP also ordered the police to activate all pertinent community police groups, strengthen networks of intelligence informants, intensify review of social media, and, in various ways, strengthen bonds of trust within the community. On 18 August, the SP called a second meeting to review progress in all these areas of community preparation. The SP also held a press conference to inform the press that the police were seriously taking steps to ensure a peaceful public festival for both the communities, in order to remain transparent and give a message to troublemakers.

*Citizens' Peace Committee Meeting* (*21 August*): The SP and District Magistrate (DM) called and co-chaired a citizens' peace committee meeting to allow Hindu and Muslim festival organizing committees to state their requests for the upcoming festivals. The requests raised the defining challenge of this event of community policing. The primary points of contention were the overlapping routes and timings of each group's religious procession on 20 September. The Hindus specified 7 pm to 10 pm for Dol Gyaras while the Muslims specified 8 pm to 3 am for Ashura. The administration asked both groups to change either the route or the time of their procession, to avoid a clash between the two emotionally charged groups in the narrow streets. However, both festival committees staunchly refused to alter their timings or routes, arguing that doing so would compromise their tradition and rituals. The DM and SP asked appropriate representatives of the mayor, of the State Legislative Assembly, and of the National Parliament to provide alternate suggestions for cooperation, but the representatives refrained from actively engaging in

the discussion and did not offer any solutions. Because the political representatives offered little help, the DM and SP turned to respected city elders and civil society members for their input. The city elders urged the festival committees to work towards a mutually conducive alternative that would ensure a peaceful celebration for both communities. Observing that the committees were reluctant to respond, civil society members offered what appeared to be a reasonable solution: that either one of the groups could alter the exact time of its procession. The members of both committees shouted them down. Judging, at this point, that the festival committees would be unable to reach a resolution, the SP called off the meeting. He gave strict instructions to the festival committees: each group had to draw up a viable alternative and bring a delegation to the police office, to negotiate a solution that would avoid festival collisions on 20 September. The administration gave a 20-day deadline for these negotiations, calling for the next citizens' meeting on 10 September, where a final decision would be made.

*District Magistrate Meeting* (*24 August*): The DM met with senior police officials to review intelligence reports and other data that might enable them to identify sources of emergent communal tensions. They identified these sources: lingering grievances from the 2016 Muslim-Hindu riots; the neutral stance taken by the town's politicians; and the significant influence of radical members of the Hindu and Muslim festival committees. In light of this information, the DM and SP sought the assistance of influential leaders of political parties, with which the different religious communities were aligned, as an avenue to build dialogue between the two conflicting groups. Seeking leaders who might be more willing to help at such a challenging time, the SP re-engaged a Hindu leader with whom he already had successful working relations, and a Muslim leader who was a minorities affairs representative of the Member of Parliament (elected from that constituency) who had attended the peace committee meeting. The Hindu leader had previously received help from the police administration in resolving frequent traffic congestions in front of his shopping complex and had a relationship of trust with local police officers due to this experience. He agreed to ask the younger (more radically-minded) members of the festival committee to cooperate with the police for peacekeeping efforts. The Muslim leader was a respected land-owner in the neighboring agricultural communities, who cultivated a long-term relationship with the police as the police help was often needed in resolving land disputes in the vicinity of his property. He assured the SP of his cooperation if the administration remained neutral, did not succumb to far-right influences on majority religious lines, or violated constitutional norms. Both leaders agreed to take measures that would meliorate tensions among the young radical-minded members. Since there was no reliable support from the political executives of the area (who sought to avoid such contentious matters, the SP instructed all police officers to continue to hold community level meetings, invest in responsible citizen's support, engage in peacekeeping dialogue, and urge the communities to concentrate on the festivals rather than the conflict. The administration sought to persuade the conflicting groups to accept a compromise for the situation.

*Neighborhood Protection Committee Meetings* (*4–5 September*): On 4–5 September, neighborhood protection committee meetings were held for each delegation to meet the DM and SP to negotiate a solution for the day of the overlapping festivals. After intense deliberation, a solution was achieved: each procession would follow a common route at different times throughout the night. The Hindu procession would cross Bajaria road (the most contested and sensitive area) between 7:30 and 8:30 pm, while the Muslim procession would cross Bajaria road between 9:30 and 11:30 pm, to avoid clashes. The timings suited the respective ritual schedules of the respective communities and hence the solution was considered viable by both parties.

*Citizens' Peace Committee Meeting* (*10 September*): This meeting was held to publicize the preceding agreement. Supported by police intelligence and expressions of concern from some city elders, the SP anticipated that the narrow time gap between the processions (8:30 and 9:30) might occasion inter-group contact and, thus, violence. The SP, therefore,

mobilized community police volunteers from both communities to help the police manage the road conditions around the Pir shrine and other areas during the processions.

*5.4. Potential Conflict Management and Planning*

Conflict management was performed at multiple levels. The District Police administration decided to augment traditional "Crowd Control" and "Clash Mitigation" operations with community policing operations. A neighborhood peace committee meeting was held where community police volunteers were briefed and provided with proper uniforms and equipment. The policemen and women were also supplied with proper equipment, telecommunication sets, and vehicles for patrolling. The district rented additional patrol vehicles and borrowed extra vehicles and telecommunication sets from neighboring districts. The tear smoke shells and water cannon meant for dispersing agitating and violent mobs were also checked and police personnel were briefed about its use and modalities and precautions to be taken. The SHO and beat police maintained close relations with community members, while the SP was kept informed by his administration, the community police volunteers, and the festival committee members.

The SP and staff drew up a city security plan, designating police deployments on primary procession routes, particularly in sensitive areas. Police officers and community police volunteers were stationed at the Pir shrine and at the Hindu temple on Bajaria road. Anticipating possible tensions from overlapping processions, the SP ordered a reserve contingent of police officers and community police volunteers to be stationed at Ghaas mandi and Jai chowk, with tear gas and water cannons at the ready if the need arose. The police installed CCTV cameras and drone camera monitors in the police control room to survey the route, with special attention to the Pir shrine and Bajaria road areas. A police order was distributed, detailing all arrangements and police deployment for the day of the event.

*5.5. Action Implementation: Day of the Event (20 September)*

On the day of the event at 5:00 pm, the police and community police volunteers were briefed on the current communal atmosphere, necessary protocols, and precautions of duty. Each police contingent, led by a beat officer, was joined by community police volunteers to work in unison. Community police volunteers were supplied with police contact phone numbers to keep their police superiors updated. Police officers were instructed to leave community-based negotiations to the community police volunteers; police should intervene only if the volunteers were unable to establish dialogue and resolve the situation. Similarly, community police volunteers were directed to remain level-headed, to attempt negotiation where necessary, and to request police officers to intervene in situations that they could not control. At 5:30 pm, after briefings were completed, all forces were deployed to designated locations. All activities were monitored through CCTV monitors in the control room. Intelligence officers regularly updated the SP on the movement of the processions and other sites of religious activities. Each procession had a police contingent assigned to it: Contingent 1 (C1) for the Hindu procession (P1) and Contingent 2 (C2) for the Muslim procession (P2). To monitor conditions and prevent problems, contingents of policemen and women were placed at the front, back, and sides of the processions. Anti-harassment patrols containing women constables were added to protect women worshippers, spectators, and bystanders from harassment (historically a frequent source of communal conflict).

As anticipated by the SP, the processions started late. At 2:30 pm, C1 reported that, despite instructions to speed up, P1 took too much time to decorate their chariots and assemble their musicians. As a result, P1 began an hour late at 7:30 pm from the city tower area, which was the time it was supposed to reach Bajaria road. Right before entering Bajaria road, near Ghaas mandi, the procession began an elaborate, time-consuming ritual. By now it was clear if P1 continued at this pace, P2 would soon collide with it. Meanwhile, P2 began on time and was on its way to Bajaria road. The police prompted P1 to make haste, but a number of young worshippers became aggravated and argued to the police

that they were being prevented from performing their ritual properly. At the same time, the police requested P2 to slow down, but its leaders claimed that once the procession started, its pace could not be controlled and they must not be harassed. If the police attempted to halt either procession forcibly, there was a good chance that the emotionally charged worshippers would react violently, assuming the shape of large moving mobs, one pressing toward the other.

Pressed for an urgent response, senior police officers directed all extra police reinforcements to Ghaas mandi square: a large open space that stood along the routes of both processions and at the intersection of roads in an otherwise congested bazaar. The police divided the crossroads square into two sections, one for each procession. With the help of community police volunteers and certain religious leaders on both sides who had engaged in intensive negotiation with the processions, P1 agreed to complete its ritual where it had stopped, while P2 agreed to pass by as quickly as possible. Senior police officers on the scene realized that the makeshift division on the square was undefined and a collision could easily be orchestrated by troublemakers from either procession. To prevent such a situation, community police volunteers were asked to form a human chain that would demarcate a division on the square. Across the square and parallel to this chain, policemen formed a second human chain, to demarcate and facilitate the movement of the competing groups on the road. The passage was thus created for P2 to pass by P1.

C2 cordoned off P2 from the side where P1's ritual was taking place, while C1 cordoned off P1 from its side, thereby creating a buffer for passage. In the midst of competing for religious fervor and chanting, as P2 approached the square, P1 increased the volume of its music and religious chanting. P2 responded in kind and increased the volume of its mourning music and the announcements being played on speakers. The demarcation was firmly maintained by the respective human chains of community police volunteers backed by police officers. Scrutinizing the activities in and around the square, senior police officers and municipal magistrates provided oversight and guidance. The police retained control of the situation; P2 passed the sensitive area without any problems from P1. An unanticipated situation now emerged, where P2 was ahead of P1 on the contentious route.

According to the festival celebration circular of the district civic authorities, P2 had been granted permission for religious festivities till 3:00 am at night while P1 had to end festivities earlier, by 12:00 am. Thus, it was important for the Hindu worshippers to move quicker than the Muslim group. This led to another unanticipated situation, where P1 had to overtake P2 to reach the temple to complete its rituals on time. Once again, with the help of the leaders of the processions, the police convinced P2 to halt by the bend of the mosque near Pir bazaar while P1 passed by. Community police volunteers and police officers formed human chains again to accommodate passage, and the processions continued their activities according to the route and time that had been predetermined. Senior police officers and municipal magistrates provided visible, on-site oversight: signaling by their presence that peace would be maintained. Both processions passed by peacefully, under the vigilant gaze of community police volunteers and police officers deployed all along the route.

The police and community police volunteers monitored and supervised the situation until 4:00 am, when both processions completed their rituals and the crowds went home. The police pickets remained in sensitive areas for another 24 h after the festival night. Two police patrols covered the town to ensure that no issues arose among the communities. Intelligence reports indicated that there were no negative reactions from the communities and no reports of communal conflicts from the patrols. In accordance with the public order mandate, a Communal Incident Report was sent to Police Headquarters stating that the administration successfully managed the two religious processions with the help of community police volunteers and representatives from the religious groups. The following week, the DM and SP received delegations from each religious group, expressing their appreciation to the administration for its peacekeeping efforts throughout the festivals.

## 6. Key Features of the Community Police Operation

In Figure 3, the SP diagrams his experience of managing this event of inter-religious group conflict and peace. The most instructive features of the conflict mitigation operation are its:
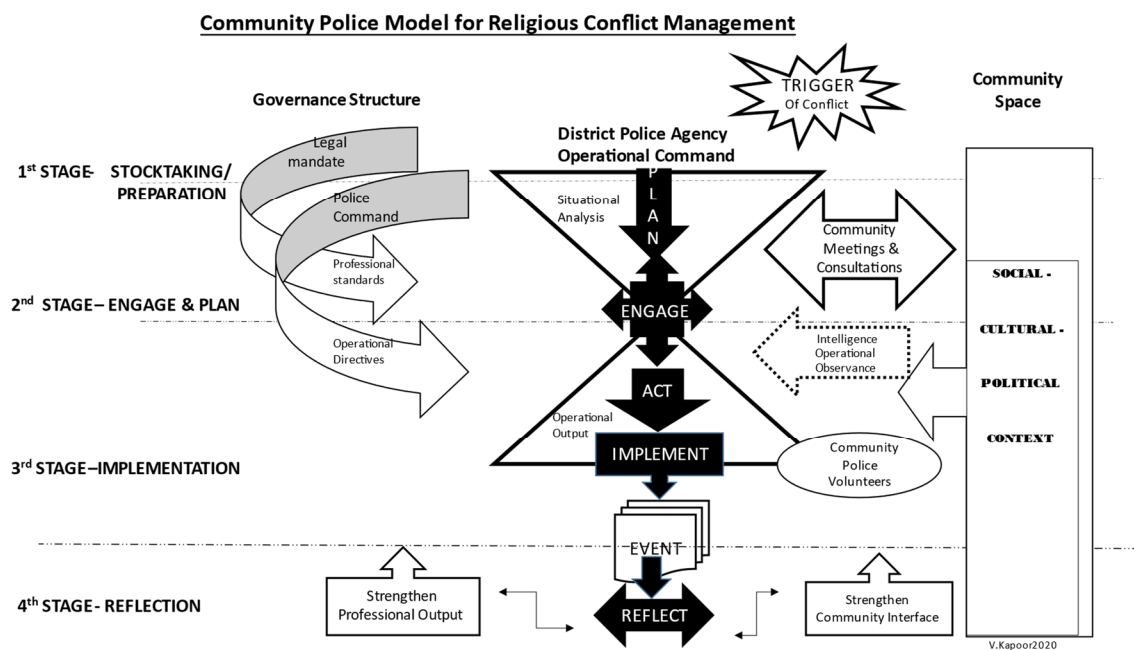
**Community Police Model for Religious Conflict Management**



**Figure 3.** SP's Diagram of the Police Operation.

*Distinctive Stages*: The operation occurred in identifiable stages: Stock-taking, Preparatory engagements, Implementing action plan, review.

*Conflict Drivers and Triggers*: Planning for the operation began approximately two months prior to the festivals. Reviewing the Hindu and Muslim holiday calendars, the DM and SP began to plan for anticipated potential interreligious conflict on the date of overlapping observances. They summoned the police command structure to begin stocktaking, reviewing the history of Muslim-Hindu conflicts in Vidisha, and identifying ongoing community grievances that could drive the conflict.

*Inherited Guidelines and Infrastructure*: As illustrated by the arrows on the left side of the diagram, police preparations were guided by an inherited infrastructure and rules for community policing.

*Real-time Engagement with Community Life*: As illustrated by the horizontal arrows on the middle-right side of the diagram, police planning emerged out of continual interaction with community stakeholders, rather than by a strictly top-down process of decision making. This interaction included ad hoc dialogue and negotiation.

*Ongoing Observation and Intelligence*: In addition to interactions with the community, police planning was also informed by traditional practices of intelligence and observation and by information provided by community volunteers.

*Action Plan and Implementation*: The long stages of stocktaking and preparatory engagement culminated in an action plan that specifies how the police force would be deployed on the day of the religious processions. The action plan is a formal manual of instructions for police conduct on that day, including a protocol to engage in negotiation and persuasive activity and to use coercive force only as a last resort.

*Review*: Interreligious community policing relies on a detailed collective memory of how the city's population has behaved during prior religious observances, including all cases of interreligious tension and conflict. The process of collective memory begins with police efforts to review the results of each prior operation that was comparable to this one.

This review includes assessments of what contributed to a given conflict and of which police actions were successful or unsuccessful in mitigating that conflict.

## 7. Lessons Learned

Future United Nations police activities in peace operations will concentrate on building institutional police capacity in post-conflict environments. The conditions of violent conflict today are increasingly localized and increasingly mobilized by ideological and religious passions. To address these conditions, UN peacekeepers need to engage with host-nation community police forces and foster strategies for long-term dialogue between community police and local religious and ideological groups. Reactive policing fails to ameliorate potential inter-religious conflict. Successful policing requires advanced planning and relies on the resources of a well-established institutional infrastructure and long-term cooperation among police and local, state, and national administrations. We may expect that, in more complex, multidimensional missions, UN Police will increasingly move away from monitoring to active participation in police reform: restructuring, training, and advising host country police agencies so that they become self-sustaining. The UN must deploy quality police officers with skills in community policing. The UN police must ensure that the local police forces are representative of their society and can protect human rights. The police must be accountable to the law, to the democratic and political institutions of government, to the public, and to civil society institutions.

*Institutional Infrastructure*: UN peacekeepers need to advise host nations on best practices of community policing. Successful community policing, particularly one that is addressing conflict among religious or ideological groups, relies on a governmental, bureaucratic, and strategic infrastructure. In the case of MP, such an infrastructure emerged over more than three decades of governmental planning and policing practice. The infrastructure coordinates the activities of government institutions (national, regional, local), local community agencies and committees (representing broad segments of the population), and the regional and local police forces.

*Institutionalized Community Involvement*: As illustrated in our case study, Vidisha's Citizens Peace Committee plays a central role in successful community policing. In whatever region or state, community policing requires continual engagement with a broad array of community actors: as illustrated in Vidisha by police engagement with various civic committees and volunteer groups.

*Diversity Engaged and Embedded Multicultural Community Police Orientation*: Community police must engage a region's social, cultural, ethnic, religious, and lifestyle diversity [42]. Police planning must anticipate each community's primary constraints, as illustrated in our case study by the attention MP police paid to the significance of festival calendars in Vidisha's history of Muslim-Hindu tension.

*Attention to Local Conditions*: Community policing addresses local conflicts, set against the backdrop of local geographies, histories, and demographics. Conflicts are set in distinct contexts of relations among particular groups. Police are, of course, trained in general disciplines of policing that may be similar to practices in other locations in the state and other locations globally. But community policing succeeds when those general disciplines are shaped to address the singular characteristics of a conflict at hand, including the social groups and individuals that are stakeholders in that conflict. Community policing succeeds when most members of the police force reside in the area and have personal familiarity with most or many members of the conflicting groups as well as the neighboring populations. Local police have observed local intergroup relations over many years. They have gained familiarity with friendships and tensions within various groups and with the capacities of community members to act as volunteer peacemakers. They are also familiar with local spoilers who may seek to hinder peacekeeping efforts. If spoilers are not controlled or neutralized or brought into the process, they can upset the legitimacy of the process as well as of the police.

*Attention to the unique characteristics of local religious groups and of local inter-religious conflict*: The drivers of local religious conflict display characteristics that are specific to the religious heritage of each party to the conflict as well as to the local contexts and histories of relations among these parties. Successful policing requires an inherited institutional infrastructure that integrates the kinds of resources deployed by Vidisha's community police: long term relations with members and leaders of local religious groups (as well as of other societal groups), deep familiarity with local religious practices (of which festival observance is only one of many), cooperative working relations with the city, state, and national administrations, a history of protecting human rights that also include the right to religious worship and identity, a history of observing granular details of local practices and of listening to the specific beliefs, wants, concerns, and challenges of each religious group.

*A Conflict-Based Mindset*: Successful community policing is attentive to the long-term potential of conflict within the community and addresses itself to drivers of conflict. Such policing anticipates occurrences of violence and takes proactive measures to mitigate the possibility of such violence based on recent histories of conflict.

*Operational Approach*: Beginning with a firm understanding of what has worked in the past, an operational approach redesigns and deploys past experience flexibly for future success. As diagrammed in Figure 3, an operational approach responds to verifiable triggers of conflict by deploying inherited institutional resources in new ways responsive to new conditions, deepening cooperative relations with all pertinent agencies and community groups, and by pursuing a disciplined sequence of essential peacekeeping actions: from stocktaking to cooperative engagements to implementation and to reflection.

*Prioritizing Non-Coercive Force*: Successful community policing retains the capacity to use coercive force when necessary but owes its success to the predominant use of persuasive force or soft power. As illustrated in the case study, persuasive activity takes time, patience, ingenuity, and continual vigilance, supported by a broad infrastructure and by the commanders' attention to changing conditions and to communal responses to police engagement. "With regard to the conventional law and order function, there is evidence that the police's drive to control public spaces can lead some officers to use heavy-handed tactics. Thirty-three percent of urban migrants in India reported having experienced violent police actions in the previous year" [43]. Such tactics are a violation of democratic values and professional norms. But they are more likely to occur when officers perceive no other avenue to preserve order. By contrast, successful community policing takes a citizen-centric approach, engaging religious leaders and community groups in long-term processes of dialogue, problem-solving, and shared management for the sake of peace. Successful community policing requires cooperation and coordination across multiple agencies. "Managing crowds, traffic flows, and processions requires coordination with other agencies, as well as support from citizens, many of whom volunteer to assist the police. When the police plan and execute with societal input, they expand the set of tools available for maintaining order" (Mangla & Kapoor, 2020) [44].

*Flexibility*: Successful community policing continually adjusts its rules and strategies to changing contexts and events. As illustrated in our case study, community policing rests on a well-developed and coordinated infrastructure that bridges governmental and community agencies. At the same time, local police forces must continually recalibrate and adapt their strategies to real-time conditions.

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