

Effectiveness of Community Policing in Combating Insecurity in Nigeria¹Akpanke, Betiang Joseph (Ph.D), ²Odey, Joseph Ogbinyi (Ph.D), & Ezor, Kelvin Issac.¹ & ³Dept. Of Political Science, University of Calabar, Calabar² International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance**Corresponding Author:** Dr. Odey, Joseph Ogbinyi +(234)-8036081749 ogbinyijnr@yahoo.com**Abstract**

Insecurity is a topical issue in every nation but prevalent in Third World countries particularly in Nigeria. The inability and ineffectiveness of the security forces to combat insecurity and rising incessant crimes and killings necessitate the need for community policing as a solution strategy. The aim of this paper is to assess the effectiveness of community policing on insecurity in Nigeria. Secondary sources of data were primarily explored for the study. Extant literature on topical issues were reviewed and the Normative Sponsor theory was adopted. From the analysis, it is evident that community policing has positively reduced crime rates in several parts of Nigeria. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, public loss of trust and confidence, inadequate manpower, selective enforcement of law syndrome, poor community relations, 'godfatherism', lack of visionary schemes have frustrated every effort to improve and stabilize police-public cooperation which is a pre-condition for effective community policing. The study recommended that there is need for provisions of adequate funding on community policing by the government; there is also the need to establish proper communication channel between the police and the community heads like the traditional rulers and chiefs, among others.

Keywords: Community Policing, Insecurity, Crime, Decentralization, Vigilantes**Introduction**

The ineffectiveness of the Nigerian police force exacerbated the increase in crime activities across the nooks and crannies of the Nigerian state. Insecurity is at its peak. The concentration of security issues at the centre is no longer realizable due to the nature and complexities of the Nigerian states. Nigeria has become a nightmare, threatened by kidnappers, bandits, secessionist movements, herder's crisis, Boko Haramist and lots more (Mbam et al, 2024). The country is plagued in the North-East by ISWAP, Boko Haram, and other Islamic terror groups; in the North-West by bandits and kidnappers, in the North-Central by genocidal Fulani herdsmen; and in the South-East by arsonists, kidnappers and killers camouflaging as Biafra secessionists, while the South-West is troubled by assorted criminals, thugs, and kidnappers.

To ameliorate the incidence of crime, the federal government embarked on the criminalization of terrorism and passed the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2011, fundamental surveillance as well as investigation of criminal related offenses, heightening of physical security measures around the country aimed at deterring or disrupting potential attacks, strengthening of security agencies through the provision of security facilities and the development and broadcast of security tips in mass media(Nigeria-South Africa Chamber of Commerce Webinar on 28th, January, 2021).

Despite these efforts, the level of insecurity in the country is increasing at an alarming rates. Reports on killings, kidnappings, terrorism, banditry, cult violence and armed robbery pop up daily notwithstanding notable interdiction actions, and impacting negatively on socioeconomic activities. Example, on 14th April, 2014, about 275 school girls were abducted by Boko Haram in the town of Chibok; the abduction of 300 school girls and staff in Nigerin state, killings of Christians and Moslems in Churches and Mosques, hundreds of killings by gunmen in Yelewata community in Benue etc, (BBC, 23rd November, 2025). A report by Global Rights stated that Boko Haram/ISWAP, gunmen and insurgents killed 555 Nigerians and kidnapped 267 others between May 29 and July 3, 2023.

These menaces awaken serious concern by the government. The rise in the cost of living and inflationary trend are the consequences of insecurity. Insecurity has also crumbled many local businesses and foreign companies, as regards to unfavourable environment for business to thrive, couple with other factors (Zekeri & Augustine, 2022). The inefficiencies of the federal government to resolve the insecurity challenges necessitate the need for a rapid solution.

The clamour for community policing, coupled with agitations for state's regional policing to combat insecurity has generated mixed reactions (Gabriel, 2021). This study assessed the effectiveness of community policing, as a remedy to insecurity in Nigeria, it's challenges and way forward. This analysis relies primarily on secondary sources.

Statement of the Problem

The clamour for a proactive strategy to solving crimes and insecurity in Nigeria necessitates the call for community policing. In the views of Brown & Keating (2020), community policing can improve security outcomes by fostering collaboration between law enforcement and civilians. Some regions have recorded lower crime due to police-community collaboration, others continue to struggle due to poor implementation, lack of trust, and political interference (Nwankwo, 2021). Critics argued that Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious landscape creates additional complexities in community policing. In some regions, community policing structures have been hijacked by ethnic or political groups, leading to bias and discrimination in security enforcement (Ojo, 2021). Political interference also affects the impartiality of community policing initiatives, limiting their effectiveness. Eze (2021), argued that there is often resistance from conventional police officers who view community policing as a threat to their authority and job security, thereby leading to conflicts between community police officers and traditional law enforcement personnel, hindering collaboration and effectiveness. Others argued that community policing requires substantial financial investment for training, equipment, logistics, and community engagement programs. The arguments for or against the effectiveness of community policing in combating insecurity necessitate the study.

Conceptual Framework

Community Policing (C.P)

Community policing involves the community and police working together on common community issues or problems. The vagueness of the concept of community policing and the variations in trajectories and operational meaning of this model make it easy to understand why almost every author in this field seems to come with his or her own definition (Cordner, 2014). The centre idea of the term is the organization, coordination and mobilization of members of a locality in solving insecurity at the grassroots level.

Community Policing contains three elements: citizen involvement, problem solving, and decentralization (Skogan & Hartnett, 1997; Skogan, 2019). Another well-known definition was given by Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1990): 'community policing is both a philosophy and organizational strategy to allow community residents and police to work together in new ways to solve problems of crime, physical and social disorder and neighbourhood decay.' The term has become one of the worldwide most popular models of policing. After its initial implementation in many Western countries, community policing has also been transferred to transitional societies often without strong democratic traditions. The international diffusion of community policing should not make us forget that community policing comes in all shapes and sizes and is highly varied in its operations (Jacques, 2021).

Insecurity

Insecurity is a major challenge, deeply rooted in Nigeria's socio-economic and political spheres. Insecurity has multi definitions and according to Chris (2021), it is the state of fear or anxiety, stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. This definition reflects physical insecurity which is the most visible form of insecurity, and it feeds into many other forms of insecurity such as economic security and social security, political, environmental insecurity. While security means freedom from all forms of threats, attacks, fears, and anxiety, insecurity means not feeling of or absence of security or exposure to danger; hazard; uncertainty; want of confidence; doubtful; inadequately guarded or protected; lacking stability; troubled; lack of protection; and unsafe (Jafaru, Alhaji, & Musa, 2024), (Abdulazeez & Magaji, 2023). Insecurity is identified as one of the obstacles to sustainable development (Abdullahi, 2020). Widespread insecurity like war, terrorism, insurgency, sectarian violence, banditry, kidnapping, coup de tat, political violence, ethno religious crises and farmers' herdsman conflicts across the world and Africa in particular present

society characterized by extreme poverty, hunger, disease, squalor, unemployment and death; heightens tension and mistrust; weakens social cohesion (Ishaku, 2020).

Crimes

Crime, according to Adebayo (2013), is a threat to the fabric of society. It causes unneeded suffering, agony, loss of lives, and damage to properties while instilling dread in the population. The safety and stability of society are also at risk. Wilson (2015) observed that crime is a social fact, a dangerous phenomenon in any city, region, or nation. Crime is an act that is in contradiction to the law and is considered as unacceptable immoral act. Osawe (2015) defined crime as an unlawful conduct; unlawful activity that entails breaking the law; immoral action that is considered inappropriate; and an act that is humiliating, imprudent, and regrettable. According to Adebayo (2013), crime is a breach of the social norms that all members of society are expected to uphold. As a result, the rest of society punishes the violators. When crimes are committed, society suffers the repercussions. Muhammad (2008) listed the dysfunctional family structures, social environments, and economic conditions as the reasons for crime. According to him, the economic scenario includes poverty and inequality, which may make it difficult for a father to send his kids to school, giving those kids a chance to spend most of their time on the streets and develop criminal thoughts. Douglason (2009) pointed out that there are several costs associated with crime for both society and the economy, including lost wages, property damage, decreased local productivity, etc. Psychological impact on victims and their family and friends, pain and suffering, and a worse quality of life are among other less obvious costs of crime. The greatest expense in all of these and other related losses is the loss of life.

Crimes are motivated by a number of factors that have their roots in community norms. It frequently results from social determinants which cause large rises in societal crime rates when they are not appropriately addressed. Farbod, Kamal and Maulan (2017), cited that these social forces include peer groups, social media, peer status, education, religion, and belief systems. Skogan (2015), contends that social forces can most effectively combat crime if they are properly harnessed, which calls for, according to Skogan (2008) focusing resources on preventing disorder, social nuisance, and minor offenses like vandalism, drinking in public, loitering, rowdiness, and disorderly behaviour as well as upgrading dilapidated physical structures in urban areas.

Theoretical Framework

1. The Normative Sponsorship Theory

The theory was collaboratively developed by Christopher Sower, Walter Holland, Manfred Tiedke, and John Freeman in 1957. The Normative sponsorship theory is a community oriented policing, which states that people with shared interests will cooperate to achieve their goals, provided these goals align with established norms and values. They proponents argued that the more congruent the beliefs and values of stakeholders, the more likely they are to sponsor change and work together effectively. Thus, the theory advocates for community involvement in shaping policing norms and fostering trust to enhance effectiveness. The idea is that police and community members must work together to define common goals and mobilize resources to reduce crime.

In the context of community policing, the normative sponsorship theory posits that people and communities actively shape the norms and values that direct their conduct (Greene, 2000). This idea holds that people in the community can serve as normative sponsors, influencing and supporting proper police behavior that is consistent with community norms (Gill et al, 2014). According to the Normative Sponsorship Theory, when community people and police officers work together to define and promote positive norms and behaviors, it increases public trust, police legitimacy, and legal compliance (Sunshine, 2003).

Contemporarily, crimes and insecurity has a retrogressive effect on every community thus, the effectiveness of community policing is evident on the supports, shared values and ultimate goal of the Nigerian security agencies which primary responsibility is to maintain law and order. This collaboration helps in developing a shared understanding of the desired policing behaviors and practices within the community (Braga, A. A., & Weisburd, D., 2010). The theoretical integration of Normative Sponsorship theory into community policing offers a promising avenue for building safer communities. By involving community members as normative sponsors, the police can align their practices with community values, enhance legitimacy, and foster trust.

Insecurity in Nigeria

Nigeria's multi-sectoral activities have been severely trampled as a result of the consistent hostilities and killings in the country's region, especially in the North West and North Central region. The economic sector, most especially agricultural activities has been on the decrease owing to the activities of famers-herders' crisis, kidnappers and bandits. Boko haram terrorist has been ravaging the Northern part of Nigeria (Edime & Olugbenga, 2025). The situation became worsen, since the inception of the late president Yar Adua's administration, with the rise of militancy in the Niger Delta; exacerbated by the activities of the Boko haram terrorist inherent in former president Goodluck's administration, and intensified in the president Mohammadu Buhari's administration, with the proliferation of activities like kidnapping, banditry, unknown gunmen, herders' crises, Islamic State West African Province (ISIS) movements etc. Agitations by ethnic groups in Eastern region of Nigeria such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) has also been regarded as threats to undermining the territorial sovereignty of the federal government (Segun, 2021: The Guardian). Several activities of incessant killings have been linked to these bodies

Decentralization of Security System

Decentralization of security denotes a security system in a federal structure that the state government, operating independently and though is in a federal structure, is not controlled by the federal government, but rather by the state government. This brings us to the concept of State policing. According to Aremu (2014) "state police is territorial policing which has a subnational form of policing in which there is devolution of security operations in the hands of the federating states or regions." Okaiyeto (2021) observes that "state policing operationally is when policing and all its operations and logistics are controlled by other governments other than the national or federal government."

There are agitations for the restoration of a decentralized security system since it was abolished by General Ironsi in 1966. Proponents of a decentralized police force argur that the single Nigerian police force is overly politicized, underfunded, unmotivated, unequipped, poorly trained, corrupt, abusive, and completely alienated from the local community. They also blame the force for rampant insecurity and pervasive lawlessness, kidnapping, armed robberies, political assassinations, communal conflicts, ritual murders, crude oil theft in the Niger Delta, and sectorial insurgency in the North. Thus, they advocate for a multi-tiered decentralized policing framework with distinct national, state, local, and community police organizations to address the many levels of policing needs (Amucheazi & Ekweremadu, 2015). Most of the crimes escalating do so in local communities and as such, becomes easier for local policing, as the officers would not only be familiar with the territory, but understand the thinking pattern of the criminals involved.

On the contrary, critics argued that this may resort to abuse by some overly ambitious governors and power-crazed politicians, particularly towards political rivals and enemies. Orifowoma & Taiwo (2020), chronicled the abuse of the federal police force in 2003 by Gbenga Daniel, a former governor of Ogun State, who directed the closure of the House of Assembly based on flimsy disagreements with the leadership of the House of Assembly. In line with this, state governors may repeat the mistakes of their predecessors by using the state police force as personal property, intimidating other political opponents, and toppling anyone they choose, as was the case with practically every local government chairman. Should there be a dispute, the governors may use the state police forces for less ethical tasks like manipulating the results of elections, intimidating political opponents, and other strange tasks like annihilating competing ethnic groups. Crime, however, thrived outside of the veil of the reasons outlined for the fear of decentralization. Ugwu et al. (2013) observed that Nigeria is plagued by a number of crimes, including terrorism from the Boko Haram Islamic group, kidnapping, child trafficking, Niger Delta Avengers, and other associated crimes like banditry that were not previously known to the public, particularly in the early 1960s and 1970s. Majority of these crimes are primarily committed in rural regions, hence it is important to have proper security oversight to curtail or, if feasible, eradicate them.

Agwanwo (2014), explains that "state police" refers to the policing apparatus that the state government creates, for the purpose of policing the state. Nigeria falls into this circumstance to checkmate the ongoing insecurity wreaking havoc on the polity due to its heterogeneous population, various cultures, and languages. In the opinion of Anyadike & Eme (2021), the establishment of a state police organization would be a significant step towards the nation's long-desired real federalism, which has eluded the country for a very long time.

Community Policing and Internal Security System in Nigeria

Community policing is a shift from traditional reactive and incident-based policing to proactive problem-solving policing with the community as a cornerstone of policing (Bamidele, 2020). In Nigeria, it was launched by Mr Tafa Balogun the then Inspector-General of Police during President Olusegun's Obasanjo administration, on 27 April, 2004 (Ndukwe 2018). Ikoh (2013) noted that the Nigeria Police first proposed the idea of setting up community policing in July 2004, while analyzing the need for effective community policing as a different strategy in the fight against Nigeria's rising crime rate. To ensure that people have a high-quality of life, the police collaborate with the public, organizations, and governmental agencies to identify and address general obstacles or issues related to infractions and other forms of disorder, particularly those coming from criminal networks, insurgent groups, and terrorist organizations.

There have been varieties of innovations and programmes of community policing to promote efficiency and acceptability by the people of the community. Some of these include the establishment of police posts possibly to help in providing walk-in reporting crimes, distribution of crime prevention and operation information, identification information, recruitment and holding meetings with neighbourhood watch groups and a host of other local groups (Ikoh, 2013).

Security organizations in Nigeria served as an alternative source to work alongside policing in villages and cities all across the nation. This practice is known as "vigilantism" or "vigilante groups." The term "vigilantism" by Abdul-Qadir et al. (2020), has Spanish origins and originally meant "awake or observe" or "watch or guard." In the modern Nigerian society, vigilante groups are primarily made up of volunteers with the support of the government and the law enforcement agencies and the consent of the community in fighting crime. The police force cannot stop crime and insurgencies on their own in the nation. Although informal and frequently supported by community contributions, this type of communal policing was initially established to protect neighbourhoods and has proven successful in reducing crime in neighbourhoods across the nation (Olujinmi, 2005).

Vigilante is used to describe a variety of groups, most notably the O'dua People's Congress (OPC) in the South-West and the Bakassi Boys in the Southeast. The Yan Kato Gagora and Hisbah were both located in Northern Nigeria, with the latter being specifically established to uphold Sharia or Islamic law. The OPC in South West Nigeria is one example of a vigilante group that was founded along ethnic lines (Ogbozor, 2016). In Nigeria, the vigilante groups exist to help guarantee security, law, order and stability to the citizens of each community. Generally, the groups are known to be more active at night than during the day. Usually able-bodied young men of each community supported financially and/or materially by the other community members (those not involved in community policing, but are members of the community) are empowered with the task of safeguarding the society and enforcing laws, often with the assistance of small weapons such as machetes, spears, bows and arrows and some guns.

Effectiveness of Community Policing on Crime Reduction in Nigeria

The need for community policing as a supporting mechanism to law enforcement agencies cannot be overemphasize. A research conducted by Muhammad Hassan (2016), reveals that community policing initiatives have impacted the life of people in Kano metropolis, by reducing crime and positively transforming the people's lives in a safer environment and also maintaining an orderly society. The research has shown that the Nigerian Police have series of crime reduction activities under community policing initiative in Kano metropolis such as; joint patrol, crime information, crime detection as well as training of vigilante groups.

Another researcher, Otodo et. al. (2025) in Abia, investigates the effectiveness of community policing in reducing crime rates and enhancing police-community collaboration, identifying the barriers to successful implementation. They discovered that while community policing has improved information sharing and intelligence gathering, its potential is hindered by resource constraints, resistance from conventional police officers, and a lack of genuine engagement with the community. Mistrust and scepticism about the police's intentions continue to undermine effective collaboration. They recommended that strengthening collaboration between police and community members, allocating adequate resources, and promoting ethical behaviour among officers are key to ensuring the success of community policing initiatives.

Gabriella (2025), stated four reasons why community policing is effective. In summary, he mentioned that community policing: builds trust and encourages community compliance; creates a positive perception of law enforcement for children; reduces crime rate; and promotes accountability in policing. Akinlabi (2022); Omilusi &

Isaac (2020); Arisukwu & Okunolam (2013) noted that Nigeria including various countries has implemented community policing and it has recorded various success in lowering crime and improving the relationship between the people and the public. Thus, the Nigerian Police Force has established community policing units in different states, working intimately with community leaders and members to identify and address local security challenges. The Security, Justice and Growth programme, supported by Department for International Development (DFID) Nigeria and implemented by the British Council, revealed that Community Policing has been introduced to various extents and depths in pilot Divisions in the following 18 States: FCT, Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Benue, Kogi, Kano, Kaduna, Jigawa, Bauchi, Katsina, Borno, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Cross River, Oyo and Edo States. Without exception, all of the pilot Divisions have achieved many successes as a result of the introduction of Community Policing. Moreover, officers from the pilot Divisions have actively trained personnel from neighbouring Divisions to promulgate best practice.

LaGrange (1993); Wilson, et. al. (in Lombardo and Lough (2007) believed that the major positive effects of community policing include: reduction of fear of crime, greater citizen satisfaction and involvement, improved police-community relations and social cohesion, improved flow of information from citizens, and enhance quality of community life. Community policing also has prospects in Nigeria because it is compatible with the present upsurge in the formation and proliferation of Neighbourhood watch/vigilante groups, such as, Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northereastern Nigeria, Niger Delta Region etc especially, in the rural areas where most members of the group come from and avoid 'strangers' policing 'strangers' as was introduced by the colonial masters at the inception of the police force in 1930s which was however, incompatible with the traditional philosophy of community policing in Nigeria.

Challenges of Community Policing in Nigeria

Community policing is awash with obstacles, namely, bribery and corruption, selective enforcement of law, community negative perception of police, inadequate funding, public loss of trust and confidence, inadequate manpower, poor community relations, 'godfatherism', lack of visionary schemes, among others. Bribery-cum-corruption is particularly systemic in the Nigeria police formation; a situation which some observers in the country referred to as an intractable problem (Alemika, 1999; Karimu, 2015). Furthermore, the police organisation in Nigeria is facing serious obstacles which have continued to affect its legitimacy and the performance of its functions of crime prevention, control, or management.

These challenges include poor funding by the government, systemic corruption and internal decadence, inadequate manpower, partisanship, ethnicity, lack of accountability, defects in constitutional provisions, and apparent lack of public confidence, further leading to weak or low legitimacy (Otu & Aro, 2013). In community policing, the community tend to control the police and get them corrupt in the process. The implication is that when the police are controlled by the community, the police connive at their illegal activities (Carter, 2002). This auspicious security measure has suffered for many years under the taint of corruption. On this note, the police may deliberately use illegal or unconstitutional means to make arrests and, in the process, ensure that the charges are thrown out of court. Police corruption is indeed multidimensional and complex; it takes various forms within and outside the police organisation. The rot and decadence in the police subsystem are: include kickbacks, favouritism, recruitment malpractice, partisanship, complicity, whitewash and cover-up, and romantic exuberances and compensation. All these shortcomings are inimical to effective community policing in Nigeria.

One of the major setbacks in C.P is the selective enforcement of law syndrome that is commonplace in Nigeria. The poor and minority groups in the community tend to alienate themselves from the police because most of the law enforcement operations focus on the behaviours of the poor, minorities, downtrodden and underprivileged members of the society. The problem centres on widespread favouritism to a group of politicians and privileged upper class community members. On that score, the community has negative perception of the police. Alemika (1988) argued that the negative community perception of police has impacts on their job performances. The community negative perception of police affects their ability to remain focus and maintain professionalism.

In order to surmount the identifiable enormous C.P challenges in Nigeria, the system must have sufficient qualified manpower. Unfortunately, inadequate manpower is another obstacle confronting effective community policing in the country. Akuul (2011), stated that inadequate manpower and poor deployment of personnel are the stumbling blocks to effective community policing in Nigeria. The Nigeria police experience endemic problems with

recruiting, training, inefficiency and indiscipline, and lack of expertise in specialised fields. Corruption and dishonesty are widespread, thus engendering a low level of public confidence, failure to report crime and tendencies to resort to self-help policing (Dambazau, 2007), rather than true community policing. This problem is compounded as recruitment and promotion of police personnel, and application of law and justice are in the hands of political godfather. Godfatherism in Nigeria is an Achilles' heel in community policing. To some observers like Onyeozili (2005), 'godfatherism' is the "funding and abetting of vices and shielding connected criminals from justice by government agents and highly placed officials entrusted with the power and authority to investigate and prosecute such vices". When some powerful Nigerians nurture and incubate criminals, the police are presented with the situation of not being successful in removing the criminals from the community.

Conclusion

The centralization of security agencies does not ensure swift response to crime prevention. Nigeria's vast population, landmass and geographical settings posed a challenge for a centralized security system. This system does not tackle insecurity at grass root due to bottlenecks and bureaucratic procedures.

The call for the decentralization of the police force becomes imperative. However, there is need for harmonizing and coordinating local communities on crime prevention in their localities. Hence, the government must coordinate local vigilantes in partnership with the police and major stakeholders. These strategies has proven effective over time. Some states in the federation have established state police but these agencies are restrained with the use of firearms. Amotekun is largely successful in improving security in Southwest Nigeria by curbing crime, rescuing kidnap victims, and reducing farmer-herder conflicts, and it serves as a model for community-led, decentralized security initiatives.

Recommendations

The study recommended the following:

1. Vigilante groups are community policing stakeholders; as such they should be consulted and be fully involve in curbing crime at the grassroots level.
2. The police should ensure proper and effective communication channel with community members such as the traditional rulers and chiefs; youth leaders among others, to enable good intelligence gathering.
3. There is need for adequate funding and solidification of the community policing system by creating special funds for oversight functions, supported by cooperate bodies and Non-governmental organization as part of their Cooperate Social Responsibility.
3. Community members as volunteers for vigilantes' services, must be subjected to proper and rigorous scrutiny. Men of integrity and good conduct, ratified by the community heads be selected to curb the infiltration of miscreants into the system
4. Public awareness by the police and sensitization on crimes prevention strategies to communities will help to reduce insecurity. This will create consciousness of illicit activities that may lead to insecurity thereby reporting same to the appropriate security agents.

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