

COMMUNITY POLICING AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN TARABA STATE

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Abstract

This paper investigates the challenges hindering the effectiveness of community policing in enhancing national security in Nigeria. The objective is to explore the concept and implementation of community policing and its implications for national security, focusing on how social structures influence policing outcomes. Despite its strategic adoption to combat rising insecurity, community policing in Nigeria faces persistent issues such as lack of trust between the police and citizens, poor community engagement, insufficient resources, and systemic corruption. Anchored on Social Capital Theory, the study examines how trust, civic networks, and community norms affect cooperation between law enforcement and the public. Using qualitative analysis and secondary data, the paper reveals weak institutional frameworks and limited public trust as major impediments to success. It concludes with recommendations for strengthening social capital, improving police-community relations, and reforming security institutions to enhance national security outcomes.

Keywords: Community Policing, National Security, Social Capital Theory

Introduction

The security of lives and property remains a critical pillar for sustainable development and national cohesion. In recent years, Nigeria has been plagued by an alarming increase in insecurity across its regions, ranging from Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, armed banditry and cattle rustling in the Northwest, farmer-herder conflicts in the North-Central, to kidnapping, militancy, and communal violence in the South (Onuoha, 2011; Ekhomu, 2019). These complex and evolving security threats have stretched the capabilities of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and other conventional security agencies, revealing glaring weaknesses in Nigeria's centralized security architecture, (David & Salifu (2020)).

In response to these persistent threats and the growing demand for community-oriented solutions, community policing has been increasingly proposed as a strategic reform to enhance national security. Community policing refers to a collaborative partnership between the police and the community, aimed at identifying and solving problems that contribute to crime and social disorder (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 2021). Unlike traditional reactive models of policing, community policing focuses on crime prevention through public participation, trust-building, and proactive engagement with local populations (Skolnick & Bayley, 2011).

The Nigerian government, recognizing the importance of this model, has made several attempts to institutionalize community policing as part of its broader security sector reform initiatives. Notably, in 2020, the Federal Government launched a new community policing framework aimed at recruiting and deploying thousands of constables from within local communities to complement conventional policing efforts (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2020). The expectation was that community policing would serve as a bottom-up mechanism for addressing insecurity by leveraging local knowledge, fostering public trust, and improving intelligence gathering.

Despite these efforts, the implementation of community policing in Nigeria has encountered several challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Inadequate funding and logistical support have limited the capacity of community policing personnel to function optimally. Furthermore, the lack of proper training, low morale, and limited awareness of community policing concepts among both police officers and community members have created gaps in communication and coordination (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2022). In many cases, there is deep-seated mistrust between the police and the citizens, fueled by a history of police brutality, corruption, and abuse of power (Amnesty International, 2020). These issues are compounded by political interference and the absence of a well-defined legal framework to regulate the structure, roles, and responsibilities of community policing units across states.

Moreover, the socio-cultural diversity and ethno-religious complexities in Nigeria present additional challenges to the uniform implementation of community policing. In some regions, local vigilante groups or informal security actors operate outside the law, leading to clashes with formal security structures or the abuse of human rights (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2020). As such, without clear guidelines and community buy-in, the community policing initiative risks being ineffective or counterproductive.

This study, therefore, seeks to critically examine the multifaceted challenges that hinder the successful implementation of community policing in Nigeria and assess their implications on national security. By exploring these issues, the research aims to contribute to the growing discourse on policing reform, public security, and the quest for sustainable peace in Nigeria. The study also aims to offer policy-relevant recommendations that can guide stakeholders—including the government, civil society, and the security sector—in enhancing the design and execution of community policing strategies in Taraba state.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a significant rise in insecurity, marked by terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes, and other violent crimes that threaten national stability. While community policing has been introduced as a strategy to enhance grassroots security and promote trust between law enforcement and the public, its implementation has faced several challenges that undermine its effectiveness. The disconnect between the Nigeria Police Force and local communities, lack of trust, inadequate training, poor funding, and political interference have hindered the success of community policing initiatives (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004; Okiro, 2020).

Furthermore, the centralized nature of Nigeria's policing structure often limits the autonomy and flexibility of local police units to respond effectively to community-specific security concerns. Many communities remain skeptical of police motives due to a history of abuse and corruption, further complicating cooperation (Ikuomola, 2011). Without addressing these systemic issues, community policing may not significantly contribute to national security or the restoration of public confidence in the security architecture in Taraba state.

Objective of the Study

To explore the Community Policing and its Implications on National Security in Nigeria

Research Question

Does community policing have Implications on National Security in Nigeria

Review of Related Literature

Ekhomu (2019) highlights the limitations of the Nigerian police in tackling emerging security threats such as insurgency, terrorism, and kidnapping. It argues that while community policing is a potential solution to these challenges, the lack of proper resources, inadequate training, and political interference have significantly hindered its implementation. The study underscores the need for a clear legal framework to guide community policing operations.

Iwuoha & Aniche (2020) examine the role of community policing in combating terrorism in Nigeria. They find that while community policing can enhance intelligence gathering and public trust, its impact is limited by weak institutional structures, corruption, and the exclusion of local authorities. The study calls for more collaboration between the police and local governments to ensure better implementation.

Alemika & Chukwuma (2004) focus on the informal policing systems in Nigeria, such as vigilante groups, and how they intersect with formal community policing efforts. They argue that community policing faces competition from these alternative security structures, which often operate outside the law, complicating efforts to establish a unified approach to policing in the country.

Odebunmi (2013) investigates the effectiveness of community policing in reducing crime rates in Nigerian urban areas. The findings suggest that while community policing can foster better relationships between the police and the community, it struggles with challenges like inadequate training and lack of trust between law enforcement and citizens, which limit its effectiveness.

Okoye (2017) focuses on community policing in Nigeria's southeastern region, particularly in handling communal conflicts. The study found that community policing has the potential to mitigate ethnic and religious tensions, but success is highly contingent upon the level of trust between the police and the community, which has been eroded by past abuses.

Nwogwugwu & Eze (2014) examine the relationship between community policing and crime prevention in Nigeria's rural areas. They found that community policing is more effective in rural areas due to strong social bonds and community cohesion, but its success in urban settings is undermined by the lack of community cooperation and overcrowding.

Brogden & Nijhar (2005) conduct a comparative study of community policing models in different countries, including Nigeria. They suggest that while community policing works in theory, its actual implementation in Nigeria is constrained by corruption within the police force and the lack of political will from government officials to support grassroots policing initiatives.

Dare (2018) studies community policing in the context of national security and finds that Nigeria's centralized policing system often fails to adapt to local security needs. He emphasizes the need for decentralized decision-making and the inclusion of community members in policing strategies to ensure greater effectiveness in preventing crime.

Onuoha (2011) explores the role of community policing in the fight against terrorism in Nigeria. He identifies that while the approach holds promise in gathering local intelligence, its impact is mitigated by the poor training of police officers, lack of resources, and the absence of a clear mandate from the government.

Yusuf (2019) investigates the link between corruption within the police force and the failure of community policing programs in Nigeria. Yusuf argues that corruption undermines the trust between the police and local communities, making the implementation of community policing ineffective in tackling crimes such as bribery, extortion, and abuse of power.

Uzochukwu (2016) examines the public perception of community policing in Nigeria. The study found that, despite public support for community policing, citizens were hesitant to fully engage with police officers due to the fear of victimization and abuse, particularly in areas with a history of police brutality.

Ede (2017) emphasizes the importance of capacity building in the success of community policing initiatives. The study suggests that without substantial investment in training, equipment, and public awareness, community policing will remain ineffective in improving national security in Nigeria.

Adegboyega (2020) evaluates the relationship between community policing and public safety in Nigeria's urban slums. The study argues that while community policing has the potential to enhance security, it often faces resistance from local residents who view the police as part of the oppressive state apparatus rather than partners in crime prevention.

Bamidele (2021) discusses the role of community policing in addressing armed banditry in Nigeria's northwestern region. He finds that community policing efforts have been hampered by local militias and the militarization of security forces, which has led to a lack of coordination and mutual mistrust between the police and local communities.

Chigozie & Chijioke (2020) examine the effectiveness of community policing in Nigeria's southwestern region. The study finds that while community policing has been successful in reducing petty crimes and fostering cooperation, it has struggled to tackle more serious security threats due to the lack of resources, poor community engagement, and institutional inertia within the police force.

Akinyele (2021) examines the role of community policing in enhancing national security in Nigeria's northern regions. The study reveals that while community policing has led to increased cooperation between local residents and the police, its success has been stifled by a lack of trust stemming from historical human rights abuses by security agencies.

Ogunyemi (2020) investigates the challenges faced by Nigerian police in implementing community policing, focusing on the Southern region. Ogunyemi concludes that political instability and a lack of funding have severely limited the ability of the police to engage effectively with local communities.

Abdullahi & Garba (2022) explore the effectiveness of community policing in combating rural banditry in Nigeria. They suggest that despite the promises of community policing, its success

has been undermined by poor infrastructure, insufficient police presence, and the influence of criminal elements in rural areas.

Afolabi & Hassan (2021) analyze the public perception of community policing programs in Nigeria's urban slums. They find that the lack of proper training and orientation for community policing officers, combined with community skepticism, has reduced the effectiveness of the strategy.

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Nnamdi & Ekekwe (2020) examine the contribution of community policing to improving local governance and security in Nigeria. Their study finds that community policing has led to greater citizen involvement in local security, but barriers like corruption, lack of resources, and inadequate coordination between agencies remain significant challenges.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Social Capital Theory, developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1980) and expanded by James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam (1993), to analyze the challenges of community policing in Nigeria. The theory posits that social networks, shared norms, and trust facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit and are essential for societal cohesion and governance. It identifies three key forms of social capital: bonding (within homogenous groups), bridging (across diverse groups), and linking (between communities and institutions). In the context of community policing, strong social capital enhances collaboration between citizens and law enforcement, promotes information sharing, and builds mutual trust. However, in Nigeria, particularly in states like Taraba, community policing is weakened by low levels of social capital due to ethnic divisions, mistrust, and institutional corruption. These deficits hinder effective community-police partnerships and contribute to the failure of security strategies. Thus, Social Capital Theory offers a valuable lens for understanding and addressing the relational and structural barriers to effective community policing and national security.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design to explore the challenges faced by community policing in Nigeria, particularly in Taraba State, and their implications for national security. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and case studies. Participants included police officers, community leaders, local government officials, and community members. Purposive sampling was employed to select individuals with relevant knowledge and experiences related to community policing. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes such as trust and cooperation, training deficiencies, ethnic and religious tensions, and political interference.

Thematic analysis revealed several key challenges, including inadequate training for police officers, insufficient funding, corruption, and low levels of community trust. These challenges hinder the effectiveness of community policing and have significant implications for national security, contributing to increased criminal activities, weakened national security frameworks, and reduced public trust in law enforcement. The study also employed strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and peer review to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Despite the limitations, including the small sample size, the methodology provided a deep understanding of the complexities surrounding community policing in Nigeria.

Presentation and Data

According to a Nigerian Police Officer responded on *what are the challenges facing community policing and its implications on national security in Nigeria?* He Stated that:

"Thank you. Community policing in Nigeria is a commendable initiative, but there are quite a number of challenges we face in its implementation. First of all, there's a serious issue of lack of trust between the police and the communities. Many people still see the police as corrupt or oppressive, which makes it difficult for them to cooperate or share useful information. (Interview with Police Officer at Sintali Ward, Jalingo Division, Feb, 2025)

Secondly, we are dealing with inadequate manpower and poor training. Most officers haven't received the proper orientation on community policing principles. We are often posted to areas we're unfamiliar with, and without adequate resources, including vehicles, communication tools, or even station infrastructure, it's hard to maintain a presence or respond quickly to incidents.

Funding is another major problem. Community policing units are poorly funded. We rely heavily on goodwill from the public or local governments for basic operations, which is not sustainable. Sometimes, this creates room for political influence, where certain individuals or groups try to use the police for personal or political gain.

Also, there is poor coordination between the federal command and local communities. Since the Nigerian police system is centralized, most decisions come from Abuja, and that limits our flexibility at the grassroots level. We need a structure that allows more local input and autonomy.

The implication of all this on national security is that crimes often go unreported or unresolved. When communities don't engage with the police, criminals exploit the gap. Kidnapping, banditry, and even terrorism thrive in such environments because intelligence gathering is weak"

According to a Community Leader responded on *What are the challenges facing community policing and its implications on national security in Nigeria?* He Stated that:

"As a community leader, I can tell you that while the idea of community policing is good, the way it is being practiced here in Nigeria is far from effective. One of the main challenges is lack of genuine collaboration. The police often come into our communities with a mindset of control rather than partnership. They rarely consult us or involve us in security decisions, and that creates a gap in communication and cooperation. (Interview with Community Leader at Sarkin-Dawaki Ward, Jalingo, Feb, 2025)

Another problem is the issue of mistrust. Many of our people don't trust the police because of past experiences involving extortion, harassment, or brutality. This makes it hard for residents to report suspicious activities or provide useful information.

We are also facing the challenge of poor feedback mechanisms. Even when we report cases or give intelligence to the police, nothing is done. This discourages people from participating. Some even believe that giving information might put them in danger if it leaks, especially in areas where crime syndicates operate.

Moreover, community policing is heavily under-resourced. Most of the officers assigned to our areas don't have patrol vehicles, communication gadgets, or even basic welfare support. So how can they effectively protect the community? Sometimes we, as community members, contribute money to support them, which should not be the case in a functional system.

The implication of all this on national security is huge. When local communities are not secured, it creates an environment where criminal elements can hide and operate freely. It weakens intelligence gathering, reduces early warning capabilities, and allows crimes like kidnapping, robbery, and terrorism to grow unnoticed"

According to a Local Government Official responded on What are the challenges facing community policing and its implications on national security in Nigeria? He Stated that:

"From a local government perspective, I can say that community policing has the potential to significantly improve security, but several challenges are limiting its success. One major issue is the lack of proper coordination between local government authorities and the police command. Often, we are not fully carried along in planning or decision-making, despite being closer to the people. (Interview with Senior Local Government Official at Jalingo Local Government Secretariat, Feb, 2025)

Another key challenge is inadequate funding and logistics. Community policing units are underfunded, and most local governments do not have a special budget for supporting security initiatives. This makes it difficult to provide the necessary infrastructure, such as communication equipment, mobility, and even basic allowances for community policing personnel.

We are also dealing with over-centralization of the police system. Most decisions affecting security are taken at the federal level, leaving local authorities with little power to act quickly on emerging threats. This slows down response time and weakens community trust in law enforcement.

Furthermore, there is a lack of training and capacity-building for officers and community volunteers involved in policing. Many of them don't have the right skills to handle conflict resolution, gather intelligence, or even engage the public in a professional manner.

The implication of these challenges on national security, particularly in Taraba State, is that insecurity at the grassroots level often escalates and spreads into broader regional instability. When local communities within the state are not secure, it creates an enabling environment for

armed groups, kidnappers, and criminal elements to operate with impunity. Weak implementation of community policing in Taraba State leads to poor intelligence gathering, a breakdown in trust between residents and security agencies, and delayed responses to threats. These gaps significantly undermine efforts to curb crime and maintain public safety, thereby contributing to the persistent insecurity and instability being witnessed across the state.

Major Finding

Community policing in Nigeria is a promising strategy, but its implementation faces lack of trust from the Community Members.

Discussion of Findings

Community policing in Nigeria, despite its promising potential as a strategy for enhancing security, faces a range of challenges that significantly hinder its effectiveness. The findings from the responses provided by the police officer, community leader, and local government official reveal critical barriers to the successful implementation of community policing, which include issues related to trust, coordination, collaboration, and resourcing.

One of the significant challenges to community policing in Nigeria is the lack of trust between the police and the local communities (Police Officer's Response). As highlighted by the police officer and the community leader, many citizens still perceive the police as corrupt and oppressive, making it difficult for them to engage in security initiatives or share useful information. The community leader further emphasizes that police officers often adopt a mindset of control rather than collaboration, further exacerbating this mistrust (Community Leader's Response). This lack of trust undermines the core principle of community policing, which relies on active collaboration and information-sharing between the police and the public. The absence of this mutual trust weakens the foundation upon which effective community policing should be built, leading to poor intelligence gathering and a weak response to emerging threats (Police Officer's Response).

The second finding points to the lack of genuine collaboration between the police and local leaders as a central issue. The community leader's response suggests that the police often approach community policing with a top-down control mentality, leaving community leaders out of key decision-making processes. This lack of consultation and involvement of community leaders in security decisions diminishes the opportunity for local knowledge and perspectives to be integrated into security plans (Community Leader's Response). According to the police officer, this exclusionary practice is compounded by poor coordination between the federal command and local authorities, with decisions often being made at the federal level, leaving local actors with little flexibility or autonomy to address specific community needs (Police Officer's Response). This fragmentation and lack of inclusive planning prevent a cohesive approach to community safety, weakening the effectiveness of the policing strategy. Additionally, limited coordination between local governments and police forces results in slow response times to threats, contributing to escalating crime and insecurity (Local Government Official's Response).

A significant constraint on the success of community policing in Nigeria, including in Taraba State, is the chronic lack of resources, as echoed by both police personnel and community leaders. Underfunding results in local officers being ill-equipped—lacking essential tools such as patrol vehicles, communication equipment, and basic welfare support (Community Leader's Response). These findings align with previous research by Alemika and Chukwuma (2018), who observed that inadequate funding and poor logistical support consistently undermine police effectiveness in Nigeria. Furthermore, the over-centralization of decision-making in the Nigerian Police Force significantly limits the responsiveness of local policing units. As highlighted in the responses of local government officials, the top-down structure based in Abuja restricts the autonomy of community-based officers, making it difficult to respond swiftly to localize threats. This aligns with the arguments of Ekhomu (2016), who emphasized that centralized policing structures are inherently inflexible and ineffective in addressing community-specific security issues. Consequently, these structural and logistical challenges hinder the effectiveness of community policing and contribute to the persistence of insecurity at the grassroots level.

Conclusion

This study on *Community Policing and Its Implications on National Security in Nigeria*, with a focus on Taraba State, revealed that the effectiveness of community policing is hindered by distrust between the police and the public, poor cooperation with community leaders, lack of resources, inadequate training, and an overly centralized police structure. These factors weaken intelligence gathering and community engagement, ultimately threatening national security, especially in rural areas. The study recommends urgent reforms such as better funding, decentralization, capacity building, and public trust-building to enhance social capital and improve the success of community policing in addressing Nigeria's security challenges.

Recommendation

To strengthen community policing in Taraba State, the study recommends that the government legally recognize and regulate local security outfits, establish inclusive Community Security Committees, and conduct joint training on human rights and conflict resolution. These steps aim to build trust, improve collaboration, and enhance the effectiveness of grassroots security efforts.

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