

Community Policing and Crime Reduction Strategies: A Case Study of Selected Local Government Areas in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of community policing as a crime reduction strategy in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Southwest Nigeria, highlighting its structures, outcomes, challenges, and stakeholder perceptions. A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining a survey of 400 respondents with 20 key informant interviews drawn from police officers, vigilante members, community leaders, and residents. A structured 4-point Likert scale questionnaire captured perceptions of crime trends, collaboration, and implementation challenges, while interviews provided deeper contextual insights. Descriptive statistics, regression, and ANOVA were conducted using SPSS v.26, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The results show that community policing has modestly improved neighborhood security and strengthened collaboration between police and residents, with vigilante-police partnerships identified as particularly effective. Regression analysis confirmed that collaboration, intelligence sharing, and funding adequacy are significant predictors of crime reduction, while corruption and mistrust exerted negative effects. ANOVA results revealed significant perception gaps, with police and vigilantes rating community policing more positively than residents, reflecting persistent challenges of trust and legitimacy. The study recommends increased funding, regular training, and logistical support for community policing structures; mechanisms for accountability and transparency to reduce corruption; improved coordination between the Nigeria Police Force, Amotekun, and vigilante groups; and integration of community policing with youth empowerment and social development programs to tackle root causes of crime.

Keywords: *community policing; crime reduction; security governance; stakeholder perceptions; Southwest Nigeria; policing reform*

Introduction

The security challenge has emerged as the most salient governance issue in Nigeria, where crime incidence has continuously increased in urban and rural settings in the past twenty years. Southwest Nigeria, although in the past considered among the most stable parts of the nation, has seen rising cases of armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, cybercrime, and gender-based violence in the past years. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), charged by the constitution with the protection of the life and property of the people, has normally been under criticism for lacking the capacity, having insufficient means, as well as souring relation with the people, all hampering trust and efficient crime control. In response to the foregoing, the practice of community policing has come to fore as a means of connecting the police with the people, stressing partnership, joint ownership of responsibility, and the application of the problem-solving method in security.

Everywhere, community policing has come to be regarded as a pragmatic solution to crime control and social order. Its simplistic ideology is based on cooperation between law enforcement institutions and local populations so as to identify security challenges and collectively design the response. In the United States, the United Kingdom, and South Africa, among other states, community policing has produced mixed and generally encouraging outcomes in the mitigation of crime, the advancement of civic trust, and the reinforcement of local capacities. The experience of community policing in Nigeria started as early as the early years of reforms in the first decade of the 2000s, but it became newly prominent with the initiation of the Nigeria Police Force's Community Policing Framework and the state-based security agencies like Amotekun in the Southwest. These measures are designed to localise the mitigation of crime, enhance the collection of intelligence, and engage the people in the security of their society.

In the face of such efforts, however, empirical research findings on the success of community policing in Nigeria are still inconclusive. Whereas some research findings indicate gains in crime identification and trust among the people, others identify enduring challenges such as underfunding, poor training, politicization, and police system corruption. Furthermore, cultural issues, distrust among security institutions and the people, and poor institutional strengthening have muddled implementation even more. In the Southwest, the proliferation of parallel structures—official police stations, people's vigilance groups, and state-supported security groups—raises the specter of coordination, lack of accountabilities, and long-term viability. Lack of systematic studies at the local government level on these initiatives has produced crucial gaps in knowledge concerning their true value in crime control reductions.

This study fills these gaps by investigating the institutions, practices, and consequences of community policing in the sampled Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Southwest Nigeria. It looks at the extent to which the application of community policing strategies has helped reduce crime, the obstacles facing their implementation, and the attitudes of

stakeholders such as police, society leaders, and the people. By targeting the field level where security issues are most tangible and where the impact of community policing is most needed, the study provides crucial information on the potential and pitfalls of the strategy. In the end, the research adds to the current security sector reform policy discourses as well as provides evidence-based advice for the enhancement of community policing as an efficacious crime-reduction mechanism in the long term in Nigeria. Even with recurrent reforms, insecurity is still a major issue in Nigeria, and the Southwest is no exception, with rising cases of armed robbery, kidnapping, cybercrime, and communal strife. Community policing was proposed as an innovation that can tackle these issues by increasing cooperation among civilians and the police, weeding out poor intelligence, and boosting trust. Yet, their effectiveness has remained doubtful. Anyone can look at reports of underfunding, ineffective training, corruption, and politicization, and understand how implementation has been hampered. Chronic distrust among civilians and law-enforcing agencies, however, remains a major hindrance to cooperation. In the Southwest, the intervention efforts like Amotekun and local vigilante groups coexist alongside the Nigeria Police Force, yet the synergy and auditability are weak. Scholarly works that examined the case of community policing in Nigeria delivered mixed messages, leaving crucial blanks concerning how they function in the field, their effects in the area of reducing crime, and their reception by the parties involved. The lack of certainty has imperativeed an examination of the case of community policing in the area, both in its achievements and challenges, in a systematic way.

Against such a background, the study intends to explore the effectiveness of community policing in some Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Southwest Nigeria. The objectives include the exploration of the structures and practices of community policing, an evaluation of its crime-reduction impact, an exploration of challenges that inhibit implementation, and an assessment of the views of the people regarding its effectiveness. These objectives inform the following research inquiries: What are the mechanisms of community policing in the study LGAs? To what degrees have the strategies reduced crime levels? What challenges inhibit successful implementation? What are the views of the people, the leaders of the people, and the policemen regarding the effectiveness of community policing? By providing responses to these inquiry questions, the study intends to create evidence that can guide both policy and practice in the reinforcement of community policing as a crime-reduction mechanism in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Community policing has proved to be one of the most influential innovations in the current thinking in policing, focusing on partnership, collaboration, and proactive action as opposed to reactive law enforcement. Theoretically, community policing has its foundation in the proposition that crime control and prevention cannot come solely through state coercing institutions, but that active participation by communities in the identification of problems, in the definition

of responses, and in the disciplining of institutions is needed. It transforms the policing model away from the often criticized “force-centered” model, where there is a shared sense of responsibility, where trust, mutual respect, and problem-solving define the interface among citizens and the police officers. The practice of community policing, therefore, includes the decentralized decision-making, participation by the community, and long-term resolution over the short-term arrest or punitive crack downs. Crime reduction, in this context, is not merely the suppression of crime, but also the reduction of the social, economic, and environmental conditions that breed insecurity.

The theoretical underpinnings of community policing and crime reduction borrow from various strands of thought in criminology. The social disorganization theory holds that crime prospers in neighborhoods where social institutions are weak, poor, and where social cohesion is lacking. The practice of community policing, by reinforcing networks of trust and mobilizing the social efficacy, attempts to overcome just these voids. The Broken Window theory, focusing on the order-keeping in neighborhoods by tackling petty violaciones and explicit indicators of disorder before they balloon into major crimes, finds an echo in the form of neighbourhood patrols and vigilance committees where the display of vigilance helps in impressing the residents and deterring the crime by being omnipresent and responsive. The Routine Activity theory points out the function of able guardianship in the avoidance of crime; by making the communities abettor co-guardians with the police, the practice of community policing enhances surveillance and deterrence. Furthermore, the Community Empowerment theory offers a sociological perspective, arguing that entrusting the security initiatives to the hands of the people creates more trust, more legitimacy, and sustainability in the crime-avoiding efforts. In aggregate, the theses illustrate that the practice of the community policing is not a tactic of the police at all, but an all-encompassing strategy toward the creation of secured and robust society.

Global empirical studies have offered useful lessons on the effectiveness and limitations of community policing. In the United States, older experiments in urban areas such as Chicago showed that community policing contributed to enhanced trust by the population in law-enforcing institutions, higher crime reporting, and local crime-solving, although sustainability and resource-allocation challenges persisted. In the United Kingdom, neighbourhood policing teams became the hub in combating antisocial behaviour and in establishing police legitimacy, as studies documented crime fear reductions as well as satisfied beneficiaries of police services. In post-apartheid South Africa, the police service was democratized as part of the institution of the community police; although improved discussion was contributed by the initiative, its impact was frustrated by resource deficits as well as political rivalries. In Uganda and Kenya, improved collection of intelligence as well as crime detection has characterized the experience of community police, as has political manipulation as well as the spread of corruptions, together with the limited availability of accountabilities. These mixed records underline the value of area-specific variables, such as the police institution's capacity,

the character of the relation by the state to society, as well as general economic and social circumstances.

In Nigeria, the development of community policing has been influenced by the deficiencies of the centralized Nigeria Police Force and the increasing pressure for local responses to security threats. Since the early 2000s, the federal government has launched community policing models aimed at decentralizing responsibility and increasing the role of citizens. However, research findings show that implementation has been inconsistent. Ede and Harrison (2020) established that in some urban areas, the implementation of community policing enhanced the collection of intelligence, while in others, it was unsuccessful in reducing violent crime because of poor coordination and insufficient funding. Adeosun (2021) documented that in most cases, the people tended to regard the community policing officers as the representatives of the same corrupt systems they were established to transform, thus creating discredit. In the same way, Olaniyan (2022) established that while the formation of neighborhood guard units in Lagos reduced burglary incidence and petty offenses, the efforts were often hampered by the shortage of funds, under-equipping, and in some cases, infringement of the right to human beings.

The advent of state-sponsored security programs like Amotekun in Southwest Nigeria has further muddled the waters of community policing. In celebration as an antidote to the increasing sense of insecurity, Amotekun has stoked controversies over duplication of functions, accountabilities, as well as the potential for politicization. According to scholars, in the absence of appropriate integration with established community policing mechanisms and the Nigeria Police Force, such parallel programs can end up diluting the overall security governance instead of making it more robust. Furthermore, dependence upon vigilante groups and informal security networks, while in the immediacy often very good in deterrence, evokes concerns over illegality, abuse of office, and non-sustainability. In spite of these challenges, studies invariably establish that community policing is possible for crime reduction where it is well practiced. Most studies emphasize that the success of the practice depends on three essential conditions: first, the availability of mutual trust by the communities in the police; second, sufficient funding, training, and institutional backing; and, third, actual decentralization that empowers local actors over central authorities. In the Southwest Nigeria case, where the crime is perpetuated by the forces of socio-economic pressure, youth employment, cultism, and poor governance, the practice of community policing needs to come out of abstractions and take the form of an actual participation that empowers local actors. Nonetheless, the lack of systematic studies of the practice of community policing at the local government has constrained the understanding of the practical dividends as well as the challenges to the practice's success.

The literature highlights that the practice of community policing is an involved yet indispensable mechanism in resolving emerging insecurity in Nigeria and other settings. Theoretically, it derives its strengths in understanding social order as related to crime control; conceptually, partnership and

mutual blame; and, empirically, it has registered mixed findings based on context, capacity, and trust. For Southwest Nigeria, scholarly works that exist illustrate both opportunities that and yet enduring constraints, yet there is no gap that is uncovered in the actual role of practices of community policing on crime descent in targeted LGAs. This scholarly study fills the gap by presenting an empirical-based evaluation of practices, achievements, and perceptions of the practice of community policing in the targeted local governments, contributing both to scholarly discourses and practical policy reforms.

3. Methodology

The study embraced a mixed-methods research design, where surveys and interviews were used to evaluate the effectiveness of community policing in sampled Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Southwest Nigeria. The population was made up of police men/women, traditional leaders, vigilantes, and the people in purposively sampled LGAs that were sampled based on high incidence of crime and active implementation of community policing. A sample of 400 respondents was established using Yamane's (1967) formula at 95% confidence level with 5% margin of error, while 20 key respondents were purposively chosen for interviews. A structured questionnaire based on a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was used to obtain quantitative data concerning crime trends, collaboration between the people and the police, and challenges of implementation. Semi-structured interview schedules were used in the qualitative component to obtain in-depth responses concerning the topic of study among police men/women, traditional leaders, youth leaders, and civil society leaders. Quantitative data were cleansed in SPSS v.26 by employing descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, percentages) and inferential tests (t-test, ANOVA, and regression) in investigating relationships between the implementation strategies of community policing and the outcome of reducing crime. Qualitative data were manually transcribed and then subjected to thematic content analysis. Triangulation was used in validating the findings. Ethical concerns, such as the obtaining of informed consent, confidentiality, and being culturally sensitive, were carefully honored.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Community Policing Indicators (n = 400)

Indicator	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Rank
Community policing has improved neighborhood security	3.15	0.81	1st
Police-community relations have improved	3.05	0.87	2nd
Vigilante groups complement police efforts effectively	3.15	0.85	1st (tie)
Crime rates (robbery, burglary, cultism) have declined	2.96	0.89	3rd
Corruption and mistrust undermine effectiveness	3.14	0.91	4th

Lack of funding limits community policing	3.20	0.88	Highest Constraint
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Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree

The descriptive findings show that respondents tend to think positively about community policing. The highest scores were awarded to the enhancement of neighborhood security ($\bar{x}$ = 3.15) and cooperation between vigilantes and the police ($\bar{x}$ = 3.15), indicating that local patrols and cooperation efforts have made petty crime more visible and frightening. Police-community relations also registered high ($\bar{x}$ = 3.05), indicating a modest gain in confidence and cooperation. However, feelings about actual crime reduction (robbery, burglary, cultism) were lower ($\bar{x}$ = 2.96), indicating that although security presence has improved, its conversion into tangible reduction in serious crime is limited. Lack of funding ($\bar{x}$ = 3.20) and corruption ($\bar{x}$ = 3.14) were strongly identified by respondents as chief barriers, reflecting institutional and structural failures. These take similar findings studies (e.g., Adeosun, 2021) that although the impact of communal patrols increases awareness, its success is negated by a lack of resources and enduring mistrust.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Community Policing Strategies and Crime Reduction

Predictor Variable	β	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Police-community collaboration	0.312	4.87	0.000	Significant
Vigilante-police partnership	0.241	3.92	0.001	Significant
Community intelligence gathering	0.285	4.35	0.000	Significant
Training and funding adequacy	0.198	2.71	0.007	Significant
Corruption/mistrust (negative)	-0.167	-2.45	0.015	Significant (inverse)
Model Summary	$R^2 = 0.46$, $F(5,394) = 34.11$, $p < 0.001$			Community policing explains 46% of variance in crime reduction

The regression findings illustrate that community policing has a statistically significant crime-reduction impact. The most influential predictors were police-community cooperation (β = 0.312, $p < 0.001$) and intelligence gathering by the community (β = 0.285, $p < 0.001$), indicating that trust-building and residents' information sharing decreases crime risk. Vigilante-police alliances (β = 0.241, $p = 0.001$) also proved to matter, signifying the potential role of non-state actors in filling capacity gaps among police. Adequacy in training and funds (β = 0.198, $p = 0.007$) had a smaller, yet positive, impact, reaffirming that material inputs are crucial in the delivery of operations. There was an inverse impact of mistrust and corruption (β = -0.167, $p = 0.015$), indicating that where there is mistrust of police, the efficacies of the police are compromised. The model accounted for 46% of variance in the crime-reduction dimension, a considerable value in social studies, yet also indicates that there are other motivators

unemployment, poor escape, and systemic insecurity impacting crime beyond the reach of policing. These findings confirm social disorganization and routine activity theses, both of which presume that participation by the population, as well as guardianship, are keys to crime reduction.

Table 3: ANOVA Results: Perceptions of Community Policing Effectiveness by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Police officers	100	3.32	0.76	3.94	0.009	Significant difference
Community leaders	80	3.10	0.82			
Vigilante members	70	3.22	0.79			
Residents	150	2.95	0.88			
Total	400	3.15	0.81			Residents less satisfied compared to officials

The ANOVA findings reveal statistically significant differences ($F = 3.94$, $p = 0.009$) in effectiveness perceptions among stakeholder groups. Police ($\bar{x} = 3.32$) and vigilante group members ($\bar{x} = 3.22$) assessed community policing most positively, while residents were the most dissatisfied ($\bar{x} = 2.95$). The gap in these findings indicates a gap in trust and legitimacy: security actors believe that efforts are paying off, yet civilians doubt that, perhaps because they feel under-responsive, experiencing inconsistent justice, or recurrent insecurity. Community leaders also assessed effectiveness as moderate ($\bar{x} = 3.10$), indicative of their role as mediators between the people and the police. These results resemble international literature, where there is an indication that police overrate their effectiveness against popular opinion (Skogan, 2020). In the case of Nigeria, the result strengthens the indication that the trust of the people is an essential determinant of the success of community policing. Without the acceptance of the people, an otherwise well-designed policing project has the risk of being seen as unsuccessful or illegitimate.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to evaluate the effectiveness of community policing in reducing crime across selected Local Government Areas in Southwest Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that community policing has produced modest but significant gains, particularly in improving neighborhood security, enhancing collaboration between police and communities, and strengthening the role of vigilante groups as complementary actors. Regression results confirmed that collaboration, intelligence gathering, and community-police partnerships are strong predictors of crime reduction, while lack of funding, inadequate training, and persistent corruption emerged as major constraints. Importantly, the ANOVA results revealed a perceptual gap: while police officers and vigilante members rated community policing as effective, residents were less convinced, highlighting the fragility of trust between security providers and citizens. These results underscore that

community policing in Southwest Nigeria is partially effective but not yet transformative. While it has improved visibility, trust, and petty crime prevention, its capacity to address serious and organized crime remains limited. Structural issues such as underfunding, corruption, and poor coordination continue to erode effectiveness. Moreover, the divergence between official narratives and residents' perceptions suggests that effectiveness cannot be measured only by institutional benchmarks but must also reflect the lived experiences of communities. Based on these insights, several recommendations emerge. First, there is a need to strengthen institutional support for community policing through increased funding, regular training, and better logistical provision for officers and community volunteers. Second, mechanisms for accountability and transparency must be reinforced to reduce corruption and build public trust. Third, community policing structures should be more inclusive of residents, with formal channels for citizen feedback and grievance reporting. Fourth, coordination between the Nigeria Police Force, Amotekun, and vigilante groups should be streamlined to avoid duplication and ensure coherent responses to insecurity. Finally, community policing should be integrated into broader crime prevention strategies, including youth empowerment, employment generation, and social development programs, to address the root causes of crime rather than focusing solely on symptoms.

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Received: 5th October, 2025

Accepted: 30th November, 2025

Published 31st December, 2025