

Community - Based Policing Strategies for Promoting Development and Stability in Kogi State

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Abstract

Kogi State, like many regions in Nigeria, grapples with persistent insecurity, community mistrust, and underdevelopment. Armed robbery, kidnapping, communal clashes, and political violence continue to undermine grassroots peace efforts and economic progress. In response to these challenges, community-based policing has emerged as an alternative approach aimed at improving security outcomes by fostering collaboration between law enforcement and local stakeholders. This study explores the role of community policing in promoting development and stability across selected communities in Kogi State. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study utilised data from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and official reports from community policing units and civil society organisations. The analysis focused on local perspectives, policing strategies, and collaborative frameworks involving vigilantes, neighbourhood watch groups, and traditional authorities. Findings reveal that

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effective community policing has led to increased public trust in security agencies, improved information flow, and more proactive responses to crime. The involvement of local actors, particularly through neighbourhood security groups and multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms, has enhanced social cohesion and contributed to a decline in petty crimes and communal disputes. However, persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, poor training, and political interference continue to limit the impact. The study concludes that community-based policing, when properly structured and supported, can significantly contribute to grassroots stability, promote participatory governance, and foster long-term local development. It recommends strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing community-police relations, and ensuring inclusive security planning at the local government level.

Keywords: Community Policing, Security, Development, Stability, Kogi State

Introduction

In recent years, Kogi State has faced increasing challenges related to insecurity, communal conflict, and fragile development outcomes. Located in Nigeria's North Central geopolitical zone, Kogi occupies a strategic position as a convergence point for multiple ethnic groups, trade routes, and political interests. However, this strategic advantage has also made it susceptible to various security threats, including kidnapping, armed robbery, herder-farmer clashes, and political violence. These security concerns have had a profound impact on local economic activities, disrupted social cohesion, and undermined long-term development prospects (Okolie et al., 2022). Despite the presence of conventional security agencies, their operations often suffer from limited reach, slow response times, and weak community trust, especially in rural areas and semi-urban communities.

A key issue underpinning this problem is the disconnect between formal law enforcement agencies and the communities they are meant to serve.

Conventional policing structures in Nigeria have historically adopted a top-down, force-driven approach that neglects grassroots participation and local intelligence networks. In contrast, community-based policing offers an alternative framework that promotes collaboration between law enforcement and citizens, based on mutual trust, shared responsibility, and proactive crime prevention (Chukwuma & Adebajo, 2023). This approach is increasingly recognised as a strategic way for addressing both insecurity and underdevelopment, particularly in fragile and transitional contexts.

The aim of this study is to examine how community-based policing strategies contribute to promoting development and enhancing stability in Kogi State. The research specifically explores how local policing initiatives are implemented, the extent of community participation, the challenges faced, and the overall impact on peace and development. By analysing these dynamics, the study seeks to answer critical questions: In what ways does community policing affect security outcomes in Kogi? How do these initiatives influence local development and stability?

The significance of this inquiry lies in its potential to inform both policy and practice. In light of ongoing national debates around police reform and decentralisation, this study offers grounded insights into how participatory security models can be harnessed to address Nigeria's complex security architecture. Moreover, it highlights the role of local actors, including traditional leaders, civil society groups, and neighbourhood watch structures in co-producing safety and fostering sustainable development (Usman & Ibrahim, 2021). This study employs a qualitative methodology, relying exclusively on secondary data sources such as policy documents, academic literature, official reports, and media content to examine the dynamics of community policing in Kogi State. By critically analysing these existing materials, the research explores patterns, narratives, and institutional frameworks that shape community-based policing practices. Situating the discussion within relevant theoretical and policy contexts, the study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on participatory security governance in Nigeria and the broader West African region.

Conceptual Clarifications

Community-Based Policing: A Definition

Community-based policing represents a progressive shift in law enforcement philosophy, moving away from authoritarian, reactionary models towards a more inclusive, participatory framework of crime prevention and social harmony. This policing model places the community not as passive recipients of security but as active partners in both identifying challenges and designing context-specific solutions. At its core, community-based policing is characterised by sustained collaboration, local ownership of safety initiatives, transparent communication, and shared responsibility between police officers and residents. It recognises that security is not solely the remit of uniformed agencies, but a shared civic obligation rooted in mutual trust and everyday engagement (Ogunrotifa & Oyesomi, 2022). Unlike conventional policing approaches that are often hierarchical and control-oriented, community policing is built on decentralised and problem-solving principles. Officers are encouraged to build relationships with community leaders, youth groups, religious institutions, and other civil society stakeholders to understand local concerns, mediate disputes, and prevent conflict before it escalates. This localised and relational approach enhances the police's legitimacy, particularly in areas where law enforcement has historically been viewed with suspicion or fear. As Chukwuma and Adebajo (2023) observe, the success of community policing in fragile settings hinges not on force, but on the cultivation of social capital networks of trust, reciprocity, and shared norms that facilitate collective security efforts.

In the Nigerian context, community-based policing has been proposed as a remedy to both the inefficiencies and the alienation that characterise state-centred policing systems. The Nigeria Police Force, which has long suffered from structural deficits, inadequate personnel, poor training, and strained citizen relationships, is increasingly seen as incapable of responding to the complexities of local insecurity without the support of the communities it serves. In response, several states, including Kogi, have initiated frameworks for community policing with varying levels of institutional commitment and success. As Ekhaton and Akubo (2024) explain, community policing is not merely a set of operational tools but a shift in institutional

culture, one that repositions the police as facilitators of peace and development, rather than instruments of repression.

Understanding Development, Stability, and Local Security

In the context of this study, development is conceived as a multidimensional process that encompasses far more than mere economic expansion. While GDP growth and income indicators remain important, true development includes improvements in human welfare, equitable access to essential services such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, justice, and the presence of responsive and accountable institutions. Development is about enhancing people's quality of life, promoting inclusive governance, and creating enabling environments where individuals and communities can reach their full potential (Onuoha & Mbah, 2021). This holistic perspective emphasises that progress cannot be sustained in the absence of security. Insecure environments, whether due to violence, fear, or institutional breakdown, obstruct investment, disrupt livelihoods, and weaken the foundations necessary for social transformation.

Stability, closely linked to development, refers to the sustained condition of peace, lawfulness, and predictability within a political and social system. It implies not merely the absence of conflict but also the presence of functioning democratic institutions, the rule of law, and mechanisms for peaceful dispute resolution. Stability is both a condition and an enabler of development; when societies are stable, they can undertake long-term planning, invest in infrastructure, and ensure inclusive policymaking. Such societies are more likely to flourish (Yahaya & Iwuchukwu, 2023). Conversely, recurrent instability undermines trust in public institutions and exacerbates marginalisation, often fuelling further cycles of insecurity.

Local security, on the other hand, refers to the everyday experience of safety and order within communities. It is shaped by the presence or absence of protective mechanisms at the grassroots level, and is deeply embedded in local social relationships, cultural norms, and governance structures. Unlike national security, which is often viewed in strategic or geopolitical terms, local security is about whether people feel safe in their homes, markets, roads, and communal spaces. In much of Nigeria, including Kogi State, local security is provided not only by state agencies but also by

non-state actors such as vigilante groups, traditional rulers, community development associations, and faith-based organisations (Oladapo & Ayoade, 2022). These actors play a pivotal role in maintaining order, mediating disputes, and filling the gaps left by formal policing systems that are either absent, under-resourced, or distrusted by the population.

In Nigeria's fragmented and plural security environment, this layered approach to security has become a pragmatic response to state failure and limited reach. Yet it also introduces complex dynamics of legitimacy, accountability, and coordination. As Ujah and Okonkwo (2024) point out, while community-based security actors often enjoy higher local legitimacy than formal police, their actions are not always regulated by law, raising questions about human rights and long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, local security remains a fundamental building block for stability and development, especially in settings where formal institutions have limited traction.

Contrasting Conventional and Community Policing

Conventional policing in Nigeria has historically been modelled on a centralised and militarised framework inherited from the colonial era. This system is highly hierarchical, bureaucratic, and largely reactive in its operations. The command-and-control structure centralises authority in Abuja, limiting the autonomy of local police divisions to adapt their responses to the specific needs of the communities they serve. This top-down model often positions the police as enforcers of state authority rather than partners in community welfare, thereby fostering alienation and mistrust between law enforcement officers and the public (Uzochukwu & Adebayo, 2022). Policing strategies are rarely tailored to local realities, and operational plans frequently exclude community input. Consequently, police visibility remains inconsistent, response times are slow, and citizens are often reluctant to report crimes or cooperate with investigations due to fears of victimisation or disillusionment.

This disconnect is further compounded by widespread perceptions of police brutality, corruption, and impunity. The *#EndSARS* protests of 2020, which reverberated across Nigeria, reflected long-standing frustrations with a police force perceived to be abusive and unaccountable. In contrast to

this coercive orientation, community policing offers a decentralised and human-centred alternative. It encourages law enforcement officers to forge meaningful relationships with residents, understand their concerns, and co-develop preventive strategies. Community policing fosters a model of shared problem-solving, grounded in empathy, transparency, and ongoing dialogue (Ibrahim & Eweka, 2023). Whereas conventional policing may be effective in temporarily quelling unrest or deterring high-profile crimes, it often neglects the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty, marginalisation, inter-group tension, and weak civic engagement. By focusing narrowly on law enforcement rather than community empowerment, it fails to foster sustainable peace. In contrast, community policing adopts a preventive, locally embedded approach that leverages indigenous knowledge, cultural norms, and social capital. Officers become accessible figures within neighbourhoods, acting not only as guardians of law but also as mediators, educators, and development partners.

This participatory model is particularly critical in fragile or under-governed regions, like parts of Kogi State, where formal state presence is limited and informal actors play a significant role in security provision. As noted by Aluko and Abdulkareem (2021), the strength of community policing lies not in its potential to replace conventional policing, but in its capacity to supplement and reorient it towards a more collaborative and legitimate institution. By integrating community voices into policing frameworks, trust is rebuilt, and the foundations for long-term stability and development are strengthened.

Policing, Trust, and Participatory Governance

Trust remains the cornerstone of any effective and legitimate policing system. It serves as the essential social currency that binds law enforcement agencies and the communities they are mandated to protect. Without trust in the competence, integrity, and fairness of the police, citizens are less likely to report crimes, volunteer information, participate in joint safety initiatives, or comply with the rule of law. In many Nigerian communities, especially those in historically marginalised or conflict-prone areas like parts of Kogi State, this trust has been severely eroded due to past experiences of police brutality, extortion, delayed response, and impunity (Oluwaniyi &

Bamidele, 2022). Rebuilding this trust is not simply a matter of improving operational capacity; it requires a systemic reorientation of the policing philosophy toward one that is people-centred, transparent, and participatory.

Participatory governance refers to the inclusive engagement of citizens in the planning, execution, and monitoring of public policies and services. In the realm of security provision, this means creating institutional platforms through which community members can influence how they are policed, provide feedback, and hold security actors accountable. Such engagement has been shown to not only enhance trust but also improve the responsiveness and legitimacy of security institutions (Obiyan & Ibrahim, 2023). Participatory governance promotes a sense of collective ownership over safety, thereby transforming security from a state-imposed function to a shared civic responsibility. In this light, community policing becomes both a practical and philosophical expression of participatory governance.

In diverse and historically fragile regions such as Kogi State, where ethnic heterogeneity, uneven development, and political grievances have undermined state-society cohesion, participatory approaches to policing are especially critical. These approaches facilitate inclusive dialogue, mediate local tensions, and promote culturally sensitive interventions that resonate with community norms and realities. Community policing, when effectively implemented, extends beyond mere crime prevention; it becomes a vehicle for rebuilding fractured social relations and re-legitimising state authority. As Ezuruike and Omole (2024) note, where conventional security mechanisms have failed, community policing has the potential to revive trust in public institutions by demonstrating that governance can be responsive, inclusive, and locally grounded.

Moreover, participatory policing models challenge the traditional boundaries between the governors and the governed. As communities gain voice and agency in security matters, the police transition from being enforcers of state will to facilitators of communal well-being. This shift not only humanises the policing experience but also strengthens democratic governance by embedding accountability and citizen oversight into everyday security practice. In the long term, such inclusive frameworks can foster resilience, social cohesion, and political stability, which are key conditions for sustainable development.

Empirical Review

A foundational study by Odeyemi and Okorie (2018) investigated the implementation of community policing frameworks in Lagos and Oyo States. The research revealed that despite policy support, structural limitations such as inadequate funding, poor sensitisation, and limited autonomy of community policing units hindered their effectiveness. The study emphasised that where community trust existed, collaboration between the police and the public significantly improved crime response and neighbourhood surveillance. This work highlights early lessons in the Nigerian context and provides a baseline for assessing how community involvement shapes security delivery over time.

Building on this, Iwuoha and Ezeibe (2021) conducted a study on community policing and public trust in Southeast Nigeria, exploring its relevance to conflict-prone areas. Their findings revealed that community policing initiatives led to a moderate reduction in communal violence and improved citizen-police relations, especially where traditional institutions were included in the security architecture. The study noted that participatory approaches were particularly effective in rural areas with strong social cohesion, a condition that parallels many parts of Kogi State. Importantly, this work emphasises the role of trust and local legitimacy in achieving policing outcomes.

More recently, Adebajo and Salihu (2023) examined community policing structures in North Central Nigeria, with a specific focus on Kogi and Benue States. Their research identified active roles played by neighbourhood watch groups, vigilante services, and youth associations in bridging the gap between formal police forces and local communities. While acknowledging challenges such as political interference and capacity gaps, the study highlighted that collaborative policing efforts had led to notable improvements in early conflict detection, dispute resolution, and local development initiatives. This directly supports the present study's emphasis on the developmental impact of participatory security frameworks in Kogi State.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two interrelated theoretical perspectives— Social Capital Theory and Participatory Communication Theory— to explain the

effectiveness of community-based policing in promoting development and stability in Kogi State.

Social Capital Theory, as advanced by Putnam (2000), posits that networks of trust, reciprocity, and civic engagement serve as vital assets for collective action and societal wellbeing (Oladipo, 2023). In the context of community policing, social capital is reflected in the quality of relationships between citizens and law enforcement agencies, as well as among community members themselves. High levels of social capital enable communities to mobilise more effectively in the prevention of crime, the resolution of conflict, and the co-production of local security. Trust and cooperation are not just desirable outcomes, they are instrumental mechanisms that underpin sustainable security arrangements (Adedoyin & Adebajo, 2022). In environments such as Kogi State, where formal institutions may be weak or mistrusted, community policing thrives when it can leverage existing networks of solidarity, cultural norms, and local leadership structures.

Participatory Communication Theory, rooted in the work of Paulo Freire (1970), emphasises dialogue, empowerment, and horizontal communication as foundations for social transformation. Freire's critique of top-down, authoritarian forms of communication has informed contemporary approaches to inclusive governance, particularly in marginalised or conflict-prone contexts. Applied to community policing, this theory supports the idea that security must be co-created through sustained engagement, mutual learning, and the active participation of all stakeholders. Participatory communication enables communities not only to voice their concerns but also to shape the priorities, strategies, and evaluations of policing initiatives (Nwagbara & Ugwu, 2023). It thus strengthens transparency, accountability, and local ownership that are essential elements for legitimate and effective policing.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine community-based policing strategies and their influence on development and stability in Kogi State. Relying solely on secondary data, the study explores documented insights from scholarly articles, government publications, security reports, and media analyses relevant to community policing initiatives in the state.

The use of secondary sources provides a comprehensive overview of historical trends, policy interventions, and community responses across diverse local government areas in Kogi. Data were critically reviewed and subjected to thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, categories, and themes aligned with the study's objectives. Key themes explored include trust-building, participatory governance, and the effectiveness of community-based strategies in managing local security. The qualitative approach and thematic framework ensured a rich interpretation of contextual realities without the constraints of field-based limitations. This methodology aligns with the study's aim of generating nuanced insights into community-led policing practices.

Findings and Discussion

Community policing in Kogi State operates through a blend of formal structures and informal arrangements. It is largely shaped by grassroots initiatives, where local communities take active roles in supporting security efforts. Traditional rulers, youth leaders, and local associations are often central to this practice. In some urban areas, community policing involves collaboration with conventional police, but in many rural parts of the state, it is community-driven and adapted to the specific security needs of each locality. The approach focuses on prevention rather than response, with a strong emphasis on shared responsibility and local surveillance.

Residents play an active part in monitoring their neighbourhoods and reporting suspicious behaviour. Community meetings and town hall gatherings serve as platforms for discussing safety concerns and planning local security actions. This participatory method has helped in the early detection of criminal activities and the swift resolution of disputes. Where trust exists between security personnel and community members, cooperation tends to be more effective. People are more likely to provide information, assist in conflict mediation, and support collective efforts to deter crime.

Despite some achievements, community policing in Kogi State faces several challenges. Limited funding undermines the capacity of local security groups, many of whom operate without sufficient resources, equipment, or welfare support. There is also a noticeable lack of formal training, which affects the professionalism and effectiveness of community security actors.

Mistrust between citizens and the police continues to affect collaboration, especially in areas where abuses of power have been previously recorded. Additionally, political interference often disrupts local security structures, particularly when political actors manipulate community groups for electoral or personal interests.

Vigilante groups and neighbourhood watch teams form the backbone of community policing in many parts of Kogi State. These groups are often composed of local youths familiar with the terrain and community dynamics. Their presence is both reassuring and strategic, particularly in areas where the formal police presence is limited. However, there are concerns over their accountability and the lack of clear legal frameworks guiding their operations. In some cases, these groups have acted beyond their mandate, leading to tension or allegations of abuse. Nonetheless, their role in crime prevention, patrol, and conflict resolution remains critical.

Community policing has contributed positively to the stability of many local areas. With improved safety, economic activities such as trading, farming, and schooling continue with less disruption. The sense of security encourages residents to invest in their communities and engage more actively in local governance. In rural communities, reduced incidents of theft, land disputes, and youth violence have created an environment more conducive to development. The collaborative nature of community policing also promotes social cohesion and mutual accountability among residents.

The practice of community policing in Kogi State reflects wider national discussions on police reform and decentralisation. While there is some alignment with national frameworks promoting community-oriented policing, implementation at the local level remains inconsistent. Challenges such as inadequate policy awareness, fragmented coordination, and a lack of institutional support have slowed down progress. A stronger alignment with national reform efforts would enhance legitimacy, provide more resources, and create clearer operational guidelines for community-based security initiatives.

Conclusion

This study has explored the dynamics of community-based policing in Kogi State, shedding light on its practice, challenges, and contributions to local security and development. The findings reveal that while community policing

is actively implemented through a blend of informal and formal structures, it is largely driven by local actors such as traditional leaders, vigilantes, and neighbourhood watch groups. The active participation of residents in reporting crime, monitoring their environment, and supporting collaborative security measures has contributed significantly to early conflict detection and resolution. However, the approach is not without its limitations. Issues of inadequate funding, lack of formal training, institutional mistrust, and political interference continue to undermine its effectiveness. Despite these constraints, community policing has shown a clear capacity to foster safety, reduce crime, and build trust within communities. It has enabled a more responsive and context-specific form of security, especially in areas underserved by conventional policing.

The implications of these findings for development are far-reaching. Enhanced local security creates a stable environment for economic activity, education, and civic engagement to thrive. For policy, the study emphasises the importance of institutionalising community policing within broader national security frameworks. There is a need for clearer guidelines, sustainable funding, proper training, and mechanisms for accountability to support these local efforts.

Recommendations

- i. There is a need to formalise and reinforce the frameworks that support collaboration between local communities and the police. This includes establishing clearly defined roles for community representatives, regular feedback mechanisms, and joint security planning. Such partnerships should be embedded within the operational structure of local policing to ensure sustained engagement, mutual accountability, and trust-building.
- ii. Community policing actors, including neighbourhood watch groups and vigilante teams, require consistent training in conflict resolution, human rights, intelligence gathering, and basic security operations. Equipping them with non-lethal tools and communication devices will improve their efficiency, safety, and professionalism, thus enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of community-driven security responses.

- iii. Structured platforms for inclusive dialogue between security agencies, traditional authorities, youth groups, and civil society organisations should be established and maintained. These forums can serve as early warning systems, help manage grievances, and support proactive responses to emerging threats. Making dialogue a routine part of security governance will deepen participatory accountability and reduce mistrust.
- iv. A coordinated approach involving traditional rulers, community-based organisations, religious leaders, and local government officials should be encouraged to address security holistically. Each stakeholder brings contextual knowledge and legitimacy that can strengthen surveillance, mediation, and community education. Building synergy among these actors will lead to more integrated and sustainable peacebuilding efforts.

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