

COMMUNITY POLICING AND PUBLIC SAFETY IN BENIN METROPOLIS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between community policing and public safety in Benin Metropolis, Edo State, Nigeria, focusing on both its challenges and potential benefits. Public safety is a fundamental human right and a necessary prerequisite for sustainable development in Nigeria, especially in urban areas such as Benin Metropolis. This research investigates the challenges to the effective application of community policing tactics and provides prospects for enhancing public safety in Nigeria, particularly in Benin City. The research adopts a cross-sectional descriptive design, utilizing data collected from 150 respondents in Benin Metropolis, and anchored on the Broken Window Theory, this study analyzes the current state of community policing in Benin Metropolis. The investigation reveals that community policing has the potential to improve public safety, but its implementation is hampered by several challenges, including inadequate funding, lack of training and equipment, and poor communication between law enforcement agencies and the community. The analysis highlights the need for a collaborative approach to community policing, involving law enforcement agencies, community leaders, and other stakeholders.

Keywords: Community Policing, Public Safety, Benin Metropolis, Nigeria, Police-Community Relations, Crime Prevention

1. Introduction

The importance of effective policing in maintaining public safety cannot be overstated, particularly in urban centers like Benin Metropolis. As the city continues to experience rapid growth and development, ensuring the safety and security of its residents has become a pressing concern. Community policing, is a policing philosophy emphasizing police-community relations, community participation, and problem-solving approaches to crime prevention (Skogan, 2006), Community policing is a strategy that emphasizes collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the community, has been increasingly recognized as a vital approach to promoting public safety (Alemika, 2012). By fostering trust, building relationships, and engaging with the community, police forces can better understand and address the unique security challenges facing Benin Metropolis. However, despite its potential benefits, community policing in Benin Metropolis faces

numerous challenges that hinder its effectiveness. The city of Benin Metropolis, as a major urban and cultural center in Nigeria's Edo State, faces persistent and evolving security challenges, including armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, and other social vices. Historically, the conventional, centrally-controlled Nigerian Police Force (NPF) has often been criticized for reactionary policing strategies, a perceived disconnect from the public, and a subsequent mutual distrust between law enforcement and citizens. This gap has made the task of ensuring comprehensive public safety increasingly difficult, prompting a necessary paradigm shift (Ibidapo, 2019).

Insecurity is a major obstacle that Nigeria is currently facing. Every day, newspapers, television station, radio, news blogs etc consistently report various forms of criminal activities, including but not limited to kidnapping, rape, assault, murder (Aigbe & Akenzua, 2020), child sexual abuse, assassination, armed robbery, burglary, vehicle theft, oil pipeline vandalism, incidents of armed attacks by Boko Haram, cybercrimes, and human trafficking (Ibidapo, 2019). These criminal acts are more often than not, committed by individuals employing advanced weaponry against defenseless citizens, in villages and cities, who are occasionally abducted with the intention of demanding ransom. On the same note, the killings perpetrated by criminal herdsmen, which were originally operating in some states in the Northern region of the country have become rampant in Edo going by recent news reports. Edo State has also had a significant amount of criminal activity, including kidnapping, armed robbery, cult fights, and conflicts between herders and farmers. In response to these persistent security concerns and the recognition that public safety cannot be the exclusive responsibility of the police, Community Policing has emerged as a globally recognized and increasingly significant approach in the Nigerian security architecture. Community policing is a philosophy that moves beyond a narrow focus on law enforcement, instead advocating for a grassroots-oriented, bottom-up model that emphasizes active partnership and collaboration between the police, local communities, and other relevant stakeholders. Its core mandate is to proactively solve community problems which include crime, fear of crime, and neighborhood conditions thereby improving the overall quality of community life. In the context of Benin Metropolis, this concept has materialized through initiatives such as the Atalakpa-Edo State Security Network and the coordination of local vigilante groups, reflecting a localized effort to complement the conventional police system.

While community policing offers a viable and potent solution to strengthening security and fostering public trust in Benin Metropolis, its implementation is fraught with considerable challenges. The success of this model is determined by its practical application and the environment in which it operates. Therefore, this exploration will delve into the significant prospects such as improved intelligence gathering, enhanced police-community relations, and localized crime reduction—as well as the critical barriers including systemic police corruption, inadequate funding

and training, and the persistent issue of public distrust that shape the reality of community policing and public safety in Benin Metropolis. This study aims to explore the challenges and prospects of community policing in Benin Metropolis, with a view to identifying strategies that can enhance public safety and improve police-community relations in the city.

Research Objectives

Specifically, this study seeks to

1. explore the prospects of community policing in enhancing public safety in Benin Metropolis.
2. identify the challenges hindering effective community policing in Benin Metropolis

Research Questions

1. what are the prospects of community policing in enhancing public safety in Benin Metropolis?
2. What are the challenges hindering effective community policing in Benin Metropolis?

Literature Review

2.1.Community Policing and Public Safety : Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

Community policing, as a concept, was first applied in the United States in the 1970s as a policing philosophy and strategy to include the public in police institutions, not as police officers, but as partners in the nation's security affairs for maximum effectiveness and responsiveness (Wong and Lee, 2009). It is a broad policing strategy that relies heavily on community involvement and partnerships, and on police presence in the community, to address local crime and disorder. Problem-oriented policing provides law enforcement agencies with an analytic method to develop strategies to prevent and reduce crime and disorder, involving problem identification, analysis, response, and assessment (National Research Council, 2018). Community policing is also recognized as one of the seven aspects of human security, a concept that prioritizes people in addressing security issues.

According to the US Justice Department's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), Community Oriented Policing consists of three main components:

1. Community partnerships (collaborative partnerships between law enforcement agencies and the individuals and organizations they serve to develop solutions to problems),
2. Organizational transformation (alignment of organizational management, structure, personnel, and information systems to improve trust in the police),

3. Problem Solving (the process of engaging in the proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and evaluate effective responses) (COPS, 2014).

According to the COPS, Community policing may entail forming partnerships with a variety of groups, such as service providers, non-profit organizations, commercial enterprises, and the media, in addition to the general public (COPS, 2014).

Nigeria faces significant public safety challenges characterized by widespread insecurity stemming from various sources, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes, and violent crime. Public safety, which refers to the protection of citizens from harm, injury, or danger, is a fundamental human right and a critical component of national security. It encompasses the activities and measures taken by governmental and non-governmental organizations to ensure the safety and well-being of communities (Arisukwu, 2017). Key aspects of public safety include:

1. Protection from harm;
2. Focus on the general public;
3. Addressing various threats;
4. Proactive and reactive measures; and
5. The shared responsibility of multiple actors.

In Nigeria, the Nigeria Police Act (2020) outlines the framework for community policing, emphasizing committee engagement at the state and divisional police command levels (sections 113, 114, and 115). Section 116 (1) of the Act highlights the goals of committee-based community policing, which include:

1. Maintaining a partnership between the community and the police force;
 2. Promoting communication between the police force and the community;
 3. Promoting cooperation between the police and the community in fulfilling the needs of the community regarding policing;
 4. Improving the police service to the community; and
 5. Improving transparency and accountability in the provision of police services to the community.
- Community policing involves restructuring and procedures to ensure that the best people are in charge of policing in their respective communities (Dickson, 2007), and it prepares police officers psychologically and physically for the demands of their profession (Andrews, 2009). In Nigeria, traditional policing by volunteer street vigilante groups exists alongside the state-mandated police force (Idowu, 2021; Oluwaniyi, 2011). In Edo State, the government has sanctioned the use of armed vigilante groups to address crime, including kidnapping, armed robbery, and conflicts between herders and farmers (Unufe & Obarisiagbon, 2023). However, crime persists despite these efforts.

2.2 Community Policing and Public Safety: A Theoretical Analysis

The ultimate objective of COP is to make a community safer and more secure by including locals in the process of detecting and resolving issues with crime and disorder (Cordner 2005). In the context of community-oriented policing, the normative sponsorship theory posits that people and communities actively shape the norms and values that direct their conduct (Greene, 2000). Incorporating Normative Sponsorship Theory into the framework of community-oriented policing implies a fundamental shift from a traditional top-down policing model to a more inclusive and participatory approach (Trojanowicz, & Bucqueroux, 1990). Police officers, as well as community members, need to work together to co-create norms and guidelines for policing activities that are acceptable and beneficial for the community. This collaboration helps in developing a shared understanding of the desired policing behaviors and practices within the community (Braga, & Weisburd, 2010).

However the critical social theory provides a lens to analyze and critique policing strategies like COP within broader social, economic, and political contexts. This theoretical exploration examines how critical social theory can shed light on the implementation and implications of community-oriented policing for building safer communities. Critical social theory allows for a critical analysis of how this policing strategy intersects with societal power structures. It raises important questions about how COP addresses or perpetuates existing social inequalities, power imbalances, and systemic injustices within

communities. To build safer communities, COP must be critically examined and integrated with a broader societal transformation that addresses the root causes of crime and insecurity. Critical social theory emphasizes the importance of dismantling systemic inequalities and power imbalances as a foundational step toward creating safer and more just communities.

Critical Social Theory, as exemplified in Schneider's (2014) research, addresses communication barriers between the police and socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The Broken Window Theory and Community Policing are two distinct concepts in the field of law enforcement that have gained significant attention for their potential to enhance community safety and reduce crime rates. When integrating the Broken Window theory into the study of community policing and public safety, Community policing provides the platform to implement the principles of the Broken Window Theory effectively. Engaging with the community, problem-solving collaboratively, and focusing on prevention

align with the proactive, community-oriented approach advocated by the Broken Window Theory. By working in tandem, these approaches can contribute to safer and more cohesive communities. Lastly the Social Resource Theory, proposed by Lin (2001), reimagines the role of the police as social resources meant to address public concerns. It views crime from the perspective of the community, recognizing that it often arises from unmet expectations, resource deficiencies, and police inefficiency. As such, this theory underscores the police's role in solving community problems and enhancing police-community relationships. Social Resource Theory posits that communities possess valuable social resources

such as social cohesion, trust, and collective efficacy, which significantly influence their ability to effectively address crime and maintain public safety. COP aligns with this theory by recognizing the role of social resources in crime prevention and community well-being.

Summarily Community-oriented policing (COP) is a philosophy of law enforcement that emphasizes collaboration, trust-building, and proactive problem-solving to enhance public safety and build safer communities. This study delved into the theoretical foundations of COP, examining frameworks such as normative sponsorship theory, critical social theory, broken windows theory, and social resource theory.

Normative Sponsorship Theory highlights the role of community involvement in shaping policing norms and fostering trust. Critical Social Theory provides a critical analysis of COP within broader societal contexts, emphasizing the need for systemic transformation. The integration of the Broken Windows Theory into COP emphasizes proactive engagement with communities to address visible signs of disorder. Social Resource Theory underscores the importance of social capital and community engagement in crime prevention and public safety.

2.3 Challenges and Prospects of Community Policing

The successful implementation of community policing in Benin Metropolis is impeded by several challenges, including:

1. Lack of trust and confidence;
2. Inadequate resources;
3. Poor infrastructure;
4. Political interference;
5. Low community participation; and
6. Changing security values.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Broken Windows Theory. The theory was first proposed by social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in 1982 and has since influenced various policies and practices of community policing. According to the theory, leaving a broken window unrepaired in a building sends a signal that no one cares about the building. In actuality, many community policing programs apply elements of the Broken Windows Theory by concentrating on resolving minor indications of disorder as part of their efforts to improve community well-being and public safety. Furthermore, the idea of tackling the underlying socioeconomic and environmental problems that fuel criminal activity usually aligns with community policing strategies. One important aspect of the Broken Windows Theory is this, which is a necessary component of the theory. This theory posits that minor forms of disorder, including graffiti and vandalism, can

contribute to more serious crime and public safety concerns. While community policing and the Broken Windows Theory are independent concepts, they are not incompatible and can be utilized to address social and environmental issues that contribute to criminal activity. The theory suggests that a deteriorated neighborhood breeds crime, while a neighborhood where disorderliness is not tolerated discourages criminal behavior. Explicitly, broken window theory states that the environment impacts what happens around it

3. Methodology

The study adopts a cross-sectional and descriptive research design. The study population comprised residents of the three local government areas that make up Benin Metropolis (Oredo, Egor and Ikpoba-Okha). A sample of 150 respondents was selected using purposive and stratified sampling techniques to ensure proper representation across the study area. Data were collected from primary sources using questionnaires and secondary sources, including published reports, books, journals, newspapers, and magazines. Tables and simple percentages were used to analyze the questionnaire data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondents' Responsibility for Security

Table 1 shows the respondents' views on who is accountable for the safety of people and their property. The majority (92%) believed it is the government's responsibility, followed by private security companies (5.3%) and community policing efforts (2.7%).

Table 1: Responsibility for Security

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Government	138	93.0
Private security companies	8	5.3
Community policing efforts	4	2.7
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

4.2 Security and Public Safety Challenges

Table 2 indicates that 88% of respondents agreed that security and public safety are challenges in Benin Metropolis, 10% disagreed, and 2% were unsure.

Table 2: Security and Public Safety Challenges

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	132	88.0
No	15	10.0
No idea	3	2.0
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

4.3 Need for Community Policing.

Table 3 demonstrates that 96% of respondents agreed on the need for community policing in Benin City, such as the Edo State Security Network, while 2.7% disagreed, and 1.3% were unsure.

Table 3: Need for Community Policing

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	144	96.0
No	4	2.7
No idea	2	1.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

4.4 Impact of Community Policing on Crime Reduction

Table 4 shows that 78% of respondents believed that the presence of community policing (Edo State Security Network) had led to a decline in crime, 16.7% disagreed, and 5.3% were unsure.

Table 4: Impact of Community Policing on Crime Reduction.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	117	78.0
No	25	16.7
No idea	8	5.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey 2025 .

4.5 Relationship Between Community Policing and Public Safety

Table 5 reveals that 80.7% of respondents agreed that there is a relationship between community policing and public safety in Benin City, 10.7% had no idea, and 8.6% disagreed.

Table 5: Relationship Between Community Policing and Public Safety.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	131	80.7
No	13	8.6
No idea	16	10.7
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

4.6 Potential of Community Policing to Improve Police-Community Relations

Table 6 indicates that 80.7% of respondents agreed that community policing has the potential to improve police-community relations in Benin Metropolis, while 19.3% disagreed.

Table 6: Potential to Improve Police-Community Relations.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	121	80.7
No	29	19.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

4.7 Community Policing and Community Participation in Crime Prevention

Table 7 shows that 78% of respondents agreed that community policing promotes community participation in crime prevention in Benin Metropolis, 16.7% disagreed, and 5.3% had no idea

Table 7: Community Policing and Community Participation.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	117	78.0
No	25	16.7
No idea	8	5.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

5. Discussion

The findings of this study emphasize the significant relationship between community policing and public safety. The results indicate that the majority of respondents believe that public safety and security are challenges in Benin Metropolis and that the government is primarily responsible for

providing security through initiatives like community policing. These findings corroborate with Ibidapo (2019), who found that community policing aids in the detection of security challenges in Nigeria. Okeshola & Mediara (2013) support this, arguing for the importance of police visibility and integration within communities to foster trust. Olaolu (2015) also highlighted that citizens perceive community policing as a proactive approach to addressing public safety concerns.

Furthermore, the study reveals that respondents believe community policing, such as the Edo State Security Network, has contributed to crime reduction, and there is a positive relationship between community policing and public safety in Benin Metropolis. This aligns with Onyeije, Anyaoha, & Osita-Njoku (2019), who emphasized that community policing involves partnerships with relevant stakeholders to address public safety problems.

However, the findings also highlight that corruption, lack of accountability, and ineffective community policing undermine public safety efforts in Benin City. This is consistent with studies by Dawodu (2007) and Nwakanma (2010), which identified factors such as poor knowledge and practice of community policing, corruption, inadequate funding, poor training, and police officers' unwillingness to embrace the concept. The National Research Council (2018) also emphasized that community policing requires a redefined relationship between the police and the community, with the community acting as a “co-producer” of public safety (Gill et al., 2014).

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study concludes that community policing has the potential to promote public safety and improve police-community relations in Benin Metropolis. However, the implementation of community policing in Benin Metropolis is confronted with several challenges, including inadequate funding, lack of trust, and inadequate training..

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Prioritize community policing:** The Nigerian Police Force should prioritize community policing and provide adequate funding and resources for its implementation.
2. **Provide adequate training:** Police officers should receive adequate training on community policing to enhance their skills and knowledge.
3. **Engage in community outreach:** The police should engage in community outreach programs to build trust and promote cooperation between the police and the community.
4. **Promote community participation:** The police should promote community participation in crime prevention and encourage community members to take ownership of community policing initiatives.

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