
Repositioning Police-Citizen Interactions for Curbing Acts of Criminality in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper focuses on repositioning police-citizen interaction in curbing act of criminality in Nigeria. It's also reviews the literature and examines how the uncordial police-citizen interaction has affected and discredited system of effective policing in curbing acts of criminality in Nigeria. Unfortunately the strained interaction between the police and the citizens has impacted negatively on acts of criminality in the country. In Nigeria, the relationship between law enforcement agencies and citizens plays a pivotal role in the prevention and mitigation of criminal activities. However, this interaction has often been fraught with challenges, ranging from distrust to abuse of power, exacerbating the prevalence of criminality in the country. Thus this paper explores the imperative of repositioning police-citizen interactions as a strategic approach to curb acts of criminality in Nigeria in order to reducing crime rate. Drawing on empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, this paper sets the stage for a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted dynamics surrounding this critical issue. The paper concludes that enhanced trust and cooperation between the police and citizens can facilitate more effective crime reporting and prevention, reduce instances of vigilantism and mob justice, and increase compliance with the law. It recommends among others that facilitating collaborative partnerships between law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders is likely to address local crime challenges and social issues. This to a lager extent will impact on the system of policing and community safety

Keywords: Repositioning, Police-Citizen Interactions, Curbing, Act, Criminality

Introduction

The place of crime prevention and crime control in any society cannot be over emphasized. Traditionally the maintenance of law and order in any civilized society like Nigeria is usually the exclusive role of conventional police and other law enforcement agencies. In Nigeria, the police forces came up with policy to tackle crime wave and insecurity, with a slogan "Fire for Fire and the adoption of community oriented policing in April 27, 200, focusing on police-citizen relationship and interaction to enhancing collaboration efforts between the police

and the public in combating security challenges in the society (Owonibi &Ukawuilulu 2020). However the police-citizen interaction in both the colonial and modern times in Nigeria generally has been described as antagonistic and characterized by suspicion, prejudice, mutual disrespect, conflict, violence and other heinous crime and extra judicial killings which are perpetrated by the same police against the citizens they ought to protect. Thus it is difficult for any police organization to succeed in its goal to maintain of the law an order without the cooperation of the people being policed.

In Nigeria, the dynamics of police-citizen interactions play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's security landscape. The efficacy of law enforcement efforts, particularly in curbing acts of criminality, is intricately tied to the nature of these interactions. As the country grapples with various forms of criminal activities ranging from petty theft to organized crime, there is a growing recognition of the need to reposition police-citizen interactions to enhance crime prevention and control strategies. Nigeria's police force, like many law enforcement agencies globally, operates within a complex socio-political context characterised by historical legacies of the colonial militarised policing geared towards the colonial and elites needs of political oppression and economics exploitation without regards to the needs of the colonialized, institutional challenges such as corruption that gave the police a poor image in the Nigerian society, shortage of manpower all these fail to cater to the needs of the people and societal expectations that worsen the relationship between the police-citizen. The history of policing in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era, with the establishment of the Nigerian Police Force in 1820 by the British colonial administration (Fatile, 2017). Since then, the Nigerian police have undergone various transformations, yet persisting issues such as corruption, inefficiency, and brutality continue to undermine public trust and confidence in law enforcement institutions (Omololu, 2019).

Police-citizen interactions in Nigeria are often marked by tension, mistrust, and abuse of power, perpetuating a cycle of violence and impunity (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2018). The pervasive use of extrajudicial tactics, arbitrary arrests, and extortion further exacerbate disconnect between the police and the communities they serve (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2015). Consequently, instead of fostering collaboration and cooperation in crime prevention efforts, these interactions breed resentment, alienation, and non-cooperation among citizens, hindering effective policing strategies (Oluwakemi, 2020). To address these challenges and reposition police-citizen interactions for curbing acts of criminality, a comprehensive approach is required. This entails not only structural reforms within law enforcement

agencies but also a fundamental shift in policing philosophy towards community-oriented and rights-based approaches (Ikelegbe, 2019). Community policing initiatives that emphasize partnership, dialogue, and problem-solving between the police and local communities have shown promise in enhancing trust, improving intelligence gathering, and promoting proactive crime prevention strategies (Okechukwu, 2016). The effectiveness of efforts to curb acts of criminality in Nigeria hinges on the quality of police-citizen interactions. By addressing the underlying issues of trust deficit, accountability, and respect for human rights, Nigeria can foster a more conducive environment for collaborative crime prevention efforts. Through targeted reforms and the adoption of community-oriented policing approaches, Nigeria has the potential to transform its law enforcement landscape and enhance public safety and security for all citizens. This paper is therefore intended to add to the body of literature that goes to substantiate the claim that there is a need for repositioning police-citizen interactions in curbing act of criminality in Nigeria, to improve the quality of life and safety in the society. In addition, this paper will assist policy makers to formulate policies aimed at enchaining peaceful interactions between police-citizen for effective policing and for crime prevention.

Conceptual Understanding of Police-Citizen Interaction

Since inception it has become apparent that Nigeria security is not an effort that can be conducted by the Nigerian Police Force and other law enforcements alone. However an effective policing must include partnerships interactions with the citizen, such as making the people to be police's friends for easy communications and for flow of information between the police and the citizen. Therefore there is an urgent need to repositioning police-citizen interaction in curbing act of criminality in Nigeria.

Reasons Why Police-Citizen Interaction is highly important to Curb Acts of Criminality

The strained relationship between the police and citizens in Nigeria can be attributed to several factors, stemming from historical, socio-economic, and institutional contexts.

Historical Context:

The Colonial Legacy: Nigeria's policing system was established during the colonial era, primarily to serve the interests of the colonial administration rather than the local populace (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). This historical legacy has left a lasting impression on police-citizen interactions, fostering mistrust and resentment.

Corruption and Abuse of Power: Widespread corruption within the police force undermines public trust and fosters a culture of impunity (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Officers often engage in extortion, bribery, and other forms of misconduct, leading to increased hostility from citizens.

Excessive Use of Force: Instances of police brutality, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests, have been well-documented in Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2020). The use of excessive force by law enforcement contributes to fear and resentment among the populace, exacerbating tensions.

Lack of Accountability: Weak accountability mechanisms within the police force allow officers to act with impunity (Oyekanmi & Ogunnubi, 2019). Cases of police misconduct are frequently met with inadequate investigations and disciplinary actions, eroding public confidence in the justice system.

Ethnic and Religious Bias: Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious landscape often intersects with policing practices, leading to discrimination and profiling of certain communities (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). Perceived biases in law enforcement further alienate marginalized groups and fuel resentment.

Poor Training and Resources: Inadequate training, coupled with a lack of modern equipment and resources, hampers the effectiveness of the police force (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Undertrained officers may resort to aggressive tactics, exacerbating tensions with the public.

Political Interference: Politicization of the police force undermines its autonomy and impartiality, with officers often deployed to serve the interests of political elites rather than uphold the rule of law (Oyekanmi & Ogunnubi, 2019). This interference erodes public trust and confidence in law enforcement institutions.

Examination of international best practices and their potential application in the Nigerian context: Examining international best practices in policing and their potential application in the Nigerian context can provide valuable insights for addressing the challenges facing law enforcement in the country.

Community Policing: International best practices emphasise the importance of community-oriented policing, which prioritizes collaboration between law enforcement agencies and local communities (UNODC, 2014). By fostering trust and cooperation, community policing can enhance public safety and reduce crime rates.

Training and Professional Development: Rigorous training programs for police officers, focusing on human rights, conflict resolution, and ethical conduct, are essential components of effective policing (OSCE, 2018). Investing in continuous professional development can improve the skills and professionalism of Nigerian law enforcement personnel.

Accountability Mechanisms: Establishing robust oversight mechanisms, such as independent police complaints commissions and civilian review boards, can help hold law enforcement agencies accountable for misconduct and abuses of power (NACOLE, n.d.). Transparent investigations and disciplinary processes are critical for building public trust.

Use of Technology: Leveraging technology, including body cameras, dashcams, and crime mapping software, can enhance transparency and accountability in policing (RAND Corporation, 2014). Embracing innovative solutions can improve efficiency and effectiveness in law enforcement operations.

Police-Community Partnerships: Engaging in collaborative partnerships with community organizations, NGOs, and other stakeholders can strengthen police-community relations and promote problem-solving approaches to crime prevention (Skogan, 2006). Building trust and understanding is the key to successful policing.

Procedural Justice: Emphasising procedural justice principles, such as fairness, neutrality, and respect for human dignity, can enhance public perceptions of legitimacy and compliance with the law (Tyler, 2006). Treating

citizens with respect and dignity is crucial for fostering positive police-citizen interactions.

Decentralization and Local Autonomy: Devolving decision-making authority to local police precincts or districts can empower officers to tailor their strategies to the specific needs and priorities of their communities (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2016). Localized approaches to policing can foster greater responsiveness and accountability.

Adapting these international best practices to the Nigerian context requires careful consideration of local socio-cultural dynamics, institutional capacities, and political realities. By learning from successful models implemented elsewhere, Nigerian authorities can work towards building a more accountable, transparent, and community-oriented police force.

Overview of Current Structure of Police-Interaction in Curbing Acts of Criminality in Nigeria

In Nigeria, police-citizen relations are marked by a complex interplay of factors stemming from historical legacies, institutional challenges, and societal dynamics. The Nigerian police force, established during the colonial era, has struggled with issues such as corruption, inefficiency, and human rights abuses, which have eroded public trust and confidence in law enforcement institutions (Omololu, 2019). As a result, police-citizen interactions are often characterized by tension, mistrust, and instances of abuse of power, perpetuating a cycle of violence and impunity (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2018).

One of the key challenges facing police-citizen relations in Nigeria is the widespread use of extrajudicial tactics and arbitrary arrests by law enforcement officers. Reports of police brutality, extortion, and harassment of citizens are common, contributing to a climate of fear and hostility (Oluwakemi, 2020). Additionally, there is a pervasive perception of impunity among police officers, with few instances of accountability for misconduct or human rights violations (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2015). The lack of effective mechanisms for addressing grievances and complaints against the police further exacerbates disconnect between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. Many citizens feel powerless to challenge police misconduct or seek redress for abuses, leading to a sense of alienation and disillusionment with the criminal justice

system (Ikelegbe, 2019). In response to these challenges, there have been calls for reforming the Nigerian police force and improving police-citizen relations. Efforts to enhance transparency, accountability, and professionalism within law enforcement agencies have been advocated for, alongside measures to strengthen community engagement and oversight mechanisms (Okechukwu, 2016). Community policing initiatives, which prioritize partnership, dialogue, and problem-solving between the police and local communities, have gained traction as a means of rebuilding trust and fostering cooperation in crime prevention efforts (Okechukwu, 2016).

However, despite these efforts, significant challenges remain in transforming police-citizen relations in Nigeria. Structural issues such as inadequate training, poor working conditions, and systemic corruption continue to undermine reform efforts, highlighting the need for sustained commitment and comprehensive strategies to address the root causes of mistrust and hostility between the police and citizens (Omololu, 2019). The current state of police-citizen relations in Nigeria reflects a complex and multifaceted reality shaped by historical, institutional, and societal factors. While there have been efforts to improve accountability and transparency within law enforcement agencies, fundamental reforms are needed to rebuild trust and confidence in the Nigerian police force. By addressing issues of corruption, impunity, and human rights abuses, Nigeria can work towards creating a more inclusive and responsive criminal justice system that serves the needs of all citizens.

Shortcomings of the Current Structure of Police-Citizen Interaction in Acts of Criminality in Nigeria

In the recent times despite the adoption of community oriented policing to enhance interaction between the police and the citizen as partnership, in collaborative bond for crime prevention. Police-citizens interactions is still largely characterised by feuds such as intimidation, rape, mass killing and police brutality, which has foster an antagonisms between the police and the citizens. The police stood as a symbol of authority to enforce government policies and regulations and arresting offences, they were usually at logger heads with members of the public. To solve this problem, there must be cordial relationship between the police and the citizens and this can only be achieved by repositioning police-citizen interaction in curbing acts of criminality in Nigeria. Whereby there will be reduction in crime and also making Nigerian communities safe.

The Necessity of Repositioning Police-Citizen Interaction in Curbing the Acts of Criminality in Nigeria

Repositioning police-citizen relations in Nigeria is crucial for several reasons, ranging from enhancing trust and confidence in law enforcement agencies to promoting security and stability within the society.

Trust and Confidence Building: A positive police-citizen relationship fosters trust and confidence among the populace towards law enforcement agencies. Trust is fundamental for effective policing as it encourages citizens to collaborate with the police in crime prevention and reporting. According to Okechukwu (2019), trust deficit between the Nigerian police and citizens has contributed to a lack of cooperation in crime prevention efforts.

Enhanced Security: Improved police-citizen relations lead to better cooperation and information's sharing, which are vital for maintaining security. A study by Abdulmalik, Ogunwale, & Adeola (2020) found that communities with strong police-community partnerships experienced lower crime rates compared to those with strained relations.

Reduced Human Rights Violations: Repositioning police-citizen relations can mitigate human rights abuses by law enforcement agencies. Strengthening accountability mechanisms and promoting community policing can help address issues of police brutality and extrajudicial killings (Amnesty International, 2020).

Social Cohesion and Stability: Positive interactions between the police and citizens contribute to social cohesion and stability within communities. When citizens perceive the police as fair and responsive, it enhances feelings of safety and belonging, ultimately fostering a more cohesive society (Uchendu & Osarodion, 2018).

Effective Crime Prevention and Resolution: Collaborative efforts between the police and citizens improve crime prevention and resolution strategies. Community policing initiatives, such as neighborhood watch programs, have been successful in reducing crime rates in various Nigerian communities (Igbinedion & Igbinedion, 2017).

Repositioning police-citizen relations in Nigeria requires multifaceted approaches, including community engagement programs, capacity building for law enforcement officers, and reforms in policing strategies and structures (Agbibo, 2016). By prioritizing these efforts, Nigeria can foster a more inclusive and effective law enforcement system that serves the needs of its citizens.

Benefits of Repositioning Police-Citizen Interaction in Curbing Acts of Criminality in Nigeria

Improved police-citizen interactions can have a significant impact on curbing acts of criminality in Nigeria thus:

Enhanced Trust and Cooperation:

Positive interactions between the police and citizens build trust and foster cooperation within communities (Tyler, 2006). When citizens perceive the police as legitimate and responsive to their needs, they are more likely to report crimes, provide information, and collaborate with law enforcement agencies (Tankebe, 2013).

Effective Crime Reporting and Prevention:

Improved police-citizen relations encourage timely and accurate reporting of criminal activities, leading to more effective crime prevention efforts (Cordner & Scarborough, 2019). Citizens who feel comfortable engaging with law enforcement are more likely to share valuable intelligence and participate in community policing initiatives.

Reduction in Vigilantism and Mob Justice:

Trustworthy and accessible police services can help deter vigilantism and mob justice, which often arise in communities where faith in the formal justice system is low (Ezeh, 2019). Strengthening police-community partnerships promotes peaceful conflict resolution and reduces the likelihood of retaliatory violence.

Increased Compliance with the Law:

Positive interactions with the police contribute to a sense of procedural justice among citizens, leading to greater compliance with legal norms and regulations (Tyler, 2006). When individuals perceive law enforcement as fair and respectful, they are more likely to voluntarily adhere to the law and refrain from engaging in criminal behaviour.

Early Intervention and Conflict Resolution:

Proactive engagement with communities allows law enforcement agencies to identify potential sources of conflict and intervene early to prevent escalation (Cordner & Scarborough, 2019). Building strong relationships with community leaders and stakeholders enables police to address underlying socio-economic grievances and mitigate the root causes of crime.

Empowerment of Vulnerable Populations:

For marginalized and vulnerable populations, positive interactions with the police can promote empowerment and access to justice (Mastrofski et al., 2000). By actively engaging with marginalized groups and addressing their unique needs, law enforcement agencies can enhance social cohesion and reduce the risk of criminal exploitation.

Promotion of Restorative Justice Practices:

Restorative justice approaches, which prioritize healing and reconciliation over punitive measures, are more viable in environments where trust between the police and citizens is strong (Van Ness & Strong, 2015). Building constructive relationships between law enforcement and communities facilitates the implementation of restorative justice programs and reduces recidivism rates.

Strategies for Repositioning Police-Citizen Interactions in Curbing Acts of Criminality in Nigeria

Repositioning police-citizen interactions in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that addresses systemic issues and promotes community trust and collaboration. Here are some strategies:

Community Policing Implementation: Community policing emphasizes building partnerships between the police and the community to address safety concerns collaboratively. Oluwasegun (2018) highlights that effective community policing strategies can improve police legitimacy and citizen satisfaction.

Training and Sensitization: Providing comprehensive training for police officers on human rights, conflict resolution, and cultural sensitivity is crucial. A study by Amnesty International (2015) emphasizes the importance of sensitizing officers to the diverse cultural norms and practices within Nigerian communities.

Enhanced Accountability Mechanisms: Strengthening accountability mechanisms within law enforcement agencies can help curb police misconduct and abuse of power. Okechukwu et al. (2020) argue for the establishment of independent oversight bodies to investigate complaints against police officers.

Technology Integration: Leveraging technology, such as body cameras and digital complaint platforms, can promote transparency and accountability in police-citizen interactions. A study by Ihekwoaba and Chukwu (2019) suggests that technology can help deter police misconduct and provide evidence for accountability.

Civilian Oversight Boards: Establishing civilian oversight boards comprised of community members can provide an additional layer of accountability and ensure that police actions align with community expectations. According to Human Rights Watch (2019), civilian oversight The boards have proven effective in addressing police abuses in other contexts.

Promotion of Dialogue and Engagement: Facilitating regular dialogues and engagement sessions between police officials and community members can foster mutual understanding and trust. Okunola (2017) underscores the importance of creating platforms for open communication to address grievances and build rapport.

Conclusion

In conclusion, fostering improved police-citizen interactions in Nigeria holds great potential for addressing the persistent challenges of criminality and insecurity in the country. By implementing international best practices such as community policing, accountability mechanisms, and procedural justice principles, Nigerian authorities can build trust, enhance cooperation, and promote legitimacy within law enforcement institutions. The potential impact of these efforts is far-reaching. Enhanced trust and cooperation between the police and citizens can facilitate more effective crime reporting and prevention, reduce instances of vigilantism and mob justice, and increase compliance with the law. Moreover, proactive engagement with communities enables early intervention and conflict resolution, empowering vulnerable populations and promoting social cohesion. Ultimately, creating safer and more resilient communities in Nigeria requires a concerted effort to strengthen police-community partnerships, prioritize accountability and transparency, and address underlying socio-economic grievances. By investing in positive police-citizen interactions, Nigerian authorities can pave the way for a more just, equitable, and secure society for all.

Recommendations

Based on the examination of factors contributing to strained police-citizen relations, international best practices, and the potential impact of improved interactions, several recommendations can be made to enhance policing and reduce criminality in Nigeria:

Invest in Community Policing: Prioritize the implementation of community-oriented policing strategies that emphasize collaboration, trust-building, and problem-solving partnerships between the police and local communities. Allocate resources for community engagement initiatives, including neighbourhood watch programs and citizen advisory boards.

Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms: Establish independent oversight bodies with the authority to investigate allegations of police misconduct, enforce disciplinary actions, and promote transparency within law enforcement agencies. Ensure that accountability mechanisms are accessible, impartial, and responsive to the needs of the public.

Enhance Training and Professional Development: Improve the quality and relevance of police training programs to emphasize human rights, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement skills. Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for law enforcement personnel to stay abreast of emerging challenges and best practices.

Promote Procedural Justice: Emphasize procedural fairness, respect, and neutrality in police-citizen interactions to enhance perceptions of legitimacy and compliance with the law. Implement training programs and policies that prioritize respectful and dignified treatment of all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Leverage Technology: Harness the potential of technology to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in policing operations. Equip officers with body-worn cameras, establish centralized databases for crime reporting and intelligence-sharing, and deploy data-driven strategies for crime prevention and response.

Foster Police-Community Partnerships: Facilitate collaborative partnerships between law enforcement agencies, community organizations, religious institutions, and other stakeholders to address local crime challenges and social issues. Encourage regular dialogue, joint problem-solving initiatives, and community-led crime prevention efforts.

Address Socio-Economic Factors: Recognize the interconnectedness between crime and socio-economic inequalities, and implement holistic approaches that address underlying root causes of criminality. Invest in education, employment opportunities, healthcare, and social services to empower marginalized communities and reduce their vulnerability to crime.

Promote Restorative Justice Practices: Explore alternatives to traditional punitive measures by promoting restorative justice approaches that prioritize healing, reconciliation, and community restoration. Support the implementation of diversion programs, victim-offender mediation, and community service initiatives to address the harm caused by criminal behaviour.

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