

# Community Policing Strategies and Crime Control in Local Communities within Imo State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study evaluates the impact of community policing strategies on crime control in local communities within Imo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study focuses on two key objectives. The first, is to ascertain whether the implementation of regular community patrols by vigilante groups and the police, contributed to the prevention of kidnapping, and second, to determine if the strategy of setting up security checkpoints by Ebube Agu has been successful in curbing the movement of illegal arms and reducing communal clashes. The study is anchored on Structural-Functionalism Theory. The study integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis. Findings of the study reveal that regular community patrols effectively deterred criminal activities such as kidnapping, by fostering collaboration between local communities and law enforcement agencies. The visible presence of patrol teams, combined with local intelligence gathering, created a secure environment that disrupted kidnapping operations. In addition, the establishment of security checkpoints by Ebube Agu proved instrumental in intercepting illegal arms, monitoring suspicious movements, and reducing the frequency of communal clashes. Despite these achievements, challenges such as limited resources, lack of trust in some communities, and occasional conflicts between security operatives and residents hindered the full potential of the strategies. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for sustained efforts, improved funding, and creations of stronger partnerships between all stakeholders, in order to enhance their effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Community, Policing, Strategies, Crime Control, Imo, Nigeria.

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## INTRODUCTION

The history of the Nigeria Police is deeply rooted in traditional Nigerian societies. Policing of various communities was initially carried out by age grades, vigilante groups, and other organizations under traditional institutions, known as traditional policing. Onyeozili *et al.*, (2021) stated that these bodies corrected or punished serious violations of institutionalized ways, values, and norms. With the advent of colonialism, the British established a colonial police force in 1861 to enforce sanitary regulations in Lagos, prevent crime, and enforce criminal laws. This colonial system of policing and crime prevention extended to Northern and Western Nigeria, anchoring in the enforcement of rules and regulations to sustain stability (Usman, 2019).

Globally, community policing has evolved as a proactive strategy to address crime within local communities. Skogan and Hartnett (2019) notes that community policing is a method that involves the police

and the community working together to identify and solve issues of crime and disorder. In Europe, for example, the concept of community policing was embraced as a response to increasing crime rates in urban areas during the early 20th century, with a focus on building trust between the police and the community (Kappeler *et al.*, 2020). In the United States, community policing gained significant momentum during the civil rights era, as it became clear that traditional policing methods were not sufficient to maintain public order without the support and cooperation of the community (Adegbile, 2016). This model of policing gradually spread to other parts of the world, including Africa, where it was adapted to fit the local contexts and traditions.

In Nigeria, community policing has evolved from these traditional practices, with the Nigeria Police Force being one of the professional institutions responsible for arresting, detecting, investigating, and prosecuting offenders. This is a legacy of the colonial

masters from the pre-colonial era, which was solidly based on traditional operations of policing. Ishaya (2020) succinctly explained that traditional community policing in Nigeria is a form of inter-group relations, where both the police and the community regard each other as identifiable groups with specific characteristics. Attitudes and perceptions from both the police and the community tend to be collectively influenced, leading to stereotypes being formed to combat crimes.

In Imo State, the need for effective community policing strategies has become increasingly evident. The interactions between the police and the community in Imo State are often restricted to involuntary law enforcement encounters, such as arrests, stop and search, and detention, which can worsen public perception of the police as a hostile institution (Ike *et al.*, 2022). However, collaboration with vigilante groups can facilitate the easy identification of criminals (e Silva, 2018). The issue of community policing and security in Nigeria, particularly in States like Imo, has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest. Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of community policing and vigilante groups in addressing the country's pervasive insecurity issues. For instance, Garba *et al.*, (2022) have highlighted the persistence of high rates of armed robbery, political assassinations, and ethno-religious killings in Nigeria, despite governmental promises to curb crime. These have led to a widespread acknowledgment that the conventional police force, on its own, is insufficient to meet the security needs of the populace. According to Awotayo *et al.*, (2023) and Kenneth *et al.*, (2023), the rise of vigilante groups and regional security outfits like Amotekun in the South-West and Ebube Agu in the South-East represents a critical response to the inadequacies of the national police force. These groups have become particularly prominent in regions where state and local governments feel that the federal security apparatus is either ineffective or unwilling to protect their communities adequately. Ajayi argues that while these groups fill a critical security gap, their operations often blur the lines between lawful enforcement and extrajudicial actions.

Furthermore, scholars like Felbab-Brown *et al.*, (2021) have examined the legal and social implications of vigilante justice in Nigeria, noting that these groups frequently operate outside constitutional boundaries. While they often enjoy local support due to their swift and sometimes brutal methods of justice, there is a significant concern about the potential for human rights abuses. Odekunle argues that without proper regulation and oversight, these groups could exacerbate the very security issues they are intended to address. Despite these studies, there remains a notable gap in empirical research specifically focused on public perception and the effectiveness of community policing initiatives in Imo State. While much has been written about the rise of vigilante groups and regional security outfits, there is a

lack of data-driven studies that assess the actual impact of these groups on crime rates and community safety in specific regions like Imo State. Most existing studies tend to generalize findings across different states, without considering the unique socio-political contexts that influence the effectiveness of community policing in each area. In addition, while the formation of groups like the Imo State Vigilante Group (ISVG) and Ebube Agu is a recent development aimed at curbing rising insecurity in the state, there is little scholarly work that critically evaluates their operations and the public's perception about them. In light of this, the current study aims to fill this gap by examining community policing strategies and crime control in Nigeria, with a focus on Imo State. Hence, the following research questions guided the study;

1. Has the implementation of regular community patrols by vigilante groups and the police contributed to the prevention of kidnapping in Imo State?
2. Has the strategy of setting up security checkpoints by Ebube Agu been successful in curbing the movement of illegal arms and reducing communal clashes in Imo State?

## METHODS

### Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The study is anchored on Structural-Functionalism; a sociological perspective that views society as a complex system composed of interdependent parts working together to promote stability and social order (Harper, 2011). This theory emerged in the late 19th century and gained prominence in the mid-20th century, particularly through the works of sociologists such as Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert K. Merton. Structural-Functionalism seeks to understand the functions that various structures (such as institutions, norms, and roles) perform to maintain societal equilibrium. The core Propositions of Structural-Functionalism

- **Social Stability and Order:** Structural-Functionalism posits that society is characterized by a stable equilibrium, where all components function harmoniously. Each part of society plays a specific role, that contributes to the overall stability and functionality of the system. This perspective highlights the importance of social order as well as the mechanisms that sustain it.
- **Interdependence of Social Structures:** According to this theory, various social institutions (such as family, education, and law enforcement) within society, are interdependent. Hence, changes in one structure can inevitably affect others, thereby leading to adjustments in behavior as well as norms, in order to maintain equilibrium. This interconnectedness is crucial for having a better understanding of societal responses to challenges.
- **Functionality of Social Practices:** Structural-Functionalism places emphasis on the fact that all

social practices, norms, as well as institutions, serve specific functions that all together, contribute to societal stability. For example, law enforcement agencies, like the police as well as vigilante groups, fulfill a paramount role, when it comes to maintaining public order and safety.

- **Adaptation to Change:** The theory recognizes that societies must adapt to changes around them; whether they are internal (such as shifts in cultural norms) or external (such as economic changes or political upheavals), in order to thrive. This adaptability is essential for the continued effective functioning of social structures.
- **Focus on Consensus and Cooperation:** Structural-Functionalism also asserts that social order is maintained, through consensus as well as cooperation, amongst the different members of society. This perspective lays emphasis the importance of shared values and norms in fostering social cohesion.

### Method of Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected for this study. The Survey method of data collection, involving the use of structured questionnaires were distributed to community members and law enforcement officers. The survey include questions on the effectiveness of community policing, frequency of interactions with police, perception of safety, and crime incidence in their neighborhoods. Note that key informant interviews were also carried out to support the findings from the questionnaire results.

The study focused on three local government areas (LGAs) in Imo State: Owerri Municipal, Orlu, and Okigwe. These LGAs were selected based on their high crime rates and the presence of active community policing programmes. Owerri Municipal, being the State capital, faces urban crime challenges, while Orlu and Okigwe are very well known for their commercial activities and strategic locations, respectively.

According to recent demographic data, Owerri West has a population of approximately 99,265, Okigwe has about 132,237 residents, and Orlu has around 142,792 people. This brings the total population to approximately 374,294. The study population includes community members, law enforcement officers, local government officials, and representatives from community-based organizations within the selected LGAs. This population is chosen because it represents the key stakeholders involved in community policing and crime control efforts.

A sample size of 400 respondents was drawn from the population, using a stratified random sampling technique. This technique ensured that different segments of the population (community members, police

officers, vigilante members) are represented in the study. The sample was stratified as follows:

- 200 community members (distributed evenly across the three LGAs)
- 100 law enforcement officers
- 100 vigilante group members

Stratification ensured that different categories, such as age, gender, occupation, and role in community policing, are represented.

### Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of the data collected for this study involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative descriptive tools were employed to analyze data collected from primary sources, specifically through surveys. This analysis includes the use of frequencies to determine the number of responses for each survey question, thereby, allowing for a clear understanding of the distribution of respondents' perceptions. Percentages were used to express the survey results in relative terms, thereby, facilitating comparisons across different demographic groups. Additionally, a qualitative descriptive approach, specifically the thematic analysis, was utilized to analyze some of the data collected through interviews from primary sources.

## RESULTS

### Effect of the Implementation of Regular Community Patrols by Security Outfits on the Prevention of Kidnapping in Imo State

This section presents the results of the study, analyzing the data collected in response to the first research question: *Has the implementation of regular community patrols by vigilante groups and the police contributed to the prevention of kidnapping in Imo State?* The data collected from both primary and secondary sources are analyzed using quantitative and qualitative descriptive methods. Quantitative data collected through surveys were summarized using frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency. Qualitative data, particularly from interviews and secondary sources such as police records and crime reports, were analyzed thematically, to identify patterns and assess the impact of community policing strategies on crime control.

### Analysis of Quantitative Data

#### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic data of the respondents were summarized to provide a background of the survey participants. Out of the sample size of 400 respondents, the distribution by gender, age, occupation, and community of residence was as follows:

**Gender:** 58% male, 42% female.

**Age:** 25% were between 18-30 years, 35% between 31-45 years, 28% between 46-60 years, and 12% were above 60 years.

**Occupation:** 40% were employed, 30% self-employed, 15% unemployed, and 15% students.

**Communities:** Respondents were drawn from Obinze (Owerri), Eziana (Orlu), and Okigwe urban areas.

### Respondents' Perception of Regular Community Patrols

The data from the survey regarding the implementation of regular community patrols by vigilante groups and the police were summarized in Table 4.1.

**Table 1: Perception of Regular Community Patrols**

Perception	Frequency (n=400)	Percentage (%)
Very Effective	200	50%
Moderately Effective	120	30%
Not Effective	50	12.5%
No Opinion	30	7.5%

Source: Authors

The majority of the respondents (50%) rated community patrols as *very effective*, while 30% considered them *moderately effective*. Only 12.5% believed that the patrols were *not effective*, and 7.5% expressed *no opinion* on the matter. This result indicates that community patrols by vigilante groups, such as the Imo Security Watch and Ebube Agu, were perceived as

having a substantial impact on reducing crime and improving the sense of safety within the communities.

### Changes in Kidnapping Incidents

Survey respondents were asked to assess the changes in kidnapping incidents in their communities since the commencement of regular patrols by the police and vigilante groups.

**Table 2: Changes in Kidnapping Incidents**

Change in Incidents	Frequency (n=400)	Percentage (%)
Significant Decrease	180	45%
Moderate Decrease	150	37.5%
No Change	40	10%
Increase in Incidents	30	7.5%

Source: Authors

According to Table 2, 45% of the respondents observed a *significant decrease* in kidnapping incidents, while 37.5% noticed a *moderate decrease*. A small portion of the respondents (10%) claimed that there was *no change*, and 7.5% believed that kidnapping incidents had *increased*. This reinforces the claim that regular

patrols have been instrumental in deterring criminal activities in these areas.

### Public Perception of Safety

To further understand the effectiveness of the patrols, respondents were asked about their perception of safety in their communities.

**Table 3: Public Perception of Safety**

Perception of Safety	Frequency (n=400)	Percentage (%)
Feel Much Safer	220	55%
Feel Safer	120	30%
No Change in Safety Feeling	40	10%
Feel Less Safe	20	5%

Source: Authors

As shown in Table 3, the majority of respondents (55%) felt *much safer* since the introduction of community patrols, while 30% felt *safer*. Only 10% indicated that they experienced *no change* in their perception of safety, and 5% felt *less safe*.

### Analysis of Qualitative Data

In this section, we provide an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data collected from interviews with community members, leaders of vigilante groups, and law enforcement officers. The qualitative analysis

focused on identifying the broader contextual factors affecting community policing and the prevention of kidnapping. This analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, where the data was coded into major themes that highlight the effectiveness of community patrols, the challenges faced by vigilante groups and police, and the nature of collaboration between these security actors.



### Impact of Vigilante Patrols on Crime Prevention

A prominent theme was the significant impact of regular community patrols on reducing crime, particularly kidnapping in areas prone to such activities. Respondents frequently cited the role of groups like Imo Security Watch and Ebube Agu in fostering a safer environment.

In Obinze, a community in Owerri Municipal, residents emphasized the deterrent effect of increased patrol visibility. A community member remarked as follows:

*"Since these patrols started, kidnappers no longer see this place as an easy target. Their presence has changed the game."*

Similar sentiments were expressed in Eziam, Orlu, where respondents www the effectiveness of late-night patrols. A resident noted that;

*"Before, we couldn't sleep at night because of fear. Now, with these patrols, the kidnappers avoid our community."*

In Okigwe Urban, the responsiveness of patrol units was particularly praised. A market leader observed that:

*"Ebube Agu patrols have brought peace to us. Whenever we call them, they respond immediately. This has scared the criminals away."*

Across all three locations, respondents reported a marked decline in kidnapping attempts. A community leader in Orlu stated that;

*"Before the patrols, kidnappers were fearless; they would abduct people in broad daylight. But now, with Ebube Agu, they think twice before acting."*

### Challenges Faced by Vigilante Groups and Community Policing

While the effectiveness of vigilante patrols was widely acknowledged, respondents highlighted significant challenges. Lack of funding and resources was a recurring concern. A vigilante member in Okigwe revealed thus;

*"We depend on contributions from residents to buy fuel and maintain equipment. It's not sustainable." Another patrol leader in Orlu added, "Sometimes, we have to use personal money to keep operations going."*

Inadequate training also emerged as a critical issue. A patrol member from Obinze said:

*"We are committed, but many of us lack proper training in modern crime-fighting techniques. Training in surveillance and intelligence gathering would help us perform better."*

Logistics challenges were frequently mentioned, particularly the lack of adequate transportation and communication tools. A respondent from Eziam said:

*"We need vehicles to cover larger areas and walkie-talkies for better coordination. Without these, our work is limited."*

### Collaboration between Police and Vigilante Groups

The collaborative nature of community policing was another key theme. Many respondents praised the synergy between vigilante groups and the police, which has enhanced crime prevention efforts. A resident of Obinze said;

*"When the police and vigilantes work together, it's a powerful combination. The police bring authority, and the vigilantes know the terrain."*

Another community member in Orlu added that;

*"Joint patrols have reduced crime significantly. Criminals don't stand a chance when both groups work together."*

Intelligence sharing was cited as one of the major strengths a vigilante member in Okigwe explained as follows:

*"We know the local hideouts, and the police have better equipment. Together, we can do more."*

However, some respondents called for improved coordination. A vigilante leader in Orlu state;

*"There are times when roles overlap, causing confusion. Regular meetings and clearer guidelines would solve this issue."*

Generally, the data analysis revealed that while community patrols have significantly reduced kidnapping incidents and fostered trust, addressing funding, training, logistics, and formal coordination between stakeholders could further enhance their effectiveness.

### Impact of the strategy of setting up security check points on the control of illegal arms movement and reduction in incidences of communal clashes in imo state

This section presents the analysis of data collected on the success of the strategy of setting up security checkpoints by Ebube Agu, when it comes to curbing the movement of illegal arms and reduction of communal clashes in Imo State. The analysis was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, involving both quantitative and qualitative descriptive methods. Primary data were gathered from the respondents in communities where Ebube Agu checkpoints are active. The study focus on the effectiveness of checkpoints located at Control Post Junction in Owerri, Nkwerre Road Junction in Orlu, and Okigwe Urban Roundabout.

## Analysis of Quantitative Data

### Demographic Distribution of Respondents

The survey data were collected from 400 residents of affected communities, including Owerri,

Orlu, and Okigwe. The demographic profile of respondents is presented in the table below, showing the distribution by gender, age group, occupation, and level of education.

**Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	240	60
Female	160	40
<b>Age Group</b>		
18-25 years	60	15
26-35 years	120	30
36-45 years	80	20
46-55 years	100	25
56 years and above	40	10
<b>Occupation</b>		
Civil Servants	120	30
Traders	80	20
Farmers	100	25
Artisans	60	15
Students	40	10

Source: Authors

From this demographic profile, the majority of the respondents were male (60%), aged between 26-35 years (30%), with civil servants (30%) and farmers (25%) making up the largest occupational groups. This diversity provided a balanced perspective on the checkpoints' impact on community safety.

### Effectiveness of Ebube Agu Checkpoints in Curbing Illegal Arms

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of Ebube Agu checkpoints in curbing the movement of illegal arms. The results were analyzed based on the frequency and percentage of responses.

**Table 5: Perception of Checkpoint Effectiveness in Curbing Illegal Arms**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Effective	220	55
Effective	120	30
Moderately Effective	40	10
Not Effective	20	5

Source: Authors

As shown in Table 2, a majority (55%) of the respondents perceived the checkpoints as "Very Effective" in curbing illegal arms, while 30% rated them as "Effective." Only 5% considered them "Not Effective," suggesting a strong consensus that the checkpoints have had a positive impact in controlling

illegal arms, especially in key areas such as the Control Post Junction in Owerri.

### Reduction in Communal Clashes

The survey also sought respondents' opinions on whether the checkpoints had contributed to reducing communal clashes in their communities.

**Table 6: Impact of Checkpoints on Communal Clashes**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Significant Reduction	180	45
Moderate Reduction	140	35
Minimal Reduction	60	15
No Reduction	20	5

Source: Authors

The results indicate that 45% of respondents observed a significant reduction in communal clashes,

and 35% noted a moderate reduction. These findings suggest that the presence of security checkpoints has

been instrumental in mitigating conflicts within communities, especially in areas like Nkwerre Road Junction in Orlu.

### Analysis of Qualitative Data

In this section, qualitative data collected through interviews are analyzed to offer a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of community members regarding the effectiveness of Ebube Agu checkpoints in curbing illegal arms and reducing communal clashes. Thematic analysis was applied to the data to identify key themes that emerged from the responses. This method was suitable because it allowed for the extraction of recurring patterns, perspectives, and narratives related to the security efforts of Ebube Agu.

### Increased Sense of Security

One of the most dominant themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis was an increased sense of security felt by residents in communities where Ebube Agu checkpoints are operational. Many interviewees and focus group participants expressed that the presence of the checkpoints made them feel safer and more secure, particularly in high-traffic areas like Control Post Junction in Owerri, Nkwerre Road Junction in Orlu, and Okigwe Urban Roundabout.

Several participants shared their experiences of heightened vigilance due to these checkpoints. One community member from Owerri remarked:

*"Before these checkpoints were established, we were always scared of armed robbers or strange movements at night, but now, the fear has reduced. You see the officers at the checkpoints, and it gives you some peace of mind."*

This sentiment was echoed by participants from other areas who noted that the visible presence of Ebube Agu officers and their frequent checks on vehicles and individuals passing through has deterred criminals from moving freely. The psychological impact of the security presence was significant, as community members described how the mere sight of these checkpoints acted as a deterrent to potential criminals.

Another respondent from Orlu added:

*"Now that Ebube Agu is watching all the main roads, we don't hear about people carrying guns and weapons like before. They stop suspicious vehicles, and it has really helped."*

This theme of increased security aligns with the quantitative findings that showed a high percentage of respondents perceiving the checkpoints as effective. It also underscores the critical role that security visibility plays in crime deterrence.

### Reduction in Illegal Arms Trafficking

Another significant theme that emerged from the analysis was the reduction in illegal arms trafficking through Ebube Agu checkpoints. Participants in both the interviews and focus groups provided anecdotal evidence of illegal arms being intercepted by security operatives at these checkpoints.

A respondent from Okigwe recalled an instance where arms smugglers were caught at a checkpoint:

*"There was this day when some young men were stopped at the Okigwe checkpoint, and after searching their vehicle, the officers found guns hidden inside bags of foodstuff. It was really shocking. If not for the checkpoint, they would have succeeded in moving those guns"*

This type of testimony illustrates the operational success of the checkpoints in intercepting illegal arms and preventing their distribution across the state. Such real-life examples of arms seizures contributed to the community's confidence in the effectiveness of the checkpoints. Several participants mentioned that since the establishment of these checkpoints, they had noticed fewer reports of arms trafficking in their areas, suggesting a direct correlation between the checkpoints and a decline in illegal arms movement.

A community leader in Orlu added:

*"Before now, arms were moved easily, and we would hear stories of youths getting involved in clashes with dangerous weapons. But now, with Ebube Agu at strategic points, it's harder for people to move guns around. This has really helped reduce fighting."*

The reduction in arms trafficking was further corroborated by security reports and local government records, which documented multiple instances of arms seizures at checkpoints. This theme highlights the checkpoints' role not only in preventing criminal activities but also in addressing broader issues of illegal arms distribution, which has been a contributing factor to communal clashes.

### Prevention of Communal Clashes

The third key theme from the qualitative data is the prevention of communal clashes in communities where Ebube Agu checkpoints are stationed. Many participants noted a significant decrease in the frequency of violent clashes between rival groups since the establishment of the checkpoints. This theme was especially prominent in discussions with residents from Orlu and Okigwe, areas that have previously experienced tensions and sporadic violence between community factions.

One focus group participant from Orlu stated:

*"There used to be fights between youth groups from neighboring villages, especially during the festive seasons. People would gather and start trouble, and before you know it, someone is hurt or worse. But now, the checkpoints are there, and the clashes have reduced."*

This reduction in violence was attributed to the strategic location of checkpoints, which have become effective monitoring and control points for conflict-prone areas. Participants explained that the checkpoints serve as early intervention mechanisms by preventing armed individuals from entering areas of potential conflict. The constant security checks disrupt the ease with which rival groups could previously mobilize and escalate tensions into full-scale clashes.

Another participant from Okigwe mentioned:

*"The checkpoints have been a blessing because they stop troublemakers from bringing weapons into our community. In the past, we had serious problems with fights breaking out, but now, we don't hear of such cases as often. The officers have really helped keep the peace."*

This narrative was supported by the data from local government security reports, which indicated a reduction in communal clashes by as much as 40% in areas where Ebube Agu checkpoints are in place. The thematic analysis thus aligns with both quantitative survey findings and secondary data sources, confirming that the checkpoints are contributing to peace and stability in the region.

### Challenges and Areas for Improvement

While the majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the work of Ebube Agu, some did raise concerns about the operational challenges faced by the security outfit. A few respondents noted instances of delays at the checkpoints, particularly during peak hours, which caused inconvenience to commuters. Additionally, some participants raised concerns about the need for better training and equipment for the officers to ensure they can effectively handle complex security issues, such as detecting more sophisticated methods of arms smuggling.

One respondent from Owerri suggested:

*"The checkpoints are doing a good job, but sometimes they delay us too much, especially in the mornings when people are rushing to work. Also, the officers need more support—better vehicles and communication equipment could help them be even more efficient."*

This feedback highlights potential areas for improvement, particularly in terms of optimizing the efficiency of checkpoint operations and ensuring that

officers are well-equipped to handle security threats. While these challenges do not detract from the overall success of the checkpoints, addressing them could enhance the effectiveness of the security measures.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings of this study indicates that over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that regular patrols by vigilante groups and the police contributed significantly to preventing crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and burglary in Imo State. These patrols fostered a sense of security and deterred criminal activity. This finding aligns with the findings of the study conducted by Hollis-Peel *et al.*, (2011), which was aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of neighborhood watch programmes on the reduction of crime rates in various urban neighborhoods across the United States. The findings of the study indicated a significant reduction in property crimes in areas with active neighborhood watch programmes. In contrast, in the case of Brazil Scheper-Hughes (2015) argued that vigilante groups, often termed "death squads," have been implicated in extrajudicial killings under the guise of crime prevention, indicating that they have only had a minimal impact on crime reduction.

When it comes to the impact of security checkpoints, this study found that the establishment of checkpoints by the Ebube Agu security outfit, was perceived as instrumental in curbing the movement of illegal arms and preventing communal clashes. Approximately 75% of respondents strongly agreed that checkpoints played a vital role in mitigating these threats. Globally, security checkpoints have been extensively used in conflict zones as a means of controlling the movement of people and goods, particularly arms. For instance, in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, checkpoints have been a key component of counter-insurgency operations aimed at intercepting illegal arms and preventing attacks (Riley, 2016). These checkpoints, often manned by both local forces and international military personnel, have been credited with reducing the flow of weapons into conflict zones, although their effectiveness has varied depending on the level of local cooperation and the sophistication of smuggling networks.

In Israel and the Palestinian territories, checkpoints have been used not only for security purposes but also as a tool of control, restricting the movement of people and goods (Rijke & Minca, 2019). While these checkpoints have been effective in preventing some terrorist attacks, they have also been criticized for exacerbating tensions and contributing to the ongoing conflict. In the United States and Mexico, security checkpoints at borders have been paramount in controlling the movement of illegal arms, drugs, and other contraband (Miller, 2019). The U.S. has mounted a series of checkpoints along its Southern border to



intercept illegal arms trafficking, which often fuels violence in Mexico. Studies by scholars like Faggard (2018) have shown that for these checkpoints, while partially effective, are often circumvented by sophisticated smuggling networks. This highlights the limitations of checkpoints when not integrated into a broader security strategy. Similarly, in Europe, checkpoints along borders and within countries have been used to intercept illegal arms and combat organized crime. The Schengen Area, which allows for free movement across much of Europe, has faced challenges in maintaining security while upholding the principles of free movement (McCabe, 2016). In response to the threat of terrorism and organized crime, some countries in the Schengen Area have reinstated temporary checkpoints, with mixed results. These checkpoints have been effective in intercepting illegal arms in some cases, but they have also led to delays and disruptions, raising questions about their long-term viability (Van der Woude, 2020).

The effectiveness of security checkpoints in controlling the movement of illegal arms is well-documented, but it is also context-dependent. Studies from regions such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America suggest that the success of checkpoints hinges on several factors, including the level of corruption among security forces, the strength of local governance, and the presence of alternative smuggling routes. For example, in West Africa, checkpoints have been a useful tool in efforts to control the movement of arms following the region's civil conflicts. However, the presence of porous borders and corrupt officials has often undermined these efforts (Walther *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to the insights it provides on the effectiveness of crime control approaches in developing countries like Nigeria, the uniqueness of this study's findings, is that it has shown that involving local communities in intelligence gathering and reporting suspicious activities, can enhance crime detection and prevention rates, and that this collaborative approach can help to improve trust between law enforcement and community members, thereby, leading to better security outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the need for the Federal, State and local governments, to continue enhancing their efforts towards addressing the many security challenges in Nigeria. It also underscores the need to make local communities a part and parcel of the efforts geared towards ensuring their safety, as the findings of this study highlights the role which local communities can play when it comes to gathering of security information. Despite the positive impacts of the patrols held by security outfits in collaboration with the police, and the check points mounted by groups like Ebube Agu in collaboration with the police, the

responses from the study participants indicate that resource based gaps still exist, amongst other limitations. In the light of the findings, this study makes the following recommendations:

1. There is need for government and other stakeholders, to provide more financial support, aimed at enhancing the impact of the community policing efforts across communities in Nigeria. Available evidences as found in this study indicate that there is need for better equipment, such as arms, patrol vehicles, tracking technology, as well as provision of funds for the training of members of security outfits concerned.
2. The government needs to enact laws that formalize and standardize the operations of the community policing groups, with the goal of ensuring that their activities are in alignment with national security frameworks and ensures their protection from political interference.
3. There is need for more effort to be geared towards continuous promotion of inclusivity, when it comes to involving local leaders, youth groups, and women in community policing efforts. Their participation will foster ownership and cooperation amongst diverse community members. Also, it is important for all the stakeholders concerned, to continue conducting enlightenment campaigns, aimed at educating the citizens on the importance of community policing, their roles in supporting these initiatives, and the benefits of a secure environment for socio-economic development.

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