



Police Reform and Public Trust in Nigeria: Examining the Effect of Police-Community Partnerships on Crime Reduction in Enugu State

By

OKEKE, Ebele Valentina

Department of Public Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

&

AGUIYI, Chukwuebuka C

**Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria,
Nsukka**

Abstract

This study examined the effect of police-community partnership on crime reduction in Enugu State, Nigeria, within the broader context of police reform and public trust. The study was anchored on Procedural Justice Theory, which emphasizes fairness, legitimacy, trust, and cooperation in police-citizen relationships. A survey research design was adopted, with data collected through a structured questionnaire from 320 respondents in the Enugu State Police Command. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, means and standard deviations, were used to analyse the research question, while simple linear regression was employed to test the hypothesis. The descriptive findings revealed a positive perception of police-community partnership and its contribution to crime reduction, with an aggregate mean of approximately 3.39 on a five-point Likert scale. The study found out that effective police-community partnerships significantly contribute to crime reduction in Enugu State. The study recommends the institutionalisation of community-oriented policing, strengthened stakeholder engagement, improved community-based intelligence sharing, continuous professional training for police personnel, and greater integration of community participation into security planning and police reform initiatives. The study concludes that police-community partnership represents an important strategy for improving police effectiveness, strengthening public trust, and promoting sustainable crime reduction in Enugu State.

Keywords: Police reform, public trust, police-community partnership, crime reduction, community policing.



1. Introduction

The effectiveness of any law enforcement agency is largely determined by the level of public trust it enjoys and its ability to maintain public security. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is the principal law enforcement agency responsible for maintaining peace, enforcing laws, protecting citizens, maintaining internal security, and protecting the lives and property of citizens. However, public trust in the NPF has significantly declined due to widespread allegations of corruption, inefficiencies, human rights abuses, lack of professionalism, brutality, and inefficiency in handling security challenges (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2024). The failure of the police to effectively tackle crime and insecurity has necessitated multiple reform efforts. In view of that, the Nigerian government has introduced various police reform initiatives including introduction of community policing initiatives, improved training programs, the establishment of oversight bodies such as the Police Service Commission (PSC), and human rights training for officers (Nwankwo, 2020).

Police reform is a critical aspect of governance. Globally, police reforms are often introduced in response to concerns about misconduct, inefficiency, and the need for modernized policing strategies. It is often introduced to enhance the effectiveness, professionalism, and accountability of law enforcement agencies, with the goal of improving public security and fostering trust between the police and the community (Bayley, 2016). Police reform in Nigeria has been a longstanding issue, with various initiatives aimed at addressing deep-rooted institutional challenges and issues such as corruption, human rights violations, and ineffective crime control, which have significantly eroded public trust in the Nigeria Police Force (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2024). These reforms have included structural reorganization, policy interventions, and community-based policing programs. The link between police reform and public trust is evident in global best practices, where successful reform efforts have led to improved policing outcomes, reduced crime rates, and increased community trust (Goldsmith, 2015).

While these efforts aim to professionalize the force, bring accountability and enhance public trust and confidence in law enforcement agencies, their effectiveness has been met with mixed



reactions. Many citizens still view the police as corrupt and unresponsive, raising questions about the sustainability of these reforms and their actual impact on security outcomes (Amnesty International, 2019). In Nigeria, the effectiveness of police reform in achieving these goals is questionable, as many reforms have been criticized for being poorly implemented or lacking genuine commitment from authorities (Amnesty International, 2019). The persistence of police misconduct, such as extrajudicial killings, bribery, and unlawful detention, has further exacerbated distrust in the police and raised concerns about the effectiveness of these reforms in enhancing public trust (Ikelegbe, 2023).

Trust in the police is a fundamental component of a functioning justice system. When citizens perceive the police as fair, transparent, and accountable, they are more likely to cooperate with law enforcement, report crimes, and engage in community policing initiatives (Tyler, 2023). Conversely, a lack of trust can lead to hostility, resistance, and the emergence of alternative security measures. Trust in the police is crucial for effective policing and public security, because when citizens trust law enforcement agencies, they are more likely to participate in crime prevention programs and mistrust breeds fear, resistance, and hostility towards law enforcement. The Enugu State Police Command has undertaken several initiatives aimed at reforming public security and rebuilding trust with the community. These efforts were part of broader national police reform agenda and state-level strategies to enhance law enforcement effectiveness and accountability. The Enugu State Police Command emphasized community policing strategies to foster better relationships between the police and residents. This led to the establishment of Community Policing and Public Engagement. This approach involved engaging with community leaders, organizing town hall meetings, and encouraging public participation in security matters to enhance trust and cooperation. While the Enugu State Police Command implemented several reforms to enhance public security and trust, incidents of alleged misconduct, extortion and abuse of power undermined these efforts. Hence, this study therefore examined Police Reform and Public Trust in Nigeria: Examining the Effect of Police-Community Partnerships on Crime Reduction in Enugu State



1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) plays a crucial role in maintaining law and order, ensuring public security, and protecting lives and property. However, over the years, it seems as if the force has been plagued by several challenges, including corruption, human rights violations, poor training, inadequate funding, and lack of professionalism. These seemingly issues have led to widespread distrust among the public, resulting in limited cooperation with law enforcement agencies, increased crime rates, and growing insecurity in various parts of the country, including Enugu State. In response to these seemingly challenges, successive Nigerian governments have introduced various police reform initiatives aimed at improving police performance, accountability, and public trust. According to Ikelegbe (2023), such reforms are community policing, the establishment of the Police Service Commission (PSC), and enhanced human rights training for officers have been implemented to address these issues. However, despite these efforts, public confidence in the police remains low, and insecurity persists, raising concerns about the effectiveness of these reform measures. Additionally, cases of police brutality, extortion, and misconduct continue to surface, further deepening the public's distrust in law enforcement agencies. Onyeonoru (2021), asserts that this situation has led many communities to seek alternative security arrangements, such as vigilante groups, which sometimes operate outside legal frameworks, further complicating the security landscape. Given the persistent challenges facing the Nigeria Police Force, there is a need to critically assess the impact of police reformation and public trust in Enugu state police command.

1.2 Conceptual Review

Police Reform

Reform refers to government-led initiatives, policies, and strategies aimed at improving efficiency, professionalism, accountability, and effectiveness in an organization. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English defines reform as follows; a) Something to improve a system, an organization, a law, etc. by making changes to it. b) To improve your behavior; to make somebody do this c) Change that is made to a social system, an organization etc. to improve or correct it (Hornby, 2010). From the above definitions, one can say that reform



is a change that is made to drastically improve and correct an individual, a system, or an organization etc. For a reform to take place there must be system failure, low productivity output or malfunctioning etc. Simply put, such a system or organization may not be working at full capacity either to maximize its potential or laid down objectives.

Police reforms in Nigeria started in the 1980s with a primary focus on new police management techniques, particularly the concern for efficiency and effectiveness (Hahn, 2003; Moran, 2005). New public management (NPM) and good governance in the police became a standard for evaluating their reformed police institution as a result (Garland, 1999; Bislev, 2007). The reforms also focused on changing the command structure of the police to allow for community involvement and effectiveness of leadership in the police service. Several reform initiatives targeted at the police in Nigeria have been and continues to be a subject of discussion in several forums.

Since 2003, the Nigerian government has attempted several command and structural changes in the police (Anderson, Gisborne and Holliday, 2013). This included, among other things, enhancing community policing, increasing the number of motor vehicles available to respond quickly to crime scenes, merging the two police services, hiring the Inspector General of Police and his two deputy officers, and creating the Independent Police Oversight Authority and the Nigeria Police Force Commission. The police force was expected to change, as well as the police force's leadership (Alemika, 2007). However, while the police institution in Nigeria was being reformed questions arose as to whether there was any progress made so far especially on the police professionalism (Amnesty International, 2013).

Police reform in Nigeria was contextualized by Mani in 2000. According to the report, when making police reforms, the government did not consider the culture and history of the police. According to him, successful police leadership in Nigeria must be able to act while also knowing when to provide quick commands. To prevent duplication and guarantee efficient leadership, he advised the Nigerian police service to modify the organizational structure. The Nigerian police, according to Mboroki (2013), have modified their method of operation. Now, taking someone into custody requires a police officer to have hard proof. Before, the police



could detain a person for as long as they want and accuse them without providing any proof. This was facilitated by the high level of corruption in judiciary.

Public Trust

Many scholars have argued that a relationship exists between citizen's obedience and trust (Putnam, 2021; Rothstein and Stolle, 2023; Tamanaha, 2024; Seron et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2025). According to Lee et al (2025), a police force that is not considered trustworthy is unlikely to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Similarly, Jackson and Bradford (2020) maintain that when citizens trust the police, they are more likely to obey the laws and accept their commands. Citizens will not routinely conform to the laws or directives of police and court simply because the police have the legal mandate to restrain their behaviours; instead, they will only do so when they consider the police to be a trustworthy authority. Moreover, when individuals view the police as trustworthy, they are likely to consider their claim to be legitimate (Zamir and Weisburd 2021). It can be strongly argued that trust represents an essential component of how people evaluate and appreciate their relationship with legal authorities. Putnam, (2021) pointed to two distinct ways in which trust could be understood as "Personal trust" and "generalised trust" (Putnam, 2021). This point suggests to us that trust in an individual police officer might be yardsticks for evaluation of the police as an institution of government. Tyler (2016) argues that trust can lead to long-time compliance with the individual police and in general in the institution of the police and even the justice system.

Trust is associated with those components of police behaviour that are immediately observable by the public, such as whether individuals are treated fairly during interpersonal interactions. It is impossible to completely envisage crime-free society, police must, therefore, depend on public consent and well-known law-abiding behaviour, so that they can focus the available resources on those citizens who might deviate from the accepted rule of the society. Police will get the support of citizens and work less in solving crime problems when they are perceived to be trustworthy by being open-minded and committed to the people they claim to serve (Tyler and Huo, 2022; Sunshine and Tyler, 2023; Jackson and Sunshine, 2017). According to Devos et al (2022) If someone trusts an institution, it implies that he or she believes that this collective



entity, overall, is competent, fulfils its obligations, and acts in responsible ways. Trusting an institution entails having confidence that the institution is reliable, observes rules and regulations, works well, and serves the general interest. Thus, the notion of trust goes beyond whether individuals have a positive or negative attitude toward an institution or whether they approve or disapprove of it. Trust refers to a set of beliefs or expectations rather than to a purely affective reaction (Devos et al.,2022).

Police-Community Partnership

Police-community partnership refers to a collaborative relationship in which the police and members of the community jointly identify security problems, share information, develop appropriate responses, and participate in activities aimed at improving public safety. The concept moves policing away from a purely police-centred model in which law-enforcement agencies are regarded as the sole providers of security, toward a collaborative model in which citizens and community institutions become active partners in crime prevention and security management. The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services identifies partnerships, problem-solving, and organisational transformation as central components of community policing, emphasizing that police agencies and the communities they serve should jointly identify and address problems affecting public safety (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009).

An important dimension of police-community partnership is trust. Trust provides the social foundation upon which citizens are willing to communicate with police, report crimes, provide intelligence, cooperate with investigations, and participate in community safety initiatives. Conversely, where citizens perceive the police as corrupt, abusive, unresponsive, or unfair, their willingness to cooperate may decline. Chapman and Martin (2016) argue that community policing conceptualises the police and community as co-producers of public safety and quality of life, with effective collaboration capable of increasing confidence in policing institutions. Thus, police-community partnership can be regarded as both an instrument of crime prevention and a mechanism for rebuilding police legitimacy and public trust.

The relationship between positive police-community interaction and public trust is also supported by empirical evidence. Mazerolle et al. (2013), in their work on procedural justice



and police legitimacy, demonstrated that the quality of police-citizen encounters can influence perceptions of police legitimacy and willingness to cooperate. Similarly, Peyton et al. (2019), using a field experiment, found that positive, non-enforcement contact between police officers and residents improved attitudes toward the police, including perceptions of legitimacy and willingness to cooperate. These findings suggest that police-community partnership is not simply an administrative arrangement but an important process through which institutional trust can be developed through repeated and constructive interactions.

In Nigeria, however, the effectiveness of police-community partnership is constrained by historical challenges in police-public relations. Ike et al. (2021), in a systematic review of interventions designed to improve confidence in the Nigerian police, found evidence of scepticism, distrust, and perceived ineffectiveness surrounding some community-policing interventions. Similarly, Aborisade and Adeleke (2024) found that inadequate preparedness, excessive reliance on force, public distrust, and limited experience with community engagement weakened police-community relations during pandemic policing in Nigeria. These findings indicate that simply establishing community-policing structures does not automatically produce effective partnerships. The quality of engagement, police conduct, accountability, responsiveness, and the extent to which citizens are genuinely involved in decision-making are critical.

Police-community partnership can therefore be conceptualised as a continuous process of collaborative security governance involving communication, participation, trust-building, joint problem-solving, information sharing, and collective action between police institutions and the communities they serve. Its effectiveness depends on the willingness and capacity of both parties to contribute to security objectives. For the police, this requires professional conduct, transparency, responsiveness and respect for citizens; for communities, it requires active participation, responsible information sharing, cooperation with lawful security initiatives, and constructive engagement with police institutions.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

A sound theoretical framework provides the foundation for understanding the relationships



between police reforms, public security, and trust in law enforcement. This work is anchored on Procedural Justice Theory by Tom R. Tyler (1990s). Procedural Justice Theory is a concept from social psychology and criminology that emphasizes the importance of the fairness of the *processes* through which decisions are made, and authority is exercised. It asserts that people are more likely to obey laws and cooperate with authorities when they perceive the processes as just, even if the outcomes are not in their favour. Procedural justice theory argues that the fairness of the processes used by police influences public perceptions of legitimacy and trust more than outcomes alone. When citizens feel they are treated with respect, dignity, and fairness during encounters with the police, they are more likely to see the police as legitimate and trustworthy, even if the outcomes are unfavorable to them. This theory helps explain how the quality of police interactions, especially under reformed policies, can impact public trust. Police reforms aimed at enhancing professionalism, accountability, and transparency are expected to align with principles of procedural justice, thereby improving public security and trust.

1.4 Methodology

In this study, survey design was adopted because it was considered appropriate in gathering the necessary data for the completion of this study. The study area is Enugu State Police Command. Being the topmost command and state headquarters of Police, it is well situated, with different offices dealing with different issues. They are charged with the responsibility for maintaining peace and order and reports ultimately to the Inspector General of the Police at the Force- headquarters, Abuja. In determining the sample size for this study, simple random sampling techniques were used, which follows randomization principle. This was to allow every member of the population equal chance of being selected. The sources of data for this work consist of two sources, namely, primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data consists of questionnaires, while the secondary sources of data collection were documentation such as textbooks, journals, reports, internet publication and unpublished materials. Data were analyzed using tables of descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages, mean, standard deviations and hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression analysis.



Discussion

Table 4.2.3 Descriptive Statistics of Research Question Three

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ITEM1	320	1.00	5.00	3.5938	.78622
ITEM2	320	1.00	5.00	3.2625	1.13639
ITEM3	320	1.00	5.00	3.3688	1.04819
ITEM4	320	1.00	5.00	3.3625	1.11410
ITEM5	320	1.00	5.00	3.3875	1.04139
ITEM6	320	1.00	5.00	3.3625	1.03837
Valid N (listwise)	320				

The descriptive statistics on respondents' perceptions of the effect of police-community partnership on crime rate reduction in Enugu State. The analysis was based on responses from 320 respondents. The results show that the aggregate mean score for the six items is approximately 3.39, which is above the criterion mean of 3.00 on a five-point Likert scale. This indicates that respondents generally agreed that police-community partnership has a positive effect on crime rate reduction in Enugu State. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.78622 to 1.13639, suggest that although there was some variation in responses, the views of respondents were reasonably consistent. Based on the descriptive statistics, it can be concluded that respondents agreed that police-community partnership positively contributes to crime rate reduction in Enugu State, Nigeria, through improved cooperation, intelligence sharing, timely reporting of criminal activities, and enhanced community participation in policing efforts. This descriptive finding is further supported by the inferential analysis presented under Hypothesis Three, which established that police-community partnership has a statistically significant positive effect on crime rate reduction.



Table 1
Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Police-Community Partnership and Crime Rate Reduction in Enugu State, Nigeria

Predictor	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	F	B	Std. Error (B)	β	t	p
Police-Community Partnership (PCP)	.539	.290	.288	1.71771	130.039	.479	.042	.539	11.403	<.001
Constant	—	—	—	—	—	5.214	.440	—	11.846	<.001

The regression analysis indicates a moderate positive relationship between police-community partnership and crime rate reduction in Enugu State ($R = .539$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .290$) shows that police-community partnership explains 29.0% of the variation in crime rate reduction, while the remaining 71.0% is attributable to other factors outside the model. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 318) = 130.039$, $p < .001$, indicating that police-community partnership significantly predicts crime rate reduction. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = .479$) indicates that a one-unit increase in police-community partnership is associated with a 0.479-unit increase in crime rate reduction. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .539$) further indicates a moderate positive predictive effect. The effect was statistically significant, $t = 11.403$, $p < .001$. Accordingly, the null hypothesis that police-community partnership has no significant effect on crime rate reduction in Enugu State, Nigeria is rejected. The study therefore concludes that police-community partnership has a significant positive effect on crime rate reduction in Enugu State, Nigeria.

1.5 Findings of the Study

The study found that police-community partnership has a statistically significant positive effect on crime rate reduction in Enugu State. The regression analysis produced a correlation coefficient of $R = .539$, indicating a moderate positive relationship between police-community partnership and crime rate reduction. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .290$) indicates that police-community partnership accounted for 29.0% of the observed variation in crime rate reduction, while the remaining 71.0% was attributable to other factors not captured in the



model. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 318) = 130.039$, $p < .001$, demonstrating that the model provided a significant explanation of the relationship between police-community partnership and crime rate reduction. Furthermore, the regression coefficient for police-community partnership was positive and significant ($B = .479$, $\beta = .539$, $t = 11.403$, $p < .001$). This implies that improvements in police-community partnership are associated with corresponding improvements in crime rate reduction.

The finding suggests that collaborative relationships between the police and community can constitute an important component of police reform and security management. This is consistent with evidence that community-oriented policing can improve cooperation and crime-control outcomes, although implementation challenges such as inadequate funding, weak communication and insufficient training may constrain its effectiveness.

1.6 Conclusion

The study concludes that police-community partnership is a significant predictor of crime rate reduction in Enugu State, Nigeria. The empirical evidence demonstrates that stronger collaboration between the police and members of the community is associated with greater crime-reduction outcomes. The finding therefore provides empirical support for treating community partnership not merely as a public-relations strategy but as an important component of contemporary police reform and security governance. The result further implies that effective policing requires more than police personnel and operational resources. It requires institutionalised cooperation between law-enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. Such cooperation can facilitate information sharing, early identification of security threats, community participation in crime prevention and improved police legitimacy. This is particularly relevant to Nigeria's current police-reform agenda, which emphasizes professional, accountable and people-centred policing as a means of strengthening public confidence. However, the R^2 of .290 also indicates that police-community partnership alone does not explain the entire variation in crime reduction. Other factors including police capacity, socioeconomic conditions, intelligence gathering, personnel availability, technology, response capability and broader security interventions may also influence crime outcomes.



Consequently, community partnership should be integrated into a broader, multidimensional police reform and security-planning framework rather than treated as a standalone solution.

1.7 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. The Enugu State Police Command should institutionalise police-community partnerships by strengthening Police Community Relations Committees and other structured community engagement mechanisms at divisional and neighbourhood levels.
2. Community participation should be incorporated into police security planning. Regular consultations with traditional institutions, religious organisations, youth groups, market associations, civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders should form part of local security assessment and planning.
3. The police should strengthen intelligence-sharing mechanisms with communities. Confidential and accessible channels for reporting suspicious activities should be developed to encourage citizens to provide timely information without fear of intimidation or reprisals.
4. Continuous professional training should be provided for police personnel on community-oriented policing, communication, conflict management and procedural justice. This is important because effective partnerships depend not only on community willingness to cooperate but also on police professionalism and responsiveness.
5. The Enugu State Government should provide sustainable institutional and financial support for community-based security initiatives, while ensuring appropriate accountability and monitoring mechanisms. This aligns with the state's broader emphasis on collaboration and investment in policing capacity.



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