

## Nieghbourhood Watch: A Vehicle for Combating Crime in Port Harcourt Urban of Rivers State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study examines the effectiveness of Neighborhood Watch schemes as a strategy for combating crime in Port Harcourt Urban, Rivers State, Nigeria, with the aim of enhancing National security through community participation. **Method:** A qualitative approach was adopted, involving in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with community members, local leaders, and security personnel to explore their perceptions and experiences with Neighborhood Watch initiatives. **Results:** The findings reveal that the indifferent attitude of residents toward crime prevention undermines government efforts in ensuring public safety. However, active community involvement through Neighborhood Watch programs significantly enhances crime control by fostering collaboration between citizens and security agencies. **Novelty:** This study highlights the role of communal responsibility in crime prevention, providing new insights into how grassroots participation can be leveraged to strengthen National security frameworks. It offers a paradigm shift from conventional state-centric security models to a more inclusive approach, emphasizing the importance of civic engagement in crime management.

## INTRODUCTION

Combating crime in Nigeria is an uphill task. Thus, no week passes by without the emergence of gruesome reports that some Nigerians have been bombed, gunned down, robbed, insulted and or assaulted due to massive security lapses. Insecurity in Nigeria has no doubt led to massive loss of human and material resources which has in turn impinged on the psych socioeconomic growth and development of our Nation (Business day news editorial comment paper, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2014).

The world crime denotes a conduct that is disapproved by law and reproved by punitive sanctions illumined that; crime is any specific act of omission or commission that violates the laws of a state which a punishment is specified for such a violations on conviction by a court of competent jurisdiction. Fackayode in, advanced that, there are four categories of crime against public order and crime against a State [1]. Crime against persons includes: manslaughter, assaults and sexual offences. Crime against property, includes: theft, burglary and criminal damage. Crime against public order subsumes; riot, affrays and incitement to racial hatred. While crime against the State includes treason and sedition.

In Nigeria, poverty is often regarded as a significant factor contributing to criminal behavior. This perspective aligns with the views of criminologists, psychologists, and sociologists, who argue that the vast disparity between the rich and the poor fosters social resentment and increases the likelihood of deviant behavior Corroborating this fact, a

1995 human development study espoused that a sizeable number of Nigerians living in urban areas do not have enough money to meet their needs [2]. In fact, about 21% of the urban population (85 million people), were estimated to be living below poverty line owing to the fact that their income is insufficient to cater for the rudiments of life, such as; food, water, fuel, shelter, medical care and schooling. Since then, the pathetic situation has remained palpable and so deteriorating daily. a condition that drives to commit crime for survival purposes. This is evident in the upsurge in crimes against persons and properties being perpetrated in urban areas [3].

There is therefore, an urgent and cogent need for the establishment of neighborhood watch scheme under which members of a community can safe guard their environment, lives and properties themselves. This paper examines the involvement of urban residents in checking crime. It is also aimed at improving national security [4].

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Neighborhood Watch**

Neighborhood watch is a communal security structure. It involves the use of home grown personnels to mount surveillance for the protection of lives and properties. Neighborhood can be packaged as a civil security architecture were members of a given neighborhood take it upon themselves to safeguard their valuables [5]. Neighborhood watch can be packaged as a scheme of system able local vigilance by house holders to discourage crime, especially bulgary corroboratively, disclosed that neighborhood watch synonym using known as crime watch is security structure made up of organized group of civilians devoted to crime and vandalism prevention in a residential area. Neighborhood watch is geared towards educating residents of a community on needed security and safety measures and how to handle criminal emergencies [6].

#### **Crime**

Crime is a punishable offence. espoused that crime is a conduct disapproved by law and backed by punitive sanction. elucidated that a crime is an unlawful act punishable by a country or state. The term crime does not have any single universally acceptable definition. conceived crime as a dangerous act that violates established rules and regulations. Prohibited acts such as murder, rape, and theft constitute crime the world over. elucidated that for something to qualify as crime, it must involved, the “act of doing something criminal” (actus reus) and an intention to do something criminal (mens rea). submitted that crime is a malicious or mischievous unlawful act [7].

#### **Statement of the problem**

It appears that the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is no longer capable of protecting lives and properties of her citizenry. This is so because of the colossal destruction of lives and properties by Boko Haram suicide bombers, armed robbers, Fulani herdsmen, militants, sectional killers, rapists, cultists and trigger manic security agents who shoot innocent citizens at will. Hence, most Nigerians sleep with both eyes open, watching and praying for safety and security in futility [8].

Insecurity in Nigeria owing to criminality is predominant in urban areas. Urban areas are the hub of criminal activities, because of the hubris of urban dwellers. In

addition to that, most urban dwellers are egocentric and as such, individualistic. Hence, criminals easily attack their targets because they rarely cooperate or collaborate to repel criminals and or rescue a victim of criminality, even if he or she screams off his or her head [9].

Cognizant of the pitfalls or flaws of how religiosity, mentoring, security agencies and individualized crime control technique, the researcher is aimed to investigate for Neighborhood watch as a panacea in combating crime in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria [10].

### **Review of Related Studies**

Otuya writing on the challenges of managing urban crime in Nigeria investigated the constraints in managing urban crime, the paper discovered that, inadequate funding, bad working conditions, poor urban setting, corrupt and unintelligent security personnel as well as weak public confidence as some of the major challenges militating against the fight against urban crime. The paper recommended improved welfare package as a panacea for managing urban crime in Nigeria [11].

In a related study by Okpo on communication: A tool for effective crime control in Nigeria. The paper traces the various challenges confronting crime control and discovered that lack of modern crime control gadgets in the state security system hampered efforts at crime control, the paper recommended that the use of surveillance cameras, and security sensors will aid crime control [12].

Obasola investigated religious imperative as a panacea to criminality. Obasola's findings showed that religious individuals are less likely to commit crime, due to the preachings and teachings that they receive. However, daily events compound the findings of this study, as most crimes are committed by highly religious people. Thus, religiosity remains a questionable means of combating crime in Nigeria.

Most Nigerians are of the view that social learning through observation or imitation of a model (mentor), is an effective means of combating or curbing crime. To validate or invalidate this view, Welsh and Hoshi in Ross, Smith, Inyess and Schoon examined the influence of mentoring on crime control. Their findings showed that mentoring is highly effective in the control of crime [13]. However, recent events indicate that most mentors commit heinous crimes using their mentees. Suffice it to say that mentoring is a questionable means of combating crime.

Angaya examined community - police partnership and crime prevention in Rivers State, the study in its investigation adopted a mix method, analytical tools employed were qualitative and quantitative, the crime triangle was applied, data from oral interview, observation and questionnaire support the findings that there is positive outcome from partnership policy in combating crime. Writing on traditional rules and curbing insecurity in Rivers State of Nigeria, the study examined the role of traditional rulers in preventing crime in their domain, the study noted that the traditional rulers as custodians of the people's culture are highly revered and if integrated into crime control mechanisms can be a huge asset in the war against crime. The related literature review shows that scholars concentrated on the obstacles associated with combating crime to the

neglect of common ownership of crime prevention. Crime affect all stracta in human society thus the need for common ownership of crime prevention beginning with the nieghbourhood watch.

### Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts **Community Impact Theory**, which asserts that elevated crime rates primarily stem from inadequate informal social regulation within community areas. Sociologists argue that informal social control can be established through collective citizen engagement in communities where social control is inherently weak or absent. **Mastrofski, Worden, and Snipes** describe this concept as *community building*, emphasizing that law enforcement agencies can enhance citizens' capacity and commitment to crime prevention by fostering positive relationships with community members [14]. **Lyons** further posits that innovative policing strategies, such as educational, recreational, and vocational programs for youth, can activate informal social control mechanisms inherent in community life.

Social control refers to a society's or organization's ability to regulate its members through incentives and sanctions. It can be categorized into **formal social control**, which is enforced by judicial and law enforcement authorities through established laws, and **informal social control**, which relies on customs and norms upheld by citizens through actions such as surveillance, verbal warnings, ostracism, and emotional pressure to encourage conformity. The core argument of **Community Impact Theory** is that crime and social disorder can be more effectively addressed through a collaborative approach that integrates **formal systems** (such as law enforcement) with **informal mechanisms** (such as community participation), which is the foundation of **Neighbourhood Watch** initiatives.

Neighbourhood Watch programs may play a vital role in addressing deviant behavior by tackling crime at its root through well-structured, community-based initiatives. **Hussein** argues that these programs actively involve community members in various stages of decision-making, leading to more effective crime prevention. **Denney** highlights that the successful implementation of community protection programs fosters mutual understanding and respect among residents, ultimately strengthening communal ties and enhancing public safety.

### Research Questions

1. To what extent will neighbourhood watch scheme be reliable in checking crime in our neighbourhood?
2. To what extent if any will gates mounted in between neighbourhoods be reliable in checking crime in our neighbourhood?
3. To what extent will bombs planted along the road be reliable in checking crime in our neighbourhood?
4. To what extent will regular street lights be reliable in checking crime within our neighbourhood?
5. To what extent, will the engagement of night and day watchmen be reliable in checking crime in our neighbourhood?

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive survey design to assess the effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme in crime control. The study population comprised all residents of Port Harcourt Urban, which has an estimated population of 1,383,592 according to the National Population Commission. A systematic random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 250 respondents, representing 0.018% of the total population.

A validated instrument titled "Neighbourhood Watch Crime Control Scale (NWCCS)" was utilized to collect data from the respondents. The instrument consisted of five item statements graded on a four-point Likert scale, with response options as follows:

1. Very Reliable (VR)
2. Reliable (R)
3. Unreliable (UR)
4. Very Unreliable (VUR)

The questionnaire was administered by the researcher, accompanied by an aide, and all completed copies were retrieved on the spot to ensure high response rates [15].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Results*

Research question1: To what extent, will neighbourhood watch scheme be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood?

**Table 1.** Frequency counts and percentages of respondent's responses on the extent to which neighbourhood watch scheme is reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood.

Scale	Responses	Percentages %
Very reliable	80	32%
Reliable	70	28%
Unreliable	60	24%
Very reliable	40	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 depicts that: 80 respondents representing 32% are of the view that neighbourhood watch scheme is very reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. Concomitantly. To respondents representing 28% professed that neighbourhood watch scheme is reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. On the other hand, 60 respondents representing 24% and 40 respondents representing 16% are of the view that neighbourhood watch scheme is unreliable and very unreliable inn checking crime.

**Research question 2: To what extent, will gates mounted in between neighbourhood be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood?**

**Table 2.** Frequency counts and percentages of respondents responses on the extent to which gates mounted in between neighbourhoods are reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood.

Scale	Responses	Percentages%
Very reliable	85	34
Reliable	80	32
Unreliable	50	20
Very unreliable	35	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 evinces that: 85 out of 250 respondents representing 34% of the view that gates mounted in between neighbourhoods are reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. Concomitantly, 80 respondents representing 32%, averred that gates mounted in between neighbourhoods are reliable in checking crime. Conversely, 50 respondents representing 20% and 35 respondents representing 14% of the sample believe that gates mounted betwixt neighbourhoods are unreliable and very unreliable respectively in checking crime within a neighbourhood [16].

**Research question 3: To what extent, will bombs planted along the road be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood.**

**Table 3.** Frequency counts and percentages of respondents response the extent to which bombs planted along the road are reliable inn checking crime in a neighbourhood.

Scale	Responses	Percentages%
Very reliable	80	32%
Reliable	70	28%
Unreliable	60	24%
Very unreliable	40	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 shows that 80 respondents representing 32 percent of the sample are convinced that planting bombs along or around neighbourhoods is very reliable inn checking crime. Concomitantly, 70 respondents representing 28% of the studied sample, believe that: implantation of bombs along a neighbourhood is a reliable means of checkmating crime. On the other hand, 60 respondents representing 24% and 40 respondents representing 16% of the population affirm and reaffirm that planting bombs along or around a neighbourhood is unreliable and very unreliable respectively in checkmating crime [17].

**Research question 4: To what extent will regular street lights be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood?**

**Table 4.** Frequency counts and percentages of respondents responses on the extent to which the provision of regular street light is reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood.

Scale	Responses	Percentages <sup>0</sup> %
Very reliable	85	34%
Reliable	80	32%
Unreliable	35	14%
Very unreliable	50	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 illustrates that; 85 respondents representing 34% and 80 respondents representing 32% of the studied sample, believe that the availability of street light is very reliable and reliable respectively in checkmating crime. On the other hand, 35 respondents representing 14% and 50 respondents, representing 20% are of the view that the installation of street light is unreliable and very unreliable in checkmating crime.

**Research questions 5: To what extent, will the engagement of night and day watch men be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood?**

Table 5: Frequency counts and percentages of respondents responses on the extent to which the engagement of night and day watchmen will be reliable in checking crime.

Scale	Responses	Percentages <sup>0</sup> %
Very reliable	85	34%
Reliable	80	32%
Unreliable	35	14%
Very unreliable	50	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 shows those 80 respondents representing 32% and 85 respondents representing 34% of the sample size believe that the engagement of night and day watchmen is very reliable and reliable respectively in combating crime in a neighbourhood. Non the other hand, 35 respondents representing 14% and 50 respondents representing 20% of the surveyed samples are of the view that the engagement of night and day watch men is unreliable an very unreliable respectively in checking crime [18].

### **Discussion**

Combating crime in Nigeria is not a child's play. It is also not an individual affair, because; it requires concerted effort. Table 1 gives credence to this assertion. If the individuals living in a neighbourhood come together and synergize their security measures, they will be invincible and their neighbourhood will be formidable. This is so, because they will harness their experiences and resources to combat criminality. More so, their solidarity and communality will scare criminals away, because; there is power in

unity. This result confirms the findings of regarding the efficacy and exigency of neighbourhood watch scheme.

Neighbourhoods will experience enhanced security if gates are strategically erected, as illustrated in **Table II**. Gates serve as **physical barriers**, restricting unauthorized access and enhancing overall neighbourhood safety. From a psychological perspective, gates act as a **deterrent to criminal activity**, as they create a perception of increased security and surveillance. **Abodari** argues that the presence of well-placed security gates strengthens crime prevention measures by limiting entry points and discouraging potential offenders.

Table 3 demonstrates that planting bombs around a neighbourhood is very reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. This is understandable because bombs are weapons of mass destruction. Hence, their presence induces or instigates than atophobia. That is, fear of death or dying. Thus, no criminal will contemplate of operating in a bomb infested neighbourhood [19].

Table 4 showcase that the installation of regular street lights will be very reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. This is so, because most heinous crimes, such as; armed robbery, rape and assassinations are committed under the cover of darkness. Since darkness and light have no communication, the installation of regular street lights will fortify neighbourhood watch schemes and make watched neighbourhoods no go areas.

Table 5 shows that the engagement of night and day watchmen will go a long way in checking crime in a neighbourhood. This is so, because the watchmen will sense their environments day and night. They will search the people coming into a neighbourhood, interrogate strange faces, repel criminals and raise alarm if need be. It is necessary to engage the services of night and they watchmen in a neighbourhood, because they will make the neighborhood impregnable or impenetrable [20].

### **Operationalizing Neighbourhood Watch for Effective Crime Control**

**Registration Of Neighbourhood Watch Scheme:** For effective operation of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme, land lords and of tenants of a neighbourhood should legalize the association by seeking registration with relevant government agencies, such as; corporate affairs commission. This is to give the association legal recognition and composition such as board of directors, executive members, functional bank account.

**Funding:** Money is needed to sustain a neighbourhood watch scheme as a corporate entity having legal backing. Thus, members should seek internal and external channels of funding such as; donation of cash and equipment monthly or annual levies and soliciting for support from; corporate organization and other donor agencies, as to keep its operation afloat.

**Documentation:** To easily identify members of a neighbourhood, there is a dire need to take proper record of all the residents. The record should include their names, their addresses within the neighbourhood, and their business or office locations [21].

This approach will easily spot out any strange person within the neighbourhood.

**Security Education:** The overriding objective of Neighbourhood Watch is to ensure public safety, therefore efforts should be made to inculcate security consciousness



from time to time using security consultant or personnels. Such forum would educate the people on key security tips [22].

**Sharing Of Telephone Contact:** In the event of a resident being attacked, other residents should be able to mobilize other members of the neighbourhood and the state security agencies to challenge the attack, this can only be possible via a telephone directorate, that contains the telephone contact of all residents within the neighbourhood [23].

**Recruitment Of Plain Cloth Watch Men:** More so, the recruitment of plain cloth Watchmen to keep vigil is one approach that Neighbourhood watchmen schemes will adopt in checking crime. Despite interacting with people within and around the Neighbourhood, night and day watchmen should be encouraged to operate in anonymous modes to enable them disseminate information to both residents and non-residents of a Neighbourhood, and channel such information to appropriate agencies for prompt action.

**Collaboration With State Run Security Agencies:** Any security measure without effective collaboration with the state run security agencies especially, The Nigeria Police Force cannot succeed. Thus, Neighbourhood watch schemes will or should endeavour to establish a cordial relationship with the nearest Police station. This is to energize or synergize their efforts and guarantee their success [24].

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding :** This study concludes that the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme is an effective mechanism for managing the rising crime rates in Nigeria, particularly in Port Harcourt Urban, by fostering community involvement and enhancing collaboration with state security agencies. **Implication :** The findings suggest that integrating community-based security initiatives into the national crime control framework can significantly enhance public safety and National security. **Limitation :** However, the study was limited by its geographical scope, focusing solely on Port Harcourt Urban, which may affect the generalizability of the results to other regions in Nigeria. **Future Research :** Further studies should explore the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes across different cultural and socio-economic contexts in Nigeria to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on crime prevention and community resilience.

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