



Bridging Traditional and Modern Policing in Nigeria: A Criminological Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution, dynamics, and effectiveness of traditional, state, and hybrid policing systems in Nigeria within the broader context of criminological theory and security governance. It explores how indigenous policing institutions rooted in communal norms and customary authority have evolved alongside the centralized state policing system and how their interaction has shaped contemporary security governance. The study adopts an integrated criminological framework, anchored on Community Policing Theory and supported by Social Control Theory, Routine Activity Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Strain-Conflict Theory, to explain police-community partnerships, informal social control, crime prevention, institutional legitimacy, and the structural drivers of insecurity. Drawing on secondary data from scholarly literature, policy documents, government reports, and other documentary sources, the study finds that hybrid policing models including Amotekun, Hisbah, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), vigilante groups, and neighbourhood watch organizations—have emerged as adaptive responses to the limitations of formal policing, public insecurity, and growing demands for community participation in security governance. While these hybrid arrangements have improved intelligence gathering, local legitimacy, crime prevention, and public responsiveness, they continue to face challenges relating to legal recognition, coordination, accountability, standardization, and human rights compliance. The study concludes that an effective policing system in Nigeria requires a well-regulated hybrid policing framework that strengthens collaboration between formal and informal security institutions through legal reforms, institutional oversight, capacity building, and community participation. Such an approach reflects the principles of community policing and provides a sustainable pathway toward inclusive, accountable, and context-sensitive security governance.

Keywords: Traditional Policing, State Policing, Hybrid Policing, Policing Systems, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria continues to face persistent and evolving security challenges, ranging from armed robbery, kidnapping, and communal conflicts to terrorism and insurgency. These complex threats have exposed the limitations of formal security structures, despite the nationwide presence of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and other law enforcement agencies. In many communities, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, residents continue to rely on indigenous security mechanisms, including vigilante groups, community policing associations, and customary dispute resolution systems, which often operate based on local knowledge, cultural norms, and social legitimacy. The coexistence of formal and traditional policing presents both opportunities

and challenges for crime prevention and public safety. While modern policing provides legal authority, standardized procedures, and institutional oversight, traditional mechanisms offer flexibility, rapid responsiveness, and strong community trust. This paper investigates the theoretical foundations and practical strategies for bridging these two systems, highlighting how an integrated approach can enhance security governance, foster community participation, and promote sustainable crime prevention. By examining the intersections of legitimacy, legality, and adaptability, the study offers insights into designing a culturally grounded policing framework capable of addressing Nigeria's multifaceted security landscape.



Clarification of Key Concepts

Understanding the complex security environment in Nigeria requires conceptual clarity, particularly because policing operates through multiple overlapping structures rooted in history, culture, and formal state authority. This section defines the core concepts that frame the study and provides analytical boundaries for interpreting the interactions among traditional, state, and hybrid policing systems.

i. Traditional Policing (Indigenous Security Practices)

Traditional policing, or indigenous security practices, refers to community-based mechanisms of maintaining law and order rooted in local customs, norms, and authority structures. Such mechanisms often operate outside formal statutory laws but derive legitimacy from social acceptance and cultural sanctioning (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000; Okunola & Abimbola, 2016). Examples include vigilante groups, palace guards, town criers, age-grade, community elders, local conflict-resolution councils etc. These actors function as informal “capable guardians,” ensuring that deviant behaviors are checked through communal pressure and negotiated sanctions rather than formal legal enforcement. The central concept underpinning traditional policing is **informal social control**, where the community collectively enforces compliance, reflecting a high degree of social cohesion and normative adherence (Ojo, 2019).

ii. Modern Policing (State Policing)

State policing refers to the formal law enforcement agencies established by the government to maintain public order and enforce laws. In Nigeria, the primary state police force is the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), which operates under the federal government. The key features of State policing are: centralized structure, formal training and resources and legal authority. Modern policing or state policing represents formal law enforcement systems established and regulated by the state, with clearly defined legal authority, hierarchical structures, and professional accountability mechanisms. Unlike traditional policing, state policing derives legitimacy from statutory authority and the enforcement of national laws,

emphasizing procedural adherence, training, and formal investigative processes. The effectiveness of modern policing depends on organizational capacity, resource availability, and the ability to coordinate with other governance actors (Alemika, 2002).

iii. Hybrid Policing / Bridging Policing

Hybrid policing refers to the integration or collaboration between traditional and state policing systems. In other words, hybrid policing refers to collaborative security arrangements that integrate community-based actors with formal state agencies. Examples include the Amotekun Corps in the Southwest, Hisbah in some parts of the north and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeast. This conceptual approach explores how formal and informal mechanisms can complement each other to improve crime prevention, enhance intelligence gathering, and foster public trust in law enforcement (Chukwuma & Ogundele, 2018). Bridging policing systems leverages the social legitimacy and local knowledge of traditional actors while harnessing the legal authority, technical capacity, and investigative power of state institutions. Such hybrid models have been suggested as particularly effective in contexts where state presence is weak, and communities possess strong indigenous security traditions (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000).

Conceptual Relationships

The conceptual framework posits that the effectiveness of crime prevention in Nigeria can be enhanced by strategically bridging traditional and modern policing systems. Traditional policing provides localized intelligence, community legitimacy, and social cohesion, whereas modern policing ensures legal enforcement, professional accountability, and structured responses. Integrating these systems through collaborative mechanisms can reduce crime rates, enhance public trust, and address gaps in law enforcement coverage.

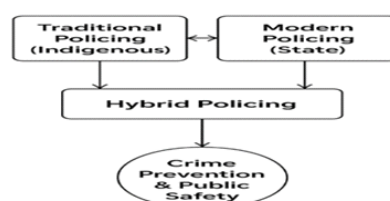




Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Policing Integration in Nigeria's Security Architecture

The figure conceptualizes policing in Nigeria as an integrative system in which traditional (indigenous) and modern (state) policing operate in a complementary relationship. Rather than functioning as parallel or competing structures, the framework emphasizes their interaction as mutually reinforcing mechanisms within the broader security architecture. This interaction produces a hybrid policing model that synthesizes community-based legitimacy, local knowledge, and informal social control with formal legal authority, institutional capacity, and state resources. The hybridization process enhances coordination, improves intelligence flow, and strengthens responsiveness to local security dynamics. Ultimately, the framework posits that such integration leads to more effective crime prevention and public safety outcomes, as it bridges the gap between formal institutions and community structures, thereby addressing both structural and contextual dimensions of insecurity.

Historical Evolution of Policing in Nigeria: From Traditional Systems to Hybrid Security Models

Nigeria's policing landscape has undergone a gradual transformation from indigenous community-based systems to centralized state policing, and more recently toward hybrid security arrangements that blend both traditions. This historical trajectory reflects how cultural legitimacy, colonial legacy, and modern security governance interact to shape policing in Nigeria.

Traditional Security Systems in Pre-Colonial Nigeria

Before colonial intrusion, Nigerian societies maintained order through indigenous security mechanisms rooted in kinship, age-grade institutions, and communal solidarity (Abrahams, 2015; Okeke, 2019). Among the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani, security was a communal affair. Age-grade groups patrolled villages, enforced moral codes, and mediated disputes functions aligned with Social Control Theory, where conformity was maintained through social norms and collective enforcement (Afigbo, 1987). Traditional rulers and councils such as Obas in

Yoruba land, Emirs in the North, and village chiefs in the East served as moral and judicial authorities, adjudicating local conflicts and mobilizing defense against threats (Odeyemi, 2014). Their legitimacy derived from cultural and spiritual recognition, consistent with Legitimacy Theory, where authority stems from shared beliefs rather than coercion.

Kinship networks also functioned as informal surveillance systems, ensuring restitution and sanctions for deviant behavior. These familial “guardians” illustrate Routine Activity Theory, as they reduced opportunities for crime through proximity and accountability (Olaniyi, 2005). In addition, local vigilante groups historically emerged to safeguard farmlands, markets, and trade routes. While they lacked standardized training or codified procedures, their moral authority and community responsiveness provided high compliance and trust (Ogunyemi, 2016). However, these traditional systems had limitations they were localized, lacked formal coordination, and were ill-equipped to confront large-scale or trans-regional crimes. Yet, their cultural legitimacy and community embeddedness remain foundational to Nigeria's modern hybrid policing structures (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000).

Emergence of Modern State Policing in Nigeria

The foundations of modern state policing in Nigeria were laid during the colonial era, beginning with the establishment of the Consular Guard in Lagos (1861). This was followed by the formation of the Hausa Constabulary (1879) and the Royal Niger Company Constabulary, which primarily served colonial interests such as enforcing taxation, protecting commercial enterprises, and suppressing local resistance, rather than ensuring community safety. In parallel, the colonial administration also developed native police units, locally recruited forces that leveraged indigenous authority and knowledge to maintain order at the community level. These native police were instrumental in bridging colonial directives with local enforcement, providing early examples of hybrid policing models in the Nigerian context. By 1930, northern and southern constabularies merged to form the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), marking the formal institutionalization of state



policing. Following independence, the NPF retained its federal command structure under the Nigeria Police Act (2020), with core responsibilities for crime prevention, maintaining public order, and conducting investigations. Despite these formal structures, systemic challenges persist, including inadequate manpower, logistical constraints, corruption, and limited community trust (Akinyemi, 2018). In response, post-independence reforms have emphasized community policing frameworks aimed at fostering cooperation between law enforcement and citizens, recognizing the value of local intelligence, participatory engagement, and social legitimacy (Eze, 2020). Nevertheless, the enduring legacy of colonial centralization and historical public distrust continues to hinder effective grassroots collaboration, highlighting the need for adaptive strategies that integrate traditional and formal policing approaches.

The Rise of Hybrid Policing and Security Integration

In response to the limitations of formal state policing, Nigeria has experienced the emergence and expansion of hybrid policing systems that integrate traditional mechanisms with institutional law enforcement. Examples include local vigilante networks, neighborhood watch groups, and state-supported formations such as Amotekun in the Southwest, Hisbah in the North, and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeast (Abiodun, 2019; Mustapha, 2020). These hybrid models seek to complement formal policing by combining the authority and resources of the state with the social legitimacy, local knowledge, and responsiveness of community-based structures. The theoretical underpinnings of hybrid policing can be traced to Network and Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), which highlights trust, reciprocity, and the circulation of information within community-police networks.

These frameworks emphasize the value of social cohesion in facilitating cooperation and intelligence sharing between communities and law enforcement agencies. Additionally, Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) helps explain their proliferation: when formal policing institutions fail to meet citizens' expectations of safety and justice,

communities innovate by creating alternative enforcement systems that mitigate perceived insecurity. Nigeria's contemporary security landscape is increasingly characterized by plural policing, where traditional legitimacy, state authority, and community collaboration intersect. This adaptive blend demonstrates a context-specific approach to public safety, grounded in both cultural continuity and modern governance imperatives, highlighting the potential of hybrid models to enhance crime prevention, strengthen community trust, and address gaps in formal security provision

Criminological Perspective and Integrated Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the criminological perspective to explain the evolution, dynamics, effectiveness, and challenges of policing systems in Nigeria, particularly the interaction among traditional, state, and hybrid policing institutions. Since policing is shaped by social relationships, governance structures, community norms, and socio-economic conditions, no single theory adequately explains its complexity. Accordingly, the study adopts an integrated theoretical framework, with Community Policing Theory as the principal analytical framework, supported by Social Control Theory, Routine Activity Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Strain-Conflict Theory. Together, these theories explain crime causation, community participation, policing effectiveness, institutional legitimacy, and crime prevention.

i. **Community Policing Theory:** Community Policing Theory, developed by Goldstein (1979) and expanded by Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1990), serves as the primary theoretical framework for this study. It argues that effective policing depends on collaboration between law enforcement agencies and communities through partnership, decentralization, trust, problem-solving, and shared responsibility rather than relying solely on centralized enforcement. The theory is highly relevant to Nigeria's evolving hybrid policing system, where state security agencies increasingly collaborate with traditional rulers, vigilante groups, hunters' associations, neighbourhood watches, and other community-based security structures. It explains citizen



participation, intelligence sharing, community trust, crime prevention partnerships, and the integration of indigenous policing practices into contemporary security governance, making it the principal lens for analysing the effectiveness and legitimacy of hybrid policing.

ii. **Social Control Theory:** Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969) posits that strong social bond attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief encourage conformity and reduce criminal behaviour. The theory explains the effectiveness of traditional policing institutions such as the Dogarai, Ilari, and Emese, whose authority is rooted in kinship, communal values, customary norms, and moral obligations rather than formal coercion. It complements Community Policing Theory by explaining the social foundations that sustain community participation, informal social control, and public compliance.

iii. **Routine Activity Theory:** Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) explains crime as the convergence of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. It is relevant because hybrid policing increases capable guardianship through police officers, vigilante groups, neighbourhood watches, hunters, and traditional guards whose presence enhances surveillance, intelligence gathering, rapid response, and territorial control. The theory therefore explains the crime prevention function of hybrid policing and complements Community Policing Theory by showing how collaborative policing reduces criminal opportunities.

iv. **Social Capital Theory:** Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000) argues that trust, social networks, reciprocity, and shared norms enhance collective action and institutional effectiveness. In Nigeria, hybrid policing depends on cooperation between citizens, traditional leaders, community organizations, and security agencies. These relationships promote intelligence sharing, crime reporting, voluntary compliance, and collaborative security governance. The theory complements Community Policing Theory by explaining how trust and social cohesion strengthen community-police partnerships.

v. **Strain and Conflict Theories:** Strain Theory

(Merton, 1938) explains crime as a response to blocked opportunities, poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion, while Conflict Theory (Quinney, 1970) argues that policing and crime reflect broader inequalities, power relations, and issues of institutional legitimacy. These theories explain why insecurity persists despite formal policing and why many communities increasingly depend on traditional and hybrid security structures. They provide the broader socio-economic and political context within which policing systems operate and complement Community Policing Theory by explaining the structural factors influencing crime and public confidence in policing.

Integrated Theoretical Framework

The five theories are complementary and collectively provide a comprehensive explanation of policing in Nigeria. Community Policing Theory serves as the central framework, explaining police-community partnerships, citizen participation, and hybrid security governance. Social Control Theory explains community-based social regulation; Routine Activity Theory explains situational crime prevention through capable guardianship; Social Capital Theory explains trust, cooperation, and intelligence sharing; while Strain and Conflict Theories explain the structural conditions such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, and institutional legitimacy that shape crime and policing outcomes. Together, the framework enables the study to analyse policing at the individual, community, institutional, and structural levels. Accordingly, the analysis and interpretation of the findings are guided primarily by Community Policing Theory, while the other theories provide complementary explanations of the social, operational, and structural dimensions of policing effectiveness in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach based solely on library research. Data were drawn from secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, government publications, and reports from organizations such as CLEEN Foundation and Human Rights Watch. The



materials were systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes and conceptual patterns related to the interaction between traditional and modern policing in Nigeria. The analysis focused on key criminological dimensions such as legitimacy, accountability, community participation, and institutional integration. By relying exclusively on documentary sources, the study ensures depth of theoretical interpretation and contextual understanding without engaging in field data collection. This method provides a rigorous basis for evaluating how Nigeria's policing evolution reflects broader criminological debates on hybrid security governance.

Results and Discussion

The findings from this study, drawn from comparative and secondary analyses, reveal a complex and evolving policing landscape in Nigeria characterized by the coexistence of three distinct but interrelated systems; traditional, state, and hybrid policing. Each system contributes uniquely to public safety, yet their operational and legitimacy challenges highlight the necessity for an integrated, multi-layered security framework.

i. Persistence and Relevance of Traditional Policing Systems

Evidence indicates that traditional security structures such as the *Dogarai* in Northern Nigeria, the *Ilari* in Yoruba kingdoms, and the *Emese* in Benin remain deeply embedded in community life despite the expansion of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) (Alemika, 1993; Mamdani, 1996; Bamidele, 2019). These systems derive legitimacy from social trust, cultural norms, and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms. Their responsiveness and capacity to mobilize local intelligence make them effective in addressing minor crimes and communal conflicts. However, the absence of statutory authority, standardized training, and technological capacity limits their ability to address complex or transnational crimes such as terrorism, cybercrime, and organized trafficking (Okeke & Igbo, 2020).

ii. Weak Public Trust and Institutional Deficits in Contemporary Policing

The study finds that the NPF, as the constitutionally mandated law enforcement institution, possesses

formal legal authority, nationwide jurisdiction, and a hierarchical command structure (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, its legitimacy remains contested. Empirical evidence from CLEEN Foundation (2018, 2020) and Human Rights Watch (2020) reveals persistent issues of corruption, brutality, and political interference, which erode public trust. Hills (2008) similarly notes that these institutional weaknesses foster a disconnect between the police and citizens, prompting reliance on alternative community-based security arrangements. The lack of adequate funding, poor training, and insufficient forensic capacity (Odekunle, 2004) further constrains the NPF's operational effectiveness, especially in rural and marginalized areas.

iii. Emergence and Dynamics of Hybrid Policing Models

Findings also point to the rise of hybrid policing systems that blend the cultural legitimacy of traditional structures with elements of state authorization and formal procedure. Notable examples include the *Amotekun Corps* in South-West Nigeria, the *Hisbah* in Kano, and regional vigilante formations in the Middle Belt (Oyekanmi, 2021; Akinlabi & Nwankpa, 2021). These models demonstrate a pragmatic response to security gaps, combining grassroots trust with some level of legal recognition. However, coordination challenges, jurisdictional overlaps, and unclear accountability mechanisms have created operational tensions between these bodies and the NPF (Alemika, 2020; Tankebe, 2009). Despite these challenges, hybrid policing has proven instrumental in restoring community confidence and enhancing localized responses to insecurity.

iv. Interaction between Policing Systems in Nigeria

The findings from the study indicate that policing in Nigeria operates within a plural framework, where both traditional and contemporary systems coexist and interact in complex ways. This dual structure reflects Nigeria's diverse socio-cultural realities and the gradual evolution of its law enforcement architecture. Traditional policing systems remain deeply embedded within local communities, drawing legitimacy from indigenous



norms and customary authority, while contemporary policing represents the formal state apparatus governed by constitutional and statutory mandates. As illustrated in the figure below, the interaction between these systems demonstrates a gradual convergence towards a more cooperative model of security governance.

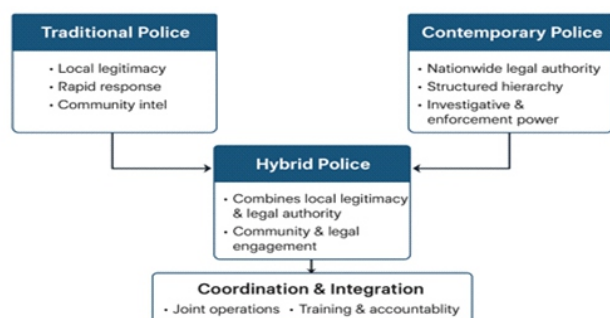


Figure 2: Interaction between Policing Systems in Nigeria

Source: Researcher's construct, 2026.

The diagram shows that Traditional Police institutions derive their strength from local legitimacy, rapid response capacity, and community-based intelligence networks. In contrast, the Contemporary Police possess nationwide legal authority, a structured command hierarchy, and strong investigative and enforcement powers. These two systems increasingly intersect to form a Hybrid Policing Model, which combines local legitimacy with formal legal authority. This hybrid structure facilitates community engagement, joint security initiatives, and a more responsive approach to crime prevention and dispute resolution.

At the foundation of this interaction lies Coordination and Integration, which encompasses joint operations, shared training programs, and accountability mechanisms. Such coordination strengthens trust, bridges institutional gaps, and enhances the overall efficiency of Nigeria's security framework. In essence, the study finds that hybrid policing anchored on collaboration between traditional and state systems has the potential to deliver a more culturally sensitive and community-oriented form of policing. This model not only improves intelligence gathering and local compliance but also mitigates the limitations associated with over-centralized law enforcement.

v. Theoretical Context of Hybrid Policing in Nigeria

The integration of traditional, hybrid, and contemporary policing systems in Nigeria can be better understood through established criminological theories. These frameworks provide conceptual clarity on why hybrid policing models emerge and how they function effectively within community contexts. The table below summarises the key criminological theories relevant to policing integration in Nigeria, highlighting their core assumptions, relevance to hybrid security systems, and practical examples.

Table 1:

Table of Criminological Theories and Their Application to Policing Integration in Nigeria

Theory	Core Assumption	Relevance to Hybrid Policing	Example from Nigeria
Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969)	Strong social bonds and moral integration reduce deviant behaviour.	Traditional policing reinforces informal social control and community legitimacy.	Community vigilante groups in Yoruba towns enforcing moral and social order.
Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979)	Crime occurs when motivated offenders, suitable targets, and lack of capable guardians converge.	Indigenous security groups act as capable guardians in areas with weak formal police presence.	Vigilante and hunter associations preventing rural banditry in Northern Nigeria.
Community Policing Theory (Skolnick & Bayley, 1988)	Collaboration between citizens and the police enhances public safety and trust.	Hybrid policing fosters community partnerships, intelligence sharing, and mutual accountability.	Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) collaboration with formal security agencies in Borno State.
Strain/Conflict Theories (Merton, 1938; Quinney, 1974)	Crime arises from inequality, marginalization, and institutional strain within society.	Hybrid policing structures emerge as community responses to systemic distrust and state inefficacy.	Reliance on traditional rulers and community elders to mediate land and chieftaincy disputes.
Network/Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000)	Social networks, trust, and information sharing enhance collective action and governance.	Hybrid policing leverages social capital to facilitate intelligence flow and strengthen local security collaboration.	Partnership between traditional leaders, local vigilantes, and police in community surveillance networks.

Source: Researcher's construct, 2026.



These criminological frameworks collectively illuminate how Nigeria's hybrid policing architecture functions at the intersection of social order, community legitimacy, and state authority. Integrating traditional and modern policing through the lenses of social control, routine activity, community engagement, and social capital reinforces security effectiveness. By leveraging trust, networks, and collaboration, hybrid policing offers a culturally grounded and institutionally responsive model for crime prevention and social stability in Nigeria.

Comparative and Institutional Insights

The comparative synthesis of traditional, state, and hybrid policing reveals a triangulated security system where each component both compensates for and constrains the others. Traditional policing thrives on community trust and cultural legitimacy but lacks formal authority and professionalization. State policing provides structure, legality, and national reach but suffers from trust and resource deficits. Hybrid policing, in turn, integrates the strengths of both systems, offering contextual flexibility and improved legitimacy but requiring clearer institutional frameworks for coordination and oversight (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012).

In sum, these findings suggest that no single model can adequately address Nigeria's multifaceted security challenges. Sustainable public safety therefore depends on a cooperative policing architecture that integrates traditional authority, formal legal power, and hybrid adaptability. Such a system would not only enhance community participation but also reinforce institutional accountability, bridging the gap between state-centered and community-oriented security governance across Nigeria's urban and rural landscapes.

Table 2:
Table of Comparative Characteristics of Traditional, State, and Hybrid Policing Systems in Nigeria

Aspect	Traditional Policing	State Policing (Nigeria Police Force)	Hybrid Policing Models	Scholarly Sources
Legitimacy	High derived from cultural	Variable often undermined by	Moderate to high combines	Alemika (2013); Hills

	norms, communal trust, and local authority structures.	corruption, brutality, and political interference.	community legitimacy with some legal recognition.	(2008); Aghedo & Osumah (2012); Akinlabi & Nwankpa (2021)
Authority	Customary and informal; lacks statutory enforcement powers.	Constitutional and statutory; full legal authority for arrest, prosecution, and investigation.	Semi-formal recognized at subnational or regional levels (e.g., <i>Amotekun</i> , <i>Hisbah</i>).	Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999); Okeke & Igbo (2020)
Operational Structure	Decentralized and community-driven, often led by traditional rulers or elders.	Centralized, bureaucratic, and command-based with hierarchical supervision.	Semi-decentralized; mixes local initiative with state oversight.	Bamidele (2019); Alemika (2002)
Response and Intelligence	Rapid due to proximity to community networks and local knowledge.	Slower, constrained by bureaucracy and limited logistical capacity.	Combines grassroots intelligence with formal follow-up mechanisms.	CLEEN Foundation (2018, 2020); Agbibo (2013)
Training and Professionalism	Largely informal; based on indigenous conflict-resolution traditions.	Formalized through police academies and standardized training programs.	Variable; members often receive partial training from state institutions.	Ibrahim (2018)
Resources and Equipment	Limited funding, relying on voluntary or community contributions.	Funded by the federal government but suffers from chronic underfunding.	Partially state-supported, often supplemented by local resources.	Onapajo & Abatan (2019)

Source: *Researcher's construct, 2026.*

As illustrated in Table 2, traditional policing demonstrates strong community legitimacy and responsiveness but is limited by challenges in legal compliance and resource availability. State policing offers formal authority and standardized procedures, yet it encounters significant trust deficits and operational inefficiencies. Hybrid policing occupies an intermediary position, combining the strengths of both traditional and institutional approaches; however, it remains hindered by weak coordination and unclear legal standing. Collectively, these findings underscore the study's proposition that a multi-layered policing framework integrating the legitimacy of traditional structures, the legal rigor of formal institutions, and the adaptability of hybrid models provides the most effective and culturally attuned



strategy for sustainable security governance in Nigeria.

Policy and Institutional Dimensions of Hybrid Policing in Nigeria

The interaction between traditional and modern policing systems in Nigeria has far-reaching implications for governance, security, and community trust. Properly structured, hybrid arrangements can enhance state legitimacy, improve local intelligence, and promote inclusive justice. However, without clear legal frameworks and coordination mechanisms, they risk reinforcing inequality or enabling abuses of power (Alemika, 2013; Hills, 2020). Nigeria's security landscape reflects both formal controls, rooted in law and state institutions, and informal control, grounded in cultural norms and communal authority. The central policy challenge is harmonising these systems to sustain community legitimacy while upholding the rule of law (Tankebe, 2019). Initiatives such as Amotekun Corps in the Southwest and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeast highlight the benefits of local responsiveness but also expose gaps in oversight and institutional integration.

Institutional reforms should prioritise structured collaboration between the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and community-based security actors through joint patrols, intelligence-sharing frameworks, and community conflict-resolution centres. Formal agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and Community Security Councils can clarify mandates, reduce rivalry, and strengthen accountability. Capacity-building in human rights, evidence handling, and mediation would further enhance professionalism (UNDP, 2024). At the policy level, the Federal Government's police reform agenda should provide legal recognition for hybrid policing under a unified national framework. This includes defining recruitment standards, oversight systems, and funding structures. State assemblies should enact localized security laws that align traditional vigilance practices with constitutional policing norms. Furthermore, digital integration through crime-mapping, mobile reporting, and data-sharing platforms can bridge gaps between community watch groups and formal agencies,

supporting modern, accountable, and people-centered policing (Bayley, 2018; UNODC, 2023).

Table 3:
Table of Policy and Institutional Implications of Hybrid Security Governance in Nigeria

Policy/Institutional Area	Current Challenge	Proposed Approach	Hybrid	Expected Outcome
Legal Framework	Lack of legal recognition of traditional actors	Develop enabling legislation and MoUs for hybrid policing		Legitimacy, accountability, and procedural clarity
Operational Coordination	Overlap and rivalry between vigilantes and police	Establish joint patrols and community security councils		Improved intelligence sharing and cooperation
Capacity Building	Limited training and professional standards	Implement training on human rights, evidence handling, and mediation		Enhanced professionalism and public trust
Digital Integration	Weak communication and data sharing	Adopt digital surveillance and reporting platforms		Faster response, transparency, and data-driven policing
Governance and Oversight	Risk of abuse or corruption	Establish independent oversight and community feedback systems		Balanced power and citizen accountability

Source: *Researcher's construct, 2026.*

In nutshell, bridging traditional and modern policing in Nigeria requires a holistic criminological framework that balances cultural legitimacy with institutional authority. Sustainable security reform depends not only on legal and structural alignment but also on participatory governance grounded in social control, procedural justice, and community trust. Such an integrated approach positions hybrid policing as a credible model for responsive and inclusive security governance in Nigeria.

Theoretical Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are interpreted primarily through Community Policing Theory (Goldstein, 1979; Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990), which provides the principal framework for explaining the evolution and effectiveness of policing systems in Nigeria. The theory emphasizes collaboration between law enforcement agencies and communities through partnership, shared responsibility, decentralization, trust, and



problem-solving. The findings support this perspective by showing that Nigeria's policing system has increasingly evolved into a hybrid model where traditional institutions, vigilante groups, neighbourhood watch organizations, and formal security agencies work together to improve crime prevention, intelligence sharing, and public safety. The findings are further reinforced by Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969), which explains the continued relevance of traditional policing institutions such as the Dogarai, Ilari, and Emese. Their effectiveness stems from strong social bonds, shared cultural values, and community norms that encourage conformity and social order. Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) complements this by demonstrating that the combined presence of formal and informal security actors increases capable guardianship, enhances surveillance, and reduces opportunities for crime, particularly in underserved communities.

Similarly, Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000) explains how trust, reciprocity, and social networks facilitate intelligence sharing, citizen participation, and cooperation between communities and security agencies, thereby strengthening hybrid policing arrangements. Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) and Conflict Theory (Quinney, 1970) provide the broader structural explanation by showing that socio-economic inequality, institutional weaknesses, and declining public confidence in formal policing have encouraged communities to develop complementary security structures to address emerging security challenges. Taken together, the findings indicate that Community Policing Theory provides the most comprehensive explanation of Nigeria's evolving policing landscape, while the complementary theories explain its social, operational, and structural dimensions. Together, they demonstrate that effective policing in Nigeria increasingly depends on collaboration between formal and informal institutions, strengthened community participation, public trust, and improved institutional capacity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that Nigeria's policing system is pluralistic, encompassing traditional, state, and

hybrid models that function interdependently. Traditional policing relies on social trust, while state policing faces institutional and legitimacy challenges. Hybrid models such as *Amotekun* and *Hisbah* bridge these gaps by blending community participation with formal authority. Drawing on Social Control, Routine Activity, Network/Social Capital, and Community Policing theories, the study concludes that sustainable security in Nigeria requires an integrated framework that unites community trust, institutional capacity, and collaborative governance. The following recommendations were proposed to strengthen coordination, legitimacy, and effectiveness across Nigeria's plural policing architecture through institutional reform, inclusive engagement, and legal coherence.

- i. The Federal Government should formalize collaboration frameworks between traditional, hybrid, and state policing actors to improve coordination and intelligence sharing.
- ii. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) should adopt community policing principles by strengthening neighborhood partnerships, cultural sensitivity training, and local accountability mechanisms.
- iii. Clear legal recognition of hybrid policing outfits such as *Amotekun* and *Hisbah* is needed to define their mandates, avoid role conflicts, and ensure human rights compliance.
- iv. Investment in training, logistics, and technology should be prioritized to enhance professionalism, data management, and crime prevention across all policing tiers.
- v. Civil society and community leaders should be included in local security councils to ensure transparency, democratic oversight, and conflict-sensitive policing practices.

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