

## **BRIDGING THE GAP: ENHANCING COMMUNITY POLICING FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND SECURITY IN ILORIN, KWARA STATE**

**OLOWOLAGBA Lekan, Yusuf**

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**Department of Sociology and Criminology Al-Hikmah University,  
Ilorin**

**\* Correspondence:** OLOWOLAGBA Lekan, Yusuf

**ABSTRACT:** This paper critically examines the evolving dynamics of community policing in Ilorin, Kwara State, against the backdrop of persistent urban insecurity and deteriorating public trust in law enforcement. Drawing upon theoretical insights, the study argues that bridging the disconnect between police institutions and local communities is essential for achieving sustainable peace and inclusive security governance. It identifies operational inefficiencies, socio-cultural barriers, and accountability deficits as key obstacles to effective community policing in Nigeria. Using Ilorin as a case study, the paper synthesises interdisciplinary literature with field-based observations to propose a comprehensive reform framework that emphasises digital innovation, local participation, cultural sensitivity, and evidence-based policing. The analysis advocates for reimagining community policing not merely as a strategy, but as a human-centred ethos co-produced through trust, dialogue, and shared responsibility.

**Keywords:** *Community Policing, Urban Security, Ilorin*

### **Introduction**

Community policing, widely heralded as a transformative model for public safety, has assumed renewed significance in the face of persistent security challenges confronting urban

centres across Nigeria. Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, represents a microcosm of the evolving dynamics between the police and the myriad communities they serve as space marked by both promise and pitfalls (Elphick et al., 2020). Despite policy shifts and growing advocacy for participatory policing paradigms, the anticipated dividends of peace, trust, and sustainable security remain uneven at the local level (Alabi, 2017; Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014). At stake is the very legitimacy of the police and the prospects for communal integration. Bridging the gap therefore entails more than rhetorical commitment; it demands nuanced strategies that foreground local realities, foster accountability, and leverage both indigenous insights and global best practices.

This paper contends that a critically reimagined community policing architecture offers the most viable pathway to sustainable peace and security in Ilorin. Drawing upon a robust body of empirical and theoretical literature both Nigerian and international, this essay articulates a framework for enhancing community policing in Ilorin, grounded in evidence, context, and humanistic engagement. To this end, the discussion will, first, establish the conceptual and historical underpinnings of community policing in Nigeria and abroad, then examine the particularities of Ilorin's security landscape. Thereafter, key gaps in current practice will be identified, before proposing a set of integrative strategies for bridging these gaps in ways that resonate with both the aspirations and lived realities of Ilorin's diverse communities.

## **Conceptual Foundations of Community Policing**

Community Policing: Evolution and Principles.

Community policing is predicated on the recognition that security is a shared responsibility encompassing the collaborative efforts of law enforcement, citizens, and various stakeholders to address public safety concerns proactively and inclusively (Elphick et al., 2020; Goldsmith, 2005). The philosophy is distinguished by three core tenets: partnership, problem-solving, and organisational transformation (Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014). Globally, the Peelian principles, which underscore the notion of “the police as the public and the public as the police”, remain instructive (Elphick et al., 2020). In the Nigerian context, these ideas have gained traction, albeit inconsistently, since their formal introduction in the 1980s, as part of broader police

reform initiatives responding to rising insecurity and public distrust (Adamu & Odekunle, 2019; Goldsmith, 2005).

### **Theoretical Rationale: Trust, Accountability, and Legitimacy**

At its core, community policing aims to restore and enhance trust, defined as citizens' conviction that law enforcement acts fairly, ethically, and responsively (Goldsmith, 2005; Bradford, 2014). Trust generates a virtuous cycle, improving police legitimacy, encouraging community cooperation, and, in turn, reinforcing public safety (Jackson et al., 2012; Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019). Effective community policing introduces robust accountability mechanisms, nurtures shared identities, and promotes communication channels that are open, transparent, and reciprocal (Elphick et al., 2020; Ojebode & Adegbola, 2016). Such dynamics are especially salient in multicultural societies like Ilorin, where ethnic, religious, and socio-economic cleavages frame police-community relations (Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019; Ajayi, 2022).

### **Community Policing in Nigeria: Context, Challenges, and Prospects**

Historical Context and National Policy Landscape.

The evolution of community policing in Nigeria has been shaped by a complex interplay of colonial legacies, post-independence centralisation, and recurrent crisis (Adamu & Odekunle, 2019; Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014). The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) has often been criticised for its paramilitary orientation, hierarchical structures, and detachment from local realities (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2018). Reform initiatives, including the Police Act amendments and the introduction of the Police Community Relations Committees (PCRC), signal a policy shift towards more decentralised and participatory models (Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014). However, as Ogunbayo (2019) and Nwankwo (2021) argue, the operationalisation of these reforms is hampered by ambiguities in legal frameworks, resource limitations, and deep-seated mutual suspicion.

### **Challenges to Effective Community Policing in Nigeria**

#### ***Structural and Institutional Constraints***

The centralised structure of the NPF, resource deficits, and lack of institutional autonomy have undermined localised policing efforts (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2018;

Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019). The absence of adequate training in community engagement, coupled with frequent staff rotations and limited personnel, further constrains effectiveness (Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014).

### ***Socio-cultural and Political Barriers***

Deep-rooted mistrust, perceived police corruption, and historical abuses have eroded the social capital necessary for effective partnership (Ogunbayo, 2019; Goldsmith, 2005). In addition, Nigeria's ethno-religious diversity and overlapping authority structures often complicate uniform approaches to community policing (Ojonemi et al., 2019; Ajayi, 2022).

### ***Accountability Deficits***

A recurring theme is the lack of robust, transparent, and accessible mechanisms for police accountability (Elphick et al., 2020; Goldsmith, 2005). This challenge is accentuated by weak civilian oversight and the absence of modern technological infrastructure to support transparency (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2016; Oluwaniyi, 2011).

### ***Prospects and Innovations***

Emerging evidence from several Nigerian states demonstrates the potential for adaptive, locally-driven community policing strategies to improve safety outcomes and public satisfaction (Ogunbayo, 2019; Ajayi, 2022). Notably, the expansion of PCRCs has, in some localities, fostered community participation, improved information flow, and reduced crime (Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019).

## **Ilorin, Kwara State: Community Policing in Practice**

### ***Urban Dynamics and Security Challenges***

Ilorin occupies a distinctive position in Nigeria's urban security matrix. With its historic religious and ethnic pluralism, the city faces a confluence of challenges, including youth unemployment, cultism, street crime, inter-group tensions, and periodic outbreaks of violence (Ajayi, 2022; Ojonemi et al., 2019). The official response has oscillated between militarised interventions and sporadic attempts at community engagement (Ajayi, 2022).

### ***Existing Structures and Initiatives***

The operational presence of PCRCs, local security outfits, faith-based organisations, and traditional rulers represents a multifaceted, albeit fragmented, foundation for community policing in Ilorin (Ojonemi et al., 2019). However, these structures often operate in silos, with limited coordination or accountability (Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019; Ojebode & Adegbola, 2016). Furthermore, digital technologies for citizen-police interaction remain rudimentary, hampering real-time information exchange and collective problem-solving (Elphick et al., 2020).

### **Empirical Insights: Community Perceptions and Gaps**

Surveys and qualitative accounts from Ilorin reveal mixed attitudes towards the police: while communities recognise the necessity of law enforcement, widespread mistrust persists, often fuelled by perceptions of partiality, extortion, and delay in emergency response (Ajayi, 2022; Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019). Notably, youth and other marginalised groups express alienation from both formal and informal policing processes, citing a lack of meaningful participation and voice (Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014).

### **Bridging the Gap: A Diagnostic Synthesis**

To forge an effective pathway towards sustainable peace and security in Ilorin, it is imperative to identify and bridge prevailing gaps in accountability, participation, and operational efficacy. Drawing on the literature, five interlinked domains are integral to this task.

#### ***1. Operational Visibility and Patrol Presence***

Oliveira, Moretti, and Reis (2016), though writing in the Brazilian context, demonstrate the importance of systematic patrolling and route planning for both crime deterrence and perceived safety. Their model, the multi-vehicle Covering Tour Problem (m-CTP), suggests that patrols designed to maximise visibility, rather than random or empirically determined circuits lead to better outcomes in terms of rapid response and public confidence. Translating this to Ilorin, where patrol presence is often sporadic and reactive, there is a critical need to deploy data-driven, balanced, and transparently justified patrol routes that are attuned to local hotspots and vulnerable sites (Ajayi, 2022; Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019).

## ***2. Digital Communication, Accountability, and Trust***

The advent of digital communication technologies offers new avenues for building trust, enhancing accountability, and fostering two-way engagement (Elphick et al., 2020; Ojebode & Adegbola, 2016). Elphick et al. (2020) contend that digitally enabled mechanisms such as mobile apps and online platforms can safeguard, inform, empower, and reassure diverse community segments. However, their systematic review exposes significant deficiencies: only a minority of policing apps worldwide offer privacy, informed consent, and meaningful avenues for anonymous reporting. In the Nigerian context, where digital divides persist but mobile phone penetration is high, there is significant scope for leveraging technology, provided it is adapted to local concerns, language, and privacy needs (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2016; Ajayi, 2022).

## ***3. Inclusive Participatory Mechanisms***

International and Nigerian scholars alike emphasise the salience of inclusive, participatory mechanisms in nurturing police legitimacy (Bradford, 2014; Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019; Ajayi, 2022). The exclusion of youth, women, and marginalised communities from policing forums, whether formal PCRCs or informal townhall meetings, restricts the diversity of perspectives and erodes confidence (Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014; Goldsmith, 2005). Authentic participation is both a process and an outcome, embedding communities as co-producers rather than passive recipients of security.

## ***4. Cultural Sensitivity and Identity-Building***

Shared identity between police and community members is a point stressed by Reicher and Hopkins (2000), as well as Jackson and Bradford (2010), it is especially pertinent in Ilorin's diverse cultural tapestry. Building such solidarity necessitates ethnically, linguistically, and religiously sensitive approaches, local recruitment, and tailored training in cultural competence (Ajayi, 2022; Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019).

## ***5. Data and Evidence-Driven Decision-Making***

Hazlett, McMurphy, and Shinkre (2025) advocate for rigorous, contextually appropriate evaluation strategies in community policing. Their "Treatment Reactive Average Causal Effect (TRACE)" approach, developed to address challenges in post-

treatment bias and measurement, underscores the need for transparency, responsiveness, and learning from local implementation data, rather than solely adhering to imported models. In Ilorin, the paucity of local data and analytical capacity remains a stumbling block to adaptive learning and innovation.

## **Towards Enhanced Community Policing in Ilorin: Policy and Practice Recommendations**

The foregoing analysis yields a constellation of recommendations for bridging the gap in Ilorin. These are structured around five pillars, each responding to identified deficits and drawing on both interdisciplinary and cross-national evidence.

### **Pillar 1: Institutional Reform and Operational Effectiveness**

#### ***A. Structured Patrol Route Optimisation***

Inspired by Oliveira, Moretti, and Reis (2016), the integration of route optimisation algorithms, adapted to Ilorin's urban geography, can enhance visibility, deterring crime while assuring communities of police presence. By systematically mapping schools, hospitals, and at-risk sites, police can minimise response times and ensure all communities experience equitable coverage (Ajayi, 2022).

#### ***B. Resource Allocation and Personnel Training***

Ensuring adequate equipment, vehicles, and local recruitment, particularly from underrepresented groups will address both efficacy and representation deficits (Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019; Nwankwo, 2021). Tailored training in community engagement, negotiation, and conflict resolution is critical.

### **Pillar 2: Community Engagement and Accountability**

#### ***A. Revitalising and Diversifying PCRCs***

Reforming PCRCs into genuinely inclusive, participatory bodies is essential. This entails proactive outreach to youth, women, religious minorities, and migrants, as well as integrating feedback from neighbourhood associations and faith-based groups (Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014; Olayemi & Adekunle, 2019).

### ***B. Civilian Oversight and Transparency Mechanisms***

Embedding robust, independent civilian oversight drawing upon local notables and professional associations will mitigate abuses and engender public faith in policing systems (Goldsmith, 2005; Ojebode & Adegbola, 2016).

## **Pillar 3: Digital Innovation and Trust-Building**

### ***A. Localised, Inclusive Community Policing Apps***

Building upon Elphick et al. (2020), the development and deployment of accessible, contextually appropriate digital platforms offering anonymous reporting, real-time alerts, and transparent complaint channels can foster connectivity and reassurance. Such apps must be inclusive, culturally sensitive, and designed through consultation with prospective users (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2016).

### ***B. Social Media Engagement***

Harnessing locally popular social media (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook) for community updates, missing person alerts, and safety campaigns can supplement traditional structures, widen reach, and monitor sentiment (Elphick et al., 2020; Ajayi, 2022).

## **Pillar 4: Data-Driven Policy and Continuous Evaluation**

### ***A. Local Data Infrastructure and Feedback Loops***

Establishing decentralised data collection and analysis hubs, possibly in partnership with educational institutions, will enable real-time tracking of crime patterns, community feedback, and patrol effectiveness (Hazlett et al., 2025).

### ***B. Evidence-Based Experimentation and Learning***

Implementing small-scale, adaptive pilot programs—evaluated using frameworks like TRACE (Hazlett et al., 2025) allows incremental learning, contextualisation, and scaling of effective practices.

## **Pillar 5: Cultural Sensitivity and Identity Integration**

### ***A. Recruitment and Capacity-Building***

Intentional recruitment from a cross-section of Ilorin's ethnic and religious communities, allied with in-service training in local languages and customs, will



consolidate trust and mitigate perceptions of bias (Ajayi, 2022; Reicher & Hopkins, 2000).

### ***B. Celebrating Shared Narratives***

Regular joint activities such as festivals, educational workshops, and peace-building forums can reinforce the shared identity between police and communities, decreasing alienation and antagonism (Jackson & Bradford, 2010).

### **Synthesis: Humanising Security for Sustainable Peace**

Ultimately, the quest for sustainable peace and security in Ilorin, and more broadly in Nigeria, is not simply a technical matter of reorganising police patrols or rolling out digital platforms, it is an inherently human endeavour, rooted in empathy, dialogue, and solidarity. As Goldsmith (2005) and Reicher and Hopkins (2000) remind us, trust is a function of daily practice, experienced justice, and the affirmation of shared humanity. The experiences recounted by Ajayi (2022), Olayemi and Adekunle (2019), and Ogunbayo (2019) further affirm the resilience and resourcefulness of Nigerian communities, even in the face of institutional deficits.

By bridging the conceptual, operational, and perceptual gaps in community policing, Ilorin can stand as a model of adaptive, participatory, and accountable practice. The imperative, therefore, is for policy-makers, practitioners, and grassroots actors to invest in sustained collaboration, mutual learning, and the co-creation of safety with the humility to listen, the courage to reform, and the creativity to innovate.

### **Conclusion**

This essay has argued that bridging the gap in community policing is both an urgent and achievable undertaking for Ilorin, Kwara State. Anchored in global principles and grounded in local realities, the recommended framework integrates structural reform, participatory governance, digital innovation, data-driven learning, and cultural resonance. Realising sustainable peace and security will require not only institutional determination but also a shift in mindsets recognising that safety is not bestowed by fiat, but is co-produced, negotiated, and humanised in the day-to-day interactions between the police and the communities they serve. The urgent task for Ilorin, and indeed for Nigeria at large, is to operationalise this vision transforming

promise into practice, and moving beyond rhetoric to real, measurable, and lived security for all.

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