

SECURITY GOVERNANCE AND CRIME PREVENTION IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED AND COMMUNITY-CENTRED SECURITY FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Security governance has become increasingly important to the management of crime and public safety in rapidly urbanising societies. In Lagos State, Nigeria, population growth, spatial inequality, urban informality, youth unemployment, mobility pressures, and the proliferation of both state and non-state security actors have created a complex environment for crime prevention. This paper examines the relationship between security governance and crime prevention in Lagos State, with particular attention to community policing, police legitimacy, public trust, private security, vigilantism, institutional coordination, and the exercise of discretion by street-level security actors. The paper adopts a qualitative conceptual approach based on a critical review of recent peer-reviewed literature published between 2015 and 2026. The analysis demonstrates that effective crime prevention in Lagos cannot depend exclusively on conventional, centrally controlled policing. Rather, sustainable security requires a governance framework that integrates state institutions, local communities, private security organisations, traditional and community leaders, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders within a clearly regulated and accountable institutional structure. The paper argues that police legitimacy and public trust constitute critical foundations of effective security governance. Where citizens perceive security institutions as procedurally unfair, ineffective or unaccountable, they are more likely to withdraw cooperation and rely on informal security mechanisms, potentially reinforcing vigilantism and extra-legal practices. The paper proposes an integrated security governance

framework based on community co-production, intelligence-led policing, institutional accountability, public-private collaboration, technological innovation, procedural justice, and socioeconomic crime prevention. It concludes that Lagos can improve its crime-prevention capacity by moving from a predominantly reactive policing model towards a participatory, preventive, intelligence-driven and accountable security governance system.

Keywords: security governance, crime prevention, community policing, police legitimacy, vigilantism, private security, Lagos State, Nigeria

Introduction

Security is a fundamental prerequisite for economic development, social stability, investment and effective urban governance. For a rapidly expanding metropolitan region such as Lagos State, the challenge of maintaining public safety is particularly complex because security threats emerge from the interaction of demographic growth, urbanisation, socioeconomic inequality, informal settlements, unemployment, transport pressures, weak institutional capacity and the activities of both state and non-state security actors. Consequently, crime prevention in Lagos cannot be understood exclusively as a question of police deployment or law enforcement. It is increasingly a question of how multiple institutions and social actors collectively govern security.

The concept of security governance provides a useful framework for understanding this transformation. Rather than viewing the state as the sole provider of security, security governance recognises that public safety is produced through interactions among government agencies, police institutions, local communities, private security companies, civil society organisations and other non-state actors. This perspective is particularly relevant to Lagos, where communities and private actors frequently participate directly or indirectly in crime prevention. Badiora (2025), for example, demonstrates that crime prevention in Lagos increasingly involves co-production involving the state, police and communities. His findings suggest that collaborative security arrangements can endure even within a highly centralised policing system when institutional and socioeconomic conditions support cooperation.

The effectiveness of security governance, however, depends not merely on the number of security actors involved but also on the quality of relationships among them. Weak coordination, institutional distrust, poor information sharing, corruption, inadequate resources and unclear responsibilities can undermine crime-prevention efforts. Recent research on Nigeria's policing environment indicates that public distrust can create a self-reinforcing cycle in which citizens withdraw cooperation from the police while police officers increasingly resort to informal practices that further undermine public confidence (Tiwaa, 2024).

This issue is particularly important in Lagos because the state's security environment is characterised by multiple overlapping forms of policing. In addition to the Nigeria Police Force, security provision involves private security companies, neighbourhood security groups, vigilante organisations, community associations and other informal actors. Research on Lagos has found that collaboration between private security companies and the police can contribute positively to crime prevention, although operational synergy remains weak (Chinwokwu, 2018).

Against this background, this paper examines security governance and crime prevention in Lagos State. It argues that sustainable crime prevention requires a transition from a predominantly reactive and centralised policing model towards an integrated governance framework based on community participation, institutional accountability, procedural justice, intelligence sharing, regulated public-private partnerships and socioeconomic prevention.

Conceptualising Security Governance

Security governance refers broadly to the processes through which security is produced, coordinated and regulated by multiple state and non-state actors. The concept departs from the traditional assumption that the state possesses an exclusive monopoly over the provision of security. Instead, it recognises that contemporary security systems frequently involve networks of government institutions, private organisations, communities and civil society.

In the Nigerian context, security governance is complicated by the gap between the formal responsibilities of state institutions and the practical security arrangements developed by communities. Okolie-Osemene (2021) argues that Nigeria's security governance challenges are associated with law-enforcement weaknesses, the activities of non-state actors and deficiencies in the professional conduct of security personnel. His analysis of the COVID-19 period illustrates how disruptions to conventional security arrangements can expose institutional weaknesses and encourage alternative forms of security provision.

Security governance should therefore be understood as both an institutional and relational process. Institutional capacity is necessary for effective policing, but capacity alone does not guarantee public cooperation. Citizens must perceive security institutions as legitimate, fair and responsive. This makes trust, procedural justice and accountability central components of security governance.

Crime Prevention and the Lagos Security Environment

Crime prevention extends beyond apprehending offenders after crimes have occurred. Contemporary approaches emphasise the reduction of the social, environmental and institutional conditions that facilitate criminal behaviour. Effective crime prevention therefore combines conventional policing with intelligence gathering, environmental design, community engagement, youth development, socioeconomic interventions and effective justice institutions.

The Lagos security environment illustrates the limitations of relying exclusively on reactive policing. Shiyabade et al. (2026), in their recent analysis of community policing and crime prevention in Lagos State, argue that strengthening police-community relations is important to improving crime prevention. Their study, based on qualitative analysis of existing evidence, identifies community policing as an important component of contemporary governance-oriented approaches to crime control.

Community policing is particularly relevant because communities possess local knowledge that formal security institutions may not easily access. Residents often have knowledge of suspicious movements, emerging conflicts, vulnerable locations and local patterns of disorder. When

properly structured, community participation can therefore strengthen early warning, intelligence gathering and preventive intervention.

However, community participation should not be confused with the uncontrolled transfer of policing responsibilities to citizens. Community-based security mechanisms must operate within legal and institutional frameworks that protect human rights and prevent arbitrary punishment.

Community Policing and Co-Production of Security

Community policing represents one of the most important mechanisms through which security governance can be strengthened in Lagos. It emphasises partnership, communication, problem-solving and mutual trust between the police and communities. The underlying assumption is that crime prevention becomes more effective when citizens participate in identifying security problems and developing appropriate responses.

Evidence from the wider policing literature suggests that community policing can improve police legitimacy, reduce fear of crime and contribute to crime-control objectives, although its effectiveness varies according to institutional design and implementation (Crowl, 2017).

In Lagos, the importance of community co-production is particularly evident because communities frequently develop their own mechanisms for addressing perceived security gaps. Badiora (2025) finds that co-created security arrangements can provide significant crime-prevention benefits where communities, police institutions and other actors cooperate.

The central policy challenge is therefore not whether communities should participate in security governance, but how such participation can be institutionalised without compromising accountability. Community security committees, neighbourhood policing forums, structured information-sharing mechanisms and regular police-community consultations could provide institutional channels through which community knowledge is incorporated into formal security planning.

Police Legitimacy, Procedural Justice and Public Trust

One of the most important findings in the literature on policing is that effective crime prevention depends significantly on public perceptions of police legitimacy. Police legitimacy refers to the extent to which citizens regard police authority as appropriate, lawful and deserving of compliance.

Akinlabi (2017) found that procedural justice was a more important predictor of police legitimacy among young people in Nigeria than perceptions of police effectiveness. The finding is important because it suggests that legitimacy is not produced solely by the ability of police officers to suppress crime. The manner in which citizens are treated also matters. Fairness, respect, neutrality and opportunities for citizens to be heard can strengthen perceptions of legitimacy.

The implication for Lagos is substantial. Police institutions that rely heavily on coercion without simultaneously developing trust may achieve short-term compliance but struggle to secure sustainable public cooperation. Crime prevention requires citizens to report crimes, provide information, cooperate with investigations and participate in community safety programmes. Such cooperation becomes difficult when citizens perceive security institutions as unfair or unresponsive.

Tiwaa (2024) provides an especially important explanation of this problem through the concept of an “institutional distrust trap.” According to the study, distrust may reduce citizens' willingness to rely on formal policing, while police officers may respond through informal practices that further undermine public confidence. The resulting cycle can encourage support for extra-legal forms of crime control.

Breaking this cycle requires institutional reforms that make procedural justice an operational principle rather than merely a normative aspiration. Police accountability mechanisms, transparent complaint systems, professional investigation procedures and community oversight can contribute to rebuilding trust.

Private Security and Multi-Actor Crime Prevention

The growth of private security organisations is another important dimension of security governance in Lagos. Residential estates, commercial establishments, financial institutions, industrial facilities and other organisations increasingly rely on private security providers for access control, surveillance and incident response.

Private security should not necessarily be regarded as a substitute for public policing. Rather, it should form part of a coordinated security ecosystem. Chinwoku (2018) found that operational collaboration and networking between private security companies and the police can positively contribute to crime prevention in Lagos, although the level of synergy between the two sectors remains inadequate.

This suggests the need for formal mechanisms through which private security organisations can share relevant intelligence with public security agencies while maintaining appropriate safeguards concerning privacy, evidence and accountability. Standardised reporting protocols, joint training, emergency communication channels and clearly defined responsibilities could improve coordination.

At the same time, private security organisations should be subject to appropriate regulatory oversight. Security governance cannot become a system in which individuals or corporations exercise coercive powers without adequate accountability. The expansion of private security should therefore be accompanied by professional standards, licensing requirements, training, ethical codes and mechanisms for investigating complaints.

Vigilantism and Informal Security Institutions

The emergence of vigilantism reflects, in part, citizens' attempts to respond to perceived deficiencies in formal policing. In Lagos, neighbourhoods may organise informal security arrangements because residents believe that formal security institutions cannot respond quickly or effectively to local threats.

Akinlabi (2019) demonstrates that support for vigilantism in Nigeria can be connected to citizens' perceptions of state policing and procedural justice. Using survey data from Lagos, the study examined how residents' experiences and perceptions influence support for non-state policing arrangements.

More recent research reinforces the importance of understanding vigilantism as part of the broader security-governance environment. A 2025 study of residential neighbourhoods in Lagos found that communities use vigilante mechanisms across different residential-density contexts, while identifying communication, financing, trust and cooperation as important challenges to their effectiveness.

The existence of vigilantism presents a governance dilemma. On the one hand, community-based security groups can provide rapid responses and local knowledge. On the other hand, unregulated vigilantism can generate human-rights abuses, wrongful accusations, arbitrary punishment and violence.

Consequently, the appropriate policy response is neither unconditional endorsement nor complete disregard. Rather, community security organisations should be integrated into formal security governance through registration, training, defined mandates, human-rights standards, reporting obligations and supervision by competent authorities.

Security Governance, Regulation and Street-Level Discretion

Crime prevention in Lagos is also shaped by the behaviour of street-level officials who implement security-related policies. Security governance is therefore not simply determined by legislation or formal policy. It is also shaped by how policies are interpreted and enforced by frontline officials.

Ackrill et al. (2023), examining the enforcement of motorcycle-taxi restrictions in Lagos, demonstrate that street-level officials exercise considerable discretion, resulting in both under-enforcement and over-enforcement. Their findings show that the implementation of regulatory policies can become a significant dimension of urban policing and governance.

This observation has broader implications for crime prevention. Where enforcement is inconsistent, selective or perceived as arbitrary, citizens may lose confidence in public institutions. Conversely, predictable, transparent and proportionate enforcement can enhance institutional legitimacy.

Security governance reforms should therefore address not only high-level institutional structures but also frontline implementation. Training, supervision, performance evaluation, disciplinary

systems and transparent operational procedures are essential to ensuring that security policies are implemented consistently.

Institutional Coordination and Intelligence Sharing

Another major challenge for Lagos security governance is institutional fragmentation. Crime prevention involves multiple agencies with different mandates, information systems and organisational cultures. Without effective coordination, intelligence may remain fragmented and opportunities for prevention may be lost.

An integrated security governance system should establish mechanisms for intelligence sharing among the police, relevant state security institutions, local authorities, private security organisations and community structures. The objective should not be the indiscriminate collection of information but the development of lawful, intelligence-led systems capable of identifying patterns, emerging risks and vulnerable locations.

Technology can support such a system through geographic information systems, digital incident reporting, CCTV networks, emergency communication platforms, data analytics and coordinated dispatch systems. However, technology should complement rather than replace institutional reform. Surveillance without accountability can increase distrust, while sophisticated technology cannot compensate for poor investigative capacity or weak institutional coordination.

Socioeconomic Dimensions of Crime Prevention

Crime prevention must also address the socioeconomic conditions that increase vulnerability to criminal activity. Poverty, unemployment, exclusion, inadequate housing and limited opportunities for young people do not automatically cause crime, but persistent socioeconomic disadvantage can create environments in which criminal networks and informal economies become more attractive.

Security governance in Lagos should therefore incorporate preventive social policy. Youth employment programmes, vocational education, community development, rehabilitation, urban renewal and support for vulnerable groups should be treated as complementary components of crime prevention.

This approach is consistent with the broader governance perspective because public security is influenced by the quality of social institutions. A narrow policing strategy that focuses exclusively on arrest and prosecution may address symptoms without addressing some of the structural conditions associated with insecurity.

Towards an Integrated Security Governance Framework for Lagos

The analysis suggests that Lagos requires a multidimensional security governance framework built around six mutually reinforcing principles.

First, **community co-production** should become a central pillar of crime prevention. Communities should participate in identifying security priorities, providing intelligence and evaluating local policing initiatives.

Second, **procedural justice and police legitimacy** should be embedded in police training, operational practice and performance assessment. Fair treatment, respect and transparency should be treated as measurable dimensions of policing effectiveness.

Third, **public-private security partnerships** should be formalised. Private security organisations should have structured channels for reporting incidents and sharing relevant information with public authorities while remaining subject to regulatory oversight.

Fourth, **informal security organisations should be regulated rather than ignored**. Vigilante and neighbourhood security groups should operate within defined legal boundaries and should be prohibited from exercising arbitrary or extrajudicial powers.

Fifth, **intelligence-led and technology-supported policing** should be expanded. Digital reporting systems, geographic crime mapping, coordinated emergency communication and data-driven deployment can improve the allocation of scarce security resources.

Sixth, **crime prevention should be integrated with socioeconomic policy**. Employment, youth development, urban regeneration and community development should form part of a long-term crime-prevention strategy.

Policy Implications

The findings have several implications for policymakers in Lagos State. The first is that security governance should be approached as a network rather than as a single-agency responsibility. The Lagos State Government, Nigeria Police Force, local government institutions, private security organisations, communities and civil society should have clearly defined roles within a coordinated framework.

Second, the state should strengthen police-community relations through permanent community policing structures. These structures should not be created merely as ceremonial consultative bodies but should have mechanisms for identifying local security problems, monitoring police responsiveness and communicating community concerns.

Third, police legitimacy should be incorporated into security-performance indicators. Conventional measures such as arrests and response times are important, but they should be complemented by indicators measuring public trust, procedural fairness, complaint resolution and citizen satisfaction.

Fourth, the government should strengthen regulation of private and community-based security actors. Collaboration should be encouraged, but security actors should operate under clear legal, ethical and human-rights standards.

Fifth, security institutions should improve information-sharing arrangements. A coordinated intelligence architecture would reduce duplication, improve early warning and enhance the ability of security agencies to respond to emerging threats.

Sixth, policymakers should recognise that crime prevention is inseparable from urban governance. Policies concerning transportation, housing, land use, employment, youth development and urban regeneration have security implications. The enforcement of urban policies should therefore be designed with careful attention to legitimacy, proportionality and community acceptance.

Discussion

The central argument of this paper is that the effectiveness of crime prevention in Lagos depends increasingly on the quality of governance surrounding security rather than solely on the coercive capacity of security institutions. Lagos represents a particularly important case because its security environment is characterised by multiple actors operating across formal and informal institutional boundaries.

The literature reviewed demonstrates three interconnected realities. First, communities possess important resources for crime prevention, including local knowledge, social networks and informal surveillance capabilities. Second, public trust and police legitimacy determine whether these community resources can be effectively connected to formal policing. Third, weak coordination among state and non-state actors can reduce the benefits of security pluralism.

The evidence also suggests that security pluralism has both positive and negative consequences. Community participation, private security and vigilantism may compensate for gaps in formal policing, but they can also produce new risks when insufficiently regulated. Consequently, the policy objective should not be to eliminate non-state security actors but to establish a governance framework that enables constructive collaboration while preventing abuse.

Badiora's (2025) analysis is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that co-production can become a sustainable mechanism for crime prevention in Lagos when political and institutional conditions are favourable. Similarly, the recent study by Shiyanbade et al. (2026) reinforces the continuing relevance of community policing to crime prevention in Lagos.

The challenge, therefore, is to transform fragmented security practices into an accountable security-governance architecture. This requires institutional coordination, public participation, professional policing, effective regulation and socioeconomic prevention.

Conclusion

Security governance and crime prevention in Lagos State are closely interconnected. The complexity of the state's urban environment means that conventional approaches centred exclusively on reactive policing are unlikely to provide sustainable solutions to crime and insecurity. Crime prevention requires a broader governance framework capable of integrating

state institutions with communities, private security organisations and other legitimate non-state actors.

The evidence reviewed in this paper demonstrates that community participation, police legitimacy, procedural justice, institutional trust, public-private collaboration and effective regulation are central to sustainable security governance. At the same time, the existence of vigilantism and informal security arrangements demonstrates the consequences of institutional gaps and public dissatisfaction with formal policing.

Lagos therefore needs a security-governance model that is preventive rather than merely reactive, participatory rather than exclusively centralised, intelligence-led rather than predominantly incident-driven, and accountable rather than purely coercive. Such a model should combine professional policing with community co-production, regulated private security, responsible technology, institutional coordination and socioeconomic crime prevention.

Ultimately, the security of Lagos cannot be produced by government alone. It must be co-produced by government, security institutions, communities, businesses and citizens within a clearly defined framework of law, accountability and human rights. The central policy objective should therefore be to move from fragmented security provision towards an integrated security-governance system capable of building trust, preventing crime and strengthening the long-term resilience of Lagos as a major African metropolis.

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