PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF SECURITY GOVERNANCE: EVALUATING EDO STATE SECURITY NETWORK'S EFFECTIVENESS IN SAFETY AND ORDER MAINTENANCE (2021-2024)

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Keywords

Public, Perception, Security, Safety, Order

Abstract

Rising insecurity in Edo State has driven the adoption of alternative policing strategies, leading to the establishment of the Edo State Security Network (ESSN) in 2021 as a grassroots response to crime and public safety threats. Despite its active role, concerns persist regarding its effectiveness, transparency, and community inclusiveness.

This study assessed public perceptions of the ESSN's performance between 2021 and 2024, focusing on its ability to ensure safety, maintain order, and engage residents in security processes.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered across selected communities in Oredo LGA, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and mean scores.

Findings revealed that while most respondents credited the ESSN with reducing crime and improving safety, they also expressed dissatisfaction with its limited transparency and minimal community participation in decision-making. This paradox operational success alongside governance skepticism highlights the need for reforms.

The study recommended institutionalizing community advisory councils, holding regular public briefings, and enhancing operatives' training in human rights and ethical conduct to build trust, strengthen accountability, and improve long-term effectiveness in safeguarding lives and property.

Introduction

The imperative of state-level security architecture in Nigeria has gained traction in recent years, especially amid growing concerns over rising insecurity and the limitations of federal policing structures. In response to these challenges, sub-national entities like Edo State have established indigenous security frameworks such as the Edo State Security Network (ESSN), launched in 2021. The ESSN was envisioned as a localized intervention aimed at curbing insecurity, promoting community safety, and enhancing public order through grassroots intelligence gathering and rapid response to threats (Legbedion, 2024). This approach aligns with the broader policy direction of community policing as endorsed by the Nigerian federal government, recognizing that conventional security forces often lack the proximity and cultural competence necessary for effective local engagement (Nweke and Nwankwo, 2023).

Public perception plays a pivotal role in determining the success and legitimacy of security outfits like the ESSN**.** Citizens' trust in security initiatives is largely influenced by their experiences, the responsiveness of the network, the conduct of its personnel, and its capacity to deliver safety outcomes. The efficacy and accountability of non-traditional security structures in Nigeria are deeply conditioned by community support and perception. In contexts where public trust is lacking, these initiatives struggle to function effectively. Community policing interventions only succeed when security actors are perceived as impartial and when communities are meaningfully involved in governance and oversight (Ikuteyijo, n.d.). Furthermore, empirical studies by scholars such as Osawe and Ashade (2023) and Iwuamadi, Ngwu and Onyemaobi (2021) reveal that communities are more likely to cooperate with local security institutions when they perceive such efforts as transparent, inclusive, and accountable—ultimately reinforcing both legitimacy and performance.

Therefore, between 2021 and 2024, the ESSN has been at the center of public discourse in Edo State, especially regarding its role in crime prevention, conflict resolution, and maintaining civil order in both urban and rural settings. However, while official accounts may highlight the successes of the ESSN, public narratives may differ significantly based on location, socio-economic status, or political affiliation. As such, investigating the public perception of the ESSN becomes crucial not only for evaluating its impact but also for recommending policy reforms to improve its efficacy. This study, therefore, aims to assess how residents of Edo State perceive the ESSN's operations within the stated timeframe, focusing on trust, efficiency, human rights compliance, and community engagement.

Research Problem

In recent years, Nigeria has grappled with an upsurge in insecurity ranging from armed robbery, kidnapping, communal clashes, and cult-related violence to herder-farmer conflicts, with many citizens losing confidence in the capacity of conventional security agencies to guarantee their safety. In response to these challenges, the Edo State government launched the Edo State Security Network (ESSN) in 2021 as a localized security architecture aimed at complementing federal security efforts by addressing grassroots-level threats, improving intelligence gathering, and restoring public order. While the establishment of ESSN was received with hope by some sections of the population, concerns have been raised over its structure, effectiveness, community relations, and potential for abuse of power, thereby creating divergent perceptions among residents.

Empirical studies have underscored the importance of public perception in determining the effectiveness of community-based security

initiatives. Citizens are more likely to cooperate with local security efforts, report crimes, and support security interventions when they perceive such systems as transparent, trustworthy, and inclusive. For instance, Chukwuma and Alemika (2001) highlight that public trust and community engagements are essential for enhancing security legitimacy and effectiveness in Nigeria. Similarly, Ambali and Araba (2020) assert that the success of localized policing initiatives largely depends on the degree of public confidence in security actors and their operational integrity. Furthermore, Akinlabi (2022) found that communities with higher levels of perceived fairness and accountability in security networks demonstrated stronger support for local policing models. These findings suggest that public perception is not merely a byproduct of security activities but a central component of their success and sustainability.

This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by critically assessing the public perception of the Edo State Security Network from 2021 to 2024, with the aim of determining how factors such as community engagement, operational visibility, response effectiveness, and trust in personnel influence the overall public rating of the initiative. Understanding these perceptions is vital for evaluating the sustainability and legitimacy of the ESSN as a community security mechanism and for informing future policy interventions to strengthen security governance in the state.

Research Questions

i. How do residents of Edo State perceive the effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement of the Edo State Security Network (ESSN) in ensuring safety and public order between 2021 and 2024?

ii. What strategies can be adopted to improve public trust, operational performance, and accountability of the ESSN based on the perceptions and experiences of Edo State residents?

iii. Research Objectives

iv. To assess how residents of Edo State perceive the effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement of the Edo State Security Network (ESSN) in ensuring safety and public order between 2021 and 2024.

v. To identify and recommend strategies for improving public trust, accountability, and the overall performance of the ESSN based on citizens' perceptions and experiences.

Hypothesis

H_0: Residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement have no significant influence on its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024.

H_r: Residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement significantly influence its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024.

Evolution and Rationale behind Local/State Security Networks in Nigeria

The evolution of local and state security networks in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the persistent failure of the centralized federal policing system to adequately address the growing insecurity across different regions. Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed a sharp increase in crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, insurgency, herder–farmer conflicts, and cult-related violence, particularly in regions where federal security presence is either weak or unresponsive (Alemika, 2013). The centralized Nigeria Police Force (NPF),

constrained by limited manpower, logistics, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, has often been criticized for its inability to respond swiftly to local threats. These challenges, along with widespread distrust of federal security forces and their lack of grounding in local contexts, have intensified calls for decentralized security structures that are closer to the people and more attuned to community-specific threats (Nuhu, 2024).

In response, several states and regions established their own security outfits, including the Western Nigeria Security Network (*Amotekun*), Kano State's *Hisbah*, the South-East's *Ebube Agu*, and Edo State's *Edo State Security Network (ESSN)*. These outfits were created to complement federal forces by providing intelligence, enhancing patrols, and engaging directly with local communities (Iwuamadi, Nwgu and Onyemaobi, 2021). However, the emergence of these outfits has sparked significant legal and constitutional debates. Critics argue that state police structures violate Sections 214–216 of the 1999 Constitution, which vest policing powers in the federal government. Proponents, on the other hand, cite Section 4(7) which allows states to make laws for peace and security within their jurisdictions, arguing for a federalism that supports multi-level policing (Nnabuihe, Ashindorbe and Odobo, 2023). The politicization of security and fears of abuse of power by state governors further fuel the debate, highlighting the tension between security pragmatism and constitutional rigidity in Nigeria's federal system.

Operational Structure and Performance of Local Security Networks

The operational structure of local security networks in Nigeria varies across states but generally includes features aimed at promoting proximity policing and community responsiveness. Most state security outfits, such as Amotekun in the South-West and the Edo State Security Network (ESSN), recruit personnel from local communities, often retired security officers, vigilantes, and youths with basic knowledge of the terrain (Akinyemi, 2021). Training, however, is frequently minimal and unstandardized, with many recruits lacking formal security education or adherence to national law enforcement procedures (Arisukwu, 2017). Command structures tend to be state-centric, with direct supervision from governors or designated security advisers, raising concerns over political interference and the absence of independent oversight. While this grassroots approach allows for quicker responses to localized threats, it also presents challenges in coordination, discipline, and adherence to human rights norms (Iwuoha, 2020).

The relationship between local security networks and federal security agencies remains tenuous and often marked by jurisdictional conflict and poor coordination. Although local outfits are designed to complement the efforts of the Nigeria Police Force and other national bodies, studies have shown that inter-agency rivalry, lack of information sharing, and overlapping duties hinder collaboration (Idowu and Usifoh, 2024). Effectiveness varies widely; while states like Ondo and Ekiti have reported reduced cases of kidnapping and robbery due to Amotekun patrols, other regions continue to face high insecurity due to logistical challenges, inadequate funding, and poor training of personnel (Kosi, Timi and Onyemaobi, 2023). Additionally, the absence of legal frameworks for some of these networks undermines their legitimacy and professional conduct. Ultimately, while local security outfits have filled a critical gap in Nigeria's fractured

security architecture, their long-term impact depends on reforming operational practices, improving professionalism, and strengthening their synergy with federal forces.

Public Perception, Community Engagement, and Accountability

Public perception plays a critical role in the functioning and legitimacy of local security networks in Nigeria. Trust and cooperation from community members often determine whether these security outfits can effectively gather intelligence, prevent crime, and respond swiftly to security threats. Studies show that where trust is high, residents are more likely to provide timely information and support operational efforts (Onyeozili, 2005). For example, in parts of Ondo and Ekiti States, communities have actively collaborated with the *Amotekun Corps*, leading to reported reductions in robbery and kidnapping incidents (Ojiezele and Akporaro, 2025). Conversely, in areas where local security actors are seen as partisan, corrupt, or abusive, public cooperation diminishes, undermining the credibility and effectiveness of the outfit (Akinlabi, 2017).

Transparency, community involvement, and adherence to human rights standards are central to shaping how people perceive local security initiatives. When recruitment processes, operational mandates, and disciplinary procedures are clear and inclusive, the public is more likely to view these bodies as legitimate (Okome, 2013). Active engagement with traditional leaders, religious groups, youth organizations, and civil society groups helps to create a sense of shared ownership and responsibility in the fight against crime. Furthermore, the conduct of security personnel—especially their treatment of suspects, observance of due process, and protection of civil liberties—has a strong influence on public opinion. Incidents of extrajudicial killings, unlawful detentions, or intimidation erode public confidence and can spark community resistance (Okoye and Adejo, 2025).

Empirical research has highlighted both notable successes and significant gaps in the accountability frameworks of local security networks in Nigeria. For instance, a study by Idowu and Usifoh (2024) found that while the Edo State Security Network (ESSN) was credited with reducing cult-related violence in Benin City, there were also reported cases of unchecked use of force and limited public oversight mechanisms. Similarly, in the North, the *Hisbah* corps have been effective in enforcing moral codes in Kano State but have faced criticism for violating individual rights, especially against women and minority groups (Haruna and Sule, 2024). These examples reveal that while local security initiatives hold promise, the absence of robust accountability measures—such as independent complaint channels, legislative oversight, and performance audits—poses a serious risk to their long-term sustainability and public legitimacy.

Theoretical Framework: Community Policing Theory

The Community Policing Theory, primarily propounded by Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux in 1990, advocates for a collaborative partnership between the police and the community to

identify and solve crime-related problems proactively. According to Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1990), the theory shifts the focus of policing from reactive, force-driven law enforcement to preventive, community-centered approaches that prioritize trust, accountability, and mutual problem-solving. The theory argues that sustainable security cannot be achieved through enforcement alone, but through building strong community ties, encouraging shared responsibility, and ensuring transparent policing practices. Community policing, therefore, emphasizes decentralization of authority, increased foot patrols, community engagement, and citizen input into decision-making processes (Skogan, 2006).

Applied to the study "Public Perception of Edo State Security Network in Ensuring Safety and Public Order (2021–2024)," the theory helps explain why the success or failure of the Edo State Security Network (ESSN) hinges largely on public perception, trust, and community engagement. If ESSN personnel are locally recruited, responsive to local concerns, and transparent in their operations, the community is more likely to cooperate with them—thus aligning with the principles of the theory. However, gaps remain. Idowu and Usifoh, (2024) argues that the Edo State Security Network (ESSN) suffers from limited formal mechanisms for community participation in security decision-making, inadequate public oversight structures, and recurring incidents of unprofessional conduct by personnel. These structural and operational weaknesses hinder the ESSN's ability to build public trust and fully align with the principles of community-based policing. The absence of clearly defined frameworks for citizen engagement and accountability not only undermines the legitimacy of the security outfit but also limits its responsiveness to community-specific security needs (Sarafa and Monday, 2023). These gaps point to a disconnect between the community and the ESSN, where security measures are often implemented without inclusive consultations or consistent feedback mechanisms.

This study, therefore, seeks to address these identified gaps by investigating how residents of Edo State perceive the effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement of the ESSN between 2021 and 2024. In doing so, the study aims to critically examine the extent to which the ESSN reflects the core principles of community policing theory, particularly in terms of public participation and accountability. By capturing the lived experiences and opinions of community members, the study intends to provide empirical evidence on areas where the ESSN falls short and to inform more inclusive and responsive community security practices in the state.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach, using questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument. To give the research a defined geographical scope within Edo State, Oredo Local Government Area was purposively selected due to its strategic relevance as a central and socio-economically vibrant area, making it a suitable representation of the target population. With a total population of 553,300 (City Population, 2022), the Taro Yamane formula was applied to determine an appropriate sample size, resulting in the selection of 400 respondents for the study.

Sampling Procedure and Technique for Data Analysis

The study utilized a simple random sampling technique to guarantee unbiased representation of participants. Data was gathered through a closed-ended questionnaire structured on a five-point Likert scale, allowing for standardized responses and simplifying analysis. Out of the 400 questionnaires

distributed, 351 were successfully retrieved and used for analysis. Two statistical methods—simple percentage and Chi-square (X^2)—were employed in processing the data. The simple percentage, a descriptive statistical tool, was used for the initial analysis, while the Chi-square, a non-inferential statistical tool, was applied to test the study's hypotheses. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

Table 1.0: Residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement have no significant influence on its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024.

Item/Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	Rank
The Edo State Security Network has been effective in reducing crime and maintaining public safety in my community between 2021 and 2024.	**39 (11.1%)**	**172 (48.9%)**	**23 (6.5%)**	**72 (20.5%)**	**45 (12.8%)**	**351 (100%)**	**2.75**	**4th**
The operations and decision-making processes of the Edo State Security Network are transparent to the public.	**61 (17.4%)**	**50 (14.2%)**	**11 (3.1%)**	**197 (56.0%)**	**32 (9.1%)**	**351 (100%)**	**3.25**	**3rd**
The Edo State Security Network actively involves community members in its security planning and activities.	**63 (17.9%)**	**43 (12.3%)**	**5 (1.4%)**	**39 (11.1%)**	**201 (57.1%)**	**351 (100%)**	**3.77**	**1st**
The activities of the Edo State Security Network have contributed significantly to ensuring safety and public order in Edo	**48 (13.7%)**	**163 (46.4%)**	**31 (8.8%)**	**67 (19.1%)**	**42 (11.9%)**	**351 (100%)**	**2.69**	**5th**

State between 2021 and 2024.								
Residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement have no significant influence on its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024.	**42** **(12.0%)**	**43** **(12.3%)**	**7** **(2.0%)**	**210** **(59.8%)**	**49** **(14.0%)**	**351** **(100%)**	**3.52**	**2nd**

Field Survey (2025)

Table 1.0 shows the residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement as having no significant influence on its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024. The study's findings suggest a complex interplay between residents' perceptions and actual security outcomes. Although a mean score of 3.52 (on a 5-point Likert scale) for effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement indicates disagreement with the statement that perceptions have no effect—implying that these perceptions do significantly influence the Edo State Security Network's capacity to maintain safety—the strongest disagreement (mean = 3.77) highlights that most residents feel the network does not actively involve community members in its planning or activities. Paradoxically, respondents generally agreed that the network's operations have been instrumental in ensuring safety and public order between 2021 and 2024, even as they concurrently express concerns about the lack of transparency in decision-making processes, underscoring a disconnect between perceived contributions to security and the openness of its procedures.

These findings align with Idowu and Usifoh's (2024) study, which found that community-driven policing fosters trust and cooperation between residents and formal security agencies, substantially strengthening internal security, reducing crime, and securing lives and properties, but requires structural overhauls and enhanced collaboration—including mechanisms for information-sharing, suspect processing, and joint training—to reach full potential. Similarly, Nweke and Nwankwo (2023) observed that while vigilante groups and local policing initiatives in Southern Nigeria effectively mitigate crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and communal conflicts, their impact is often undermined by insufficient training, poor coordination with official forces, and political interference. Together, this evidence supports the conclusion that while residents acknowledge the network's role in promoting safety, the absence of strong community participation and transparency can significantly impair its legitimacy and sustained effectiveness.

Additionally, the findings indicate a nuanced public perception of the Edo State Security Network's (ESSN) performance between 2021 and 2024. A mean score of 2.75 on a 5.0 Likert scale suggests that respondents generally recognize the ESSN's effectiveness in reducing crime and maintaining public safety in local communities. However, this positive assessment is tempered by the fact that most respondents disagreed with the notion that the ESSN's operations and decision-making processes are transparent to the public. This contrast underscores a trust gap—while the network's crime reduction efforts are acknowledged, the lack of transparency in its internal processes may limit community confidence, accountability, and long-term legitimacy.

These findings align with prior research demonstrating that security agencies can be effective in reducing crime yet face legitimacy challenges when transparency is lacking. Idowu and Usifoh (2024) found that while the ESSN contributed significantly to community safety in Edo State, insufficient openness in decision-making hindered stronger public trust and participation. Similarly, Nweke and Nwankwo (2023) observed that community-based policing groups in Southern Nigeria often deliver tangible crime prevention results but suffer from reduced legitimacy when they operate without clear accountability mechanisms. Both studies reinforce the idea that sustained effectiveness in security provision requires not only operational success but also transparent governance that fosters community trust.

Hypothesis

Residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement have no significant influence on its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024.

Table 2.0

Sex * Residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement have no significant influence on its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024. Crosstabulation

Count

		Residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement have no significant influence on its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024.					
		SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
Sex	Male	42	43	7	113	0	205
	Female	0	0	0	97	49	146
Total		42	43	7	210	49	351

Table 3.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	136.148[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	186.723	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	112.329	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	351		

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.91.

From table 3.0 above, the data shows a Pearson's chi-square of 136.148 with df at 4 and alpha (α) at .000. This shows that there is a significant relationship between residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagements significant influence on its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024 due to the study alpha (α) of .000 lower than the benchmark alpha (α) of 0.05. Thus, the study reject the null hypothesis (Residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagement have no significant influence on its ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024) and accept the alternate hypothesis (There is a relationship between residents' perceptions of the Edo State Security Network's effectiveness, transparency, and community engagements ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State between 2021 and 2024).

Conclusion

The study on public perception of the Edo State Security Network (ESSN) between 2021 and 2024 reveals a mixed but insightful evaluation of its role in ensuring safety and public order. Findings indicate that while residents generally acknowledge the ESSN's effectiveness in reducing crime and maintaining community safety, concerns remain about its transparency and the degree of community engagement in its operations. The results suggest that operational success alone is insufficient for sustaining long-term legitimacy; rather, trust, openness, and participatory decision-making are equally critical for deepening public confidence in security institutions.

Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of aligning crime reduction strategies with principles of accountability and inclusiveness. The absence of transparency in the ESSN's decision-making processes, despite its tangible contributions to safety, reflects a

gap that could undermine its credibility and long-term public support. Strengthening transparency measures, fostering active community participation, and institutionalizing channels for public feedback will not only enhance the ESSN's effectiveness but also cement its role as a trusted partner in safeguarding lives and property across Edo State.

Recommendations

First, the Edo State Security Network (ESSN) should prioritize improving operational transparency to build and sustain public trust. This can be achieved by establishing clear and accessible channels for sharing information with the public, such as quarterly security reports, open town hall meetings, and press briefings that detail security activities, resource allocation, and outcomes. Transparent communication not only reinforces accountability but also reduces public suspicion and misinformation regarding the network's activities.

Second, the ESSN should institutionalize structured platforms for community engagement. Initiatives such as ward-level security committees, regular stakeholder consultations, and joint community–security patrols can ensure that local concerns are incorporated into security strategies. Involving residents directly in security planning and monitoring will foster a sense of ownership, enhance cooperation between the community and security operatives, and improve the responsiveness of the ESSN to grassroots realities.

Finally, continuous capacity building for ESSN personnel is essential. Training programmes should emphasize human rights, ethical conduct, conflict resolution, and effective community relations. Equipping security operatives with these skills will not only enhance their professionalism but also improve interactions with the public, reducing tensions and fostering mutual respect. When combined with transparency and community participation, these measures will strengthen the ESSN's legitimacy, effectiveness, and ability to ensure safety and public order in Edo State over the long term.

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