



Effects of Social Order on the Prevention and Control of Crimes in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article explores the intricate relationship between social order and the efficacy of crime prevention and control mechanisms. Social order is defined as the restructuring of the social system in society to promote stability in order to and play a crucial role in shaping community resilience against criminal activities. This article employs a routine activity theory approach, integrating sociological and criminological perspectives, and a descriptive method to analyse how social order influences crime rates and the non-effectiveness of law enforcement strategies. Key variables such as community cohesion, social norms, and institutional trust are examined to understand their impact on reducing crime. The paper suggests that opportunities, targets and guardianship be strengthened along with trust in public institutions, to significantly enhance crime prevention and control efforts. The study concludes by recommending policy interventions that foster social cohesion and strengthen new community policing initiatives, in order to contribute to a sustainable reduction in crime.

Keywords: Social Order, Crime Prevention, Cohesion, Social Norms, Community Policing

I. Background

The influence of anomie since the emergence of democratic dispensation in Nigeria in 1999 has caused the Nigerian communities to experience chaos, violent/economic crimes and anarchy often supported by people in authority. There is constant and wide range of protests, demonstrations on public / regional issues, stemming from discontentment. This new security challenges has seriously threatened national cohesion and coexistence. Two of the most significant of the challenges are crimes and political polarisation. This connection between the two contributes to the present extremism we are facing as a nation. According to George et al. (2021), with the abundant resources of the country, the people are still impoverished. These deprivations are the

hallmark of violent and property crimes, internal conflicts, kidnappings, home displacements and murder.

During the military era in Nigeria, social order was maintained by decrees. The institutions were all administered by fear, not consensus. Now, with democracy, everybody have become free – the freedom of will. This liberty has entranced ethnic intolerance, political conflicts, generated new social norms / new crimes and distort social order. This freedom has caused several agitations, revenue decline due to damages of oil pipelines, kidnapping and relocation of industries and foreign investors. These crimes have occurred due to some personal interest. To Jonathan et al. (2021), there are reasons why people indulge in crime – gains, favourable environment, unemployment, inequality, poverty etc.

Increasing crime rate are propelled by some factors, among them are socioeconomic conditions (unemployment, inequality, social and economic deprivation etc.), (Vargas, 2023). By this, some persons have decided to make criminal activities as their normal means of livelihood. And because our family structures are not controlled, it influences the behaviour of children, parental care, educational institution as well as the social living. In the view of Kassaye (2022), the numerous social, economic and political challenges are stressing the Police institution. The traditional police duties of crime prevention have been diverted into containing strikes, protests and of protecting the political class. Individuals and few communities do not care to undertake community policing – combating crimes with measures they are not familiar with. Alemika (2012) noted that, the poor performance of the police have created lack of trust in the capacity of the police system. The lack of police capacity so identified has helped spread crimes, risks and insecurity. The social damages have impacted on the various institutions and make them inefficient and foster social disorder. In a review of causes of deviant behaviour, Garfield (1987, p. 273) poised



that “a gap between people’s aspirations and their access to legitimate means of achieving them results in a breakdown of values, at both societal and individual levels’.

The objective of this paper is to assess the effects of social order mechanism on crime prevention and control; and identify current social mechanisms that will prevent and control crime.

The Current Situation in Nigeria

Many regions in Nigeria are witnessing crimes of various dimensions, the police as a known agent of social control is not performing as expected. Their poor performance stems from a number of issues. According to Maidawa (2023) they include lack of working tools, trust, and inadequate number etc. hence, crimes are spread daily without detection, no arrest nor proper prosecution. The crime increase and lack of the ability of the police to deal with it has created regional non-state actors, as “Ebubeagu” (south-east), “Amotekun” (south-west), and “Civilian JTF” (North) as an alternative to crime prevention and control mechanism.

The government is constitutionally bound in the formulation of policies, and monitoring of its implementation towards promoting the wellbeing of the various institutions of the state.

The Concept of Social Order and Related Issues

Social order implies the restructuring of the social system through renewed direction, laws and orientation. Social cohesion in this study is the task of togetherness in the cause of emotional, social and economic unity of the community, while social norms is the guiding rules appropriate for behaviours within a community.

Crime is an enemy to development. In the view of Adebayo (2013), crime threatens national institutions leading perhaps to underdevelopment. Crime deprives investments; diminish life quality; ruin human as well as social capital; harms citizens; and subvert the rule of law. Mathews (1993) also noted crime to originate from our social interactions from external culture. Numbeo (2019) recorded that Nigeria is among the first three African countries with high crime rate with 64.64% of the world index. Dambazau (2007) reviewed Nigeria as being on the world crime map since 1980s. Vargas (2023) study projects the influence of family size to have an influence on crime rates. This is in the way of delinquency, and abuse. Kelly (2000) discovered the relationship between violent crimes and income levels, resulting from social inequality. Still on socio-economic factors, Elgar and Aitken (2011)

associated poor income to murder cases in relation to lack of trust in communities.

The relationship between social order and crime prevention has been a focal point in criminological research. Social order, characterized by societal norms and collective efficacy, plays a crucial role in crime control mechanisms. Sampson and Groves (1989) emphasized that neighbourhoods with high levels of social cohesion and mutual trust are less likely to experience crime. They argue that social order facilitates informal social control, which deters criminal behaviour. Additionally, the work of Bursik and Grasmick (1993) supports the notion that social order can enhance community engagement in crime prevention initiatives, leading to lower crime rates. Their findings suggest that communities with established social networks and trust are more effective in implementing strategies that prevent crime.

To reduce crime rate in Japan, Ward (2019) reported the provision of surveillance monitoring equipment to prevent crimes on the streets. Mussa (2019) offered the patrol technique as an effective crime deterrence mechanism. Ajayi and Atanda (2020) also recommended street lightings, stronger gates, security guards for effective crime prevention and control. According to Pharoah (2008) property crimes; corruption has been the most common crimes since 1998, 2003 and 2007 in South Africa, indicating a down turn on security control. In the work of Chinwokwu (2013) police could not perform optimally because of inadequate training, poor facilities, along with lack of due process. Other studies have opted for the reform of the police in Nigeria (Akinlabi, 2017). On the issue of public trust, James et al. (2020) noted a decline in police trust to be attributed to government policies and practices. This is true, because the powers of the police are in the hands of the state.

Social order is pivotal in establishing effective crime control strategies. To Putnam (2000) in his argument, social networks and community engagement are essential for building social capital, which in turn enhances crime prevention. Higher level of social cohesion leads to increased social control, which can deter criminal behaviour. In a study by Taylor (2001), he suggests that social order can facilitate the development of community policing strategies that enhance police-community relationships, leading to improved crime control outcomes.

Community Cohesion

Community cohesion relates to the solidarity acquired by members of the community.



By its members of a community with diverse backgrounds volunteer to contribute and work together. In the view of Putnam (2000) social capital fosters greater networks that bind people together and create strong community cohesion. Inclusion is another major element of cohesion which Cantele (2001) stresses as promoting understanding and respect among different groups, creating common values. Of great value in cohesion is economic independence. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) identified economic stability as a bond influencing community cohesion, while unemployment, inequality and deprivation breed resentment and division. Institutions are crucial to community cohesion. Giddens (2009) identified institutions as mediators, promoting community engagement.

Social Norms

Without social norms society will be unguarded. Norms shape and guide behaviours considered acceptable in a community. The historical account of Emile Durkheim since 1893 on social norms proves that it creates values and unity in society. Mechanical solidarity of shared values and beliefs is more urgently now desired for. This is because norms uphold mechanisms of crime prevention as each person is monitored. Shaw and McKay's Chicago theory helps explain communities in relation to social norms. It proves that neighbourhoods experience crime in relation to weak social institutions, as opposed to communities with enforced social control. Social norms help maintain social order, prevent crimes and control deviant behaviour.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, this study is anchored by the Routine Activity Theory (RAT) formulated by Cohen and Felson (1979). The RAT holds that crime is an event propelled by space and time. Criminals usually take advantage of opportunities. On opportunities, Tillyer and Eck (2009) opined that opportunities are unevenly distributed in the society. Hence, the ties of economy, personal wealth and status accelerate opportunities. Therefore, preventing and controlling crime must be anchored on reducing opportunities. The structures that create different means of opportunities, benefits and goals must be altered and replaced with increased risks factors, punishments and monitoring. Cohen and Felson predicated three elements for crime occurrence. (a) Motivated offender (opportunity). (b) Suitable Targets (persons/properties) and (c) Absence of guardians (lack of adequate security).

In Nigeria, the indicators are wide spread in the form of widening gap in social class; low income, lack of employment, increased school dropouts, poor economy, and high inflation rates etc. Structurally, patterns that influence crime are, technology (cybercrimes), migration (uneven distribution of social amenities in both urban and rural communities), higher value items (increased upper class property), unplanned environment (haphazard estate development) etc. These have resulted to increased cases of kidnaping, property theft, cyber-crimes and corruption. Public as well as private spaces are no longer protected. There is no supervisory responsibilities and lack of social control actions by security agents.

Sociological Perspectives of Social Order on Prevention and Control of Crimes

This theory is relevant to the study as it tries to establish the justification upon the cultural change and increasing opportunities for crimes. RAT identified opportunities, targets and guidance as emanating from cultural lack and the structure of the society. This implies that a differentiation in the social structure, values and goals of the society generate pressure upon community members, of whom, when not met lead to criminal opportunities. The theory recognizes the decaying societal values, social order as well as social inequality as a bane to norms, community cohesion and widens the criminal opportunities, expand targets, and stress guardianship. Our socialization process has changed, with influence from the dominant ostentatious and marginalized sub-culture. Social roles have shifted from 'labour for pay' to 'crime pays' and 'get-rich-quick'. This mind-set is being inculcated amongst our youths, by which cybercrimes/violent crimes; corruption among the political class and civil servants are on the rise.

Criminological Perspectives of Social Order on Prevention and Control of Crimes

The theory exposes the poor economic trends in the country, as crimes like kidnaping and ethnic agitations have displaced many businesses from their locations. This rises from the willingness of citizens to seek ends at all cost. This motivation creates individuals and properties at public and private sectors as potential targets of criminal interests. The guardianship role of the society is becoming weaker, with public trust constantly eroding in the security sector. Law enforcement and the weak legal sanctions are equally major issues in the social order explanation of the Nigerian state.



Effects of Social Order and Crime Prevention

There are many angles to the effects of social order, both positive and negative. The positive impacts are that, a strong enforcement of social order ends in reduced crimes; it fosters community cohesion leading to increased community crime partnership; strong social order helps in social control and effective expression of policing and of the criminal justice system. The negative aspects are that social disorder increases crime rates; weakens community trust and policing engagement; it increases social disorganization and creates more crime opportunities. Hence, strategies for the maintenance of social order, crime reduction and social cohesion have to be enhanced.

Influence of Institutional Trust on Crime Control

Trusts in law enforcement and public institutions are necessary. Trust is one of the greatest needs of social relations. Trust breeds understanding as well as knowledge and consequences in a relationship. Specifically, community trust among law enforcement officers is a three-dimensional relationship (Saplenza, 2021), that is (a) Police (b) Citizens and (c) Objectives.



Fig. 1. The Police Trust Model

The police institution is created to serve the security purpose of the nation. Men and women of integrity are expected to work out their roles. The subjects that they serve are the citizens of the country. The citizens are expected to cooperate for them to be protected in times of need and to fulfil the objectives for which the institution was set to achieve. Equally, the institution is to fulfil policies and enhance performance.

The impact of institutional trust in community cooperation is embedded in Nigerian ethnic groups through traditional security /crime control practices. This was the means by which

societal norms were stressed. But with the passage of time, especially the European influence, they were abandoned. New and foreign ones originated, strange to our culture and practices, for example, the modern police. Modern police is managed by men and women outside the cultural environment. They are to serve the orders of the leaders, not community based. This deviation in norms has shifted numerous values. The traditional policing method was based on values / norms maintenance, whereas modern policing emphasised problem solving. Goldsmith (2005) noted that trust as a strategy alone can reveal order, preparations and the customary rights associated with policing and direct and shape public trust.

Crime Prevention and Control Strategies

Crime prevention and control is presently of national social anxiety. Everybody is discussing it, from the layman to the academics. However, approaches to crime prevention vary from one community to another; by nature of crime; from pattern of crime; age of criminals and more. Roles of control also vary from government, law enforcement agencies, community, institutions and individuals. Crime prevention approaches are the eliminating approaches to the occurrence of crime. Prevention lies on the social institutions, the family and community norms. While the crime control mechanisms are the business of the police and other law enforcement agencies, the policies and laws of government as well as the role of the judiciary.

Bilal, Khan and Shah (2020) developed two models of crime prevention, primary and secondary model. By primary model it means monitoring, management and orientation of individuals within their social environment. This is the role of the family, school and church in sanctioning and the education of an individual's mind. The secondary stage is coordinated by the larger society when the primary role fails. Around the world, new and effective approaches to crime prevention and control are being sort for. However, the rationale is to reduce crime, promote community safety, aid economic development, and promote social quality of life amongst others.

Other scholars acknowledged three dimensions, primary, secondary and tertiary prevention model. According to Robert (2003), the police role is at the primary level. Institutions as the mass media, schools, family as secondary, while the interventions with the offenders being the tertiary. Crime prevention requires the effective role of community members, business organizations, government at all levels, institutions as well as non-



governmental agencies. In relating the theory to crime prevention, it requires the strategies of modifying factors that reduces opportunities for the occurrence of crime and focuses on limiting the

social and economic factors that endured the offender to crime and of providing adequate guardianship.

Drivers of Crime Prevention

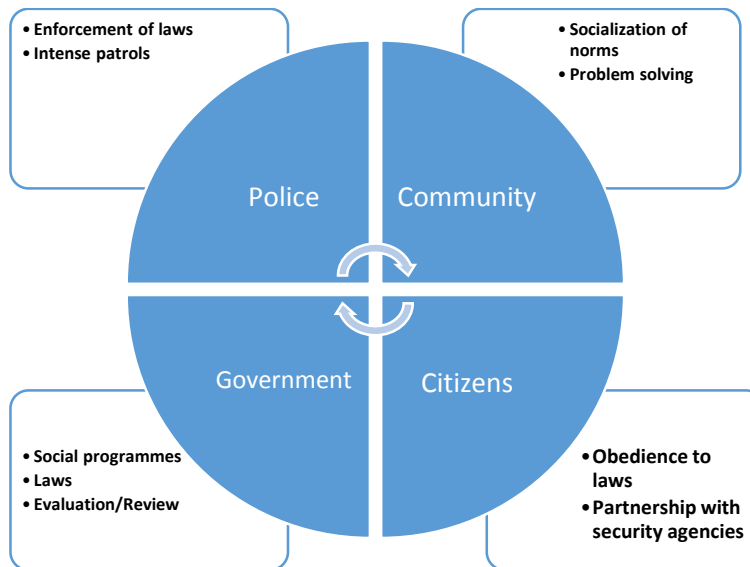


Fig. 2 Drivers of Crime

Control Measures

The Cohen and Felson theory is premised on three things, the environment (where crime occur), the property or image (that attract crime) and the criminal (that commit the offence). Therefore, the environment needs constant patrol by the police. The property needs material and human protection. The criminal in turn needs government policies – orders, for control. In Nigeria, our laws require concerted rehabilitation – a programme of action for the treatment and reorientation of hardened criminals to reduce risk among citizens. Punishment approach – the major aim of crime control is to deter others from continuing in that direction. Hence, high sentencing of offenders, especially habitual criminals is suggested. The stringent regulation of firearms laws, coupled with appropriate sanctions, is essential in promoting public safety and reducing incidences of gun-related violence.

Challenges

In Nigeria, crime prevention and control responsibilities are enormous for individuals and communities, with little to nothing in modern mechanisms. The Nigerian nation need a review of crime control and preventive measures of what works best, what does not work and new measures to adopt, as crime is dynamic. The changes in crime

patterns will help in the development of models of promising crime prevention and control.

As enunciated by the theory, crime opportunities created are high foreign exchange rates, rising cases of inflation, unemployment, unpromising investment climate. The community norms and laws are weak. The security agencies can not undertake their supervisory roles of policing the nation, reasons being lack of equipment, inadequate number, high risk factors and low morale.

Observably, there are rapid social changes in our culture driven by modern science and technology. These changes have brought about new opportunities in crime and pose serious challenges for social order as well as crime control and prevention. For example, in the communication sector, a new crime has emerged – cybercrime, and has created trends of crime in the economic subsector and criminal social behaviour amongst the youths.

The rising unemployment rate is a factor in creating both opportunities and targets for crimes. Several disorders such as south-east agitations, south-south kidnapping, and north-east insurgency has closed many businesses and created poverty. This has equally widened the class gap, creating inequality. The social control mechanisms in the



country are weak as the family, school and religious groups cannot act in control of the systems.

The police was created as guardian of the social order, stability, crime prevention and control. It should be held responsible for breakdown of community norms and of social controls, but according to Adebayo (2013) inadequate equipment, lack of motivation, lack of trust and corruption has reduced its authority and powers.

The Way Forward

Crime prevention strategies: The Nigerian crime rate has risen to the peak and effective crime prevention strategies / actions that would cause a reduction in criminal activity needs to be emplaced. Therefore, three levels of crime prevention model are recommended – motive, target and guidance.

- Motive mode – This involve steps at hindering the causes of crime (biologically, psychologically, socially, economically etc.). Creating job opportunities, emphasising more on vocational education, strengthening community relations, improve health programmes, reduce inflation, and introduce agricultural schemes.
- Target mode – Our Correctional Centres should be truly for corrections of the criminal minds. Effective youth programmes, young adults (school leavers) intervention schemes.
- Guidance mode – A demand of the reform of our criminal justice system, where justice will have a face.

Policy Recommendations

The following are some suggestions on prevention and control of crime.

1. Strategies to enhance social order: Police and citizens share security responsibilities for crime prevention and control. Crime rate can go down with the help of government institutions, individuals and organisations. First is to place emphasis on the opportunities that criminals have in committing crimes. Again to create regulations that hinders smooth and successful deviant behaviour, because criminal behaviour is discouraged through social order. Government to generate measures at contributing to improving the quality of life of individuals in the society.
2. Community and its benefits: Provision of electricity to help light up some dangerous part of the communities. Initiation of community security identification of all community members. Government and communities to help improve social amenities (schools, hospitals, roads, etc.) of the society. Identification of peculiar crimes of the local community in order to identify the approaches

to be adapted to its prevention. Togetherness to fight crime will reduce crime rate, especially burglary. To promote watch group and vigilante services in the neighbourhood. Joint police – community members patrol scheme. Information sharing to nib in the bud criminal activities. Community crisis training programme to keep community members awake to group action.

3. Policies to build and maintain institutional trust: Identification of crime problems, analysis of situation and proposing range of options. To foster police and community work-model that togetherness and cooperation will suffice. Delineation of functions with reference to types of crime, where the police, vigilante will have their roles devoid of quagmire.

II. Conclusion

The imperative of established social order for the maintenance of laws and reduction in crimes is derivable from the role of government, individuals, enforced community norms and interest institutions. Hardening targets will reduce corruption in government and in both public and private spaces, creating more job avenues will engage ideal hands in crime opportunities, while the police and other security agencies will focus on prevention.

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