

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLICE IN CURBING THE MENACE OF UNKNOWN GUNMEN IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The menace of unknown gunmen in Anambra State is a very serious problem that requires collective effort to curb. These gunmen have carried out several destructive activities in every location they have visited, sparing no one from their acts of violence. They are also believed to be responsible for sustaining the *sit-at-home* phenomenon in the south-eastern region of Nigeria. This paper investigated the effectiveness of the police in curbing the menace of unknown gunmen in Anambra State. The Broken Windows Theory provided the theoretical framework for the study. A mixed methods research design was adopted, employing both questionnaires and in-depth interviews (IDIs) as instruments for data collection. The questionnaire was administered to 378 respondents, while 8 participants were purposively selected for the in-depth interviews. The findings revealed that the strategies adopted by the police in combating the unknown gunmen were not effective. Collaboration between the police and other security agencies in addressing gun violence was also found to be poor. The study further identified the major challenges faced by the police, including inadequate funding, insufficient manpower, lack of modern equipment, and poor infrastructure to support effective policing. The paper recommended, among other measures, the building of trust between law enforcement and host communities to enhance intelligence gathering on potential threats. It also recommended the use of modern technologies such as surveillance cameras, drones, and data analytics to significantly improve the police's capacity to monitor crime hotspots and respond swiftly to incidents involving gunmen.

Keywords: Police, Unknown Gunmen, Insecurity, Community policing and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

Introduction

The problem of unknown gunmen (UGM) in Nigeria has emerged as a significant security challenge, particularly in the south-eastern region of the country. Unknown gunmen refer to armed individuals or groups who engage in violent acts, including killings, kidnappings, and arson, without clear identification or motives (Akinyetun et al, 2023). The rise of these unknown gunmen could be symptomatic of deeper issues within Nigerian society and governance (Onyemaobi & Ezeora, 2023). Unknown gunmen are often described as criminal elements whose identities remain obscured, leading to widespread fear and insecurity among the populace (Ikezue, 2023). Ibekwe (2024) avers that their modus operandi typically involves sudden attacks on civilians, government officials, and security personnel. He further noted that these attacks can occur in various forms such as ambushes, shootings during daylight hours, or night-time raids on communities. The targets range from ordinary citizens to political figures and law enforcement agencies (Akinyetun et al, 2023).

The menace by the unknown gunmen in Nigeria has escalated significantly in recent years, particularly since 2021. The statistics surrounding these attacks reveal a troubling trend of increasing violence and insecurity across various regions, especially in the Southeast (Ukoji & Ukoji, 2023). In 2021 alone, there were numerous reported incidents involving unknown gunmen, with estimates suggesting hundreds of attacks throughout the year. For instance, a report indicated that between January and July 2021, over 100 attacks were attributed to unknown gunmen in the Southeast region (Akinyetun et al, 2023). Security forces have also been targeted extensively. Reports suggest that more than 200 police officers and military personnel have lost their lives due to ambushes and direct confrontations with these unknown gunmen since 2021 (Ajisafe, 2024).

According to Ikezue (2023), the lack of clarity regarding their identities has led to speculation about their affiliations with various groups, including separatist movements like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and banditry networks prevalent in northern Nigeria. Some officials have suggested that these gunmen are not entirely unknown but are rather local youths driven by socio-economic grievances or manipulated by political elites for nefarious purposes (Ikezue, 2023).

The role of the police in addressing this menace through various strategies aimed at restoring peace and security appears to be inadequate. According to Gana et al. (2023), the complexity of the threat posed by unknown gunmen necessitates collaboration between various security agencies beyond just the police force. This includes military units, civil defence organizations, and intelligence agencies. They further revealed that raising public awareness about safety measures is another vital aspect of curbing violence from unknown gunmen. In spite of the efforts of the police and other sister agencies in fighting against the menace of unknown gunmen, it appears that security of

lives and properties could not be guaranteed. Several studies have been done on the activities of the unknown gunmen; however, there seems to be dearth of literature on the role of the police in curbing the menace of the unknown gunmen in Anambra state. This paper is therefore focused on investigating the effectiveness of the police in curbing the unknown gunmen and challenges faced by the police in the fight against unknown gunmen in Anambra state.

Literature Review

Concept of Unknown Gunmen

The phenomenon of “unknown gunmen” has emerged as a significant security challenge in Nigeria, particularly in the south-eastern region, where it has exacerbated an already precarious state of insecurity. This menace is characterized by violent attacks on civilians, government institutions, and security personnel, often carried out by unidentified assailants. According to Onyema and Princewill (2022), the activities of these unknown gunmen have created widespread fear and instability across the southeast, with their actions ranging from targeted assassinations to large-scale destruction of public infrastructure. The root causes of this crisis are deeply embedded in systemic issues such as poor governance, economic deprivation, and unresolved grievances related to ethnic marginalization. Scholars like Okoli and Ugwu (2019) argue that the failure of successive governments to address socio-economic inequalities and political exclusion has fuelled resentment among marginalized groups, creating fertile ground for violent uprisings. Furthermore, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across Nigeria has enabled these groups to carry out their operations with relative ease (Eze & Nwankwo, 2020).

Government responses to the activities of unknown gunmen have been largely reactive and militarized. While security forces have launched several operations aimed at neutralizing these groups, critics argue that such measures often exacerbate tensions rather than resolve them. For instance, Ezeani (2021) highlights how heavy-handed military interventions have led to collateral damage and human rights abuses, further alienating local communities and undermining trust in state institutions. In addition to military action, there have been calls for more comprehensive approaches that address the underlying drivers of insecurity. These include initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue between aggrieved groups and the government, as well as programs focused on poverty alleviation and youth empowerment (Onyema & Princewill, 2022).

The impacts of the activities of unknown gunmen on the southeast region are profound. Economically, frequent attacks have disrupted trade and commerce, leading to significant losses for businesses operating in affected areas (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Socially, communities live under constant fear of violence, which has eroded social cohesion and displaced thousands from their homes. Politically, the inability of state authorities to effectively address this crisis has undermined public confidence in governance structures while emboldening other non-state actors who exploit these vulnerabilities for personal or ideological gains (Ezeani, 2021). The situation is further compounded by misinformation campaigns that obscure the true identity and motives of these assailants. As Onyema and Princewill (2022) note in their study involving respondents from across south-eastern states, there is widespread speculation about whether these gunmen are politically motivated actors or criminal elements exploiting existing chaos.

Concept of Police

The police play a critical role in maintaining public safety, enforcing laws, and ensuring the smooth functioning of society by upholding order and justice. Their responsibilities extend beyond crime prevention and law enforcement to include community engagement, conflict resolution, and emergency response. According to Walker (2020), policing is not merely about enforcing laws but also involves managing social tensions and mediating disputes within communities. This broader perspective highlights the importance of fostering trust between law enforcement agencies and the public they serve. Trust is essential because it directly impacts the legitimacy of police actions and their effectiveness in reducing crime rates. Moreover, as articulated by Mastrofski et al. (2018), procedural justice—the perception that police treat individuals with fairness, respect, and impartiality—plays a significant role in shaping public attitudes toward law enforcement. When citizens perceive that officers act fairly, they are more likely to cooperate with authorities and comply with laws voluntarily.

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need for police reform to address systemic issues such as racial bias, excessive use of force, and lack of accountability. For instance, Reiner (2017) emphasizes that incidents involving police misconduct can erode public confidence in law enforcement institutions, particularly among marginalized communities who often experience disproportionate levels of surveillance or violence. These challenges have led to calls for adopting community-oriented policing strategies that prioritize collaboration between officers and local residents to identify problems and develop solutions collectively. Community policing aims to build stronger relationships between police departments and neighbourhoods by emphasizing transparency, communication, and mutual respect. Additionally, technological advancements have transformed modern policing practices by introducing tools such as body-worn cameras, predictive analytics software, and real-time surveillance systems. While these innovations can enhance accountability and efficiency, they also raise

ethical concerns regarding privacy rights and potential misuse of data (Smith, 2021). Policymakers must strike a balance between leveraging technology for public safety while safeguarding civil liberties.

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) plays a critical role in maintaining law and order in Nigeria, a country characterized by diverse cultures, languages, and socio-economic challenges. Established in 1930, the NPF has evolved through various reforms aimed at enhancing its effectiveness and accountability. According to Olojo (2017), the primary responsibilities of the NPF include crime prevention, investigation, and enforcement of laws, which are essential for fostering public safety and security. However, the force has faced significant challenges, including corruption, inadequate training, and human rights abuses, which have undermined public trust (Akinwunmi & Olufemi, 2020). The police's relationship with the community is often strained due to these issues; as noted by Ezeani (2018), effective policing requires collaboration between law enforcement agencies and citizens to build mutual trust. Furthermore, the NPF's role extends beyond traditional policing; it is increasingly involved in addressing complex security threats such as terrorism and organized crime (Umar & Adebayo, 2021). The introduction of specialized units within the NPF aims to tackle these emerging challenges more effectively. Nevertheless, ongoing calls for reform highlight the need for improved governance structures within the police force to enhance accountability and operational efficiency (Ogunyemi & Olatunji, 2019). Overall, while the Nigerian Police Force is tasked with crucial responsibilities in safeguarding citizens' rights and maintaining peace, its effectiveness is contingent upon comprehensive reforms that address systemic issues.

Theoretical Anchorage

Broken Windows Theory

The Broken Windows Theory is a criminological theory that posits a direct relationship between visible signs of disorder and crime in urban environments. It was first articulated by social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in their seminal 1982 article "Broken Windows," published in *The Atlantic Monthly*. The theory suggests that minor offenses, such as vandalism, loitering, and public drinking, if left unchecked, can lead to an increase in more serious crimes. The underlying premise is that maintaining order by addressing these minor issues can prevent larger crimes from occurring. Wilson and Kelling argue that the presence of physical disorder—such as broken windows or graffiti—signals to potential criminals that the community is indifferent to its environment and lacks social control. This perception emboldens criminal behaviour, creating a cycle where disorder breeds more disorder. Conversely, a well-maintained environment sends a message of vigilance and care, discouraging criminal activity.

The theory gained significant traction in the 1990s, particularly under the leadership of New York City Police Commissioner William Bratton and Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Their administration adopted aggressive policing strategies based on this theory, focusing on quality-of-life offenses to foster a sense of safety and order. The results were notable; during this period, New York City experienced a dramatic decline in crime rates.

In the context of Anambra State, Nigeria, where there has been a notable rise in gun violence attributed to unknown gunmen, the principles of the Broken Windows Theory can be applied to understand how police intervention can mitigate this menace. The increasing prevalence of violent crime often correlates with underlying social disarray such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of community cohesion which can be exacerbated by visible signs of disorder. Implementing community policing strategies aligns with the Broken Windows Theory by fostering relationships between law enforcement and local communities. By engaging with residents and addressing minor issues such as vandalism or petty theft, the police can help restore a sense of order and safety. This proactive approach may deter potential criminals from escalating their activities into more severe offenses like armed robbery or murder. Moreover, increased police visibility in neighbourhoods plagued by violence can serve as a deterrent against crime. When officers patrol areas known for gun violence or other criminal activities, it sends a message that such behaviour will not be tolerated. This aligns with the Broken Windows Theory's emphasis on maintaining order to prevent further deterioration.

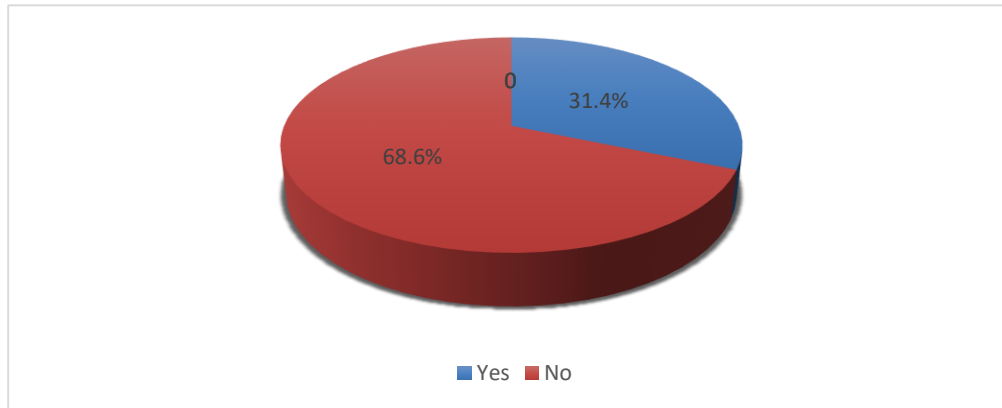
Critics of the Broken Windows Theory argue that it can lead to over-policing and disproportionately affect marginalized communities. They contend that while addressing minor offences may contribute to a sense of order, it does not necessarily address the root causes of crime or reduce serious criminal behaviour effectively.

Methodology

The study adopted the mixed methods research design. This method involves the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in data collection. The sample size of 378 adult residents of Anambra state was used for gathering quantitative data. The questionnaire was administered for the quantitative data. The sample size was determined statistically using the Cochran (1963) formula. The study respondents were drawn from the three senatorial districts in Anambra state through the application of the multi stage sampling procedure. For the qualitative data, 8 persons were purposively selected for the in depth interview (IDI). They include four (4) police officers, two (2) community leaders and two (2) community members. The quantitative data collected from the field will be processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 software. However, the data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, simple percentages and charts. On

the other hand, the qualitative data collected through IDI were analyzed thematically. This involved first transcribing the interviews and thereafter reading the interview notes and transcripts to gain an overview of the body and context of the data collected. Each theme was discussed and necessary illustrative quotes from the IDI were extracted to support the quantitative data

Findings



Field survey, 2025

Fig. 1: Respondents' views on whether they think the police can curb the activities of unknown gunmen in Anambra State

The data presented in Figure 1 reveals a significant lack of confidence among respondents regarding the ability of the police to address the activities of unknown gunmen in Anambra State. A substantial majority, 68.6%, believe that the police cannot effectively handle this issue, while only 31.4% express confidence in their capabilities. This disparity highlights a pervasive scepticism about law enforcement's effectiveness and integrity in tackling security challenges in the region. This finding is corroborated by the submission of an IDI participant:

They are largely powerless and riddled with corruption, especially when it comes to handling complex security threats like those posed by unknown gunmen in the state. For years, we have seen how poorly equipped and undertrained officers are when faced with organized criminal groups or insurgents. Beyond that, corruption within the force has eroded public trust completely. In my opinion, one of the biggest problems is that many officers prioritize personal gain over public safety. It's no secret that some members of the police collude with criminals or turn a blind eye after receiving bribes. This makes it impossible for them to act decisively against groups like these unknown gunmen who terrorize communities without fear of consequences. How can we expect results from a system where accountability is almost nonexistent? Moreover, there's also an issue with leadership and political interference. Often, senior officers are more concerned about pleasing politicians than protecting citizens. This compromises their ability to act independently or take bold steps against criminal elements. Until there is a complete overhaul of both the structure and culture within our police force, starting with better training, higher salaries to reduce bribery, and stricter oversight mechanisms, I don't see how they can effectively tackle such serious threats (Male, 62 years, Community Leader, Awka)

Conversely however, another IDI participant stated that:

First, it is important to acknowledge that the activities of unknown gunmen have posed significant challenges due to their unpredictable nature and often sophisticated weaponry. These factors have made combating them particularly complex. However, I want to assure citizens that we are not complacent about this threat. The Nigerian Police Force has been implementing strategic measures aimed at addressing these issues head-on. For instance, we have increased intelligence-gathering efforts through community policing initiatives and collaboration with local stakeholders who understand the terrain better than anyone else. Additionally, specialized units and tactical teams have been deployed in hotspots across Anambra State to respond swiftly and decisively to incidents involving these criminal elements. We also recognize that rebuilding public confidence is crucial for success. To this end, we are enhancing transparency in our operations and ensuring accountability for any lapses within our ranks (Male, 53 years, Police Officer, Awka).

Table 1: Respondents' views on the effectiveness of police strategies in curbing the activities of unknown gunmen

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Very Effective	8	2.2
Somewhat Effective	14	3.9
Not Effective	341	93.9
Total	363	100

Field Survey, 2025

The data presented in Table 1 highlights a significant finding regarding public perception of police strategies in addressing the activities of unknown gunmen. With an overwhelming 93.9% of respondents indicating that these strategies are not effective, it is clear that there is widespread dissatisfaction and scepticism about the current approaches being employed by law enforcement agencies to tackle this issue. Only a marginal percentage of respondents (2.2%) believe the strategies are very effective, while 3.9% consider them somewhat effective. This stark disparity underscores a critical need for reassessment and improvement in policing methods to address this pressing security challenge.

Honestly, I have no confidence in the police when it comes to handling the issue of unknown gunmen or even general security matters. These so-called ‘strategies’ are either nonexistent or poorly implemented. For instance, how can you expect results when most officers lack proper training or equipment? Many times, they don’t even respond promptly to distress calls, and when they do, it’s often too late or half-hearted. Corruption is another major problem; instead of focusing on protecting citizens, some officers are more interested in extorting money from innocent people at checkpoints. It’s frustrating because we hear about billions allocated for security every year, yet there’s no visible improvement. The police seem reactive rather than proactive, they wait for incidents to occur before taking any action, and even then, it’s usually just for show. To make matters worse, there’s little accountability within the force itself. When officers fail or abuse their power, nothing happens; they just continue as if nothing went wrong. How can anyone trust such a system? (Female, 42 years, Postgraduate student, Awka).

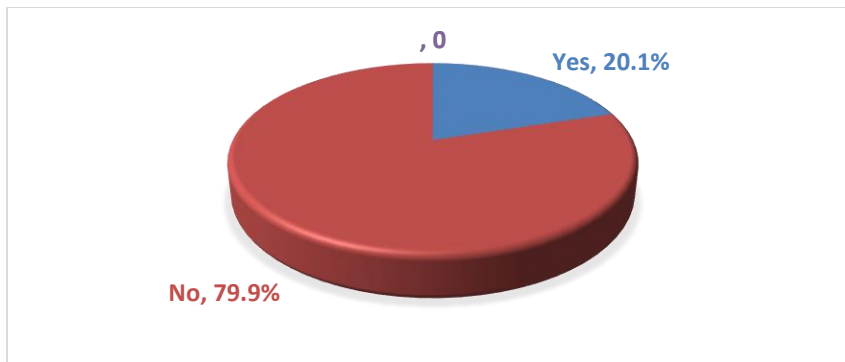


Fig. 2: Respondents’ views on whether they feel safe reporting suspicious activities to the police regarding unknown gunmen

The data presented in Fig. 2 reveals a striking lack of confidence among respondents regarding their willingness to report suspicious activities related to unknown gunmen to the police. With only 20.1% of respondents affirming that they feel safe reporting such activities, and a staggering 79.9% indicating otherwise, it is evident that there is a significant trust deficit between the public and law enforcement agencies. This finding is in line with the submission of an IDI participant:

For many Nigerians, including myself, there is an overwhelming perception that the police are either ineffective or complicit in some of these criminal activities. Over time, we have seen numerous cases where individuals who reported crimes or suspicious behaviour ended up being harassed or even targeted by those very criminals they sought to expose, sometimes due to leaks within the police force itself. This lack of trust stems from years of systemic corruption, poor accountability, and inadequate training within law enforcement agencies. Many Nigerians believe that instead of protecting citizens, some officers prioritize extortion or personal gain over their duty to serve and protect. In situations involving unknown gunmen, a term often associated with violent attacks and insecurity, people fear retaliation if their identities are exposed after reporting such incidents (Male, 68 years, Retiree, Nnewi).

Table 2: Respondents’ views on how they rate the collaboration between police and other security agencies in addressing gun violence

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	33	9.1
Good	22	6.1
Fair	33	9.1
Poor	275	75.7
Total	363	100

Field Survey, 2025

The data presented in Table 2 highlights a significant lack of confidence among respondents regarding the collaboration between police and other security agencies in addressing gun violence. With an overwhelming **75.7% rating the collaboration as poor**, it is evident that there is a deep-seated dissatisfaction with how these institutions work together to tackle this critical issue. Only **9.1% rated the collaboration as excellent**, while

another **6.1% considered it good**, suggesting that positive perceptions are minimal and far outweighed by negative opinions. The remaining **9.1% who rated it as fair** further underscores the general scepticism surrounding this partnership. This finding aligns with the submission of an IDI participant:

Mistrust plagues law enforcement agencies in many parts of the world, including Nigeria. The perception that police and security agencies fail to collaborate effectively often stems from visible lapses in coordination during crises, delayed responses to violent incidents, and an inability to prevent recurring acts of gun violence. In Nigeria, for instance, citizens frequently witness situations where overlapping responsibilities between agencies lead to confusion rather than cohesive action. This lack of trust is compounded by a history of poor accountability within these institutions. When gun violence occurs, there is often no clear communication or transparency about what measures are being taken or whether any progress has been made in apprehending perpetrators or preventing future incidents. Instead, citizens are left feeling vulnerable and unprotected. There have been cases where a fight erupted between, say the police and the army. Such incidents hardly inspire camaraderie and inter-agency collaboration (Male, 47 years, Civil Servant, Awka).

Table 2: Respondents' views on whether there are challenges faced by the Police in the fight against unknown gunmen in Anambra State

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	358	98.6
No	6	1.4
Total	363	100

Field Survey, 2025

The data presented in Table 2 highlights the overwhelming consensus among respondents regarding the challenges faced by the police in combating unknown gunmen in Anambra State. 98.6% of respondents affirmed that there are indeed challenges faced by the police, while only 1.4% disagreed. This near-unanimous agreement underscores a critical issue: the significant obstacles law enforcement encounters when addressing this pervasive security threat.

Table 3: Respondents' views on the challenges faced by the Police in the fight against unknown gunmen in Anambra State

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Corruption	8	2.2
Lack of inter-agency collaboration	14	3.9
Lack of resources		
Nonchalance of the Police	243	68.6
Total	92	25.3
	358	100

Field Survey, 2025

Based on respondents' views, as reflected in Table 3, the most significant challenge is the lack of resources, which accounts for an overwhelming 68.6% of responses. This issue encompasses a wide range of deficiencies, including inadequate funding, insufficient manpower, lack of modern equipment, and poor infrastructure to support effective policing. Another critical challenge identified is nonchalance among police personnel, which was noted by 25.3% of respondents. This attitude can be attributed to several factors, including low morale due to poor working conditions and a lack of incentives for officers risking their lives daily in volatile environments. The issue of lack of inter-agency collaboration was highlighted by 3.9% of respondents as another obstacle in combating unknown gunmen effectively. Lastly, corruption within the police force, though cited by only 2.2% of respondents, remains a pervasive issue that exacerbates all other challenges. According to an IDI participant:

One of the most pressing issues we face is indeed the lack of resources. However, I believe that fostering stronger inter-agency collaboration could significantly alleviate this challenge. When agencies such as the Police Force, military units, Department of State Services (DSS), and other security outfits work together seamlessly, we can pool our limited resources more effectively. For instance, sharing intelligence between agencies can reduce duplication of efforts and ensure that every operation is targeted and efficient. If we have access to surveillance equipment or vehicles from sister agencies during joint operations against unknown gunmen, it would compensate for some gaps caused by our own resource limitations. Similarly, coordinated training programmes could help us maximize human capital without requiring additional financial investments. Moreover, inter-agency collaboration fosters trust and synergy among security operatives on the ground. In situations where unknown gunmen operate with sophisticated weapons or tactics beyond what local police units can handle alone, having immediate backup from other agencies ensures that no single unit bears the burden alone due to resource shortages (Female, 39 years, Police Officer, Awka).

Discussion of Findings

The study found that the role of the police in curbing the activities of unknown gunmen in the state has been hampered by their ineffective strategies. This finding aligns with the finding of a study by Aborisade and

Fayemi (2015) which reported that the police have been largely ineffective in their fight against crime. Also, a study by Okwuosa (2020) highlights that inadequate training and lack of resources significantly hinder the ability of law enforcement agencies to combat organized crime and violence perpetrated by armed groups. This aligns with the assertion that police forces often struggle to implement effective strategies against unknown gunmen due to systemic issues within their institutions. Furthermore, a systematic review by Nkosi&Dube (2023) analyzed various policing models implemented across African states and found that reactive policing approaches—where law enforcement responds after crimes occur—are less effective than proactive measures aimed at preventing crime before it happens. This finding underscores the need for strategic reform within police departments to adopt more preventive measures rather than solely focusing on reactionary tactics. Moreover, a comparative analysis conducted by Adebayo et al. (2021) examined the policing strategies employed across several African nations facing similar challenges. Their findings indicated that many police departments are plagued by corruption, insufficient funding, and a lack of community engagement, which collectively undermine their operational effectiveness. This is particularly relevant when considering the role of community trust in policing; without it, efforts to curb violent crime become increasingly difficult. The study emphasizes that successful interventions require not only robust policing strategies but also collaborative efforts between law enforcement and local communities.

Lack of resources was found to be the major challenge hindering police effectiveness in their fight against unknown gunmen in Anambra State. This finding aligns with the finding of Mothiba (2022) conducted a study on the challenges facing law enforcement in Zimbabwe. He noted that the Zimbabwean police force grapples with similar issues of resource inadequacy, which has led to a decline in public trust and confidence in law enforcement agencies. The lack of modern equipment and technology has rendered the police less effective in investigating crimes and apprehending suspects. This situation mirrors what is observed in Anambra State where unknown gunmen operate with relative impunity due to the inability of local law enforcement to mount an effective response. In another study focusing on South Africa's policing challenges post-2019, Khona (2022) pointed out that systemic issues such as corruption and misallocation of resources further exacerbate the difficulties faced by police forces. He argued that even when funds are allocated for policing purposes, they are often mismanaged or diverted away from frontline operations. This mismanagement leads to a situation where officers lack necessary tools for crime prevention and investigation.

Leveraging technology in policing was found to be a very effective measure in curbing the activities of unknown gunmen in Anambra State. It was found that social media monitoring and the use of surveillance technology would be effective in the fight against unknown gunmen in the state. This finding aligns with broader trends observed in various studies conducted across Nigeria which highlight the effectiveness of technology in enhancing law enforcement capabilities. For instance, a study by Ojo and Olatunji (2020) emphasizes that the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) could improve crime mapping and resource allocation for police forces, thereby enabling more strategic responses to criminal activities. They argued that GIS technology allows law enforcement agencies to visualize crime patterns and hotspots, facilitating proactive measures rather than reactive ones. Moreover, another study conducted by Adegbite et al. (2023) underscores the role of social media monitoring in policing efforts. Their findings indicate that police departments utilizing social media platforms can gather intelligence on criminal activities and public sentiments regarding safety concerns. This proactive engagement not only aids in real-time response but also fosters community trust and cooperation with law enforcement agencies. Similarly, the work of Agbaraka and Uchendu (2020) highlighted how mobile applications designed for reporting crimes have empowered citizens to communicate directly with police forces, leading to quicker interventions and a reduction in crime rates. These studies collectively illustrate a paradigm shift where technology serves as an enabler for more effective policing strategies. Furthermore, the implementation of body-worn cameras among police officers has been shown to enhance accountability and transparency within law enforcement practices (Ibrahim & Adebayo, 2019). The presence of these cameras not only deters potential misconduct but also provides crucial evidence during investigations. This technological advancement is particularly relevant in contexts where trust between communities and police is tenuous due to historical grievances or perceived abuses of power.

Two hypotheses were formulated and tested. It was found that there is a significant relationship between level of poverty and prevalence of the activities of unknown gunmen in Anambra State, suggesting that the level of poverty is contributing to the increase in the activities of unknown gunmen in Anambra State. It was equally found that there is a significant relationship between police effectiveness and prevalence of the activities of unknown gunmen in Anambra State, Nigeria, suggesting that police ineffectiveness leads to a high prevalence of the activities of unknown gunmen.

Conclusion

The role of the police in curbing the menace of unknown gunmen in Anambra State, Nigeria, is critical to restoring peace and security within the state. The persistent threat posed by these unidentified armed groups has not only instilled fear among the populace but also undermined the rule of law and hindered socio-economic development.

Effective policing strategies—such as intelligence-led operations, community engagement, and inter-agency collaboration—are essential for dismantling these criminal networks. Furthermore, addressing underlying issues such as poverty, unemployment, and political instability is vital for achieving long-term stability. The police must also enhance their capacity through training and the provision of adequate resources to adapt to the evolving tactics employed by these gunmen. Ultimately, a holistic approach that combines law enforcement, community support, and socio-economic initiatives will be pivotal in restoring safety and public confidence in Anambra State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Police forces should undergo rigorous training programmes that focus on tactical response to active shooter situations and counter-terrorism techniques. This includes simulations and drills that prepare officers for real-world scenarios involving unknown gunmen. Training should also cover de-escalation techniques to minimize violence and improve communication skills with the public.
2. Building trust between law enforcement and the community is crucial in gathering intelligence about potential threats. Community policing initiatives encourage officers to engage with residents, attend community meetings, and establish rapport with local leaders. This relationship can lead to increased cooperation from citizens who may provide valuable information regarding suspicious activities or individuals.
3. Establishing robust intelligence networks is crucial. The police should collaborate with local communities to gather information about suspicious activities. Creating a platform for sharing intelligence among various security agencies can also enhance situational awareness.
4. Utilizing modern technology such as surveillance cameras, drones, and data analytics can significantly improve the police's ability to monitor crime hotspots and respond swiftly to incidents involving gunmen. Implementing a centralized database for tracking firearms can also aid in identifying illegal arms dealers.
5. Ensuring that police departments are adequately funded allows them to acquire necessary equipment, hire more personnel, and maintain operational readiness.

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