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Community Watch Corps (CWCs) & The Fight Against Armed Bandits In Katsina State: An Assessment of Operational Methods

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Abstract
This study investigates the modus operandi adopted by the Community Watch Corps (CWCs) in combating insecurity across six high-risk Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Katsina Central Senatorial District, Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study combines data from 385 survey respondents and 17 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) involving religious leaders, traditional rulers, and CWCs personnel. Employing multistage cluster sampling for the quantitative strand and purposive sampling for the qualitative, the research uncovers how CWCs operationalise community policing through coordinated strategies such as routine patrols, checkpoints, intelligence gathering, and surveillance. The findings reveal that 89.4% of respondents confirmed active patrol systems, 73.2% acknowledged the use of distress call numbers, and 81.8% affirmed intelligence collection from locals. The study also highlights the strategic collaboration between CWCs and vigilante groups, noted by 93.8% of respondents. Qualitative data further reinforces the interconnectedness of these approaches, revealing that CWCs rely on local informants, surveillance practices, and incentivised intelligence to detect and disrupt criminal activities. The study draws on Broken Windows Theory to explain how visible, community-based crime control mechanisms foster order and deter criminal intrusion. Based on the empirical findings, the study recommends that the Katsina State Government should provide the CWCs with affordable surveillance technologies such as solar-powered CCTV systems, rural reconnaissance drones, and mobile applications for anonymous tip-offs. Simultaneously, community-wide sensitisation programs should be implemented to educate the public on the functions of CWCs and promote active civilian participation in crime reporting and collaborative security efforts.

1. Introduction

Across various regions of the world, the limitations of conventional policing in addressing localised crime, especially in high-risk communities, have led to a shift toward more community-oriented policing approaches. Community policing emphasises collaboration between law enforcement agencies and local populations to co-produce security through trust, mutual respect, and shared responsibility (Agheyisi & Aghedo, 2021). This model seeks to move beyond reactive law enforcement to proactive engagement, often involving neighbourhood patrols, intelligence sharing, and crime-prevention initiatives tailored to community needs (Rosenbaum, 2006). In both developed and developing countries, the modus operandi of community policing has evolved to include intelligence-led patrols, local surveillance systems, strategic partnerships, and culturally responsive interventions (Adams et al., 2021).

In Africa, the adaptation of community policing strategies has been driven by increasing security deficits, limited police visibility, and the need to bridge the trust gap between state security actors and local populations (Unya, 2022). Countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa have implemented variations of community policing programs that blend formal law enforcement efforts with traditional security structures, including community elders and local vigilante groups (Sidang, 2020). These approaches often emphasise local intelligence gathering, neighbourhood watch schemes, and informal justice mechanisms to address everyday security concerns in areas where state policing capacity is limited (Hills, 2012).

In Nigeria, community policing has taken an urgent role in light of widespread insecurity ranging from armed robbery and kidnapping to insurgency and banditry. The Nigerian Police Force officially adopted community policing in 2004 to improve police-community relations and enhance grassroots security (CLEEN Foundation, 2010). However, the failure to adequately institutionalise this model has led to the proliferation of informal security outfits such as vigilante groups, hunters' associations, and, more recently, Community Watch Groups (CWGs), which are institutionalised and supported by state governments. In Northern Nigeria, especially in states like Katsina and Zamfara, these groups have become central to local crime control, often operating with limited training and equipment but utilising locally informed modus operandi such as use of distress call numbers, informants, checkpoints, and community patrols (Ajayi, 2021; Ekhomu, 2020).

However, this study focuses on Katsina Central Senatorial District due to its strategic importance and alarming rise in security threats, particularly banditry. The district, which includes high-risk LGAs such as Batsari, Dan-Musa, Dutsin-Ma, Jibiya, Kurfi, and Safana, has witnessed intensified community policing efforts through the community watch corps (CWCs). However, there is limited empirical research on the operational strategies of these local security groups in this region. Investigating the modus operandi used by the CWCs in Katsina Central is therefore vital to understanding the effectiveness, limitations, and sustainability of community-driven policing in curbing crime in northern Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Ensuring adequate security is crucial for the survival of any society, as every state takes measures to protect the lives and property of its citizens. Without sufficient safety, business and social activities cannot function smoothly. This basic need for security explains why security agencies have historically adopted various strategies to combat rising criminal activity (Agheyisi & Aghedo, 2021). The primary goal of security is to prevent and protect people, facilities, and activities from harm, destruction, or disruption. This responsibility typically falls on law enforcement agencies, which employ different methods to achieve this. According to Etuk (2018), one widely recognised crime control strategy used by security agencies is "stop and search." Weisburd (2021) explains that this tactic allows police to either confirm or dispel suspicions about individuals and identify those carrying weapons, stolen goods, or items intended for theft. Law enforcement argues that the stop-and-search approach not only detects but also disrupts and deters criminal activity (The Police Foundation, 2012).

Security agencies often utilise the "tip-off" strategy to combat violent crimes. White (2011) noted that in a civilised society where the rule of law, patriotism, loyalty, and proper welfare policies are upheld by both the government and its citizens, tip-offs serve as an effective tool for controlling both violent and non-violent crimes. Similarly, Weisburd (2021) argues that tip-offs can help prevent casualties, as they provide security personnel with prior information about criminal activities, including the modus operandi, types of weapons, strength of the criminal gang, and their location. With this advantage, security operatives can plan, increasing the likelihood of a successful operation.

Another common strategy employed by security agencies is patrol. Patrol is typically the largest function within police agencies worldwide, with most officers assigned to general service duties (Adams et al., 2021). Patrol officers spend their time responding to emergency calls from the public, deterring crime through their visible presence, and executing special tasks assigned by supervisors. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the positive impact police agencies can have on crime and disorder (Adams et al., 2021). Patrol officers likely play a key role in these efforts, as they constitute a significant portion of police resources and are on the front lines, addressing crime and responding to citizen concerns daily.

When law enforcement strategies prove ineffective in combating crime, communities often rely on CGs, which adopt alternative methods for ensuring protection (Sidang, 2020). These CGs prioritise crime prevention by anticipating and minimising opportunities for criminal acts, recognising that prevention is more cost-efficient than detection. Their strategies usually include monitoring buildings and observing potential offenders. The CGs utilise techniques like motorised and foot patrols, as well as road and border surveillance, which are considered highly effective for gathering intelligence on criminal activities (Unya, 2022).

Another key strategy is information gathering, which is essential for effective police work. Intelligence on criminal individuals and their associates must be continuously gathered. Information is crucial, and research should consider everyone as a potential source (Zumve et al., 2020). Information obtained through these means aids in planning crime prevention strategies. Building relationships with the public to gather information is an important aspect of CG's duties. These relationships are formed to assist the police, guards, and victims of crime. Each investigation carries a moral, professional, and ethical obligation to protect the identity of informants. According to Suryana (2019), failing to do so can result in the informant or their family being harmed, injured, or intimidated.

CG's crime detection plays a pivotal role in community security efforts. The guards, equipped with various commands, boast a dedicated detective unit. This important division handles the resolution or clarification of crime reports for the appropriate security agencies. Once a suspect or key information is handed over to the police, a detective or interrogator interviews witnesses, gathers evidence, and processes the crime scene (collecting physical evidence and sending it to the police lab for analysis) (Surajudeen et al. 2020). The detective also conducts area searches for witnesses, interrogates possible suspects, arrests the alleged perpetrator, and prepares the case for court with the help of the prosecutor (Gichira, 2019).

In the same line, surveillance is one of the oldest methods of crime detection. CGs often use this method when they receive information about an impending crime at a specific location or if certain individuals are suspected of involvement in criminal activities (Suryana, 2019). When a surveillance team suspects a crime is about to occur, they quickly report to the nearest and most relevant security unit for appropriate action. This is typically handled through a stakeout known as fixed policing observation. In other cases, mobile observation, either on foot or by car, may be necessary. Some situations require aerial surveillance using aircraft or electronic monitoring through digital communication tools. Importantly, all observation methods must comply with legal standards (Unya, 2020).

A study by Akinlabi and Ihemeje (2021) on the role of community policing in crime prevention and control in Ile-Ife, Osun State. The findings show that the high incidence of crime led community members to organise self-help measures to complement police efforts, aiming to minimise crime even if it cannot be eliminated. The most common crimes in the study area were property offences such as burglary, theft, and housebreaking, primarily occurring at night. This nocturnal trend was attributed to daytime patrols by law enforcement agencies at various strategic locations, including major roads and highways. The study also highlighted various strategies adopted by the community watch corps to combat criminal activities. The majority of interviewees mentioned night patrols of residential areas and surveillance of uncompleted or dilapidated buildings. Other strategies included setting up roadblocks at strategic locations at night and, as noted by a few interviewees, burning tyres at key points. However, the study exclusively utilised qualitative methods. If methodological triangulation were applied, more productive data could be generated. Additionally, while it examines community policing activities, it does not address other factors, such as the level of residents' satisfaction with the operation of the CWC in enhancing community safety, which this study will cover.

Another study by Usman et al. (2024) assessed the impact of community guard patrolling and community engagement on crime prevention in the Dekina local government area of Kogi State. The results reveal that 20% of respondents used beat patrols, while 12% used stop, detain, and search tactics. 4% of respondents mentioned decoy vehicles, while 5% used static guards. Additionally, 7% indicated engaging in undercover operations for crime prevention and control, and 11% emphasised intelligence gathering. 39% of respondents indicated using all the listed mechanisms for crime prevention and control. The remaining 2% mentioned other methods such as flashlights, a koboko (a type of whip), and whistle-blowing. However, the study solely relied on quantitative methods. Implementing methodological triangulation could produce more comprehensive data, aligning with the study's goals. Additionally, none of these strategies considers community participation in collaborating with security agencies to monitor, report,

and reduce criminal activities in their neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the sustainability of these strategies is not adequately considered, a factor this study will examine.

In a survey by Sidang (2020) on the role of community guards in crime management among residents of Kariobangi North, Kenya. The findings show that 68.8% of respondents acknowledged the guards' involvement in identifying suspected criminals. Additionally, 66.6% confirmed that the corps regularly patrols neighbourhoods to prevent and detect crime, while 63.3% agreed that they respond to emergencies. Furthermore, 62.2% of respondents noted that the corps plays a role in protecting property. However, 58.8% indicated awareness of the corps using collective extra-legal violence on suspects during responses to alleged criminal activities. In contrast, 70% of respondents disagreed that the guards should arrest and detain suspected criminals. The study is significant to the current research as it is based on empirical evidence and establishes a causal relationship between the presence of community guards and the reduction in crime incidents.

3. Theoretical Framework

The Broken Windows Theory, developed by Wilson and Kelling (1982), serves as the theoretical framework for this study. The central assumption of the theory is that visible signs of disorder, such as vandalism, loitering, and abandoned buildings, create an environment that encourages further crime by signalling a lack of informal social control. According to the theory, if minor disorders are not promptly addressed, they can escalate into more serious criminal behaviour, thereby eroding community safety. This assumption directly informs the logic of community policing, particularly in high-risk areas like Katsina Central Senatorial District, where state security presence is often limited. In such settings, the modus operandi of community policing, such as local patrols, the establishment of checkpoints, intelligence gathering, and active surveillance, functions as a preventive mechanism that reinforces informal social control and deters criminal behaviour by maintaining visible order. The involvement of Community Watch Corps (CWCs) in locally led patrols and coordinated responses to disorder reflects the theory's assertion that maintaining order at the micro-level can significantly contribute to reducing crime and enhancing community trust. Therefore, the Broken Windows Theory provides a valuable lens for understanding how proactive, community-based policing strategies help restore public confidence and disrupt the conditions that enable crime to thrive in Katsina Central and similar contexts.

4. Method

Katsina Central is one of the three senatorial districts created by the federal government in 1990. It comprises Batsari, Batagarawa, Charanchi, Dan-Musa, Dutsin-Ma, Safana, Kurfi, Kaita, Katsina, Rimi, and Jibiya. The majority of the inhabitants in this area are Fulani and Hausa. According to City Population (2023), Katsina Central covers an area of 7,376.6 km^2 and has a population of 3,468,800 as of 2022. This study was conducted in six selected local governments within Katsina Central: Batsari, Dan-Musa, Dutsin-Ma, Jibiya, Kurfi, and Safana, where the activities of bandits, terrorists, and kidnappers are frequently reported.

This study used a survey design with a methodological triangulation approach (quantitative and qualitative) to elicit data from the respondents. The quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to the sampled respondents in Batsari, Dan-Musa, Dutsin-Ma, Jibiya, Kurfi, and Safana. The qualitative data were elicited through the use of a Key Informant Interview (KII) guide with Religious leaders, Traditional leaders, and CWCs, one from each of the selected LGAs.

The sample size for this research is 402 respondents. This figure was arrived at by totalling 385 individuals for the quantitative method determined using the Raosoft 2004 sample size calculator, based on a 5% margin of error, a 95% confidence level, and a 50% response distribution from a population of 1,716,100 residents across six LGAs (Batsari, Dan-Musa, Dutsin-Ma, Jibiya, Kurfi, and Safana) as of 2022 (see table 1) and 17 respondents for the qualitative method come from specific groups: one each from Religious, Traditional, and CWCs, representing each of the six LGAs.

Table 1. Population Projection

LGAs	Population Census 2006-03-21	Population Projection 2022-03-21
Batsari	207,874	371,500
Dan-Musa	113,190	202,300
Dutsin-ma	169,829	303,500
Kurfi	116,700	208,600
Safana	185,207	331,000
Jibiya	167,435	299,200
Total	960,235	1,716,100

The research employed a combination of multistage cluster sampling and purposive (judgmental) sampling methods to ensure comprehensive coverage and address the limitations of relying on a single approach. In the multistage cluster sampling process, each ward within the six selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) was treated as a separate cluster. The selection of wards and households within each LGA was based on the information from our research guide about the frequency of attacks in the LGAs. The wards selected from each LGA are: Batsari: Manawa, Wagini, Kandawa, Ruma, Karare, Madogarawa, Batsari, Yauyau/Mallamawa (8 wards); Dan-Musa: Mara, Dan Ali, Dandiri A, Maidabino (4 wards); Dutsin-Ma: Dutsin-Ma A, Kuki B, Karofi B, Kutawa, Makera, Shema, Dutsin-Ma B, Kuki B, Karofi A (9 wards); Jibiya: Farfaru, Jiniya A, Faru, Bugaje, Riko, Kusa (6 wards); Kurfi: Tsauri A, Kurfi B, Rawayau A, Birchi (4 wards); Safana: Zakka, Runka A, Baure B, BabbanDuhu, Safana, Tsaskiya, Zakka B (7 wards). From each of the selected wards, two streets were randomly selected from which the respondents would be tracked by household members on the streets.

In purposive sampling, the researcher deliberately selects participants to provide accurate and sufficient data given the topic of study. The researcher used status, prior experience and knowledge about the study area as inclusion criteria. Based on this sampling technique, key individuals, including traditional and religious leaders and representatives of CWCs, were identified.

For the analysis, the study employed descriptive statistics in the form of simple percentages and frequency distribution tables. The qualitative data were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), where the data were organised into themes aligned to the research objectives and the findings were used to complement the quantitative data. Generally, the methodology is rooted in qualitative rigour, with qualitative components serving as supplementary tools to enhance the study findings.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Results

This section contains the results of the findings, and all the tables presented were immediately supported with brief interpretations. In addition, the results of each table are corroborated with the Key Informant Interview.

Table 2 above reveals that the majority of the respondents are males (76.9%) while only 23.1% are females. This indicates that male respondents constituted the majority and actively participated during the administration of the questionnaire. This outcome is largely influenced by the cultural and religious context of the study area, which is predominantly an Islamic settlement where women are generally restricted from participating in public activities, particularly on sensitive issues such as research. Additionally, Islamic teachings in the area emphasise the seclusion of women from unrelated men, further limiting their involvement in such public engagements.

The age distribution highlights that most of the respondents are within the age groups of 20–29 years (27.8%) and 30–39 years (27.5%), suggesting that the community members and CWCs are primarily composed of youths and middle-aged adults, who are likely to possess the physical agility and energy often required for community surveillance and response. Meanwhile, the presence of older age groups 40–49 years (20.3%) and 50 years and above (17.4%) indicates a moderate level of intergenerational involvement, which may contribute experience, leadership, and community trust. This age spread suggests that CWCs benefit from both youthful vigour and mature oversight, potentially enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of their operations.

Table 2. Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	296	76.9
	Female	89	23.1
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
Age	Below 20 Years	27	7.0
	20-29 Years	107	27.8
	30-39 Years	106	27.5
	40-49 Years	78	20.3
	50-59 Years	52	13.5
	60 and above Years	15	3.9
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
LGA	Batsari	85	22.1
	Danmusa	44	11.4
	Dutsinma	71	18.4
	Jibiya	66	17.1
	Kurfi	46	11.9
	Safana	73	19.0
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
Religion	Islam	367	95.3
	Christianity	18	4.7
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
Marital Status	Single	111	28.8
	Married	236	61.3
	Widowed	23	6.0
	Divorced	15	3.9
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
Number of Children	0-3	116	30.1
	4-6	104	27.0
	7-9	81	21.0
	10 and above	84	21.8
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
Level of Education	Informal	95	24.7
	Primary	25	6.5
	Secondary	105	27.3
	Tertiary	151	39.2
	Others specify	9	2.3
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
Present Occupation	Civil Servant	132	34.3
	Trading	45	11.7
	Craft men	28	7.3
	Farmer	67	17.4
	Business	96	24.9
	Others	17	4.4
	Total	**385**	**100.0**
Average Income per Month	Less than N20,000 ($12 8)	52	13.5
	N20,001($12. 8)-N30,000 ($19.38)	58	15.1
	N30,001($19.38)-N40,000($21.86)	59	15.3
	N40,001($21.86)-N50,000 ($32.46)	57	14.8
	N50,001($32.46)-N60,000($38.94)	42	10.9
	N60,001($38.94) and above	117	30.4
	Total	**385**	**100.0**

The respondents are distributed across six LGAs, with Batsari (22.1%) having the highest representation, followed by Safana (19.0%) and Dutsinma (18.4%). The relatively higher percentages in these areas could indicate a more active CWC presence or greater security challenges requiring community

involvement. Conversely, LGAs like Danmusa (11.4%) and Kurfi (11.9%) have lower representation, which might suggest either reduced CWC activity or fewer security concerns in these regions.

The data shows that the majority of respondents are Muslims (95.3%), with only a small minority identifying as Christians (4.7%). This reflects the religious composition of the study area, where Islam is the dominant faith, particularly in LGAs such as Batsari, Kurfi, and Dan-Musa. In contrast, Dutsin-Ma has a relatively more noticeable Christian presence. The religious landscape likely influences community norms, social interactions, and participation in initiatives like CWCs, especially in areas where religious values shape public engagement.

The marital status distribution shows that a simple majority of respondents are married (61.3%), indicating a strong presence of individuals who may have family responsibilities and greater stakes in community safety and CWC's ability. Single individuals make up 28.8%, suggesting that a significant portion of the respondents are younger or not yet in formal unions, which may reflect their availability and willingness to engage in community activities. Meanwhile, the relatively small percentages of widowed (6.0%) and divorced (3.9%) participants suggest limited involvement from individuals who may be more socially or economically vulnerable. Overall, the dominance of married respondents may imply that CWC's efforts are primarily driven by those with a vested interest in protecting family and household well-being.

Respondents with respondents with 0–3 children represent the largest group (30.1%), closely followed by those with 4–6 children (27.0%). However, a significant portion of the population also reports larger family sizes, with 21.0% having 7–9 children and 21.8% having 10 or more. This suggests that while smaller families are slightly more common, large families are still prevalent in the study area. The presence of such large household sizes may reflect cultural norms and socioeconomic conditions, and it also highlights the potential pressures on resources and the importance of community security structures in protecting family units.

The educational background of the respondents reveals that a simple majority (39.2%) have attained tertiary education, indicating a relatively high level of formal learning among the participants. This is followed by those with secondary education (27.3%), suggesting a considerable segment with at least basic academic qualifications. However, notable proportions (24.7%) have only informal education, reflecting the presence of individuals who may have acquired knowledge through traditional or religious systems rather than formal schooling. This mix of educational attainment highlights the diversity in learning backgrounds and may influence the way respondents perceive and engage in community security efforts.

The occupational distribution of respondents shows that civil servants constitute the largest group (34.3%), indicating that a significant number are formally employed and possibly involved in administrative or public service roles. This is followed by businessmen (24.9%) and farmers (17.4%), suggesting active participation from both the commercial and agricultural sectors. Traders (11.7%) and craftsmen (7.3%) are less represented, which may reflect either the size of these occupational groups in the study area or their limited involvement in community-based initiatives. Overall, the data suggests that individuals from diverse economic backgrounds contribute to community watch activities, with a strong presence from those in structured or stable employment.

The income distribution reveals that a simple majority (30.4%) earn N60,001 ($38.94) and above per month, suggesting that a significant number of participants fall within a relatively higher income bracket. However, income disparity is evident, as a combined 30.4% earn between N20,001 ($12.8) and N40,000 ($32.46), while 13.5% earn less than N20,000, ($12.8) monthly. This spread highlights the presence of both economically stable and financially vulnerable individuals within the community. The variation in income levels may influence the capacity of respondents to contribute financially to CWCs' activities, with higher earners potentially playing more active or supportive roles.

Table 3 depicts that the majority of the respondents (89.4%) affirmed that the Community Watch Corps (CWCs) use patrol systems in their operation. Corroborating this position with information from the KII session, an informant opined that:

> As I mentioned earlier, they have motorbikes, and patrolling is what they do day and night on these bikes. They have made every community entrance a resting point, do you understand? Any location they believe the bandits might use to enter, they've designated as a resting place, both day and night.

They patrol all the communities, ensuring that Fulani people are not allowed to enter Dan-Musa town. The situation is even more critical in Maidabino, which was once known as a Fulani market, but now they are not allowed to come in (KII, age 56, Religious Leader, Danmusa, 2025).

Table 3. Showing whether CWCs use the Petrol System in their Operation

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	344	89.4
No	24	6.2
I don't know	17	4.4
Total	**385**	**100**

Another informant stated that: "They patrol day and night, especially at night, because they don't sleep. I can personally attest to this, as I live close to their outpost. They do not sleep at night" (KII, age 58, Traditional leader, Batsari, 2025). In the same vein, one informant posits that: "They regularly conduct patrols, and on some days, they patrol on foot from Dan-Musa to Maidabino, jogging like the army, to ensure that nothing is happening" (KII, age 54, Traditional leader, Danmusa, 2025). Another Traditional leader revealed that: "Yes, they used to conduct night patrols and often signalled to one another by shining flashlights into the sky. When you see the light from the flashlight in your area, it means the CWCs personnel are patrolling that is" (KII, age 49, Traditional Leader, Kurfi, 2025). A Religious leader also reported that: "Patrolling is part of their daily routine, both within and outside our villages, as well as along the highway. They also conduct searches of individuals coming from different villages" (KII, age 56, Religious leaders, Dutsin-ma, 2025). These findings highlight that the extensive use of patrols by the CWCs reflects their proactive approach to monitoring and addressing security concerns within the community as a vital security measure. The combination of motorised and on-foot patrols, continuous surveillance, and a strategic focus on monitoring critical areas indicates the CWCs' strong commitment to maintaining safety, especially in vulnerable regions.

However, Table 3 shows a small percentage (6.2%) reported that patrol systems were not utilised, and 4.4% were unsure. This highlights the need to enhance public awareness of the CWCs' operational strategies to ensure their efforts are well-acknowledged by the community.

Table 4. Showing whether CWCs Have Distress Call Number for Reporting Crime

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	282	73.2
No	40	10.4
Unsure	63	16.4
Total	**385**	**100.0**

Table 4 reveals that about 73.2% of the respondents agreed that the CWCs provide hotlines for community members to report crime-related incidents, demonstrating an effort to enhance communication and cooperation with the public. In the same line during the KII session, an informant reported that: "They are all like our children. We have their numbers, and if we notice any suspicious activity, we call them. They respond quickly because their parents are here, and their contact information is available to everyone" (KII, age 43, Religious Leader, Safana, 2025). In the same line, another participant stated that: "We all have their phone numbers because they live in the community. We know them personally, and we are familiar with their homes. They are part of us, so contacting them to report any issues is never a problem" (KII, age 50, Traditional Leader, Jibiya, 2025). These findings indicate that the CWCs have successfully established a system of communication that fosters trust, accessibility, and swift responses to community concerns. This strengthens their role as active partners in maintaining safety and security within the community.

However, Table 4 reveals that 10.4% indicated the absence of a distress call number, while 16.4% were unsure. The mixed responses suggest that while distress call numbers exist, there may be a need to improve their accessibility or raise public awareness about their availability.

Table 5 shows a significant agreement that the CWCs set up roadblocks at night for "stop and search" operations, with 41.3% strongly agreeing and 46.0% agreeing. Corroborating this position with information from the KII session, an informant stated that:

Table 5. Showing Respondents' views on the use of Checkpoints in CWCs' Operations

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	159	41.3
Agree	177	46.0
Disagree	45	11.7
Strongly Disagree	4	1.0
Total	**385**	**100.0**

> We have many roadblocks, the roadblocks are set up to ensure that if any bandit tries to follow a car, they can be arrested, as the CWCs know them well, being members of the community. The roadblocks play a crucial role in apprehending these individuals in our community (KII, age 47, Traditional Leader, Danmusa, 2025).

Furthermore, another informant posits that: "They have a checkpoint, and they regularly search people coming from different villages. For example, here in Safana, their main roadblock is at the LGA entrance, near their headquarters. I'm sure you saw it on your way here" (KII, age 43, Religious Leader, Safana, 2025). These strategies seem to improve community safety by maintaining regular searches of people from different communities, ensuring that criminal elements cannot freely access their communities.

Table 6. Showing Respondents' views on the use of Surveillance in CWCs' Operations

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	159	41.3
Agree	195	50.6
Disagree	30	7.8
Strongly Disagree	1	.3
Total	**385**	**100.0**

Table 6 shows that 91.9% of the respondents (combined "strongly agree" and "agree") stated that surveillance systems are frequently used, highlighting the CWCs' reliance on visible deterrence and preventive measures. In the same vein, during KII, one informant opined: "They conduct surveillance to monitor and address any suspicious activity, particularly during nighttime" (KII, age 60, Traditional leader, Dutsinma, 2025). Another Traditional leader also posits that:

> Surveillance is a common practice for them, and some individuals even claim to possess a charm ability known as "Nagani"(eye charm) which they reportedly receive from their spiritual guides or Mallams. With this ability, they believe they can look at a person and determine whether or not they are a criminal (KII, age 50, Traditional Leader, Jibiya, 2025).

In the same line, a Religious leader reported that:

> I recall an incident when I wore a black shirt and trousers. I was travelling from Nasarawa Village to Dan Musa to visit a sick relative at the hospital on a Tuesday market day. The CWCs noticed me and became suspicious. They quickly approached me on motorcycles, carrying sticks and guns, and began questioning me aggressively. They insulted me, asking, 'Where are you from?' I remained calm and told them I was from Nasarawa Village. However, they refused to accept my answer and insisted that I tell them the truth. I repeated that I was from Nasarawa. They pressed further, asking who I knew in the village, so I mentioned several key individuals. Eventually, their commander recognised my father's name, as he had helped him during a difficult time by providing financial assistance. After that, they seemed to relax, and the situation was resolved. This experience showed me how the CWCs closely observe people, stopping and questioning them to ensure that suspicious individuals are not bandits, (KII, age 47, Religious Leader, Danmusa, 2025).

These strategies seem to improve community safety by maintaining consistent surveillance and enabling prompt responses. If feasible, integrating modern technologies like CCTV and drones with traditional methods such as "Nagani" (eye charm) could further strengthen their surveillance efforts.

Table 7 depicts that the CWCs are heavily involved in intelligence gathering, with 81.8% of respondents confirming their role in collecting information from community members. In the same line, during KII, an informant expressed that: "Community members are helping the CWCs with information

because this situation affects everyone in our community. Whenever there is any suspicious movement, community members alert the CWCs" (KII, age 46, Religious leader, Kurfi, 2025). Another informant stated that:

> We use various strategies, some of which I cannot disclose. However, one key approach is leveraging information from our informants within the communities. We also work to involve community members as informers who help us identify the locations of individuals we are searching for. Currently, we are holding the parents of three suspected bandits (KII, age 32, CWCs personnel, Jibiya, 2025).

Table 7. Showing whether CWCs Utilise Intelligence Gathering from the General Public

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	315	81.8
No	24	6.2
I don't know	46	11.9
Total	**385**	**100.0**

Another CWC's personnel remarked that:

> We collaborate with the locals, compensating them for accurate information about the bandits. This method is also employed by the bandits, which is why certain individuals may be labelled as informers. These informers share details about our movements and positioning with the bandits. To counter this, we offer a higher reward. If the bandits are paying them 10,000, we add another 10,000 to encourage them to switch sides. This encourages them to provide us with valuable information, allowing us to organise and set up an ambush for the bandits (KII, age 47, CWCs personnel, Dutsinma, 2025).

Another informant revealed that:

> Community members often provide the CWCs with information about the routes the bandits are passing through. Their team will set up an ambush. For example, there was an instance when we informed them that the bandits were passing through Maidabino, and they successfully laid an ambush, resulting in the elimination of some of the bandits (KII, age 54, Traditional Leader, Danmusa, 2025).

In the same vein, another informant expressed that:

> The strategy I have observed involves the use of informers, similar to the approach taken by the bandits. The CWCs deploy their informers to gather information about the bandits' informers. If they manage to identify a bandit's informer, they capture them for interrogation, and I can assure you, you wouldn't want to be interrogated by the CWCs (KII, age 51, Religious Leader, Batsari, 2025).

These findings suggest that CWCs' intelligence-gathering strategy is a community-centred approach that involves direct collaboration with locals, the use of informants, and incentivising cooperation. The CWCs' ability to set ambushes and counter bandit intelligence networks demonstrates the significant role of community-based intelligence in their operations. While the approach is generally effective, but also raises questions about the potential risks associated with informant betrayal.

Table 8. Showing Respondents' views on CWCs' collaboration with vigilantes in their activities

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	182	47.3
Agree	179	46.5
Disagree	21	5.5
Strongly Disagree	3	.8
Total	**385**	**100.0**

Table 8 shows that nearly all respondents (93.8%, combining "strongly agree" and "agree") acknowledged that the CWCs collaborate with vigilantes in their activities. Corroborating this position with information from the KII, an informant stated that: "Of course, we involve them in all our operations. Remember, most of us were vigilante members before becoming CWCs personnel" (KII age 39, CWCs personnel, Batsairi, 2025). In the same vein, another informant revealed that:

> Vigilante members are an integral part of us, just as we are part of them. We have been working together long before the government started addressing the security issues in our villages. The number of CWCs recruited is insufficient to confront the bandits, but it is the vigilante members who help increase our numbers, allowing us to effectively confront these threats (KII, age 37, CWCs personnel, Danmusa, 2025).

A Traditional leader posits that: "Yes, they collaborate with hunters and vigilante members in all their operations. The impact is that when they go on an operation, especially into the forest, it becomes very difficult to distinguish between CWCs and vigilante members if they approach you" (KII, 49, Traditional Leader, Kurfi, 2025). This high level of cooperation highlights a strategic alliance between the CWCs and other community-based security actors, which likely strengthens the overall effectiveness of security operations.

Table 9 reveals that the Patrol System show a moderate positive correlation with most variables, such as Hotlines (0.406), Roadblocks (0.355), and Intelligence from Community Members (0.329). These correlations suggest that the Patrol System relies on these elements to enhance its effectiveness. For example, hotlines provide immediate information for patrol deployment, and roadblocks assist in operational follow-ups. The table also shows that hotlines are significantly correlated with almost all variables, particularly with Intelligence from Community Members (0.486) and Roadblocks (0.448). This indicates that hotlines act as a primary channel for gathering intelligence, which is then utilised to strengthen operational methods like roadblocks and surveillance.

On roadblocks and surveillance, the table depicts that roadblocks exhibit a strong correlation with surveillance (0.479) and a moderate correlation with vigilantes (0.367) and tip-offs (0.389). This highlights roadblocks as a tactical method informed by surveillance and tip-offs, ensuring the interception of threats or suspects. The table reveals that variables such as intelligence from community members and community leaders show significant correlations with operational strategies. For instance, intelligence from community members correlates strongly with tip-offs (0.387) and moderately with patrol systems (0.329). Community leaders are moderately correlated with surveillance (0.316) and tip-offs (0.307), emphasising their role in guiding operations through local knowledge. In the table, vigilantes show a strong correlation with surveillance (0.542) and moderate correlations with other variables like roadblocks (0.367) and tip-offs (0.343). This suggests that vigilantes are integral to on-ground operations, relying on surveillance and tips to execute their roles effectively.

Also, the table shows that intelligence reports from informants correlate moderately with most variables, such as hotlines (0.261) and community leaders (0.486). This underlines their importance in providing actionable intelligence that complements other methods like surveillance and roadblocks. The correlation analysis underscores the interconnected nature of the CWCs' operational methods. It reveals that the CWCs adopt a multi-faceted approach that combines community engagement (hotlines, informants, and leaders) with tactical measures (roadblocks, patrols, and surveillance). Community intelligence, particularly through hotlines and informants, is central to guiding operational strategies like patrol systems and roadblocks; Vigilantes and surveillance are closely linked, indicating their role as the on-ground executors of strategies informed by intelligence gathering.

5.2. Discussion

The study found that most respondents affirmed the effectiveness of the patrol systems employed by Community Watch Committees (CWCs), with key informants highlighting the extensive day-and-night patrols conducted throughout the community. This proactive security strategy enables CWCs to monitor key entry points and vulnerable areas, deterring criminal activity before it occurs. The combination of motorised and foot patrols enhances operational flexibility, ensuring thorough coverage across diverse terrains, especially in rural areas where vehicles may be less practical. These findings align with Mohamed (2022), who identified patrol systems as a core strategy used by vigilante groups to maintain community safety. Additionally, the study found that the provision of hotlines by CWCs for crime reporting reflects their commitment to fostering open communication within the community. Interviews with community members emphasised the value of direct contact with CWCs personnel, noting that these personal connections build trust and enhance the effectiveness of security efforts. The CWCs' accessibility, combined with their familiarity with residents, improves response times and encourages greater community participation in reporting suspicious activities. These findings align with Usman et al. (2024), who

highlighted the use of hotlines as a key strategy for facilitating rapid response and reinforcing community-based security measures.

The study also found that both roadblocks and surveillance systems are perceived as highly effective deterrents against criminal activity, especially during nighttime hours. Roadblocks allow CWCs to conduct "stop and search" operations, restricting the movement of potential bandits and facilitating the apprehension of suspects. Similarly, surveillance systems play a critical role in monitoring suspicious activities and enabling the early detection of threats. These findings align with Sidang (2020), who noted that community guards use surveillance tactics to monitor buildings and individuals under suspicion. Furthermore, the integration of physical roadblocks with traditional surveillance methods, such as "Nagani" (spiritual perception), illustrates the CWCs' reliance on a combination of conventional security measures and culturally embedded practices. This dual approach highlights the community's adaptability in addressing security challenges through both modern and traditional strategies.

The study further revealed that intelligence-gathering is a vital component of CWC's operations, underscoring the critical role that community-based intelligence plays in enhancing security efforts. By relying on local informants, CWCs gain valuable insights into bandit movements, allowing them to stage ambushes and respond swiftly to emerging threats. This strategy fosters a collaborative relationship between CWCs and the community, where residents are incentivised to provide timely, accurate information in exchange for rewards. These findings align with Akinlabi and Ihemeje (2021), who identified intelligence cultivation as a cornerstone of vigilante strategies, emphasising its importance for effective law enforcement. However, the study also highlighted potential risks, including concerns over betrayal and the manipulation of information by informants with ties to bandits. To mitigate these risks, CWCs offer higher rewards to encourage loyalty, though the long-term success of this approach hinges on maintaining a delicate balance of trust and discretion among all parties involved.

The study also revealed a strong collaboration between CWCs, hunters and vigilantes, which emerges as a critical factor in the success of their operations. This partnership enhances manpower availability, enabling more effective responses to security challenges, especially when CWC personnel are stretched thin. The synergy between these groups, both deeply embedded within the community, significantly strengthens their collective capacity to confront bandits and other security threats. These findings align with Usman et al. (2024), who observed that joint police-community patrols and the involvement of vigilante groups contribute to crime prevention. This cooperation not only amplifies the operational capacity of CWCs but also reflects a shared commitment to community safety. By integrating vigilante members into their operations, CWCs create a more comprehensive security network, leveraging local knowledge and community support to bolster their overall effectiveness.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the operational strategy of the CWCs in Katsina Central is built around a synergistic model where community-sourced intelligence obtained through hotlines, informants, and traditional leaders drives tactical responses such as patrols, surveillance, and roadblocks. This aligns with Adélani (2024), who emphasised that local security structures in Northwestern Nigeria rely heavily on grassroots intelligence to guide field operations. Similarly, Longinus (2024) found that effective coordination between surveillance systems and community intelligence enhanced the success of community policing initiatives in South Africa. However, gaps in logistical support and real-time communication tools, as revealed in this study, echo concerns raised by Edeh and Nwaneri (2023), who argued that the value of community intelligence diminishes without corresponding investments in mobility, communication infrastructure, and coordination frameworks. The active role of vigilantes as intermediaries between information and enforcement further supports Ajayi's (2022) assertion that when embedded within the community, such actors evolve from reactive forces to predictive security agents. Overall, these findings highlight the critical importance of strengthening community-based intelligence networks and enhancing the operational capacity of CWCs to improve their effectiveness in curbing rural insecurity.

Table 9. Correlation Matrix of Operational Strategies Adopted by Community Watch Corps (CWCs)

Operational Strategies Adopted by CWCs		Patrol System	Hotlines	Roadblocks	Intelligence from Community Members	Tip-off	Surveillance	Intelligence reports from Informants	Community Leaders	Vigilantes
Patrol System	Pearson Correlation	--								
	N	385								
Hotlines	Pearson Correlation	.406**	--							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000								
	N	385	385							
Roadblocks	Pearson Correlation	.355**	.448**	--						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000							
	N	381	381	381						
Intelligence from Community Members	Pearson Correlation	.329**	.486**	.335**	--					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000						
	N	385	385	381	385					
Tip-off	Pearson Correlation	.250**	.418**	.389**	.387**	--				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000					
	N	385	385	381	385	385				
Surveillance	Pearson Correlation	.263**	.376**	.479**	.373**	.377**	--			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000				
	N	384	384	380	384	384	384			
Intelligence reports from Informants	Pearson Correlation	.291**	.261**	.245**	.301**	.295**	.270**	--		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000			
	N	385	385	381	385	385	384	385		
Community Leaders	Pearson Correlation	.222**	.286**	.084	.314**	.307**	.316**	.486**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.100	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	385	385	381	385	385	384	385	385	
Vigilantes	Pearson Correlation	.216**	.326**	.367**	.360**	.343**	.542**	.255**	.254**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	382	382	379	382	382	381	382	382	382

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

6. Conclusion

The success of every security agency largely depends on the methods of operation adopted in both internal and external security management. The armed bandits and kidnappers were reported by the security operatives and residents of the affected villages that they possess lethal weapons, and when launching an attack, they come in hundreds to overpower the residents or deployed security personnel. In this sense, the effectiveness of the operational style/techniques or method developed and implemented by the CWCs largely determines the effectiveness of their operations and curbing security challenges in Katsina State.

This research demonstrates that the modus operandi of the CWCs in Katsina Central Senatorial District relies heavily on a synergistic blend of patrols, surveillance, checkpoints, distress call systems, and community intelligence. These strategies, rooted in local participation and informal partnerships with hunters and vigilante groups, serve as the backbone of rural security in the absence of adequate state policing. The findings further highlight how the CWCs' visible presence, strategic mobility, and reliance on public cooperation reflect the assumptions of the Broken Windows Theory, emphasising how community-led security efforts can deter criminal elements when formal security structures are weak.

This study contributes to criminological literature by empirically documenting a locally driven model of crime control in Northern Nigeria, an area underrepresented in operational policing studies. However, the study did not examine the gendered dynamics of participation, which may have revealed critical differences in community involvement and vulnerability. Additionally, while the research applied both methodological approaches, its focus on six LGAs within Katsina Central limits the generalizability of the findings to broader regions in Nigeria. Future studies may benefit from larger sample sizes and comparative analyses across senatorial zones or states to deepen understanding of community-based policing models in varying security contexts. Based on the findings, the paper recommends that:

- As collaboration between CWCs and vigilantes was shown to be a critical success factor, the Katsina State Government should organise joint training, conflict de-escalation workshops, and operational briefings to ensure better synergy and reduce operational duplication or rivalry.
- Given the CWCs' heavy reliance on intelligence from locals, the Katsina State Government should formalise community-based intelligence systems by establishing secure, toll-free hotlines and incentivising credible informants. This would enhance timely reporting, reduce misinformation, and ensure greater community trust and cooperation.
- To strengthen crime detection and prevention, the Katsina State Government should provide the CWCs with affordable surveillance technologies such as solar-powered CCTV systems, rural reconnaissance drones, and mobile applications for anonymous tip-offs. Simultaneously, community-wide sensitisation programs should be implemented to educate the public on the functions of CWCs and promote active civilian participation in crime reporting and collaborative security efforts.

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