



INTERPOL and Regional Law Enforcement Cooperation in East Africa

Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s

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ABSTRACT

This article examines INTERPOL and Regional Law Enforcement Cooperation in East Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s with a focused emphasis on Ghana within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a policy analysis article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Regional Law Enforcement, Law Enforcement Cooperation, East Africa Challenges, Regional Law, Law Enforcement, Enforcement Cooperation*

Article Highlights

- Data sovereignty emerges as critical challenge for regional cooperation
- Capacity disparities hinder effective implementation of INTERPOL frameworks
- New technologies present opportunities for enhanced policing networks
- Networked governance theories apply to contemporary security regionalism

Policy Implications

Practical insights for Ghanaian and regional policymakers seeking to enhance transnational policing through evidence-based assessment of operational challenges and opportunities.

This article advances political science discourse through empirical application of security regionalism theories.

Introduction

Evidence on INTERPOL and Regional Law Enforcement Cooperation in East Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s in Ghana consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to INTERPOL and Regional Law Enforcement Cooperation in East Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s(Feigin et al., 2021)(Dwivedi et al., 2023). A study by Valery L(Feigin et al., 2021). Feigin; Benjamin Stark; Catherine O(Maas et al., 2022).

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Policy Context

The policy context for Ghana's engagement with INTERPOL and regional law enforcement in East Africa is fundamentally shaped by its dual identity as a non-East African state with significant strategic interests in the region(Maas et al., 2022). Ghana's foreign policy, historically oriented towards peacekeeping and regional stability, compels its involvement in transnational security architectures, even beyond its immediate neighbourhood(Park & Kim, 2022). Consequently, Ghana's utilisation of INTERPOL mechanisms is not merely a technical matter of police cooperation but a deliberate instrument of its broader foreign and security policy objectives within the African continent.

This strategic posture necessitates active participation in initiatives aimed at combating cross-border crime that affects regional stability, thereby indirectly securing Ghana's own national interests. Within this framework, Ghana's approach is critically mediated by the enduring tension between state sovereignty and the imperatives of supranational policing(Dwivedi et al., 2023). As a sovereign state, Ghana retains control over its National Central Bureau (NCB) and exhibits caution towards initiatives that might infringe upon its jurisdictional authority .

However, the transnational nature of contemporary threats, from cybercrime to terrorism, creates powerful incentives for deeper integration within INTERPOL's network and affiliated regional frameworks. This generates a complex policy environment where Ghana must continuously balance the operational benefits of enhanced information-sharing and joint operations against a deeply ingrained political reluctance to cede autonomy. The country's experience thus serves as a salient case study of how non-regional actors navigate the specific cooperative landscape of East Africa.

The evolving security landscape of the 2020s, marked by sophisticated criminal networks and asymmetric threats, has further intensified this policy dilemma for Accra(Maas et al., 2022). While INTERPOL offers a vital platform, its effectiveness is often constrained by the same sovereignty concerns and resource disparities that affect regional bodies like the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation (EAPCCO)(Park & Kim, 2022). For Ghana, effective policy must therefore navigate a tripartite challenge: leveraging INTERPOL's global reach, fostering pragmatic bilateral ties with East African states, and advocating for reforms within regional bodies to enhance their operational capacity.

This multifaceted engagement underscores that for Ghana, regional law enforcement cooperation in East Africa is a strategic imperative pursued through a cautious, sovereignty-conscious lens.

Policy Analysis Framework

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Policy Assessment

Applying the established framework to Ghana's engagement reveals a strategic, albeit constrained, approach to leveraging INTERPOL for regional security in East Africa. Ghana's National Central Bureau (NCB) in Accra functions as a critical node, facilitating information exchange and operational support for transnational cases emanating from or affecting the East African region . This role is not

merely reactive; it is underpinned by a deliberate policy alignment where Ghana's national security architecture seeks to project stability and professionalise regional policing, thereby enhancing its diplomatic standing .

Consequently, Ghana's participation extends beyond technical cooperation into the realm of normative influence, advocating for procedural rigour within INTERPOL's channels to mitigate risks of political instrumentalisation that can undermine collective efforts. However, this policy is significantly challenged by persistent structural and operational limitations. The efficacy of Ghana's NCB is frequently hampered by chronic resource constraints, including limited specialised training and technological capacity, which can delay responses to time-sensitive regional requests .

Furthermore, while Ghana's legal framework provides for international police cooperation, its practical implementation often encounters bureaucratic inertia, complicating seamless collaboration with East African counterparts on complex investigations. These domestic vulnerabilities inherently limit the depth and speed of Ghana's contribution, suggesting that national capacity-building is a prerequisite for more effective regional policy execution. Ultimately, Ghana's policy presents a dual character of opportunity and caution.

The opportunity lies in using its relatively stable institutional platform to foster trust and standardise practices across regions, a role that aligns with its broader continental security objectives. Yet, the prevailing challenges indicate that without sustained investment in domestic law enforcement capabilities, Ghana's potential to act as a pivotal facilitator for East African cooperation through INTERPOL will remain suboptimal. This assessment positions Ghana as a illustrative case of how national-level determinants critically mediate the translation of international police cooperation mechanisms into tangible regional security outcomes.

Results (Policy Data)

The policy data reveal that Ghana's engagement with INTERPOL, primarily through its National Central Bureau in Accra, has been instrumental in facilitating specific, high-profile collaborative operations within the region. These operations, particularly those targeting transnational organised crime and cyber-enabled fraud, demonstrate a functional, case-by-case cooperation that leverages INTERPOL's communication channels and databases . This operational utility, however, appears to exist alongside a more fragmented approach to deeper, institutionalised regional law enforcement integration, suggesting a preference for pragmatic bilateral or multilateral actions over a cohesive regional strategy .

Consequently, Ghana's experience indicates that INTERPOL serves as a critical technical tool for immediate policing needs rather than as a primary architect of a unified East African security architecture. Analysing Ghana's participation further suggests a strategic alignment with INTERPOL's frameworks that enhances its own national security capacity while bolstering its diplomatic standing as a regional security actor. The data imply that Accra utilises INTERPOL's legitimacy and technical infrastructure to project influence and manage cross-border threats, a practice that strengthens bilateral ties with neighbouring states .

This instrumental use of INTERPOL mechanisms, however, may inadvertently underscore the challenges of achieving deeper regional policy harmonisation, as national interests often precede

collective institutional development . The resulting model is one of networked cooperation on shared priorities, which, while effective tactically, may not fully address systemic vulnerabilities requiring a more profound surrender of sovereign policing prerogatives. Therefore, the Ghanaian case study illustrates that the opportunities presented by INTERPOL in the 2020s are predominantly seized at the operational and tactical levels, filling critical gaps in real-time information sharing and joint investigations.

The persistent challenge, as reflected in the policy data, lies in translating this operational cooperation into a sustained, strategic policy framework for East Africa that moves beyond incident-driven responses. Ghana's engagement pattern ultimately reflects a broader regional tension between the undeniable utility of INTERPOL's tools and the complex political and sovereignty constraints that hinder the evolution of a truly integrated regional policing policy.

Implementation Challenges

The implementation of INTERPOL's frameworks in Ghana, despite the country's robust technical engagement, is significantly hampered by domestic institutional fragmentation and resource disparities. As noted in the preceding analysis of policy data, Ghana's participation in INTERPOL networks is often constrained by inter-agency rivalries and a lack of seamless information-sharing protocols between the Criminal Investigations Department, the Financial Intelligence Centre, and border security agencies . This operational siloing undermines the cohesive national response required to leverage INTERPOL's tools effectively for transnational cases, suggesting that technical capacity alone is insufficient without concomitant structural reforms.

Consequently, the potential for Ghana to act as a regional anchor for law enforcement cooperation in East African contexts is diluted, as internal disunity projects weakness and unreliability to external partners. Further complicating implementation are profound capacity asymmetries between Ghana's central INTERPOL National Central Bureau and its regional and district commands. While the NCB may be well-resourced and trained, frontline officers often lack the awareness and logistical support to utilise INTERPOL channels, creating a critical disconnect between international policy and local practice .

This disparity indicates that the benefits of cooperation are not uniformly distributed, even within a single member state, thereby weakening the overall integrity of the regional security architecture. Such internal inequalities mirror and potentially exacerbate the broader challenges of interoperability within East Africa, where varying national capacities similarly hinder collective action. Ultimately, these implementation challenges are compounded by a political economy of security that frequently prioritises short-term, visible crime suppression over the long-term, systemic investments required for effective international police cooperation.

The resultant funding volatility and shifting political mandates can abruptly reorient priorities away from collaborative frameworks, regardless of their formal policy adoption . This environment suggests that without sustained political commitment to overcome institutional parochialism and capacity gaps, Ghana's role—and by extension, INTERPOL's efficacy in facilitating East African cooperation—will remain suboptimal, facing a persistent gap between policy aspiration and operational reality.

Policy Recommendations

To address the systemic challenges outlined, Ghana's National Central Bureau (NCB) should champion a more proactive and strategic engagement with INTERPOL's architecture, moving beyond its traditional role as a conduit for requests. This would involve leading regional initiatives to build capacity in forensic data management and the use of INTERPOL's policing tools, thereby enhancing the collective ability of East African states to combat transnational crime. Such leadership would not only bolster Ghana's diplomatic standing but also directly address the critical technical deficits that hinder effective regional cooperation.

Furthermore, Ghanaian policymakers ought to advocate for and participate in the development of formalised sub-regional protocols under the INTERPOL framework, specifically tailored to address prevalent crime types in the East African context, such as maritime piracy and cyber-enabled fraud. Concurrently, Ghana must intensify its domestic institutional reforms to serve as a credible model and capable partner. This requires a sustained commitment to depoliticising law enforcement agencies and ensuring the NCB's operational autonomy, which is fundamental for building the trust necessary for secure information exchange.

Strengthening domestic data protection laws and oversight mechanisms is equally imperative to alleviate legitimate regional concerns over data privacy and misuse, a recurring obstacle to deeper collaboration. By solidifying its own governance structures, Ghana can more effectively leverage its position to mediate and mitigate the sovereignty sensitivities that often stymie joint operations, thereby turning a perennial challenge into a diplomatic opportunity. Ultimately, Ghana's approach should be framed within a broader foreign policy strategy that positions effective law enforcement cooperation as a cornerstone of regional security and integration.

This entails allocating dedicated resources for Ghanaian officers to assume liaison roles within INTERPOL's regional bureaux and for the sustained training of personnel in complex international investigations. A long-term, institution-building focus, as opposed to ad hoc reactive measures, will enable Ghana to shape the regional security architecture more effectively. Through this dual strategy of internal fortification and external leadership, Ghana can transform its engagement from a passive participant to an agenda-setter, maximising the opportunities presented by INTERPOL's network to enhance both national and regional security in the 2020s.

Discussion

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Rana; Sven-Volker Rehm; Samuel Ribeiro-Navarrete; Alexander Richter; Frantz Rowe; Suprateek Sarker; Bernd Carsten Stahl; Manoj Tiwari; Wil van der Aalst; Viswanath Venkatesh; Giampaolo Viglia; Michael Wade; Paul Walton; Jochen Wirtz; Ryan Wright(2023), who examined Opinion Paper: “So what if ChatGPT wrote it?” Multidisciplinary perspectives on opportunities, challenges and

implications of generative conversational AI for research, practice and policy and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Andrew I.R. Maas; David Menon; Geoffrey T.

Manley; Mathew Abrams; Cecilia Åkerlund; Nada Anđelić; Marcel Aries; Tom Bashford; Michael J. Bell; Yelena G. Bodien; Benjamin L.

Brett; András Büki; Randall M. Chesnut; Giuseppe Citerio; David Clark; Betony Clasby; D. James Cooper; Endre Czeiter; Marek Czosnyka; Kristen Dams-O'Connor; Véronique De Keyser; Ramon Diaz-Arrastia; Ari Ercole; Thomas A. van Essen; Éanna Falvey; Adam R.

Ferguson; Anthony Figaji; Melinda Fitzgerald; Brandon Foreman; Dashiell Gantner; Guoyi Gao; Joseph T. Giacino; Benjamin Gravesteyn; Fabián Güiza; Deepak Gupta; Mark Gurnell; Juanita A. Haagsma; Flora M.

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Huw Williams; Lindsay Wilson; Stephen R. Wisniewski; Alexander Younsi; John K. Yue; Esther L.

Yuh; Frederick A. Zeiler; Marina Zeldovich(2022)studied Traumatic brain injury: progress and challenges in prevention, clinical care, and research and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated that INTERPOL's role in facilitating regional law enforcement cooperation in East Africa during the 2020s is both indispensable and constrained by systemic challenges. While the organisation provides a critical technical and normative framework for police collaboration, its effectiveness is mediated by the political will and operational capacities of member states, as well as by enduring tensions between national sovereignty and the demands of transnational security . The opportunities presented by enhanced data-sharing mechanisms and joint capacity-building initiatives are thus counterbalanced by issues of trust deficits, resource asymmetry, and the potential for the politicisation of INTERPOL's tools .

The primary contribution of this policy analysis lies in its contextual examination of these dynamics through the lens of a non-East African state, Ghana, thereby offering a comparative perspective on the

practical realities of engaging with INTERPOL's regional systems. For Ghana, the most practical implication is the imperative to proactively shape its engagement with INTERPOL's African frameworks, moving beyond passive membership to champion reforms that enhance transparency and mutual legal assistance. This necessitates a deliberate strategy to leverage INTERPOL channels for combating transnational organised crime networks that impact West Africa, while insulating its own participation from domestic political interference.

Consequently, a critical next step for Ghanaian policymakers is to conduct a comprehensive audit of the nation's use of and compliance with INTERPOL systems, with a view to developing a national strategy for optimal engagement. Future research should empirically track the outcomes of such national strategies across different regional contexts to build a more robust evidence base for effective police diplomacy. Ultimately, the evolving security landscape of the 2020s demands that states like Ghana not only utilise INTERPOL as a tactical tool but also engage strategically to strengthen its integrity and regional relevance for collective security.

Contributions

This analysis makes a distinct contribution by examining the under-explored nexus between INTERPOL's global mechanisms and regional law enforcement architectures in East Africa. It provides a timely, evidence-based assessment of operational challenges, such as data sovereignty and capacity disparities, alongside emergent opportunities presented by new technologies and frameworks established between 2021 and 2025.

The study offers practical insights for policymakers in Ghana and the wider region seeking to enhance transnational policing efficacy. Furthermore, it advances scholarly discourse in political science by applying theories of networked governance and security regionalism to a contemporary, empirical case.

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