

**PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF SECURITY OF LIVES AND PROPERTY IN NIGERIA  
AFTER FIFTY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE: A STUDY OF SOUTH-EAST  
GEOPOLITICAL ZONE.**

**Nwankwo, Ignatius Uche  
Department of Sociology/Anthropology  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
E-mail: iunwankwo@yahoo.com**

**Abstract**

*The study which focused on South-east geo-political zone examined public perception of security of lives and property. It also examined the perception of the police and vigilante services as well as challenges they encounter in safeguarding lives and property. Three out of the five states in the zone were randomly selected for the study. A total of 810 participants were drawn through convenience of availability technique from urban and rural areas. The enlistment criteria were 18 years and above, and not less than 5 years of residence in the zone. Three instruments were used. They are questionnaire, focus group discussion (FGD) for men and women groups, and in-depth interview (IDI) for police and vigilante members. Frequency tables and percentages were applied in presentation and analysis. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for test of significance. It was found that fear of crime was very high (80%) among residents. There was also high negative perception of the police services whereas vigilante groups enjoyed high positive rating. Furthermore, the study found that level of fear of crime and perception of safety and security differ by place of residence and income level. It was recommended that police should be adequately trained, remunerated and motivated to discharge their duties more efficiently.*

**Key words:** Safety, Security, Perception

**Introduction**

Prior to the arrival of the explorers, missionaries and colonial masters, the diverse social collectives that make-up present day Nigeria had formidable social control agents and mechanisms. Among the Hausas, Igbos, Yorubas, and the minority tribes, safety and security ranked tops among considerations that attracted immense attention of leadership and the entire community alike.

At that time, traditional social control and security measures emphasized team work or collective involvement. Conflict was not necessarily unusual but was promptly resolved through approaches like settlement directed talking (dialogue), commensality (eating and drinking together) and roles of titled men, masquerade cults, age-grades, kindred groups and council of elders etc. There were also restrictive norms and regulations with clearly defined sanctions which were rigidly applied without bias irrespective of social ranking of culprits. Fines, ostracism, ridicule and satire, banishment, oath – taking and ritual cleansing constituted some of the punishments that helped to deter individuals from criminal and delinquent pursuits. Family and individual names without blemishes of criminal or delinquent acts and or violations of important traditional norms were cherished as symbols of social recognition.

With the advent of colonialism, monetized economy was introduced (Nnoli 1980). Urbanization, western education and social contacts with other social groups also had their impacts. All these stimulated a new value system that dislocated the traditional socio-economic order. That was despite the vast advantages of the traditional socio-economic order in promoting neighbourhood peace, safety and security.

The situation resulted in an upsurge in threats to safety and security in erstwhile relatively calm and secure pre-independence communities. The criminal justice system like the police, courts and prison recorded appreciable progress in ensuring compliance of the colonized to colonial policies and directives. However, they were less successful in stamping out other threats to security of lives and property. This was not unconnected to the fact that primordial value preferences and traditional security initiatives still enjoyed sizeable followership and gave room for conflict between them and poorly understood colonial instruments. The apostles of resilient traditional security options that refined deviants (rather than kill them) and repaired relationships between disputants remained skeptical of the new order.

At independence in 1960, neither an expected adoption of traditional security arrangements nor a policy of co-existence and integration with the inherited British option was vigorously pursued. Instead, the totality of colonial structures, philosophy and supporting institutions (inclusive of security arrangements) and their inherent lapses were upheld. This further compounded problems of security of lives and property inherited from colonial era even as many new security challenges emerged in the post independence era. The hope for reversal of the trend toward safe and secure cities and rural communities as Nigeria got older among committee of nations appear to have become a mirage. Armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, burglary, theft, rape, religious riots and communal clashes are regular occurrences in rural and urban communities of Nigeria.

In the South-East zone where trade and commerce have witnessed peak activities the tempo of aforementioned social vices has remained unusually high. This is because commerce has attracted both business men/women and those who pursue criminal tendencies from elsewhere.

This paper is an attempt to examine the perception of the public about security of lives and property in the South-East zone of Nigeria, 50 years after independence. The study is an attempt to identify what the people consider as major threats to security of lives and property in the area, the causes of such threats and to proffer solutions for sustainable development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of security of lives and property in the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria is quite enormous and represents a historical reality over the years. Armed robbers regularly besiege highways, banks, markets, hotels and private homes in rural and urban communities of the zone where they kill, maim and deprive individuals of their valuables. There is hardly a day without robbery incidents in parts of the five states of the South-East For instance; Ojo (2009) reported the cold murder of a lecturer at Awka, Onyema and Ikegwonwu (2008) decried armed robbery attack even on a motherless baby's home in the zone. Such incidents have turned the area into a 'massive jungle' to borrow the words of Adeniran (2002) who described most of Nigeria in that context on account of massive criminal activities and insecurity everywhere.

The incessant cases of armed robbery in the Southeast zone is compounded by frequent communal clashes like the Umuleri /Aguleri crisis in Anambra state and Ezilo/Ezza hostilities in Ebonyi state etc. Such clashes are sources of dangerous

weapons to the zone.

Cases of politically masterminded violence and thuggery are also prevalent as well as cultism in higher institutions. The politically motivated mayhem that destroyed parts of the government house in Awka during the tenure of Dr Chris Ngige is another case in point. The zone is also yet to recover from the shock of an attempt to abduct a sitting governor in Anambra state.

Recently, kidnapping has become a notorious crime in which the zone has surpassed even the South-South region where it first became a social problem in Nigeria. One recalls that Niger-Delta militants had initially used kidnapping of foreign nationals to convey grievances about exploitation of mineral resources without commensurate compensation to land owners. Ndulue (2010) reported the kidnapping of three elderly women at Ezinifite community. Also, a bus load of school children was reported to have been taken over and the children kidnapped at Osisioma, in Abia state (National Television Authority Abuja, 9010).

The state of insecurity in major commercial towns of Aba and Onitsha has reached an alarming stage. Night social life is totally absent in the two towns as gun shots from security operatives and criminals disturb the peace of the night.

The menace of social miscreants operating under different guises as Motor Park touts, Sanitation Agents, Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) Officials for state and local governments, and task forces are common experiences. These outfits, many of whom lack genuine government support, terrorize unsuspecting visitors and citizens of the zone.

The police and other arms of the criminal justice system seem to have been over-powered by the magnitude of threats to lives and property in the zone. The sophistication and expansion of criminal activities despite police efforts at controlling the situation is very worrisome. Equally worrisome is the attempt to apply extra-judicial options in some communities. Such options negate civilized and statutory provisions.

In the recent past, the involvement of the 'Bakassi Boys' a vigilante outfit that employ jungle justice by lynching criminal suspects did not fare any better as they soon became instruments of political intimidation. Worst still, the police and the local vigilante groups formed by communities are no match to the superior armoury and firing power of criminal gangs.

Also, the police, communities and vigilante groups are yet to develop an efficient working synergy that will fuse them into a team with comparative advantage over criminal outfits. The policy of community policing is also yet to attain optimal implementation.

It is against the backdrop of these problems that this study was undertaken to ascertain the public perception of security of lives and property in the South-East zone of Nigeria, after 50 years of independence. The study also explored the causes of security lapses and examined challenges of existing security structures. Measures for improvement were also put forward.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do residents of South-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria perceive the safety of their lives and property as Nigeria marks 50<sup>th</sup> birthday?
2. What factors are accountable for the nature of perception of security of lives and property in the area?
3. How are the police perceived as an agent of crime control in South-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria?
4. What types of informal policing structures are established in the area and how do the people rate their effectiveness as security outfits?
5. What problems do residents of South-east Nigeria identify to affect police and informal policing structures in maintenance of safety and security in the zone?
6. What measures could be taken to improve the state of safety and security in south-east geo-political zone of Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. Perception of safety and security in South-East Zone of Nigeria varies significantly with income level.
2. Perception of safety and security in the South East Zone of Nigeria varies with rural or urban character of place of residence.

### **Methodology**

The study was located in the south-east zone of Nigeria. The zone has five states namely Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Abia, and Imo states. The states are situated on a fairly flat land with tropical vegetation. The climate in the area is humid with substantial rainfall.

The study adopted the cross – sectional survey design since the entire population of south-east zone could not be reached given limited resources and time at the disposal of the researcher.

Out of a total population of 16, 381,729 (NPC, 2006), only 810 respondents were drawn from three states (Anambra Enugu, and Ebonyi) which were randomly selected for study. The sample size of 810 respondents was considered adequate for applicable tests. The inclusion criteria are 18 years of age or above, and residence in the south east zone at least for the past five years. However, only 78 instruments that were correctly filled were used analysis.

Five hundred and ten (510) respondents were drawn from urban areas /state capitals (170 per state); and three hundred (300) respondents from rural communities (100 per state). The state capitals and some rural communities were purposively chosen. Purposive sampling technique was also used to select streets or rural routes from where households and respondents were selected. Convenience of availability was applied to select respondents. However, effort was sustained throughout the selection process to include population segments like men, women, youths in school, youths out of school, and security operatives.

The instrument for the study constitute of a questionnaire with twenty (20) items of closed and open ended character. This was complemented with FGD sessions with

male and female groups in each state and in-depth interviews (IDI) with police and vigilante men in the three states studied. Purposive sampling or convenience of availability was adopted in selecting participants for FGD and IDI.

Frequency tables, percentages and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) were adopted for presentation and analysis of data. Analysis of qualitative data from FGD and IDI took the form of interpretation, description and recording of what was actually said. In going through the transcriptions, phrases with contextual or special connotation were noted and pulled out to complement the statistical data.

### Findings/Results

The findings of this study are grouped into six thematic issues related to both research questions/ objectives of the study and the hypotheses. They include.

- Socio – Demographic Characteristics of Respondents
- Perception of the Police Safety and Security Measures
- Informal Policing Structure(s) Operating in the Zone
- Perception of Safety and Security by place of Residence (Rural or Urban).
- Problems Confronting the Police and other Security Outfits.
- Measures Suggested for Improving Safety and Security by Respondents.

### Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 shows that response from a total of 413 (52.88%) female and 368 (47.12%) male respondents were included in this analysis. About two thirds of the respondents (502 or 64.28%) reside in urban areas while 279 (35.72%) reside at rural areas.

The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 68 years and above, with a mean age of 40.45 years and standard deviation of 13.496. The modal and median ages were 45 and 41 years respectively.

More males than females were into civil/public service, trading and farming. The income classifications of respondents showed that the females were economically disadvantaged in the zone. Most of the respondents (526 or 67%0 had either primary or secondary education. They however differed academically by sex as more males have tertiary education than females. Also, more female respondents had no formal education. Christianity and married group constitute major religious affiliation and marital status among respondents.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

| Characteristics  | Respondents  |              | Total /%          |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
|                  | Male         | Female       |                   |
| Sex              | 368 (47.12%) | 413 (52.88%) | 781 (100%)        |
| <b>Residence</b> |              |              |                   |
| Urban            | 308          | 194          | 502 (64.28%)      |
| Rural            | 60           | 219          | 279 (35.72%)      |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>368</b>   | <b>413</b>   | <b>781 (100%)</b> |
| <b>Age Group</b> |              |              |                   |
| 18 – 27          | 35           | 41           | 76 (9.7%)         |
| 28 – 37          | 76           | 82           | 158 (20.23%)      |

|   |            |            |                    |
|---|------------|------------|--------------------|
| 38 – 47                                 | 182        | 214        | 396 (50.70%)       |
| 48 – 57                                 | 40         | 38         | 78 (9.99%)         |
| 58 – 67                                 | 10         | 22         | 32 (4.10%)         |
| 68 and above                            | 25         | 16         | 41 (5.25%)         |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>368</b> | <b>413</b> | <b>781 (100%)</b>  |
| <b>Occupation</b>                       |            |            |                    |
| None (house wife/man)                   | 13         | 127        | 140 (17.93%)       |
| Civil/Public Servant                    | 92         | 45         | 137 (17.54%)       |
| Trader                                  | 124        | 62         | 186 (23.82%)       |
| Farmer                                  | 76         | 42         | 118 (15.11%)       |
| Artisan                                 | 43         | 88         | 131 (16.77%)       |
| Student/Apprentice                      | 20         | 49         | 69 (8.83%)         |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>368</b> | <b>413</b> | <b>7881 (100%)</b> |
| <b>Highest Educational Attainment</b>   |            |            |                    |
| No formal Education                     | 42         | 87         | 129 (16.52%)       |
| Medium Education (primary or secondary) | 243        | 283        | 526 (67.34%)       |
| High Education (tertiary)               | 83         | 43         | 126 (16.13%)       |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>368</b> | <b>413</b> | <b>781 (100%)</b>  |
| <b>Income Per Month</b>                 |            |            |                    |
| No/low income (N1,000-N30,000)          | 24         | 94         | 118 (15.11%)       |
| Medium income (N31,000 - 60,000)        | 243        | 291        | 534 (68.37%)       |
| High income (N61,000 and above)         | 101        | 28         | 129 (16.52%)       |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>368</b> | <b>413</b> | <b>781 (100%)</b>  |
| <b>Marital Status</b>                   |            |            |                    |
| Single                                  | 84         | 101        | 185 (23.69%)       |
| Married                                 | 214        | 242        | 456 (658.39%)      |
| Divorced                                | 14         | 16         | 30 (3.84%)         |
| Separated                               | 8          | 2          | 10 (1.28%)         |
| Widowed                                 | 48         | 52         | 100 (12.80%)       |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>368</b> | <b>413</b> | <b>781 (100%)</b>  |
| <b>Religious Affiliation</b>            |            |            |                    |
| Christianity                            | 336        | 382        | 718 (91.93%)       |
| Moslem                                  | 9          | 5          | 14 (1.79%)         |
| Traditional Religion                    | 23         | 26         | 49 (6.27%)         |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>368</b> | <b>413</b> | <b>781 (100%)</b>  |

**Source:** Field Survey, 2010.

### Perception of the Police Safety/Security Measures

More than three quarter of the respondents (632 or 80.92%) agreed that they fear crime in their area. They attributed such fear to frequent occurrences of armed robbery (55.18%), Kidnapping (36.11%) and burglary/ theft (3.46%) etc. All FGD groups in the three states studied expressed deep worry about security of lives and property in their area. IDI participants also corroborated the extreme level of fear of crime in the entire south east zone.

**Table 2: Perception of safety and security measures by Income level**

| Perception Indicators or variables |   | Low Income |    |    |     |       | Medium Income |     |     |     |       | High Income |    |    |     |       |
|------------------------------------|---|------------|----|----|-----|-------|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------------|----|----|-----|-------|
|                                    |   | VA         | A  | IA | VIA | Total | VA            | A   | IA  | VIA | Total | VA          | A  | IA | VIA | Total |
| a.                                 | Crime Prevention and Control                | 11         | 42 | 53 | 12  | 118   | 63            | 224 | 225 | 22  | 534   | 11          | 64 | 50 | 4   | 129   |
| b.                                 | Police Presence and Patrols                 | 12         | 21 | 80 | 5   | 118   | 22            | 171 | 320 | 21  | 534   | 3           | 40 | 75 | 11  | 129   |
| c.                                 | Police/Public Relationship and Co-operation | 11         | 10 | 92 | 5   | 118   | 53            | 108 | 330 | 43  | 534   | 2           | 30 | 65 | 32  | 129   |
| d.                                 | Police Response to Distress calls           | 22         | 43 | 32 | 21  | 118   | 86            | 224 | 149 | 75  | 534   | 11          | 33 | 53 | 32  | 129   |
| e.                                 | Proper Handling of Reports                  | 53         | 43 | 18 | 4   | 118   | 14            | 256 | 107 | 22  | 534   | 32          | 86 | 9  | 2   | 129   |
| f.                                 | Police Equipments                           | 11         | 33 | 53 | 21  | 118   | 65            | 160 | 181 | 128 | 534   | 11          | 42 | 44 | 32  | 129   |

**Source:** Field Survey, 2010.

Table 2 shows the perception of three income categories (low, medium and high income) to six safety and security related variables using a 4-point rating scale of very adequate (VA), adequate (A), inadequate (IA) and very inadequate (VIA). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test conducted at 0.05 level of significance and 14/75 degree of freedom shows that F-ratio (93.69) > F-critical (1.83). The interpretation is that perception of residents of southeast zone with respect to safety and security varied with income levels. Such variation among income groups as revealed by the test does not augur well for inter-income group co-operation in the effort to maintain safety and security in the area. Table 2 also shows that the respondents have more negative responses to most of the six perception indicators/variables on safety and security measures by the police. The negative perception of the police was corroborated by male and female FGD participants in the three states. They were accused of being more interested in collecting N20 at road check points rather than perform security checks. However, policemen who participated in the IDI strongly submitted that they are doing their best given operational handicaps they encounter at duty posts..

### Informal Policing Structure (IPS) Operating in the Zone.

**Table 3: Responses to Whether Informal Policing Structure (IPS) Exist in the Zone**

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Yes       | 721       | 92.32      |
| No        | 60        | 7.68       |
| Total     | 781       | 100        |

Source: Field Survey, 2010.

Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents 721 (92.32%) agreed that IPS operate in their areas. Only 7.68% disagreed. The implication here is that there is a high level of awareness about the operation of IPS groups in the South east zone.

The respondents identified the IPS groups by names like 'Vigilante' and 'Ndi-nche' (neighbourhood watch groups). There was also high acceptance of IPS group in the zone. Majority of the respondents, 608 (77.85%) indicated that they are very satisfied with their services, while only 0.77% said they were very dissatisfied. The FGD groups also appreciated the vigilante outfits for being responsive to their duties

### **Perception of Safety and Security by Place of Residence**

A further step was taken by the researcher to ascertain the interaction between place of residence of respondents and their perception/view on adequacy or otherwise, of safety and security in their areas. This is demonstrated in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Perception of Safety and Security by Place of Residence (Rural/Urban)**

| Place of Residence | View of State of Safety and Security |          |             |                 | Total |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|-------------|-----------------|-------|
|                    | Very Adequate                        | Adequate | In adequate | Very Inadequate |       |
| Urban              | 75                                   | 203      | 117         | 107             | 502   |
| Rural              | 53                                   | 86       | 129         | 11              | 279   |
| Total              | 129                                  | 288      | 246         | 118             | 781   |

Source: Field Survey, 2010.

Table 4 shows the data procured from respondents residing at urban and rural areas respectively. On the whole, 53.3% of respondents living in urban areas indicated that Safety and Security is either adequate or very adequate, while 49.8% of those in rural areas made the same indication. The result of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test carried out showed that at 0.05 level of significance and 4/10 degree of freedom, the estimation/perception of safety and security varied with urban or rural character of place of residence.

### **Problems Confronting Police and Other Security Outfits (IPS Groups)**

The most important problems identified to face police and IPS groups in the area were lack of equipments (41%), trained personnel (27%), poor ammunitions (22%), poor relationship with communities they serve (6.4%) and poor salaries/motivations towards work (4.4%)

### **Measures Suggested for Improvement of Safety and Security**

Finally, item 20 in the instrument sought for recommendations to improve safety and security. Participants in the FGD and IDI were asked similar questions. The responses /submissions of different groups were collated below.

- Police and Vigilante (IPS) groups should be provided with adequate equipment for effective operations.
- Enhanced salary package for both groups
- The Police and Vigilante groups should work as a team to achieve greater results.
- Logistics (transport means, communication gadgets, ammunitions, bullet proofs etc) should be adequately provided by government.

- There should be regular refresher courses for police and vigilante groups.
- Residential quarters should be provided for police and vigilante groups to enhance their personal safety.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study investigated public perception of safety and security as well as perception of the police and informal policing structures. Analysis was thematically presented. There is high level of fear /anxiety about crime in the south east zone of Nigeria. Most commonly occurring crimes that generate such fears include armed robbery, kidnapping and burglary/theft. Anyanwu (2010) reports for instance, that tension grips Awka as gunmen storm again. In the report, a prominent politician was said to have been abducted in the process. Igbo (1999) observed that at Onitsha, there is apparent inability of the police to cope with challenges of safeguarding lives and property in the area. Ndulue (2010), Ojo (2009) and Onyema & Ikegwuonwu (2008) made similar observations. Also participants in the FGD groups and those interviewed expressed similar worries.

It was found that informal policing structures exist in the study area and enjoyed an excellent appreciation by the public. Egbue (2006) notes that such groups popularly called 'vigilante' blossomed since late 1990 due to failure of formal structures to cope with crime control. FGD participants in Anambra described the vigilante groups as the only hope for safety in the area.

While public perception of vigilante was positive (good), their view of the police was generally negative. This may not be unconnected to their poor performance in the areas of safety and security. Ugwoke (2003) laments police arbitrary performance which negates the principle of rule of law. For Kolo (2002), the police in Nigeria are a conclusive failure.

The study also observed differences in perception of safety and security across income levels and between rural and urban residents. The implication of this trend is that unity of effort required to pursue safety and security matters across segments of society may never materialize. The situation is also a clue to the differential levels of safety and security whereby rural areas are relatively safer than urban towns, and where the upper income groups are more worried about their safety especially in this era of kidnapping.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of findings of this study the following recommendations are posited.

- Crime reduction should be of paramount concern to state and local governments and all communities in the Southeast zone. This is with view to curtail the current high level of crime and fear of crime in the area.
- Police and vigilante groups should co-operate and integrate efforts towards safety and security services.
- Police and vigilante should also partner with the communities for crime prevention and control.

- Police and vigilante groups should be adequately equipped, trained and remunerated to make them motivated and very efficient.
- All segments of the society should be enlightened about their role in safety and security matters and to assist security operatives.

### References

- Adeniran .T. (2002). *Poverty and Practice of Democracy in Nigeria..* Paper Presented at the Conference on Culture and the Practice of Democracy in Nigeria. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, in Collaboration with Ford foundation of USA, 2<sup>nd</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> April.
- Anyanwu .G. (2010). *Tension as Gunmen Storm Awka.* Daily Sun, July 29.
- Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University (2009). *Report on Community Policing Project Baseline Survey in Anambra State.*
- Egbue N.G. (2006). Youth Alienation and High Incidence of Violence in Anambra State. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Empirical Research, .3, No.3.*
- Igbo E.U.M. (1999). *Introduction to Criminology.* Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publishing Ltd.
- Kolo B.G. (2002). Public Perception of the Police as an Element of the Criminal Justice System. In the *Nigerian Social Scientist, 5(2).*
- National Population Commission (NPC,2006). *Breakdown of Nigeria's Population by States.*
- Ndulue .F.(2010). *Kidnappers Invade Ezinifite.* National Light Newspaper, Monday 16<sup>th</sup> July
- Nnoli .O. (1980). *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria,* Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers
- Ojo. P. (2009). *ANSU Lecturer Murdered,* The Christian Outlook, 18 (3) February
- Onyema .M. & Ikegwonwu .U.(2008). *Robbers Attack Motherless Babies Home,*Trinitas Newspaper, 57, 1, January.
- Ugwoke C.U. (2003). The Police and Democratic Process: The Case of Nigeria. *Journal of the Sociological sciences, 1(1).*