

Vigilante Groups and Crime Prevention and Control in Nigeria: A Study in Functional Analysis

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[0173] Abstract

Vigilante groups in Nigeria have emerged as a response to the perceived ineffectiveness of formal law enforcement agencies particularly the police in controlling rising crime rates. They are often composed of volunteers from the community and operates under various structures, from informal neighbourhood watches to more organized state-sponsored groups. Studies indicate that their success often stems from the local knowledge, community trust and ability to respond swiftly due to their proximity. While vigilantee groups can contribute to crime reduction in certain contexts, their activities also carry significant risks. It is within this context that the study explores the roles of vigilante security outfit in crime prevention and control in Nigeria. The study adopted the functionalist theory in the explanation of the discourse. The utility of the theory to the study is that when state institutions are perceived as unable to effectively prevent and control crime, communities creates informal mechanisms (vigilante groups) to fulfil this essential social function. This highlights the idea that when one part of the system fails, other parts may emerge or adapt to maintain social order. Findings from the study revealed that their effectiveness is often hampered by their own internal challenges and this persistent systematic issues within the Nigerian security apparatus, hence, despite their presence crime continues to be a significant problem. The study recommended that in order to harness the benefits of vigilante groups while mitigating their risks, government should evolve better regulation, training, adequate resources and integration into the formal security framework with robust accountability mechanisms.

Keywords: Crime Prevention and Control, Extrajudicial Killings, Formal Law Enforcement Agencies, Human Rights Violations and Vigilante Groups

Introduction

The term vigilantism originates from the Latin word *vigilans*, which means "a watchman, a guard, or one who observes." This kind of non-state or self-policing is defined by reactive, ad hoc, and often violent crime control tactics, including organized attempts by groups of people to enforce standards and ensure compliance with law and order for their communities. It often resorts to violence because to the perceived ineffectiveness of governmental institutions, particularly the police and the judiciary. The formation and proliferation of vigilante groups in Nigeria have deep historical roots, stemming from a complex interplay of pre-colonial traditions, colonial policies and post-colonial governance failures. This is because, before the arrival of colonial powers, various indigenous Nigerian communities had their own established self-help institutions for maintaining public order and security. These often involved community guards, local defense groups and traditional system of justice and dispute resolution. These groups were integral to the social fabric and were often based on lineage, compounds, urban cum wards providing protection against theft and other forms of criminality (Sunday and Piate, 2019). The British colonial administration upon conquering and consolidating its hold over Nigeria, sought to establish a monopoly on the use of force, which led to the creation of the Nigerian Police Force in 1930, supported by Native Authority Police in some areas. Colonial authorities disregarded indigenous policing arrangements, viewing them as threat to their control. The colonial police force was often seen by the natives as serving the interests of the

colonial rulers rather than fostering social peace or protecting the local population. This strangers regulating strangers approach alienated many communities (Piate, Udo and Emeh, 2025). Nigeria upon attainment of independence in 1960, the Federal and regional (now state) governments largely retained the centralized colonial police structure, which meant that the police remained remote from many communities and often continued to be perceived as an instrument of the state rather than a service provider for the people. The post-colonial police inherited the challenges of underfunding, inadequate training and equipment which hampered their effectiveness in a rapidly evolving and increasingly complex society like the Nigerian State (Baker, 2008; Piate, 2014). A fundamental and recurring antecedent to vigilantism in Nigeria is the perceived and actual failure of the state to effectively provide security and administer justice to its citizens. This has been a persistent problem since independence, exacerbated by various factors, such as the rising crime rates accentuated by the Nigerian civil war, which led to a proliferation of firearms, contributing to a significant rise in armed robbery and other violent crime in the 1970s and beyond.

Again, the Nigerian Police Force is often perceived as underfunded, understaffed, ill-equipped and plagued by corruption, human rights abuses and lack of responsiveness, this has led to a widespread loss of faith in their capacity to protect lives and property. While vigilante groups existed before 1999, Nigeria's return to democracy witnessed a significant proliferation and diversification of these groups. This was partly due to the increased space for Civil Society Organizations and partly due to continued or even escalating insecurity. Vigilante groups in Nigeria often organized along ethnic, religious or community lines. This reflects a deeper sense of siege among specific groups who feel unprotected by the state (Piate, 2014). These groups include the then Bakassi Boys in the Southeast which emerged in response to armed robbery and other crimes, often employing extrajudicial methods, O'odua People's Congress (OPC) of the Southwest, initially formed to protect Yoruba interests, it also engaged in crime fighting, Hisbah, religious police committees in some northern states that enforce sharia law and Civilian Joint Taskforce (CJTF) in the Northeast formed to combat Boko Haram insurgency. Nigeria vigilantism, in essence, is a direct response to a perceived security vacuum created by weak and often unresponsive state. It is a manifestation of communities resorting to self-help to protect themselves, drawing on a historical tradition of community-based security that predates the modern Nigerian State (Piate, 2014). Human societies are faced with various challenges and problems which is due to the fact that individual members of any given society tend to behave in different ways. While some behave in a manner that conforms to society norms, customs, traditions as well as rules and regulations, others may behave in a non-conformist manner resulting in deviant and criminal behaviours. The worldwide increase in crime rates may be ascribed to the inadequacy of official crime control techniques to successfully mitigate criminal occurrences. The ineffectiveness and inefficiency of formal crime control mechanisms likely contribute to the emergence and persistence of crimes such as terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, rape, assassination, theft, and ethnic militia activities in various regions of Nigeria (Anyo, Tagher and Ugbem-Onah, 2024; Piate, 2025). The police and other security forces, tasked with the constitutional obligation to provide safety, have failed to secure the lives and property of the populace. The services of these institutional crime control bodies seem to be costly and inefficient. The perceived deficiency in operational efficiency and service delivery prompted the formation of vigilante organizations in Nigeria. The support of vigilante groups has been notable in enhancing the community's pursuit of economical, accessible, and prompt mechanisms for crime control and order maintenance (Sunday and Piate, 2024). Research on informal security, such as vigilante organizations, reveals that fifty percent of Nigerians use their services for protection against criminal assaults. Some contend that the efficacy of vigilantes is evident in their function as covert operatives outside the purview of official authorities (Chukwuma, 2002; Alemika and Chukwuma, 2003; Singer, 2003; Yusuf, 2024; Sunday, Piate, Abunimye, Ishaya and Edet, 2024). The functions of vigilantes encompass the following: crime prevention by enhancing security via collaborative patrols with law enforcement, diminishing opportunities for criminal activity through heightened

awareness campaigns, establishing neighborhood crime prevention initiatives, aiding the police in identifying offenders, facilitating crime detection through effective communication with law enforcement, and promptly reporting suspicious activities to both the police and community members regarding dubious individuals. Each vigilante group has a detective team among its different commands, responsible for investigating or reporting crimes to the appropriate security services (Obeagu, 2014; Yahaya and Bello, 2019). The efficacy and growing involvement of community-based informal security organizations at local and state levels in Nigeria are ascribed to societal apprehension over security and the police's ineffectiveness in managing the rising tide of crime (Adejoh, 2013). That is, it arose to meet societal demand for safety and security.

Several views have been raised regarding the operational responsibilities of these informal security organizations (Onwuegbusi, 2017). While some people are content with their operating responsibilities despite their flaws and drawbacks, others are adamant about their continuous operation despite their abuses and excesses. According to Amnesty International Worldwide (2013), those in support are people who have victim of protracted surge in insecurity such as armed robbery and other high profile crime related due to police ineffectiveness (Elechi, 2003). Those that are against vigilante groups argued that armed informal security organizations routinely carry out executions, wrongful arrests and detention, and degrading treatment of individuals. In many parts of the country, there have been several incidents of abuses of human rights by informal security groups and vigilante groups. People frequently accuse members of these groups of extortion, harassment, arson and other criminal offenses/abuse. Their argument is premised on the fact that, the objective of establishing vigilante groups was to complement the policing role of the regular state security forces by improving or adding new qualities to make the act of policing attractive and effective. It was expected that since the state security forces have failed by being notorious for the abuse, torture and violation of the fundamental rights of the citizens, including extra-legal killings, the members of the vigilante groups would have avoided such atrocities (Amnesty International Report, 2003).

However, evidence and events have demonstrated that the vigilante groups were not different from the state security agencies in their act of abusing human fundamental rights and that the vigilante groups were even more brutal than the state security agencies. The summary is that some Nigerians oppose vigilante groups due to concerns about human rights abuses, lack of accountability and the potential for them to devolve into ethnic militias or been used for political gain. There are also concerns about their effectiveness and whether they can truly combat crime without resorting to violence and violating the rights of individuals (Piate, 2017). To corroborate this fact, Hanson and Akran (2024) in examining the causal relationship between vigilante groups and Human Rights Abuses in Orashi Area of Rivers State opined that vigilante groups employed excessive force even to the point of occasioning harm on the victim in the course of discharging their duties against the provisions of law and all civilized norms. In the event of any resident defaulting in payment of monthly dues, which is supposed to be voluntary or free will for the member of vigilante groups who is doing the work on voluntary understanding, such defaulter risks having his or her property seized or auctioned. Others according to them, is the issue of resort to cruel and corporal punishment like parading a victim around the community naked, intrusion into private homes in the name of discharging their duties and most times at odd hours and extrajudicial killing. It is within this context that the study explores the roles of vigilante security outfit in crime prevention and control in Nigeria.

Theoretical Explication of the Discourse

The research used functionalist theory to elucidate the discourse. The functionalist theory in sociology provides a framework for seeing society as a complex system in which its components collaborate to foster solidarity and stability. The principal advocates of the idea are Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, Talcott

Parsons, and Robert Merton. Emile Durkheim often considered the founder of functionalism, focused on how societies maintain internal stability and survive overtime. He introduced concepts like mechanical and organic solidarity, anomie and the idea that crime serves essential functions for society.

On its part, Spencer viewed society as an organism with interconnected parts working to meet the needs of its members. He applied biological analogies to social evolution and natural selection. Parsons expanded on Durkheim's work, developing the idea that society is a functioning structure with specific needs (adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance) that are met by social institutions. While building on the work of his predecessors, Merton refined functionalist thought by distinguishing between manifest (intended and recognized) and latent (unintended and often unrecognized) functions of social institutions. He also developed strain theory to explain deviance.

The core assumptions of the theory are: society is viewed as a complex system made up of interconnected and independent parts (institutions; norms, values, groups) that work together, societies tend towards stability; equilibrium and social order, social institutions and norms are seen as necessary to maintain this order and prevent widespread conflict; there is a general consensus among members of society on fundamental values and norms which leads to cooperative efforts to achieve common goals, this shared understanding is fostered through socialization and that crime and deviance are seen as inevitable and even necessary aspects of healthy society, that is, they serve various functions such as reinforcing social norms, promoting social cohesion and acting as a catalyst for social change.

The functionalist theory offered several utilities for understanding vigilante groups and crime prevention and control in Nigeria. That is, the emergence of vigilante groups in Nigeria can be seen as a response to a dysfunction or gap in the formal state security apparatus (the Nigerian police force). When state institutions are perceived as unable to effectively prevent and control crime, communities create informal mechanisms (vigilante groups) to fulfil this essential social function. This highlights the idea that when one part of the system fails, other parts may emerge or adapt to maintain social order. Vigilante groups, despite their informal nature, serve the manifest function of maintaining social order and security within communities. By apprehending criminals, resolving disputes and enforcing local norms, they contribute to the overall stability and well-being of the community. Their activities can also foster a sense of social cohesion among community members who unite against perceived threats. Functionalism allows for the analysis of both manifest and latent functions. While the manifest function of vigilante groups is crime control, they may also have latent functions such as providing employment for some youth or creating a sense of local empowerment. However, it also considers dysfunctions. The human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings and potential for corruption associated with some vigilante groups in Nigeria represent significant dysfunction that disrupt social order rather than promote it. Finally, the rise of vigilante groups can be seen as a form of social adaptation to changing crime patterns and weaknesses in formal policing. If these groups are effective, they might pressure the state to reform its security institutions or even integrate some aspects of community policing into formal structures, thus contributing to social change (Ogbonnaya, 2020; Onyeozili, 2005; Piate and Effiong, 2021; Piate, 2024).

Vigilante Security Outfit and Crime Prevention and Control in Nigeria

A vigilante security outfit refers to groups of individuals who arm themselves to safeguard their families and communities in response to perceived deficiencies in governmental security presence. They are collectives of individuals who own weaponry to safeguard themselves and their society when they perceive governmental failure in this regard (Oyagi, 2016). In Nigeria, vigilante service organizations have been largely recognized for their different degrees of success. This might be ascribed to their efficacy and efficiency in addressing security risks. The use of traditional voodoo in some communities to detect criminal members has emerged as an effective strategy in mitigating the concerns of insecurity. The pervasive environment of distrust between official state security agencies and residents has emerged as a

significant catalyst, prompting individuals to pursue alternative solutions as a coping mechanism (Ogbozor, 2016; Baker, 2002). Consequently, the informal security institution is favored above official security organizations in the majority of communities. Perceptions of the informal security institution are founded on three factors: availability, trust, and efficacy. In most instances, law enforcement is not promptly accessible when needed in rural areas. Additionally, additional variables contributing to the overall preference for vigilante groups over the police include their familiarity with the local surroundings. The function of vigilante organizations in crime prevention, reduction, detention, and control mostly involves providing assistance to the police and other state security authorities. Their specialized duties including supplying intelligence on criminal activities and threats to law enforcement and other security entities, apprehending criminal elements in the absence of security agents, and then transferring them to the relevant security authorities. The relationship between vigilantism and crime prevention is intricate and often controversial.

While vigilante groups sometimes arise to address perceived gaps in formal law enforcement and can contribute to crime reduction in certain contexts, their activities also carry significant risks. The breakdown of the connection include: in areas where formal policing is inadequate, understaffed or inefficient due to lack of resources, corruption or other institutional issues, vigilante groups often emerge as a community-led response to escalating crime rates by filling security gaps. They fill a void in providing security. Vigilantes are typically members of the local community, possessing intimate knowledge of the area, its residents and potential criminals. This local insight can enable them to identify and address security threats more efficiently and provide valuable intelligence to formal law enforcement. Their prompt presence and dedication to their communities may result in swifter reactions to situations than professional police teams, thereby dissuading offenders. The observable presence of vigilantes may instill fear in criminals, hindering their ability to operate unimpeded. When collaborating with law enforcement, vigilante organizations may augment their efforts by supplying information, aiding in arrests (often transferring suspects to the police), and bolstering community security. Vigilante security groups have demonstrated efficacy in combating crime in Nigeria due to their rapid response to security threats, surveillance of suspicious activities and individuals, collaboration with the community to address criminality, supplementing police efforts in areas of insufficient law enforcement, and ensuring a continuous presence within the community. For example, with a comprehensive awareness of counterinsurgency terrains, vigilante organizations have aided in identifying and dismantling critical insurgent institutions via local information. They have enabled the apprehension of prominent Boko Haram suspects and the rescue of some abductees. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), as a vigilante entity, has significantly aided the Federal government's campaign against terrorism. They were accountable for the identification, arrest, and elimination of Boko Haram militants. This has elucidated the rationale for the fact that prominent cities like as Maiduguri and Biu, where the Civilian Joint Task Force is prominently present, have not been usurped by the Sect (Anie and Odije, 2019). The relative efficacy of vigilantes in counterinsurgency in Nigeria substantiates the premise in societal and human security literature that security is optimally delivered by the populace rather than imposed upon them (Smah, 2020). Citizens place their trust in vigilante services due to their apprehensions regarding crime and their diminished confidence in the state's capacity to safeguard them (Ogye, 2014; Tonwe and Osemwota, 2013). Vigilante groups exhibit a profound commitment to their responsibilities, primarily due to their membership being drawn from the communities they serve, coupled with their resolve to enhance security, combat crime, and maintain accountability to the community (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2004; Oyagi, 2016).

The measures and methods adopted by vigilante service groups in crime prevention and control in Nigeria include: constant patrol around the community, regular night watch, enforcement of local community laws, apprehension of suspected criminals and mounting of checkpoints at community borders. Vigilante groups conduct foot patrols, especially at night to monitor their areas, deter potential

criminals and reassure residents. They often man street entrances or village gates. Vigilante groups also engage in intelligence gathering, that is they are crucial in collecting information on suspected criminals, their activities and hideouts within their communities. This local intelligence is often shared with formal police for investigation. Vigilantes often apprehend suspected criminals. However, by Nigerian law, they are legally obligated to handover suspects immediately to the police for formal investigation and prosecution. Their visible presence and reputation for swift, albeit sometimes harsh action are believed to deter offenders and prospective lawbreakers. They mobilize community members, including landlords, tenants and community leaders to actively participate in security efforts and report suspicious activities. This fosters a sense of collective responsibility for security. More organized vigilante groups may conduct routine beat patrols, stop and search individuals and detain those they deem suspicious. Some group engage in more sophisticated methods like undercover work and even provide escorts for individuals.

Table 1: PROFILE OF NON-STATE SECURITY PROVIDERS IN SOME SELECTED STATES OF NIGERIA

Zone	State	Name of Non-State Actor	Sponsor
South-East Zone	Abia State	Abia State Vigilante Group	Abia State Government
		Neighbourhood Watch	Host Communities
	Anambra	Anambra State Vigilante Services	Anambra State Government
		Neighbourhood Watch	Host Communities
	Ebonyi	Ebonyi State Neighbourhood Watch	Ebonyi State Government
		Community Vigilante	Host Communities
	Enugu	Enugu State Neighbourhood Association and Watch Groups	Enugu State Government
		Community Vigilante	Host Communities
	Imo	Imo Security Watch and Vigilante Group	Imo State Government
		Vigilante Group of Nigeria	Private Individuals
South-West Zone	Ekiti	Neighbourhood Watch	Host Communities
		Ekiti State Vigilante Group	Ekiti State Government
		Oodua People's Congress	Private Individuals
		Vigilante Group of Nigeria	
	Lagos	Lagos Neighbourhood Safety Corps (LNSC)	Lagos State Government
		Oodua People's Congress	Private Individuals
		Vigilante Group of Nigeria	
		Vigilante Service of Ogun State	Ogun State Government
	Ogun	Oodua People's Congress	Private Individuals
		Vigilante Group of Nigeria	
	Osun	Harmonized Vigilante Group	Osun State Government
		Oodua People's Congress	Private Individuals

South-South Zone	Oyo	Vigilante Group of Nigeria	
		Yoruba K'OYA Movement	
		Oodua People's Congress	
		Vigilante Group of Nigeria	
	Akwa Ibom	Mboho Mme Ette Idung ke Akwa Ibom	Akwa Ibom
		Vigilante Group of Nigeria	Private Individuals
		Community Vigilante Groups	Host Communities
	Bayelsa	Bayelsa State Volunteer Service	Bayelsa State Government
		Egbesu Boys of Africa	Private Individuals
		Vigilante Group of Nigeria	
	Delta	Vigilante Group of Niger	Private Individuals
		Niger Delta Vigilante	
	Edo	Edo State Integrated Vigilante Service	Edo State Government
		Vigilante Group of Nigeria	Private Individuals
	Rivers	Neighbourhood Safety Agency of Rivers State Government	Rivers State Government
		Vigilante Group of Nigeria	Self-sponsored
Benue	Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)	Benue State Government	
	Neighbourhood Watch	Host Communities	
North Central Zone	Nasarawa	Nasarawa State Youth Empowerment Scheme (NSYES)	Nasarawa State Government
		Neighbourhood Watch	Host Communities
	Kogi	Vigilante Group of Nigeria	
		Enyidudu Community	Host Communities
Plateau	Operation Rainbow	Plateau State Government	
	Vigilante Group of Nigeria	Self-sponsored	
North-East Zone	Adamawa	Neighbourhood Watch	Host Communities
		Yan Banga (Night Watch)	
		Vigilante Group Adamawa State	Adamawa State Government
		Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)	
	Bauchi	Amalgamated Union of Nigeria Hunters	Self-sponsored
		The Sarasuka	Host Communities
	Borno	The Vigilante Group of Wunti	
		Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)	Self-sponsored
Gombe	Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme (BOYES)	Borno State Government	
	Gombe Vigilante Group	Gombe State Government	

North-West Zone	Taraba	The Hunters Association	Self-sponsored
		The Kalare Youth	
	Yobe	The Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) also known as the Taraba State Vigilante Group (TSVG)	Taraba State Government
		Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)	Yobe State Government
	Jigawa	The Hunters Association	Self-sponsored
		The Youth Vigilante Group	Host Local Governments
	Kaduna	Jigawa State Vigilante Group of Nigeria (JVGN)	Jigawa State Government
		Kaduna Vigilante Group of Nigeria (K-VGN)	Kaduna State Government
	Kano	Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) also known as Kabala Concern Forum (Mammal da fora)	
		Kano State Vigilante Group of Nigeria (KVGn)	Kano State Government
	Zamfara	Hisbah	
		Zamfara State Vigilante Service	Zamfara State Government
		Hisbah	

Source: Ogbonnaya (2020)

Despite the formation of vigilante groups to assist normal police services in Nigeria, crime continues to persist due to a complex interplay of factors that limit the effectiveness of these groups and highlight systemic issues within the broader security landscape. Major findings include: vigilante groups often operate with inadequate resources, including a shortage of patrol vehicles, communication gadgets, modern weapons, uniforms, flashlights and rain gear. This severely hampers their operational capacity. Many vigilantes lack formal training in crime detection, law enforcement procedures and human rights. This can lead to the use of excessive force, human rights abuses, unlawful killing and a general lack of professionalism, eroding public trusts. There is also the issue of an absence of enabling legal instruments to properly regulate vigilante groups. This lack of official recognition and oversight contributes to a profound lack of accountability for their actions, allowing egregious crime like public executions, illegal detention, torture and extortions to go unpunished. Vigilante groups are often informally funded through community contributions which can be meager and irregular. This financial insecurity can lead to corruption, as vigilantes may be tempted to engaged in illicit activities or be co-opted by local elites and political figures for personal gain or to settle scores.

Vigilantes can encounter hostility from law enforcement while doing their responsibilities. Although examples of effective collaboration exist, insufficient cooperation and confidence may impede successful crime combat. They may be used by politicians or local elites for personal agendas, diverting their allegiance from community defense to supporting entrenched interests. This compromises their initial intent and may exacerbate violence, particularly in regions characterized by ethnic or community strife. Vigilante groups often lack formal organization, defined operating protocols, standardized processes, and established hierarchies or compensation structures. The informal character engenders discrepancies and a deficiency of a cohesive approach. Vigilante organizations significantly contribute to crime prevention and control in Nigeria; yet, their activities encounter many challenges that impede their

efficacy and provoke concerns. Significant problems include the lack of a legal framework and regulatory measures. Currently, in Nigeria, there is no legislation that establishes, empowers, mandates, recognizes, or defines the authority of vigilante groups to operate as crime control entities. Vigilante organizations function without explicit legal authorization or defined statutes outlining their rights, tasks, and restrictions. The illicit character may raise inquiries about their validity and responsibility. The absence of a legal framework sometimes leads both the police and the public to dispute the legitimacy of vigilante organizations. This mindset has demotivated many inside the company, resulting in a poor performance rating (Cleen, 2003; Chikwendu, 2016; Okeke, 2013).

The interaction with official police remains ambiguous. The connection between vigilantes and professional police is often murky, resulting in problems such as police harassment of vigilantes or inadequate transfer of suspects. Although some collaboration is present, a more structured integration is required. The absence of effective statutory regulatory agencies allows vigilante organizations to operate without sufficient control, increasing the potential for abuses. The activities of armed vigilante organizations operating outside governmental oversight create significant concerns about the use and potential misuse of weaponry. This reflects the state's failure and the danger of a steady descent into state failure and collapse, which may give rise to warlords in various regions of the nation. The expansion of guns inside society due to the actions of vigilante organizations is a significant catalyst for conflict and violent crime overall (Anyo et al., 2024). The degree to which these groups have led to widespread instances of ethnic, religious, and communal violence requires investigation, since many prominent vigilante organizations are mostly ethnic militias (Okeke, 2013). The problem of human rights breaches and abuse of power pertains to extrajudicial murders and torture. The activities of vigilante organizations raise apprehensions about the safeguarding of human rights, adherence to the rule of law, and the principle of due process. Vigilante organizations face criticism about their adherence to the human rights of suspects during investigations. Numerous accounts indicate that vigilante groups are perpetrating human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, unlawful detentions, torture, necklacing of suspects, hanging, deployment of tear gas, electrocution of individuals, and the application of pepper to sensitive areas such as the anus, eyes, penis, and vagina, as well as inflicting severe corporal punishment on suspects. This undermines public confidence and may result in diminished community backing.

Extrajudicial killing refers to the unlawful killing of an individual without adherence to the due process of law, as established by a competent judicial authority after a formal trial and a subsequent decision of guilt, resulting in the imposition of a punishment. Numerous vigilante organizations have been implicated in extrajudicial executions, which contradicts the intended objective of their services. Furthermore, many vigilantes lack proper training in law enforcement protocols, human rights, and the use of force, resulting in unstandardized operations and an increased potential for abuse. The lack of an accountability system results in perpetrators of abuse often escaping punishment. Vigilante organizations often have insufficient financing, resulting in a deficit of critical operating equipment, including patrol cars and communication devices. No institution or organization can run, operate, or perform optimally without the provision of essential facilities to promote competence and efficiency. The absence of work tools significantly impairs the operation of institutions or organizations. In addition to human rights, inadequate training in criminal detection, investigative methodologies, and legal protocols constrains their efficacy. Another obstacle is the topic of pay. Vigilante organizations provide security services to safeguard the lives and property of community members; nevertheless, the personnel executing these duties are little compensated, which undermines their morale. The absence of payment tokens for full-time members compels some to engage in dishonest behaviors, which may subsequently result in diminished morale.

In Nigeria, vigilantes are often equipped with rudimentary or locally sourced firearms, which constrains their ability to face highly armed criminals such as bandits or kidnappers. Overcoming these challenges necessitates a comprehensive strategy that encompasses legal reforms to formalize and

regulate vigilante activities, the provision of sufficient training and resources, the establishment of strong oversight and accountability mechanisms, and the promotion of enhanced collaboration and trust between vigilante groups and formal law enforcement agencies.

Conclusion

Vigilante groups in Nigeria have emerged as a response to the perceived ineffectiveness of formal law enforcement agencies particularly the police in controlling rising crime rates. They are often composed of volunteers from the community and operate under various structures, from informal neighbourhood watches to more organized state-sponsored groups. Studies indicate that their success often stems from their local knowledge, community trust and ability to respond swiftly due to their proximity. While vigilante groups can contribute to crime reduction in certain contexts, their activities also carry significant risks. Findings of the study reveal that their effectiveness is often hampered by their own internal challenges and the persistent systemic issues within the Nigerian security apparatus. This has led to a situation where despite their presence, crime continues to be a significant problem.

The way forward is that in order to harness the benefits of vigilante groups while mitigating their risks, the study recommends better regulation, training, adequate resources and integration into the formal security framework with robust accountability mechanisms.

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