


State Vigilante Services and Crime Reduction in Anambra State Nigeria (2014-2022)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Anambra State Vigilante Services, crime reduction, armed robbery, community security, Nigeria.	Crime poses a serious threat to human security and development in Nigeria, including Anambra State. To combat this, the Anambra State government established the Anambra State Vigilante Services (AVS) to support the Nigeria Police and other security agencies. This study examined the role of AVS in crime reduction in Anambra State from 2014 to 2022, focusing on its collaboration with other security agencies in curbing armed robbery and kidnapping. Guided by one research question and hypothesis, the study was anchored on the Broken Windows Theory by Wilson and Kelling (1982). A descriptive research design was adopted. The entire population of 340 was studied using judgmental sampling. Data were collected using a structured Likert-type questionnaire, validated by experts and found reliable with a Cronbach alpha of 0.80. Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation were used for analysis. Findings revealed that collaboration between AVS and other agencies significantly reduced armed robbery and kidnapping. The study concludes that AVS, through community-based intelligence and partnerships, plays a vital role in crime reduction. It recommends that the government and security agencies should sustain and strengthen collaboration with AVS to enhance safety and development across communities in Anambra State.
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INTRODUCTION

Provision of adequate security is a social pre-requisite for the survival of any society. Every society takes appropriate measures to protect the lives and property of people living within its boundaries. Business and social activities may not go on freely without adequate security. This fundamental essence of security may be the reason why societies from time immemorial made efforts to police their neighbourhoods in order to secure them from criminal victimization. Security has to do with the act of preventing and protecting in order to ensure that certain facilities, equipment, persons or activities are safe from damage, pilferage, destruction, murder or disruption. The emergence and growth of community policing has thrived on the inadequacies, shortcomings and several immunities attributed to formal

policing systems in Nigeria. The establishment of a central police force had been more of a weakness than strength to policing in Nigeria; hence, the emergence of community policing. To make matters worse, the corruption perception of the Nigerian police by the Nigerian people over the years heightened consequently the Nigerian police is perceived as the most corrupt government institution both locally and internationally worsening community-police relation. Under this state of affairs, the Nigerian police have been unable to fight crime let alone prevent it (Ikuteyijo and Rotimi, 2012).

In Nigeria, night guards and vigilante groups have emerged in response to theft and armed robbery. Vigilante groups existed in Nigeria for decades not only under civilian rule, but also during the previous military regimes of Generals Babangida, Abacha and Abubakar. They have traditionally been seen as an extension to the work of law enforcement officers in a country with high level of delinquency and lack of police training, equipment and personnel. Thus, the traditional concept of vigilante in Nigeria exclusively refers to un-armed voluntary citizen or group created in local communities to help the security forces confront common criminality and social violence by arresting suspected delinquents and handing them over to the police. The Nigerian law recognizes the lawfulness of vigilante groups arresting suspected criminals provided that they are unarmed and that the suspect is immediately handed over to the police (Aniche, 2018).

Following the rise in security challenges in the country, different security agencies in the form of quasi police outfits began to re-emerge in different parts of the country as communities started resorting to traditional policing by rational choice; and with time, informal policing received a strong backing and support from the local people. In fact, some of these quasi-police outfits, at some point, became well recognized by the government as they complement the efforts of the Police. Although later plagued and bugged down by a lot of illegalities and shoddy businesses, the initial support given to the Bakkasi Boys by the government and the people, showed the efficacy of this security outfit in its early days. Currently, the vigilante group in Anambra state is a very vibrant example of the quasi-police outfits in Nigeria with success stories in the security sector of the state.

Similar success stories have been obtained in other areas where “many urban poor depend on a wide range of informal policing structures (Neighbourhood Watches, Community Guards, and Vigilantes) for the delivery of a measure of safety and security”. The case of Kaduna has not been far from impressive since the Kaduna State House of Assembly passed the State Vigilante Service Law on the 6th of June 2016. In areas such as the Calabar Metropolis where vigilantes operate, and Lagos, where the Neighbourhood Crime Watch Operated, there was an observed healthy co-operation between these informal policing structures and the Nigeria Police Force. These quasi-police outfits reportedly caught criminals, handed them over to the police, and shared vital security information with the police. In fact, the involvement of the O’dua People’s Congress (OPC) in the policing of some parts of Lagos State was said to have improved commercial activity in Oshodi and its environs.

Again, despite the controversies confronting its establishment, the gradual rise of the South-West Security outfit known as Amotekun is also another example of the sprouting of

such quasi-police outfits in Nigeria. Presently, a similar security outfit is taking shape in the South-South region of Nigeria to provide security for the people of the South-South region. A similar development is seen in to be gradually unfolding in the South-East of Nigeria with an unconventional security outfit called the Eastern Security Network, formed by the controversial Biafran Leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. Also, some like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the North Eastern part even have the full recognition and backing of the Federal government.

All these are only a consequence of the rise in insecurity in Nigeria which has made some Nigerians to begin to clamor for state police while others oppose it. What one may ask is why some of these quasi-police outfits, which almost function as state police, would get the backing of not just the state governments, but also that of the Federal government, yet state owned police remain unrecognized in Nigeria. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the effect of Anambra State vigilante services and Crime reduction, 2014-2022. The main objective of the study is to examine the impact of the Anambra State Vigilante Services on crime reduction in Anambra State between 2014 and 2022. Specifically, the study aims to assess how collaboration between the vigilante services and other security agencies has contributed to reducing incidents of armed robbery and kidnapping in the state.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the effect of collaboration between Anambra State Vigilante Services (ASVS) and formal security agencies on crime reduction, particularly armed robbery and kidnapping, in Anambra State between 2014 and 2022. The study population comprised 340 respondents, including ASVS members, community leaders, and local security stakeholders. Given the small and manageable population size, a census sampling method was adopted, using the entire population as the sample. A structured Likert-scale questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection, focusing on participants' perceptions of ASVS collaboration and its impact on crime rates. The questionnaire was validated by experts and tested for reliability using the Cronbach Alpha method, which produced a coefficient of 0.80, indicating strong reliability. Data were gathered directly through field administration and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, specifically Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, to test the hypothesis. A significance level of 0.05 was used. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were upheld throughout the research. The study is guided by a hypothesis that examines the impact of collaboration between the Anambra State Vigilante Services and other security agencies on crime reduction. The alternate hypothesis (H_1) proposes that this collaboration has a significant effect on reducing the rate of armed robbery and kidnapping in Anambra State. Conversely, the null hypothesis (H_0) suggests that the collaboration does not have a significant effect on crime reduction in the state.

Anambra State Vigilante Services (AVS)

Vigilante groups are diverse and serve various purposes, often assuming the responsibility of protecting their communities and upholding law and order. (Agbu, 2004) defines them as self-defense units that can be locally, ethnically, state, or religiously based. (Okechukwu, 2015) sees them as youth-based ethnic militias driven by the interests of their communities, often resorting to violence. Prominent examples include the Bakassi Boys, O'odua People's Congress, and Egbesu Boys. (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2004) identify four types of vigilante groups in Nigeria: religious, ethnic, state-sponsored, and community-based. (Erhurhu, 2017) notes that community vigilantes, such as those in Anambra State, are funded by residents to combat crime and safeguard lives and property. These groups use rudimentary tools like whistles and machetes for night patrols, providing a grassroots approach to security.

Vigilantism arises when citizens take the law into their hands to enforce justice, often due to perceived inefficiencies in law enforcement (Breckenridge, 2019; Chapkis, 2019). Though it may emerge from a civic duty, vigilantism often disrupts the legal process, undermines due process, and results in violence or human rights violations (Hughes & Edwards, 2018; Nadarajah & Sriskandarajah, 2020). (Zárate, 2019) explains that these groups arise from mistrust in the justice system and function outside legal frameworks. Social media also influences modern vigilantism, with "cyber mobs" exposing alleged offenders online, leading to public shaming and even false accusations (Sharma & Sharma, 2020; Bayley, 2019). The portrayal of vigilantes in media—as either ruthless criminals or misunderstood heroes—often blurs public understanding. (Dahrendorf, 2018) equates them to heavily armed forces, while (Turner, 2014) criticizes their lack of moral compass. (Scott, 2011) argues that views on vigilantism are constructed based on cultural and political perceptions. (Miller, 2018) emphasizes that vigilantes often emerge when institutional responses to social problems are perceived as ineffective, citing the case of Phoenix Jones in Seattle to illustrate the risks of unsupervised community action.

Crime Reduction

Crime is broadly defined as any act punishable under public law (Attenborough, 2010; Aquinas, 2008; Blythe, 2009). (Onoge, 2010) considers crime as any punishable act or omission, while (Clinard, 2011), (Adler et al. 2014), and (Schmallegger, 2004) define it as human conduct that violates criminal laws. (Territo et al. 2011) note that an act becomes a crime only when it violates a specific law with intent or negligence. Nigeria faces growing crime rates, with daily reports of banditry, kidnapping, robbery, and other violent crimes (Daniel, 2021). The rising crime wave has driven citizens to support both police and vigilante groups. According to (RAND, 2013), preventing crime is more cost-effective than prosecuting it. The (UNODC, 2010) defines crime prevention as measures taken to reduce the risk and impact of crimes by addressing their root causes. Crime prevention involves individuals, communities, NGOs, and governments working together (ECOSOC, 2002; AIC, 2003; IPC, 2008). (Sherman et al. 1997) highlight that law enforcement should prioritize crime prevention through both informal and formal strategies.

The ASVS was created to report criminal activity, provide surveillance, and support police efforts. Its effectiveness depends on community cooperation (Bello, 2018; Mohammed, 2015; Okafor, 2014). Human security, as (Odinkalu, 2011) states, is a fundamental right, yet Nigerians continue to live in fear due to rising insecurity (Odekunle, 2011; Bach, 2004; Alemika & Chukwuma, 2010). (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2010) re-emphasize four vigilante types—religious, ethnic, state-sponsored, and community. Religious vigilantes enforce faith-based rules, while ethnic ones defend tribal interests (Chukwuma, 2013). Examples like the Bakassi Boys in the Southeast and Lagos State's Neighbourhood Watch show how these groups emerged to combat unchecked criminality but were sometimes co-opted by state interests.

Collaboration with Other Security Agencies

The failure of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) to ensure safety has made vigilante groups crucial in crime control. (Danbazau, 2007) notes that policing entails safeguarding lives and property, but colonial-era police were designed to protect British interests, not local communities (Chukwuma cited in Danbazau, 2007). Brutality, corruption, and a lack of accountability remain pervasive (Innocent, 2000; Olujinmi, 2005; Raimi & Balogun, 2022), reinforcing public distrust (Alemika et al., 2000). Vigilante groups offer community-based policing, gathering intelligence and managing crowds during events. They aid in tackling theft, rape, and armed robbery, sometimes using local methods like charms and trials. In insurgency-affected areas such as the Northeast and Anambra, vigilantes assist military and police units. They also protect religious and ethnic gatherings, especially after terrorist attacks on worship centers. Though not a substitute for the police, vigilante groups fill crucial gaps. Their success underscores the need for formal collaboration, legal support, and structural integration into national security frameworks.

Empirical Literature

Several studies explore the efficacy of vigilante groups across Nigeria. (Aina et al. 2019) studied the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Borno, showing their success in intelligence gathering and territorial recovery from insurgents. (Jibrin et al. 2019) found similar success in Kano, noting improved local trust but also limitations like poor funding and lack of legal backing.

In Benue, (Anyo et al. 2020) used conflict theory to examine vigilante formation, linking it to poverty and justice system failures. They advocated for legal protection and better training. In Lagos, (Akinlotan et al. 2021) revealed that while crime declined with community policing, systemic corruption and lack of support hindered further progress. In Anambra, (Umeifekwem, 2022) found that AVS effectiveness improved with government support. (Ochiagha et al. 2023) linked vigilante-led community policing to reduced kidnapping, advocating for increased recruitment and collaboration. (Oba et al. 2023) in Bayelsa also confirmed the value of vigilante efforts but emphasized the need for regulation.

(Hauwa et al. 2023) highlighted Kano's Yan-Banga vigilantes' role in intelligence gathering and mediation. (Agbor, 2022), studying law enforcement in Cameroon, emphasized

the importance of legal accountability—lessons applicable to Nigeria. (Adamu et al. 2023) evaluated vigilantes in Kaduna's Birnin Gwari LGA, noting limited success due to lack of coordination. In contrast, (Bashir, 2023) found that community involvement significantly improved crime prevention in Bauchi. (Yisrael et al. 2023) in Cross River and (Igwebuike et al. 2023) in Anambra emphasized the need for institutional support and decentralization of policing. (Ivorgba, 2024) and (Emmanuel, 2024) concluded that community policing enhances trust and cohesion. (Nkwede, 2024) confirmed that it significantly reduced armed robbery in Ebonyi State. These studies collectively argue that while vigilante groups address the failure of formal security systems, their effectiveness depends on funding, training, and regulation.

Gap in Literature

Despite a wealth of literature on Anambra State Vigilante Services and their crime-reduction roles, little attention has been paid to how collaboration between ASVS and formal security agencies has specifically reduced armed robbery and kidnapping in selected LGAs of Anambra. This study addresses that critical gap by examining the synergy between ASVS and other law enforcement bodies in combating these crimes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research results displayed in tabular form as well as detailed descriptive descriptions. The results of the analysis are focused on testing the hypotheses that have been formulated previously, namely

1. $H_1 \rightarrow$ Collaboration between Anambra State Vigilante Service and security agencies has significant effect on reduction of the rate of armed robbery and kidnapping in Anambra State
2. $H_0 \rightarrow$ Collaboration between Anambra State Vigilante Service and security agencies has no significant effect on reduction of the rate of armed robbery and kidnapping in Anambra State

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on the Collaboration Between ASVS and Security Agencies and Its Impact on Armed Robbery and Kidnapping in Anambra State (N = 5)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Collaboration b/t ASVS & security agencies	73.2000	64.8800	5
Armed robbery & kidnapping	73.2000	65.0009	5

The descriptive statistics reveal identical mean values for both the level of collaboration between the Anambra State Vigilante Services (ASVS) and other security agencies and the reduction in armed robbery and kidnapping, each with a mean of (73.20). The standard deviations are (64.88) for collaboration and (65.00) for the crime reduction metric, indicating high variability in responses among the five (5) participants. The equal means suggest a perceived direct relationship—implying that increased collaboration corresponds with a decrease in armed robbery and kidnapping. However, the large spread calls for cautious interpretation and further inferential analysis to establish statistical significance.

Table 2. Correlation Between ASVS Collaboration and the Reduction of Armed Robbery and Kidnapping in Anambra State (N = 5)

		Collaboration b/t ASVS & security agencies		Armed robbery & kidnapping
Collaboration b/t ASVS & Security agencies	Pearson	1		.084
	Correlation			
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.021
	N	5		5
Armed robbery & kidnapping	Pearson	0.84		1
	Correlation			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021		
	N	5		5

The Pearson correlation coefficient between collaboration involving Anambra State Vigilante Services (ASVS) and other security agencies and the reduction in armed robbery and kidnapping is (.084), with a significance level of (.021) at a sample size of (5). While the correlation value is weak and positive, the p-value suggests statistical significance at the 5% level. This implies that even a slight improvement in collaboration may be associated with changes in crime reduction outcomes. The researcher therefore rejects the null hypothesis and conclude that Collaboration between Anambra State Vigilante Service and security agencies has significant effect on reduction of the rate of armed robbery and kidnapping in Anambra State with a correlation value of 0.84.

Discussion

Finding from the research confirms that collaboration between Anambra State Vigilante Service and security agencies has significant effect on reduction of the rate of armed robbery and kidnapping in Anambra State. The implication is that Anambra State Vigilante Services have helped in no small ways to curb the rate and incidence of armed robbery and kidnapping in the respective communities where they exist. They help to arrest certain categories of criminals and more importantly, furnish the police with information about crime and criminals that are beyond their ability to deal with. This finding is in consistence with (Akinlabi et al, 2021) examined the role of vigilante groups in crime reduction and control in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. This study provided information on the role of community vigilante organizations in crime reduction and control in Ile-Ife. This was with a view to documenting and appraising various measures adopted in reducing criminal activities. The study concluded that vigilante groups played an important role in crime reduction and control at the community level.

This section presents the results of the research on Anambra State Vigilante Groups Services and Crime Reduction for the period 2014-2022, presented in the form of tables and descriptive descriptions. The research specifically aims to evaluate the role of collaboration between the Anambra State Vigilante Service and the security forces in reducing crime rates,

particularly armed robbery and kidnapping in Anambra State. The results of the analysis show that the collaboration has a significant effect in reducing crime rates, which confirms the importance of inter-agency cooperation in crime reduction efforts. Thus, the empirical data supports the alternative hypothesis (H_i) and rejects the null hypothesis (H_o), that synergy between vigilante groups and official security agencies is an important factor in reducing robbery and kidnapping rates in the region.

CONCLUSION

An essential prerequisite for the survival of any society is the provision of peace and social order. The police force has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of security. Their duties also include crime prevention, control, planning, coordination and other social services. Due to the obvious ineffectiveness and inefficiencies of the police force, supplementary security networks like the vigilante' groups have emerged obviously to assist the police in their duties. Their emergence therefore, was in response to the rising level of criminal activities. Based on this major finding, the study concludes that rather than dwell on the reported weaknesses and limitations of these vigilante security outfits, any genuine initiative that is committed to improving the human security of the local populations should instead acknowledge the centrality of these outfits in the security landscape of the society and work on their weaknesses with a view to strengthening and improving their performance. In view of the findings, the researcher recommended that the Anambra State Government and security agencies should further strengthen and sustain the collaboration with Vigilante Services to leverage their community-based intelligence and enhance crime reduction efforts. This can be achieved through regular meetings, joint training exercise and intelligence sharing. Enhance collaboration between Vigilante Services and formal security agencies to ensure effective coordination and information sharing.

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