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Survey of Public Perception of Role and Acceptance of Vigilante Service Groups as Agents of Crime Control in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract

This research work investigated the roles, public acceptance and perceived shortcomings of Vigilante service groups in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria. The study adopted cross-sectional survey design and was anchored on broken window theory (BWT) and structural strain theoretical platforms. A total of 600 study participants drawn through a combination of multi-stage and simple random sampling techniques responded to the quantitative tool (questionnaire). Data was also generated through qualitative tools. These were through four sessions of in-depth interview (IDI), and another four sessions of focus group discussions (FGD) with male and female gender at both urban and rural parts of the state. The study found that residents of the state saw the role of vigilante service groups in their area as that of partnering with the police in safeguarding life and property. It was also found that vigilante service groups were well accepted in the area. However, a major shortcoming of vigilante service groups which the study revealed is that they engage in unlawful arrest and detention of citizens. It was recommended among other things that members of the vigilante group be regularly trained and re-trained to make them knowledgeable and committed to their responsibilities without abusing privileges or infringing on the rights of citizen.

Keywords: Acceptance, Vigilante service groups, Crime control, police, informal policing structure

Introduction

The place of crime prevention and control in any society cannot be overemphasized. In contemporary Nigerian society, a combination of informal policing structures and the police play crucial roles in crime prevention and control. The police play important roles in the society without which the sustenance of order, legality, development, and democracy may be difficult. (Alemika, 2001). However, Reiner (2000) observes that formal policing structures, a body of men recruited and paid by the state to enforce law and maintain order is a recent development in human history. Traditionally and historically, policing was the responsibility of every adult in the community. The emergence of the state as an entity with the claim to the monopoly over the means of legitimate violence in society (Weber, 1968 cited in Ritzer, 2012) resulted to the creation of specialized agencies such as the police and the armed forces for controlling the use of violence by other groups. In Africa, informal policing structures had existed prior to the emergence of formal policing structures. The advent of formal policing in the continent was ushered in by colonialism. Focusing on the experiences of Nigeria, we find that colonialism changed all aspects of life in our society ranging from religious, economic, cultural and interpersonal relationships (Marenin, 1985). Nnoli (1980) opined that colonial rule introduced monetized economy to Africa and Nigeria. This substantiates the fact that colonialism eroded Africans of 'Africaness' (Marenin, 1985). With the continued presence of the police, questions about the needfulness of vigilante groups abound. However, the critical roles the Bakassi boys played in crime control in Anambra State and in other states where they were operational would suffice as a response to the aforementioned questions. When they came in, they garnered an unalloyed support because they knew who these criminals were, they also knew the communities in which they operated very well, they also knew where their hideouts were and that was why they overpowered the

criminals and restored order to the state in which they operated. Currently, the vigilante groups appear to have the same support the bakassi boys had when they were in operation. The vigilante groups are structured to operate in the communities on a 24 hour basis. Because they are closer to the people and can respond more rapidly than the police whenever they are called upon, their roles in crime control is brought to lime light here No police force can function effectively if they don't win the support of the people they want to police. The formal policing structure does not have the capacity to be in every community at every point in time. Besides they are less knowledgeable on the terrains they are expected to operate in. The vigilante groups on the other hand are closer to the people. This indicates that they have a role to play in crime control by filling up this gap in policing. Although there seems to exist a high level of preference, patronage and acceptability for Vigilante service groups in Anambra state, there may exist some areas of shortcomings in service delivery by this group. There have been allegations that the vigilante groups use violent means in carrying out their roles of crime prevention and control. The then bakassi boys and now currently the Anambra vigilante service have all been accused of extra radical killings which violates fundamental human rights. The inability of the informal policing structures to develop mechanisms that would ensure people are adequately tried before they are sentenced have continued to raise dust and act as one of the greatest undoing of the informal policing structures (Onwuegbusi, 2013) Also, the use of diabolical means in crime detection and control is another area of possible shortcoming. People expect to see a structure that is properly equipped to track and tackle criminals and crime, not a diabolical institution. These shortcomings could be modified at the end of the study. They could be seen to be true or not, depending on what the respondents believe and know.

Study Objectives

1. To examine the role of Vigilante Service Groups in crime prevention and control in Anambra State
2. To determine the level of acceptance of Vigilante Service Groups as agents of crime control in Anambra State
3. To identify the areas of shortcoming in service delivery by Vigilante Service Groups in Anambra State

Theoretical Orientation

This study is anchored on broken window theory (BWT) and structural strain theory. While broken window theory was used to explain the place of informal policing structures in crime control, structural strain theory was used to explain the incidence of crime in the society. The proponent of broken window theory is Philip Zimbardo (1969). The theory focuses on the control and prevention of crime from within the community as against from outside the community. It explains how effective and efficient informal policing structures are in controlling crimes compared to the formal policing structure that is made up of 'strangers'. The theory holds that only the community members can safeguard themselves from crimes. This is because they live in the community and can work and watch at all times. They also know who those potential criminals are and how best they can be contained. The core

principle of informal policing structures is the constant maintenance of law and order in the various communities by members of that community.

This is in line with the core notion of broken window theory which asserts that constant presence of police structures makes a community less conducive for crime and criminals. Increased police presence and enforcements of informal rules of conduct and laws can make a community seem less chaotic and safer, thereby increasing presence and involvement of residents in their community and lowering crime rates (Palmiotto,2000).The BWT can be incorporated into the concept of informal policing in the sense that collective efforts by both the police and community dwellers can help alleviate the rate of crime in the community as the police see residents as partners in development and vice versa. The broken window theory asserts that if there is a crack anywhere in the community and no one is available or observant enough to take care of it, overtime it becomes a deep ditch that would pose a serious security risk to members of the society. The BWT assumes that most neighborhood crimes are more often than not perpetrated by offenders who reside near the victims; this makes crime primarily a local problem which can best be solved locally.

Methods

Study Area and Population

The cross sectional survey design was adopted in this study. The study was conducted in Anambra state. Anambra is one of the 36 states of Nigeria. Anambra was created from the Old Anambra State on the 27th August, 1991. The name of the state is the anglicized version of the original "O ma Mbala", the native name of the Anambra River. The capital of the state and the seat of government is Awka. Onitsha and Nnewi are the commercial and industrial cities respectively, in the state. The slogan of the state is "Light of the Nation". The state is bounded by Delta State in the West, Imo State in the South, Enugu State in the East and Kogi State in the North. The indigenous ethnic group in the state is Igbos. The predominant religion in Anambra state is Christianity.

The 2006 population figure for Anambra state is four million, one hundred and seventy seven thousand, eight-hundred and twenty eight (4,177,828). The male population is two million, one hundred and seventeen thousand, nine hundred and eighty-four (2,117,984) while the female population is two million, fifty nine thousand eight hundred and forty-four (2, 059844) (NPC). The target population for this study comprises males and females aged 18 years and above. This group of people was used because they are adults and mature enough to answer question on informal policing structures and crime control.

Sample size and sampling procedure

A sample size of 600 was used for the study. This number was considered enough and adequate in view of the statistical requirements, time frame and available resources. The multistage sampling method that involves successive random sampling was employed in selecting local government areas (LGAs), communities, villages' streets households and respondents in the study. The multi-stage design was very relevant because the study population was very large and made up of several clusters like towns, villages and households. All the local government areas in

the state were first categorized into urban and rural. From each category one LGA was selected using purposive sampling technique. Consequently, Awka south and Oyi LGA were selected as the urban and rural LGAs respectively using purposive sampling. In selecting the households, the researcher used simple random sampling technique (balloting) to select households. The researcher also used simple random sampling method (balloting) in selecting the desired number of respondents. One respondent 18 years and above was chosen from each selected household. The researcher alternatively chose one sex from a selected house and another sex from the next. This was to ensure gender balance.

Instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative tools were employed for the study. This enabled the researcher achieve a maximum result. Instrument for quantitative data was the questionnaire while for qualitative data, focused group discussion guide (FGD) and in-depth interview guide were used. The major instrument however was the questionnaire. The researcher trained two research assistants. These trainees comprised of one male and one female. This ensured gender balance. The research assistants were trained for two to three days. The questionnaires were self-administered on a face to face contact with the respondents. In the focused group discussion, two research assistants were made use of. One helped in writing down verbal and non-verbal responses while the other was in charge of operating the tape recorder. Similarly, the in-depth interview (IDI) was done with the help of two research assistants. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with participants purposely drawn from the LGAs the study covered. A total of 4 FGD sessions were conducted; two sessions for the rural areas and two sessions for the urban areas. To ensure gender homogeneity, FGDs were conducted for males and females separately. This means the 4 FGD sessions comprised of two male and two female sessions.

The in-depth interview (IDI) comprised of four interviewees. This comprised of two police officers and two officers of the Anambra Vigilante Group. The IDI is more flexible and has a higher completion rate. Also, it offers greater opportunity of extracting more information than the other methods.

Data analysis

The IDIs and FGDs were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Adequate interpretation of the respondents' statements was ensured, and statements were found to have contextual importance or connotations were extracted and used as excerpts to support statistical data. Responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). This was expressed in frequency distribution tables and percentages.

Research Findings/Results

Table 1: Socio-demographic data of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	216	36.9
Female	369	63.1
Total	585	100
Age	Frequency	Percentage

18-27	129	22.1
28-37	298	50.9
38-47	114	19.5
48-57	37	6.7
58 and above	5	.9
Total	585	100
Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Never married	297	50.8
Married	272	46.5
Divorced	5	.9
Separated	6	1.0
widowed	5	.9
Total	585	100
Educational qualification	Frequency	Percentage
No formal education	0	0
Primary/FSLC	1	.2
GCE/SSCE/WAECqnmn	225	38.5
OND/diploma	41	7.0
HND/first degree	245	41.9
Higher degree/MSc/PhD	73	12.5
Others	0	0
Total	585	100
Religious affliction	Frequency	Percentage
Christianity	534	91.3
Moslem	28	4.8
Traditional religion	23	3.9
Others	0	0
Total	585	100
Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Civil servant	78	13.3
Student	94	46.2
Farmer	59	10.1
Unemployed	81	13.8
Artisan	38	6.5
Others	0	0
Total	585	100
Place of residence	Frequency	Percentage
Urban	296	50.6
Rural	289	49.4
Total	585	100

Table 1 indicates that there are 216 (36.9%) male respondents while the number of female respondents is 369 (63.1%). This implies that there are more female respondents than male respondents in the study. The table indicates that respondents who are within the ages of 18-37 years are 129 (22.1%), those who fall within the ages of 28-37 years are 298 (50.9%), and those between the ages of 38-47 are 114 (19.7%), while those between the ages of 58 and above are 5 (.9%). This shows that majority of the respondents are between the ages of 28-37. Table 1 reveals that 297 (50.8%) of the respondents indicated "never married" as their marital status, 272 (46.5%) indicated that they are married, 5(.9%) of the respondents indicated divorced as their marital status, 6(1.0%) of the respondents indicated separated as their marital status while 5(.9%) indicated widowed as their marital status. This implies that majority of the respondents are not married.

In terms of educational qualification, table 1 shows that 0 (0%) of the respondents have no formal education, 1(.2%) of them have obtained primary school certificate/FSLC, 225 (48.5%) of them have the GCE/SSCE/WAEC as their highest educational qualification, 41 (7.0%) of them have obtained OND/Diploma as their highest educational qualification, those that have obtained HND/First degree as their highest educational qualification are 245 (41.9%) while those that have obtained Higher Degree/MSc/PhD

are 73 (12.5%). No respondent (0%) indicated other as his/her highest educational qualification. This shows that majority of the respondents have obtained HND/First degree. On religious affiliation, table 1 shows that 534 (91.3%) of the respondents are Christians, 28 (4.8%) of them are Muslims while 23 (3.9%) of them are practicing traditional religion. No respondent (0%) indicated 'others' as his/her religious affiliation. This implies that majority of the respondents are Christians.

A further look at table 1 reveals the occupation of the respondents. The table indicates that 78(13.3%) of the respondents are civil servants, 235 (40.2) are business men/women, 94 (16.1%) are students, 59(10.1) are farmers, 81 913.8%) are unemployed, 38(6.5) are artisans while no respondent (0%) indicated others as his/her occupation. This shows that majority of the respondents are business men/women. Table 1 also shows that 296 (50.6%) of the respondents are students, 59(10.1) are farmers, 81 (13.8) are unemployed, 38(6.5%) are artisans while no respondent (0%) indicated others as his/her occupation. This shows that majority of the respondents are business men/women. Table 1 also shows that 296 (50.6%) of the respondents are from urban areas while 289 (49.4%) of them are from rural. This implies that we have more urban respondents than rural respondents.

Analysis of Research questions

Research Question One: What are the roles of Vigilante Service Groups in crime prevention and control in Anambra State?

Responses of respondents on the roles of vigilante service groups are shown on table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents on the role of vigilante service groups in crime prevention and control.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Partnering with the police	301	51.5
Covering and combing the nooks and crannies of the community/street which the formal police have been unable to do effectively	116	19.8
Maintain constant presence in the community/streets to prevent criminals from operating	71	12.1
Rapid response to security threats to prevent breakdown of law and order	39	6.7
Can't say	21	3.6
Not applicable	37	6.3
Total	585	100

Table 2 shows the roles vigilante service groups play in crime control and they include partnering with the police 301 (51.5%), covering and combing the nooks and crannies of the community/streets which the formal police have been unable to do effectively (19.8%), maintaining constant presence in the community/streets to prevent criminals from operating (12.1%), rapid response to security threats to prevent breakdown of law and order (6.7). The question did not apply to (6.3%) of the respondents while 3.6% of the respondents can't say what the roles of vigilante groups are in relation to crime control. The table shows that majority of the respondents identified partnering with the police to perform their responsibility of crime prevention and control as the role vigilante service groups can play in crime control

Research Question two: What is the level of acceptance of Vigilante Service Groups as agents of crime control in Anambra State?

Table 3: Distribution of respondents on their views on whether vigilante service groups are accepted as agents of crime prevention and control in Anambra State.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	187	31.0
Agree	357	61.0
Disagree	21	3.6
Strongly disagree	20	3.4
Total	585	100

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents (187%) agree that vigilante service groups are accepted as agents of crime control in Anambra state. This finding is supported by data from the qualitative instrument.

An IDI respondent stated that:

Vigilante service groups are visibly present in all parts of the state. This implies that the locals accept vigilante groups. In fact they even make contributions to us. The *Igwes*, the *Ezes* (traditional rulers), they all accept the vigilantes in their communities because there is this trust. They believe that we know every part of the communities we are stationed to operate in and therefore they show their acceptance always (Male, 30, Vigilante Officer).

Table 4: Distribution of respondents on whether they recognize vigilant service groups as agents of crime control and prevention in their community.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	444	75.9
No	50	8.5
Can't say	91	15.5
Total	585	100

Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents (75.9%) indicated that they recognize vigilante service groups as agents of crime control in their community.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents on what influenced their recognition of vigilante service groups as agents of crime prevention and control

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
The group is constitutionally recognized in the state	85	14.5
They are more accessible than other security groups	327	55.9
Vigilante service groups handle cases professionally	11	1.9
They are linked to the Nigerian police in terms of duty	42	7.2
Not applicable	120	20.5
Total	585	100

Table 5 shows that majority of the respondents identified the accessibility of vigilante service groups over other security outfits as the reason for their recognition of the group as an agent of crime control

Research Question 3: what are the areas of shortcoming of vigilante service groups in Anambra State? Respondents were asked to identify the areas of shortcoming in service delivery by vigilante service groups in the state. Their

responses are shown in the table below

Table 6: Distribution of respondents on areas of shortcoming of vigilante service groups they are aware of.

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Vigilante service groups engage in unlawful arrest and detention of citizens	171	29.2
Poor screening of new members	57	9.7
Lack of representation of women and non-indigenes	21	3.6
Poor accountability	33	5.6
Lack of professionalism in the use of arms	78	13.3
Intimidation of people	20	3.4
Can't say	21	3.6
Not applicable	184	31.6
Total	585	100

Table 6 shows the areas of short coming in service delivery by vigilante service groups. From the table, the engagement of vigilante service groups in unlawful arrest and detention of citizens is the major (171) shortcoming of the group.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study reveal that vigilante service groups have a role to play in crime control in Anambra state. Among the roles vigilante service groups can play in crime control as identified in the study are: partnering with the police, covering and combing the nocks and crannies of the community/streets which the formal police have been unable to do effectively, maintaining constant presence in the community/street to prevent criminals from operating and repaid response to security threats to prevent breakdown of law and order.

This finding is line with that of Adegbusi (2009) who posited that vigilante service groups partner with the police in every community they operate in and this partnership have gone ahead to see to reduction in crime rate. This is also in line with the findings of Chukwuma and Alemika (2004) who found that vigilante service groups are always available whenever they are needed since they maintain constant presence in the community/streets to prevent criminals from operating.

The study also discovered that vigilante service groups are well accepted in Anambra State. The respondents indicated that they accept and prefer vigilante service groups as agents of crime control above other security outfits due to their (the vigilante service group) accessibility and responsiveness when contacted over any security issue. This is in line with what Chukwuma and Alemika (2004) found in their study about acceptability of informal policing structures. They stated that the level of acceptance of informal policing structures is measured by level of patronage and it was discovered from their study that level of patronage of informal policing structures was very high

Conclusion

The study examined the level for acceptance of vigilante service groups as agents of crime control in Anambra state. Vigilante service groups were established to complement existing security outfits as the rising rate of criminality in the communities in the state showed that the task of crime control was increasingly becoming daunting and challenging for the existing security agencies. The high level of acceptance of vigilante service groups in the state

portrays their importance in crime control. As the study showed, vigilante service groups are closer to the people and respond more rapidly whenever there is a security issue hence their wide acceptability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the paper recommends the following:

1. Efforts should be made by members of vigilante service groups to sustain the commendable efforts they are making towards crime control in the communities. Constant patrol and rapid response to distress calls should be maintained by the group.
2. It was established in this study that the police alone cannot effectively and efficiently control crime in. It is therefore recommended that vigilante service groups in the state be adequately equipped through provision of funds, equipments and strong enabling laws that would guarantee their independent and unbiased discharge of their security functions. The old order of compelling the vigilante groups to report their operations to the police should be done away with. This is because it constitutes a clog in the wheel of proper discharge of their duty.
3. Constant training and retraining of vigilante service group members would enhance their efficiency on the job. There should be room for regular training to equip them with knowledge on modern ways of fighting crime especially at the community level.
4. Motivation of vigilante members is crucial and as such should be taken seriously as it will enable them get dedicated to service. Outstanding members should therefore be recognized to boost the morale of other officers. An excellence award unit should therefore be set up in the office of the governor of the state to kick start this all important project
5. Public enlightenment on the role of vigilante service groups in crime control should be carried out periodically as it will further shore up the level of acceptability of the group among residents of the state.

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