

Security and Crime Prevention in Under-Policed Societies: The Experiment of Community Vigilantism in Anambra State of Nigeria, West Africa

Sunday K.M. Anadi, PhD

Southern University and A&M College

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

Department of Graduate Studies, Higgins Hall, Room 409G

500 Jesse Stone Blvd. Baton Rouge, LA 70813.

Email: Sunday_anadi@subr.edu; sunnyanadi@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study examines the solo experiment of individual communities in Anambra State of Nigeria in West Africa in their efforts to provide much desired security and order. These efforts are to be implemented through the communities own version of vigilantism due to either the lack of or non-existent organized police services. As part of the sampling, the author distributed a questionnaire to over 500 respondents and, in the end, analyzed 500 responses to attitudinal and demographic questions with the help of Cluster-random sampling techniques. Also, multivariate logit analysis was applied by using respondents 'participation in vigilante groups as independent variable, and attitudinal-predisposition statements (dealing with age, education, reduction in crime, fear of crime, reduction in chaos and distrust in police services) as the dependent variables resulted in significant interactions and effects. The study revealed that age, education, reduction in crime, fear of crime and distrust in the Nigeria police, Anambra State services have influenced the behavior of individuals to engage in vigilantism. The study further found out that vigilantism ensures fairness among the inhabitants of a given society, ensures justice and accountability for societal welfare gains. The study recommended that the Government of Nigeria, Non-Governmental Agencies and other stakeholders should intensify the media advertising on the establishment of Vigilante groups in order to improve upon the lives of the citizenry.

Keywords: *Vigilantism, Crime rate, Multivariate-Logit, Chaos, Police service and Security*

1.0: Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that a country's strength depends on its security, which is deemed the most essential aspect of every vibrant and stunt economy. United State of America, as a model for nations, has reached where they are now due to a superb security system and economic stability. Nigeria, among several other West African countries, can least boast of their security systems. Trust and confidence in the security system has been eroded among the populace, thus leading to the formation of several groups, including outright Vigilantism. Many contemporary writers have consistently misunderstood the real conditions as well as reasons for the emergence of community vigilantism in the South Eastern areas of Nigeria. However, several of the writers have used their publications to explain the motivations propelling vigilantism as rooted in both traditional and cultural practices, such as secret societies, occult practices and political opportunism in the context of social disorder and chaos (Smith 2004, Anderson 2002, Baker 2002, Reno 2002, and Human Rights Watch 2002).

Surprisingly, Boas (2002) and Reno (2002), even lump community vigilantism as same with ethnic militias, fighting for political, economic and social recognition and patronage. Most states in the south east of Nigeria had for decades suffered unbaiting social disorder as a result of fluid and fractious institutional environment. Armed robbery had increasingly expanded to frightening levels of brutality and murder, while rape and kidnapping was also becoming a daily desert for many of the unprotected communities. These conditions were further exacerbated by the fact that several police officers have been at one time or other implicated in forced extortions, extrajudicial killings, rape, armed robberies or release of criminals in response to bribery or political pressure. Amidst this seemingly unbaiting chaos and institutional failure, many communities had long organized self-help neighborhood vigilantes to provide them the much desired security and order ever before the emergence of the much touted Bakassi Boys.

In contrast, some other literatures discuss vigilante groups as a "gang of thugs bent on profiting from social disorder (Reno 2002; HRW 2002) display an apparent lack of understanding of the underlying factors and character of community vigilantism in Anambra state. Community vigilantism particularly in Anambra state had

traditionally represented popular struggles for accountability in the face of the ravages of deprivation, insecurity, social disorder and political manipulation resulting from general institutional failure. The result is that many communities and villages are left to struggle for basic services as well as physical security, and recourse to informal systems of law enforcement with a commitment to an anticrime mandate. As crime control community vigilante groups, vigilantism in Anambra state endeavor to punish people they believe are in fact guilty of criminal wrongs such as armed robbers, accomplices to armed robbers, kidnappers and other outlaws, and not concerned with legal guilt. They see criminals and outlaws as damaging to the social bonds and communal ties that bind the society together.

Philosophically, our own brand of community vigilantism was never intended to dehumanize their people, but consider criminals as serious enemies that must be defeated. In the community vigilante mindset, criminals' particularly violent criminals and their facilitators must be punished, and punished outside the law, and considers issues of legality as threatening intrusions on the community's basic right to protect themselves. In the sheer absence of credible institutions to ensure physical security and order, several communities in Anambra state organized vigilante groups with a tacit commitment to seek quick, final and cost-effective justice that is often severe and deadly, which the legal perspective will understandably dismiss as extra-judicial. Since punishment is a basic issue of justice, in its original form, community vigilantism in Anambra state, was neither seeking vengeance nor to dehumanize their targets, rather it sort to deliver punishment that is swift, severe and sure to criminals and their accomplices that compromise the basic right to life and happiness of all community citizens.

Like many established police organizations across the world where commissioned officers sometimes, engage in unethical behaviors, community vigilantism in Anambra state is not immune to such occurrences. It is not uncommon that certain overzealous elements within the vigilante groups may engage in illegal acts in the course of pursuing quick justice. Even in countries with strong institutional frameworks for delivering justice, cases of unethical behaviors by law enforcement and justice administrators are abound with significant doses of criminality and extra-judicial killings.

This paper do not in any way support illegal acts by certain elements of the vigilante groups, however, it tries to highlight some of the patriotic actions of the vigilante in reestablishing order and security amidst chaos and disorder in a structurally flawed society – thus supporting Brown (1975) definition of vigilantism as “morally sanctimonious” behavior aimed at rectifying or remedying a structural flaw in society.

2.0: Literature Review

The Nature of Policing in Nigeria

The process of building a Nigeria police organization occurred between 1820 and 1894, and generally performed conventional police functions such as internal security, supporting the prisons, immigration and the customs service, as well as other military duties whenever needed. The Nigeria police is under the operational and administrative control of a National Inspector General (IGP), appointed by the president and responsible for the maintenance of law and order. Today, the organization has all the administrative departments/command units of a modern police force, with the constitutional mandate to maintain law and order throughout the country under the abstraction “to serve and protect”. This mission “to serve and protect” theoretically implies that the Nigeria police force ought to be public servants with the mandate to serve and protect the public. The Nigeria police legitimacy is based on institutional authority derivable from the Nigeria constitution.

However, to effectively enforce the laws and exert it authority, the police force must first gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public. This requires that in order to gain authority and respect, officers must act in a certain manner; otherwise the public would reject them. In essence, this means that to gain acceptance in the eyes of the citizen, officers must be restrained and polite as well as even-tempered and reserved. However, Nigeria's colonial experience and decades of military rule had engendered a police force that is essentially an instrument of coercion and riddled with widespread corruption, inefficiency and institutional decay.

The Issues – Police Repression, Corruption and Lawlessness

Unlike many established police organizations, the Nigeria police continue to be bugged down by persistent problems of poor funding, recruitment, training, widespread inefficiently and unacceptable indiscipline. The Nigeria factor – widespread corruption and outright dishonesty compound already existing issues of inefficiency and indiscipline. In addition, the brazen lawlessness of the police arising from their systematic corruption and non-enforcement of the laws became part of the larger social and political problem bedeviling the country. Political patronage is common and endemic corrupt practices extend from the IGP down

to the patrol officer. Also, because officers work in small groups or even sometimes alone, they have ample opportunities to shake down criminals and other law-breakers, instead they allow criminals such as robbers, con men, treasury looters, thieves, prostitution, and lately kidnapping etc. to go about their businesses in return for a share of the proceeds.

Even, officers who seem not to go along with the non-enforcement of laws or approve of the graft and corruption of others exacerbated by ethnic divisions, find themselves transferred to distant and less desirable locations. These endemic problems rear their ugly heads in most police formations throughout Nigeria and consequently lead to inefficient, ineffective, and near non-existent police services. The result is a low level of public confidence, apathy, and poor acceptance of police authority leading to constant use of force, disinterest and failure to report crime, and the general tendency for people and unprotected communities to resort to self-help in handling issues of security and order.

Currently, the Nigeria police tend to tilt heavily toward greater use of force to command respect and obedience, usually excessive violence than excelling in the much desired community service functions, as well as crime prevention, detection and investigation. The use of excessive violence worsened by widespread corruption and indiscipline in the force, has further widened the gap between the police and the public they serve. To make matters worse, the brazenly corrupt and gluttonic Nigeria political elite has practically aligned themselves with the police to further traumatize the already traumatized and helpless public. It is no news, that most of the political office holders in Nigeria have one –to-four police escorts. Even, thousands of rich private citizens have also found a new way of advertising their wealth by organizing their own police convoys and escort vehicles fitted with sirens, thus Balkanizing the already inadequate number of officers to manage and deliver police services to the teeming population.

Community Vigilantism & Problem Solving in Anambra State

The original philosophy underlying the formation of community vigilante groups, and the state-wide adoption and legitimization of the Bakassi Boys was to reduce crime, the fear of crime and disorder in the state. Chaos, instability and violent crime seriously hurt not only the immediate victims but also the entire community citizens with apparent inability to take concrete actions, as well as the political fortunes of policy makers. Until the vigilante groups emerged, there was very little the police could do to arrest and punish known and proven criminals in Anambra state, and indeed the entire south east. Records show that previous half-hearted efforts by the police (if any) as well as the traditional community neighborhood watch programs were severely limited in their effectiveness in controlling crime. Long before the 1990's, many communities in Anambra state had begun experimenting with the formation of their own variant of community vigilantism. The initial traditional vigilante groups were grossly ill-equipped, poorly trained and poorly coordinated to effectively contain the rampaging criminal gangs with often superior firepower scattered all over the state. However, from the late 1990's and early 2000, community vigilantism in Anambra state began to assume a new character and dimension with the expansion and legitimization of vigilantism (the Bakassi Boys) in the state.

The adoption and legitimization of the Bakassi Boys in 2000, created a formidable partnership involving the State Government, the Bakassi Boys, localized vigilante groups, and community leaders to actively seek ways to prevent and react to crime – a kind of multi-group union with the potential to engage proactively in crime reduction and prevention patrols or reactively in the form of task forces as circumstances demand. This partnership requires the state, the vigilante groups and the community to communicate and cooperate on a wide range of crime issues. It is universally a fact that often the communities know the problems intimately, and even the criminals as well as the likely solutions. Thus, emboldened by state resources, the vigilante groups especially the Bakassi Boys became notorious for their quick successes in brutally dealing with criminal gangs in the state, and reestablishing order within a short period of time.

Obviously, holding the corrupt, inefficient and ineffective Nigeria criminal justice system in contempt, the Bakassi Boys realized that to rid the state of diehard criminals, their approach must dwell heavily on swift, severe and sure justice in contradiction to the legal processes of the normal criminal justice system. In the vigilante mindset, extraordinary circumstances require extraordinary solutions – certain violent crimes warranted torture and lynching. Many literatures on vigilantism across the world have also convincingly shown that vigilantism originated to a certain degree as a result of the state's failure to completely prosecute or punish criminal activity (Bidaguren & Nina, 2004).

The community support bestowed to the Bakassi Boys has been variously misinterpreted by different international researchers and human rights organizations as well as some sections of the media without a clear understanding of the security situation in the state before, during and after the Bakassi Boys. Some have argued

that such widespread support was a product of limited interests and loyalties (Harnischfeger 2003; Ifeka 2000; Smith 2004), while others have dismissed it as a demonstration of the brutal nature of the Nigeria society (HRW/CLEEN 2002:4-2). Ekeh (2002) insists that widespread support enjoyed by the bakassi Boys was as a result of their practical honesty, and ability to restore order in the frustrating chaotic social environment.

In addition, the Bakassi Boys positive public perceptions during the first few years, squarely lie in their public demonstrations of impartiality, fairness, justice, accountability and incorruptibility, though certain sections of the community citizens had some reservations concerning their brand of justice and brutal methods.

Meanwhile, the public display of vigilante brutal methods was essentially a deterrent effort to discourage daredevil criminals and served as predictions about what would be their future fate when caught. Sometimes, thousands of people routinely gathered in public places to witness the torture and execution of alleged criminals. These public displays place a high premium upon performing successful domination of the criminals and eliciting excruciating pain. Oftentimes, the frequency of these public displays succinctly calls attention to the frequency of the heinous crimes which causes them. In the chaos created by criminal gangs, the facts of crime tended to appeal more to the criminals imagination than the facts of punishment, and invariably sets aside all fear of death in any form when opportunity calls for the gratification of their criminal desires.

Current Reactions & State of Community Vigilantism in Anambra State

It has been stated earlier that community vigilantism in Anambra state particularly the adoption of the Bakassi Boys was greeted with an unwavering public support and enthusiasm in the first few years of its activities. The widespread sense of insecurity and high rates of violent crimes had orchestrated an environment for a kind of populist action to reclaim the streets from criminals. It represented also, a popular action against the ineffective, inefficient and grossly corrupt Nigeria law enforcement agencies and their apparent inability to ensure law and order. Effective law and order demands adequate crime control measures and effective apprehension and prosecution of criminals, the absence of which creates a fundamental flaw in the character of a society. This flaw in itself further creates a dangerous vacuum that compromises the basic survival instincts of the citizenry, and ultimately precipitate a populist action/support to fill the vacuum.

The basis of popular support enjoyed by community vigilantism in Anambra state as personified by the Bakassi Boys was their seeming integrity characterized by untainted accountability and incorruptibility. During the first few years, there were little or no allegations of unfairness or partisanship nor public negative reactions to their methods. For the public, though their methods may be undesirable, it still provided an alternative to the rampaging violent armed robberies, kidnappings, police corruption and general institutional breakdown. The authority and popularity of the Vigilantes began to wane when their activities seem to compromise the very values they espoused – the values of fairness, accountability, incorruptibility and non-partisanship. Like police actions such as (shooting unarmed citizen) that compromise the basic police values of “to protect and to serve” and often sets the police and the public in confrontation with each other.

Two specific actions of the Bakassi Boys – the murder of Chief Okonkwo, former chairman of Nnewi South Local Government and Mr. Barnabas Igwe, the president of the Nigeria Bar Association, Onitsha Branch, (these were vocal critics of the then governor) seriously compromised their integrity and ultimately ignited public apprehension and fears of partisanship and corruption. These incidents and other allegations of exploitations set in motion the gradual but steady decent of the Bakassi Boys, leading to the erosion of public trust and thus, created the political necessity that ultimately led to their disbandment in late 2002 by the federal government.

The idea that some of the Bakassi Boys’ victims may be innocent and that partisanship and parochial interest had infiltrated the Bakassi Boys created an uncomfortable dilemma for the public as they began to seriously review some of their activities. As stories of Bakassi Boys corruption and politicization spread, public displeasure and criticisms mounted and irreparably damaged the image and integrity of the Bakassi Boys as incorruptible heroes.

3.0: Method and Materials

This current study used the security perspective to view community vigilantism in Anambra State as a product of heightened community security concern in the midst of rampant crime and insecurity, worsened by near non-existent police services. The nature of the study is recursive (i.e. both quantitative and qualitative research). A cross-sectional data across 500 household’s responses to attitudinal and demographic questions were sampled. Multivariate logit regression analysis of community area and educational level as independent

variables, and attitudinal statements (reduction in crime, fear of crime, reduction in chaos, and distrust in police services as the dependent variables collected with the help of cluster random sampling techniques.

Closed-ended questionnaires were administered but were centered on vigilantism in Nigeria. STATA 12 was used to analysis the field data with the help of logit regression model to establish the perception on the establishment of vigilantism in Nigeria.

3.1: Model Design

A conceptualized logit model was used to establish the determinants of the establishment of the vigilantism in Nigeria. The dependent variable is qualitative/ binary variable which takes into accounts yes or no responses. It would be useful to capture the dependency of Y on X as a simple function, particularly when there are several explanatory variables. For example, in ordinary multiple regressions, the link function is called the identity link since

$$g(\mu_i) = \mu_i \text{ and so } \mu_i = \eta_i, \text{ or}$$

$$E(Y_i) = x_i' \beta = \mu_i = \eta_i$$

The usual assumption

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{i1} + \dots + \beta_k X_{ik} + \varepsilon_k$$

where $\varepsilon_k \sim N(0, \sigma_\varepsilon^2)$ and ε_i and ε_k are independent for $i \neq k$. The expectation of Y i.e

$$E(Y_i) = E(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{i1} + \dots + \beta_k X_{ik} + \varepsilon_k) \text{ and so } \pi_i = \beta_0 + \sum \beta_k X_{ik}$$

For this reason, the regression model to a dummy response variable is called the probability model. For a logit model

$$\text{logit}(Q = 1) = \Phi^{-1}(p_i) = \sum_{k=0}^{k=n} \beta_k X_{ik} = \Phi(X' \beta)$$

Hence the logit model for the study is given as;

$$\text{logit}_k(Q_i = 1) = \Phi(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Age} + \beta_2 \text{EDU} + \beta_3 \text{RIC} + \beta_4 \text{FOC} + \beta_5 \text{RCH} + \beta_6 \text{RIB} + \varepsilon_k)$$

Where Q_i = Qualitative dependent variable: if respondents are part of vigilante group=1; if not=0.

Age = quantitative value of age

EDU= Number of years spent on education

RIC= Reduction in crime (i.e. if vigilantism reduces crime =1, if not =0)

FOC= Fear of Crime (a dummy variable: if fear Crime =1, if not =0)

RCH= Reduction in Chaos (a dummy variable: if there is Chaos =1, if not =0)

DIP= Distrust in the services of the Anambra State police (a dummy variable: if there is loss of confidence and distrust in the Anambra State police services =1, if not =0)

Φ = Cumulative standard normal distribution function

ε =Error-term

Study Hypotheses

In consideration to an output that would be revealed from the analyses, the study tested the appropriateness or otherwise of each of the model parameters such that one of the coefficient of the

$\beta_i \neq 0$ for at least one i .

The appropriate hypothesis is given as

$H_0: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \dots = \beta_k = 0$ against the alternative that

$H_1: \beta_i \neq 0$ for at least one i

At $\alpha = 0.01, 0.05$ and 0.1 level of significance respectively. Where β_i are the model parameters or coefficients of the independent variables.

4.0: Empirical Results

The Quantitative Analysis of the Logit Regression Results for the Determinants of Community and State Vigilante Group Establishment in Nigeria

Table 1 summarizes the computations for parameter estimates for the logit working correlation assumptions with respect to perception on vigilante groups establishment in Nigeria. The coefficients of the independent variables (i.e. age, educational level, reduction in crime, fear of crime, reduction in chaos, and distrust in police services) are the values with the asterisked and their probability effect of establishing a vigilante group due to the various tested predictive variables is the sign the value possesses. Figures that has been asterisked (*), (**) and (***) denote significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% level, respectively for each model.

Table 1: Determinants of Community and State Vigilante Group Establishment in Nigeria

VARIABLES	Coefficients	Standard Errors	p-values
<i>Age</i>	0.0421412***	(0.00412030)	0.000
<i>EDU</i>	0.0530312***	(0.00514030)	0.000
<i>RIC</i>	0.0421411***	(0.00346032)	0.002
<i>FOC</i>	0.0521411***	(0.00326032)	0.010
<i>RCH</i>	0.0421411***	(0.00316032)	0.020
<i>DIP</i>	0.0521411***	(0.00216032)	0.011
Observations		500	
R-squared		0.858	

Note: Standard errors are presented in parentheses. *, ** and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% level, respectively. The study through STATA 12 used p-values computed to determine the statistical significance of the variables estimated. The rejection of the null hypothesis was set at the 5%, significance levels of the Two-tailed, with p-critical value of 0.05. Results were obtained from STATA 12. **Source: Field data, January, 2017.**

The independent variable with respect to specific time point's interaction with respondents' responses on whether they are part of a vigilante group or not as serving as the dependent variable was tested to be significant at $\alpha = 0.1$ and 0.05 respectively. About 86% of the data points were explained and taken into consideration the analyses as seen from our R-squared estimate of 0.86 to one (1) decimal place (86%). This implies that about 86% fluctuation or variation in the establishment of vigilante group was explained by the changes in the independent variables (i.e. age, educational level, reduction in crime, fear of crime, reduction in chaos, reduction in burglary e.t.c.).

The parameter estimates for the models are approximately the same for all the assumptions when we consider estimation at 1 decimal point.

The explanatory variable Age was statistically significance at 5% and 10% significance level for vigilantism. Age variable was positively related to the vigilantism. This implies that as people grow-up they think more about their security and safety.

Education was also statistically significant to vigilantism at 5% significance level. This implies that, at 5% significance level, education has influence on the behavior of individual to engage in vigilantism. This is because education was positively related to the establishment of vigilante group. This could be as a result of knowledge gain, on freedom of speech, formation of groups and the need to seek for societal protection and a scholar.

Reduction in Crime rate was also statistically significant to the establishment of vigilante group at 5% significance level. This implies that, at 5% significance level, reduction in crime has a positive influence on the behavior of citizens to fight for their protection.

Conversely, fear of crime was positively related to the establishment of vigilante groups in Nigeria at 10% significance level. Interestingly, fear of crime was statistically significance at 5% and 10% significance level to the logit model of vigilantism.

Meanwhile, Reduction in Chaos was also statistically significant to the establishment of vigilante group at 5% significance level. This implies that, at 5% significance level, reduction in crime has a positive influence on the behavior of citizens to fight for their protection.

Lastly, distrust in the police services as a predictive variable was positively related to the establishment of vigilante groups in Nigeria at 10% significance level. This is to help forestall the incidence of crime rate resulting from the outfit of the police department in Nigeria. Also, the variable (i.e. distrust in police services) was statistically significance at 5% and 10% significance level to the logit model of vigilantism.

Table 2: Respondents View of the Overall Effects of Vigilantism on Societal Welfare Gain

Variables : Importance	N	Mean	Z-value	P-value
Ensure Fairness	110	3.8	1.606	0.000
Ensure Justice	105	3.24	6.931	0.000
Incorruptibility	85	2.66	-8.234	0.000
Accountability	100	2.76	9.534	0.000
Impartiality	100	2.76	-9.534	0.000
Total	500	-----	-----	-----

Source: (Field Data: January, 2017): Principal components analysis on the Views from both the urban and rural inhabitants.

Table 2 reveals that vigilantism ensures fairness among the inhabitants of a given society (i.e. 110 respondents). The greatest contributor to the societal gains is contingent reward whose mean value is 3.81 (i.e. fairness). The data further revealed that vigilantism also ensures justice (105 of the respondents) and accountability (100 of respondents) for societal welfare gains. Apparently, from the table 2 the emergence of vigilantism in a community from the perspective of the respondents minimizes corruptibility (85 of the respondents) and partiality (100 of the respondents) among the citizens.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the original Anambra vigilante group otherwise known as the Bakassi started with noble intentions to rid the society of criminal elements. However, after its politicization by the then Anambra State Government and other Local politicians, the group lost the most valuable assets-public trust and confidence. The consequence was a gradual but steady erosion of the psychological commitment and eventual fall and proscription by the Federal Government. The study is expected to serve as a springboard for many elites to do an in-depth research more on the relevance and challenges on vigilantism. Aside the several challenges facing the country, the study is beseeching all stakeholders to implement the stated policies.

Based on the findings, the study strongly recommends the following;

1. The Government of Nigeria, Non-Governmental Agencies and other stakeholders should intensify the media advert on the establishment of Vigilante groups in order to improve upon the lives of the citizen.
2. The Government of Nigeria, Non-Governmental Agencies and other stakeholders should set aside a budgetary allocation for the operations and sustainability of the various Vigilante groups in order to improve upon the lives of the citizen.

3. The various vigilante groups should be motivated through awards, certification of recognitions and many others.

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