

VIGILANTE GROUPS IN CURBING INCESSANT ARMED ROBBERY IN ANYIGBA METROPOLIS OF DEKINA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

One of the most prominent vigilante organizations in Nigeria is the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), which operates in various states, including Kogi State. The town has experienced an upsurge in armed robbery incidents, targeting businesses, students, and residents. Despite efforts by law enforcement agencies, Anyigba has continued to experience a high rate of armed robbery, with criminals targeting homes, businesses, and travelers. The study focused on role of vigilante groups in curbing incessant armed robbery in Anyigba Metropolis The study adopted "Social Control Theory. The study used both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The population of the study was (109) with sample size of 85. The study revealed that vigilante groups has not been effective in reducing armed robbery in Anyigba metropolis of Kogi State, vigilante adopt various operational strategies to combat crime in Anyigba metropolis and there are challenges faced by vigilante groups in their security efforts. The study therefore recommended that Nigerian government should formalize the role of vigilante groups by creating legal frameworks that define their powers and responsibilities, vigilante groups need proper training in criminal justice procedures and community policing and finally, there should be greater cooperation between vigilante groups and formal law enforcement agencies.

Keywords: Vigilante Group, Armed Robbery, Crime Prevention, Community Policing & Extrajudicial Actions

INTRODUCTION

Crime prevention and community security have remained central concerns for societies across the globe. While formal policing institutions are tasked with maintaining law and order, their effectiveness often varies based on resources, governance structures, and societal factors. In many regions, especially where state institutions are weak or overburdened, informal security groups, commonly referred to as vigilante groups have emerged to fill the security vacuum (Baker, 2008). These groups play a crucial role in crime prevention by providing rapid response, intelligence gathering, and deterrence against criminal activities. However, their operations are often controversial, raising ethical and legal questions about accountability, human rights, and state authority (Johnston, 1996; Baker, 2008).

Vigilante groups have existed throughout history in different parts of the world, often emerging as a response to inefficiencies in state policing. In the United States, for instance, vigilante justice was prominent during the 19th-century frontier period, where local communities formed self-defense groups to combat banditry in the absence of effective law enforcement (Brown, 1975). One of the most well-known historical examples is the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance (1851 and 1856), which was formed to address crime and corruption but also engaged in extrajudicial killings and deportations (Johnson, 2001). In Latin America, particularly in Mexico and Brazil, vigilante groups have evolved into complex security networks. In Mexico, "autodefensas" (self-defense groups) emerged in response to cartel

violence, particularly in regions where the police were either absent or compromised by corruption. These groups have had a mixed impact—while some successfully repelled criminal elements, others became involved in criminal activities themselves (Grillo, 2016). Similarly, in Brazil, "militias" originally formed to combat gang violence in favelas but later engaged in extortion and human rights abuses (Arias & Goldstein, 2010). Also, in Africa, vigilante groups have played significant roles in security governance, particularly in regions with weak state institutions. In South Africa, neighborhood watch groups and "street committees" were formed during the apartheid era to provide security in Black townships where police presence was limited (Buur & Jensen, 2004). However, some of these groups engaged in violent reprisals, leading to concerns over mob justice. Similarly, in Kenya, groups like the "Mungiki" and "Sungu Sungu" initially emerged to provide community security but later became notorious for their involvement in criminal activities and extrajudicial killings (Mutahi, 2011). These cases illustrate the double-edged nature of vigilante groups: they can provide immediate security benefits but may also become threats to public order if not properly regulated.

In Nigeria, vigilante activities have evolved into an integral component of local security governance in response to rising crime and the inefficiency of formal law enforcement agencies. Historically, Nigerian communities relied on traditional security structures, such as age-grade associations and hunters' guilds, to maintain law and order (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2014). However, modern vigilante groups have become more organized, particularly in response to urban crime, banditry, and insurgency.

One of the most prominent vigilante organizations in Nigeria is the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), which operates in various states, including Kogi State. The VGN collaborates with formal security agencies to combat crime, particularly in areas where police presence is limited. Similarly, regional vigilante outfits such as the Bakassi Boys in the southeastern states and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the northeast have played crucial roles in addressing insecurity (Ikelegbe, 2016). However, these groups have also been accused of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial executions, unlawful detention, and torture (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

In Kogi State, and particularly in Anyigba, a major commercial and educational center, the activities of vigilante groups have become a focal point in crime prevention efforts. The town has experienced an upsurge in armed robbery incidents, targeting businesses, students, and residents. The inadequacies of the Nigeria Police Force—due to factors such as understaffing, poor funding, and corruption—have compelled local communities to take security into their own hands. Vigilante groups in Anyigba engage in night patrols, intelligence gathering, and crime deterrence, often working in collaboration with community leaders and law enforcement officers. While their presence has contributed to crime reduction, concerns remain regarding their accountability, use of force, and potential for abuse (Okunola & Aremu, 2020).

Despite efforts by law enforcement agencies, Anyigba has continued to experience a high rate of armed robbery, with criminals targeting homes, businesses, and travelers. The Nigeria Police Force, constrained by inadequate personnel, logistical challenges, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, has struggled to effectively tackle the menace. As a result, community members have resorted to vigilante groups to provide security and complement the efforts of the police. However, the effectiveness and legitimacy of these groups remain a subject of debate. While some residents believe vigilantes have significantly reduced crime, others express concerns over their methods, which sometimes include jungle justice and excessive force.

Existing literature on community-based security initiatives highlights both the benefits and drawbacks of vigilante operations. For instance, Adebayo (2019) argues that vigilante groups play a crucial role in crime prevention by providing intelligence and swift responses to criminal activities. On the other hand, Olalekan (2022) notes that the lack of proper regulation and training often leads to human rights violations, making some vigilante activities counterproductive.

However, despite the growing body of literature on vigilante operations globally, limited empirical attention has been given to their localized dynamics within smaller urban centres in Nigeria such as Ayingba, particularly regarding their interaction with formal security institutions and their overall impact on community safety. Existing studies often generalize vigilante activities at national or regional levels without adequately examining the contextual variations, accountability mechanisms, and public perception at the community level. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the role of vigilante groups in crime prevention in Anyigba, Kogi State, with specific attention to their operational strategies, relationship with formal law enforcement agencies, effectiveness in curbing armed robbery and other criminal activities, and assess whether their contributions are sustainable in the long run.

The following hypotheses were formulated:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the effectiveness of the activities of vigilante groups in reducing armed robbery in Anyigba metropolis of Kogi State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between the operational strategies employed by vigilante groups in crime prevention in Anyigba metropolis of Kogi State.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Vigilante

The concept of a vigilante has been widely discussed in security studies, criminology, and governance literature. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) states that: "Vigilante groups are non-state actors that engage in policing functions without formal legal recognition, sometimes operating as crime-fighting units but often raising concerns about due process and human rights abuses." This definition underscores the legal ambiguities surrounding vigilante operations and the potential for extrajudicial actions. Similarly, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP, 2018) defines vigilantism as: "The unauthorized enforcement of perceived justice by individuals or groups, often involving violent means, in response to community security concerns." This suggests that lack of official oversight is a defining characteristic of vigilante groups.

The African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum (APCOF, 2015) describes vigilante groups as: "Community-initiated security networks that emerge due to weak policing structures, varying from crime-fighting groups to self-defense militias, with differing levels of state engagement." This definition is particularly relevant in Africa, where vigilante groups vary from law-abiding community watch teams to militant self-defense groups.

Vigilantism arises as a response to perceived inefficiencies in formal law enforcement, particularly in regions where crime rates are high, and the state struggles to maintain security. While the term "vigilante" often carries both positive and negative connotations, scholars have debated its role in crime prevention, social order, and human rights violations. Scholars define vigilantism in different ways, often depending on the social, political, and legal contexts in which vigilante groups operate. Johnston (1996) defines vigilantism as: "A social movement giving rise to premeditated acts of force—or threatened force—by autonomous citizens aimed at controlling crime or perceived threats to security, where the state's policing capacity is seen as inadequate." This definition emphasizes three key elements: autonomy from the state, the use or threat of force, and a response to crime or insecurity.

Abrahams (1998) describes vigilantism as: "A form of informal justice where individuals or groups take the law into their own hands to punish criminals or suspected offenders outside the legal system." His definition suggests that vigilantism exists outside state-sanctioned law enforcement, operating as an alternative form of justice. Baker (2002) explains vigilantism within the African context as: "An organized but unofficial community security mechanism that emerges in response to a lack of effective policing, often filling the gaps left by weak state institutions." Baker's definition aligns with the reality in Nigeria, where vigilante groups often supplement inefficient state security agencies in combating crime.

Concept of Armed Robbery

Armed robbery is a serious crime that involves the use of force or threats of force to steal property or valuables from a victim, typically with the use of weapons such as firearms, knives, or other dangerous objects. It is considered one of the most violent forms of theft and a major concern for law enforcement agencies and policymakers globally. This concept has been studied from various criminological perspectives, with a focus on the causes, methods, and consequences of armed robbery, as well as its prevention and control. Armed robbery, as defined by scholars and legal authorities, involves a theft where the offender uses or threatens the use of physical violence to force a victim into surrendering property or money. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) define armed robbery as: "A criminal act involving the use or threat of physical force with the intent to unlawfully take property or money from an individual or establishment, often facilitated by the use of a weapon." This definition highlights the use of force and intention to unlawfully deprive the victim of their property.

Siegel (2005) offers a similar definition: "Armed robbery is the theft of property or money through the use of force or violence, typically involving a weapon, and often accompanied by intimidation or threats against the victim." Siegel's definition underscores the violent nature of the crime, pointing to the potential for significant harm to the victim, both physically and psychologically.

All the definitions of armed robbery share a common emphasis on the unlawful taking of property through the use or threat of force, often involving a weapon. They highlight violence or intimidation as the central distinguishing element that separates armed robbery from other forms of theft. Both Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) and Siegel (2005) stress the offender's intent and the coercive nature of the act, pointing to the psychological and physical harm it causes victims. However, differences emerge in the contextual focus of each definition—while Gottfredson and Hirschi frame armed robbery within the broader scope of criminal motivation and intent, Siegel's approach centers on its practical manifestation as a violent encounter. In legal and criminological contexts, therefore, the definitions converge on the

elements of force, threat, and unlawful deprivation, but diverge slightly in how they interpret the underlying purpose, context, and consequences of the act.

Furthermore, a global perspective, armed robbery remains a pervasive challenge, particularly in societies experiencing socio-economic inequality, unemployment, and weak law enforcement systems. While developed nations focus on organized crime and urban violence, developing countries face a blend of armed robbery driven by poverty, political instability, and ineffective policing. In the Nigerian context, armed robbery has evolved into a major social problem linked to economic hardship, youth unemployment, and the proliferation of small arms (Cohen & Felson's 2019). The Nigerian legal framework, under the Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Act, prescribes severe penalties, including death sentences, underscoring the gravity of the offense. Despite these measures, the persistence of armed robbery in Nigeria mirrors global patterns, revealing how both structural and situational factors shape the crime's occurrence and complexity within different national contexts.

Vigilante Groups and Curbing of Armed Robbery in Anyigba Metropolis

The rise of armed robbery as a significant security threat in various parts of Nigeria, including Anyigba Metropolis in Kogi State. This has led to a growing reliance on alternative security mechanisms, such as vigilante groups. These groups have emerged in response to the increasing inadequacies of the formal police force in addressing widespread insecurity, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. Vigilante groups in Anyigba, like many others in Nigeria, have become an essential part of community security, actively participating in curbing criminal activities such as armed robbery. Vigilante groups in Anyigba, much like in other parts of Nigeria, are community-based organizations that often operate outside the formal security structures but work in collaboration with local law enforcement agencies. These groups primarily aim to reduce crime rates, particularly violent crimes like armed robbery, by acting as a deterrent and sometimes intervening in criminal activities. Several scholars have examined the role of vigilante groups in Nigeria's security framework.

In Anyigba, vigilante groups have taken on the role of community policing, which aims to build trust between the police and the community while actively preventing crime. According to Baker (2012), community-based security groups like vigilantes play an instrumental role in enhancing local safety by conducting routine patrols, engaging in crime prevention activities, and deterring potential offenders. Vigilante groups in Anyigba often engage in patrols at night and establish checkpoints to monitor areas prone to robbery activities. These preventive measures can disrupt the opportunity structure for criminals by making it riskier to operate in certain areas.

In a broader context, Cohen and Felson's (1979) Routine Activities Theory suggests that crime occurs when a motivated offender encounters a suitable target without capable guardianship. Vigilante groups act as capable guardians, reducing the likelihood of armed robbery by increasing the risk for offenders and providing immediate responses to suspicious activities.

While vigilante groups operate independently, they also collaborate with formal law enforcement agencies, including the police. In Anyigba, this partnership is crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of crime-fighting efforts. According to Ikelegbe (2016), many vigilante groups work hand-in-hand with the police, especially when they capture suspects or intervene in robberies. This collaboration ensures that the activities of vigilantes are aligned with the legal frameworks

of the country, while also improving the operational capacity of the police force in areas where resources and personnel are limited.

For instance, vigilantes may act as informants or assist in tracking down criminal gangs involved in armed robberies, providing local intelligence that police forces might not be able to gather on their own. In regions with insufficient law enforcement presence, this partnership helps to bridge the gap between the official security apparatus and the community.

Vigilante groups in Anyigba also use community-based intervention strategies, where they engage residents in crime prevention education and encourage active participation in reporting criminal activities. According to Shaw and McKay (2012), social disorganization in communities leads to an increased likelihood of criminal activity, including armed robbery. Vigilantes help mitigate this by fostering stronger social cohesion and ensuring that residents are actively involved in maintaining safety in their neighborhoods.

Scholars like Abrahams (2018) have argued that the legitimacy of vigilante groups is often grounded in their ability to connect with community members, offering a sense of shared responsibility for crime prevention. By raising awareness about the risks of armed robbery and creating community-based surveillance systems, vigilante groups become agents of social control, contributing to reducing incidents of armed robbery in Anyigba.

The effectiveness of vigilante groups in combating armed robbery in Anyigba has been subject to various debates. While some argue that vigilantes provide necessary security and deterrence, others highlight concerns regarding human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings. However, numerous studies and reports have pointed out the positive contributions of vigilantes in curbing armed robbery and other crimes in local communities.

Empirical studies on vigilante effectiveness in Nigeria show that their presence significantly reduces the incidence of violent crime, particularly armed robbery. Alemika and Chukwuma (2014) found that in regions where vigilante groups are active, there is a marked decrease in the occurrence of armed robbery and other violent crimes. The constant patrolling and visibility of vigilante groups in Anyigba act as a deterrent, reducing the chances of criminal activities being successfully carried out.

Furthermore, Eze and Guerette (2017) argue that when vigilantism is organized and coordinated, it can be highly effective in reducing opportunities for armed robbery, as offenders are deterred by the risk of capture and immediate community retaliation. The presence of vigilant groups makes areas less attractive to criminals, as the likelihood of being caught or confronted by an organized community is higher. The effectiveness of vigilante groups in Anyigba is also linked to the trust and engagement they have built with local residents. In Anyigba, this social cohesion plays a critical role in creating a safe environment that curtails armed robbery. Vigilante groups engage in community outreach programs, educating people on how to protect themselves and report armed robbers, which builds a culture of vigilance among the people. This collaborative effort between the community and vigilante groups often leads to better outcomes in crime control.

Despite their success in deterring armed robbery, vigilante groups in Anyigba face several challenges that hinder their effectiveness. One of the primary challenges is the lack of proper training and resources. According to Becker (2013), the informality of vigilante groups often leads to unprofessional conduct, as members may not be adequately trained

to handle complex situations, particularly in high-stress encounters like armed robbery. Some vigilantes, lacking proper equipment and tactical knowledge, may resort to violent means that result in the loss of life or human rights abuses.

Operational Strategies Employed by Vigilante Groups to Prevent Crimes in Anyigba

Vigilante groups in Anyigba, like in many other communities in Nigeria, play a critical role in crime prevention and community safety. These groups operate in the absence or inadequacy of formal security forces, filling the gap through grassroots security mechanisms. The effectiveness of vigilante groups largely depends on their operational strategies, which are tailored to local security challenges. Below are five key operational strategies employed by vigilante groups in Anyigba to prevent crime:

- i. **Community-Based Intelligence Gathering:** One of the most effective strategies employed by vigilante groups in Anyigba is community-based intelligence gathering. This strategy involves members of the vigilante group actively engaging with residents to collect information on suspicious activities and individuals within the community. Vigilante groups work closely with community leaders, market associations, and religious groups to build trust and encourage information sharing. This approach allows vigilante groups to identify potential threats before they escalate into major crimes. It also fosters collaboration between the security personnel and the community, ensuring a proactive approach to crime prevention (Ekpenyong & Usoro, 2021).
- ii. **Night Patrols and Surveillance:** Regular night patrols and surveillance are another key strategy vigilante groups use to deter criminal activities in Anyigba. This method ensures that communities remain under constant watch, making it difficult for criminals to operate. Vigilante members are strategically deployed at night to monitor high-crime areas, streets, and entry/exit points of the town. They use flashlights, motorcycles, and mobile communication devices to coordinate their patrols efficiently. Night patrols serve as both a deterrent and response mechanism, making it harder for criminals to execute their plans. Studies indicate that visible security presence reduces crime rates and increases public confidence in security measures (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2014).
- iii. **Collaboration with Formal Security Agencies:** While vigilante groups function independently, they also collaborate with formal security agencies such as the Nigerian Police Force and the Civil Defense Corps to improve crime prevention efforts. They provide intelligence reports to the police for investigation and prosecution. Joint patrols are sometimes conducted to ensure broader coverage of crime-prone areas. This synergy between formal and informal security outfits enhances crime prevention by bridging the gap between local knowledge and professional law enforcement techniques (Otu, 2020).
- iv. **Use of Traditional and Technological Crime Prevention Methods:** Vigilante groups in Anyigba employ both traditional and modern methods in their crime prevention strategies. Traditional methods include the use of native intelligence, charms, and cultural taboos to discourage criminal behavior. These strategies ensure a mix of conventional and innovative crime prevention techniques. The incorporation of modern technology into vigilante operations enhances efficiency and response time (Adebayo, 2013).
- v. **Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Mechanisms:** Beyond crime prevention, vigilante groups in Anyigba also engage in conflict resolution and mediation to prevent minor disputes from escalating into violent crimes. They act as mediators in land disputes, market conflicts, and family disagreements. Through community dialogues, they provide alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms that reduce reliance on

formal court systems. By addressing social conflicts before they escalate, vigilante groups help maintain peace and stability within the community (Ekpenyong & Usoro 2018).

Challenges Hindering the Effectiveness of Vigilante Groups in Crime Prevention in Anyigba

Vigilante groups in Anyigba play a crucial role in supplementing formal security agencies to combat crime. However, despite their contributions to community security, they face numerous challenges that hinder their effectiveness. These challenges range from inadequate resources and lack of legal recognition to issues related to human rights violations. This paper explores five key challenges confronting vigilante groups in Anyigba, supported by scholarly views and references.

- i. **Inadequate Funding and Logistics:** One of the major obstacles faced by vigilante groups in Anyigba is inadequate funding and logistical support. Unlike formal security agencies that receive government allocations, vigilante groups largely depend on community donations and voluntary contributions, which are often insufficient. Limited access to essential security tools such as patrol vehicles, firearms, communication gadgets, and uniforms. In addition, Poor remuneration of vigilante members, leading to low morale and high attrition rates. Adebayo (2013) argues that the effectiveness of community policing mechanisms, including vigilante groups, is significantly undermined by financial constraints. Without adequate funding, these groups struggle to carry out their duties efficiently, thereby weakening crime prevention efforts. Similarly, Alemika and Chukwuma (2014) highlight that vigilante groups in Nigeria often lack government support, making them vulnerable to operational challenges.
- ii. **Lack of Legal Recognition and Institutional Backing:** Another major challenge hindering the effectiveness of vigilante groups in Anyigba is the absence of legal recognition and institutional support. Since most vigilante groups operate informally, their authority is often questioned, limiting their ability to function effectively. Many vigilante groups operate without a clear legal framework, making it difficult to prosecute criminals they apprehend. In some cases, vigilante members are arrested and prosecuted for carrying out security duties without official authorization. Otu (2020) notes that the lack of a formal legal framework for vigilante groups in Nigeria results in conflicts with state security agencies, reducing their operational effectiveness. Ekpenyong and Usoro (2021) argue that integrating vigilante groups into the formal security structure can enhance their efficiency and provide them with legal protection to carry out their duties without fear of victimization.
- iii. **Human Rights Violations and Excessive Use of Force:** A significant challenge affecting vigilante operations is the frequent allegations of human rights abuses and excessive use of force. In some instances, vigilante groups have been accused of extrajudicial killings, unlawful detentions, and brutal interrogations. Some vigilante members use jungle justice, executing suspects without proper investigations. There have been cases of abuse of power, where vigilante members harass innocent civilians. Additionally, lack of formal training in law enforcement often leads to unprofessional conduct and violations of human rights. Alemika and Chukwuma (2014) emphasize that vigilante groups, due to their informal nature, often lack training in human rights laws, leading to excessive force and rights violations. Onyango and Orodho (2018) argue that for vigilante groups to be effective, they must adhere to the rule of law and human rights principles to maintain public trust and legitimacy.
- iv. **Rivalry and Conflict with Formal Security Agencies:** Another critical challenge is the conflict between vigilante groups and formal security agencies, particularly the Nigerian Police Force. This rivalry often arises due to

differences in operational methods, competition for control, and lack of coordination. Formal security agencies sometimes perceive vigilante groups as threats rather than partners. Ekpenyong and Usoro (2021) highlight that police-vigilante conflicts are a major impediment to effective crime prevention in Nigeria. They argue that fostering better synergy between vigilante groups and law enforcement agencies can improve security outcomes. Similarly, Otu (2020) notes that mutual distrust between vigilante groups and formal security forces undermines intelligence sharing and crime response efforts.

- v. **Infiltration by Criminal Elements:** Vigilante groups are sometimes infiltrated by criminal elements, which compromises their effectiveness and credibility. In some cases, individuals with criminal records join vigilante groups under the guise of providing security, only to use their position for personal gain or criminal activities. Some vigilante members engage in extortion, demanding bribes from residents in exchange for protection. Adebayo (2013) asserts that criminal infiltration is a common problem in community policing structures, as lack of proper background checks allows wrong individuals to gain access to sensitive security operations. Alemika and Chukwuma (2014) suggest that introducing accountability measures and periodic evaluations can help curb corruption and infiltration within vigilante groups.

Theoretical Framework

Social Control theory, propounded by Travis Hirschi (1969) in his work *Causes of Delinquency*, explains that individuals are naturally inclined toward deviant or criminal behavior unless controlled through strong social bonds, shared norms, and moral values. The theory emphasizes that conformity to societal expectations is maintained when individuals are closely attached to their community, committed to its well-being, actively involved in positive activities, and hold firm beliefs in its moral and legal codes.

This theory provides a strong explanatory basis for the role of vigilante groups in curbing incessant armed robbery in Anyigba Metropolis. Vigilante groups represent a form of informal social control mechanism, emerging where formal law enforcement is perceived as weak or ineffective. They operate through community-based surveillance, deterrence, and swift response to criminal activities—functions that directly reflect Hirschi's four social bond elements:

Attachment: Members of vigilante groups often have strong emotional ties to their community, motivating them to protect lives and property. Their attachment fosters cooperation among residents, discouraging potential offenders from engaging in armed robbery due to community cohesion and mutual trust.

Commitment: Vigilante members and law-abiding residents are committed to maintaining peace and order. This shared investment in communal security serves as a deterrent to crime, as individuals are less likely to engage in armed robbery when they recognize the community's unified stance against it.

Involvement: Through active participation in patrols, intelligence sharing, and community meetings, vigilante groups engage residents in crime-prevention activities, thereby reducing idle time that could lead to deviance or criminal behavior.

Belief: The existence and activities of vigilante groups reinforce communal belief in moral order and respect for law and justice. By upholding shared values, they discourage acts such as armed robbery that threaten social stability.

In the context of Anyigba Metropolis, where frequent incidents of armed robbery have created fear and insecurity, Social Control Theory helps explain how vigilante groups strengthen social bonds and promote communal vigilance as a deterrent to crime. Their role extends beyond physical protection—they help restore community confidence, reinforce moral order, and enhance residents’ sense of belonging and responsibility.

Furthermore, John Hagan (1993) expanded on Social Control Theory by noting that weak social structures and inequalities often hinder individuals’ ability to form strong social bonds, leading to higher crime rates in marginalized communities. Applying this to Anyigba, vigilante groups fill the gap left by weakened formal institutions, acting as a community-driven mechanism of social control that curbs incessant armed robbery through collective responsibility and local enforcement of norms.

Empirical Review

Author(s)	Aim	Methodology	Findings	Conclusion
Oladipo and Adedeji (2020)	Examined the effectiveness of vigilante groups in combating armed robbery in Oyo and Ogun States Southwest Nigeria.	Descriptive Survey Analysis	That Lack Of Training And Limited Resources Hindered The Vigilantes' Ability To Fully Address Armed Robbery.	The study revealed that vigilante groups had a significant impact on reducing armed robbery incidents in areas with poor police coverage
Okafor and Eze (2017)	Assessed how vigilante groups contributed to reducing armed robbery in Anambra and Enugu States	Analytical approach of FGD	That vigilante groups significantly reduced the fear of crime and improved community safety through their proactive engagement and patrols.	The study noted that vigilante groups often faced challenges related to resources, lack of formal training, and lack of cooperation from law enforcement agencies.
Adeyemi and Adebayo (2021)	Evaluate the crime prevention strategies employed	Mixed Approach	Vigilante groups in rural areas were especially effective in curbing	Challenges such as lack of equipment, insufficient

	by vigilante groups in rural communities in Kogi and Benue States.		armed robbery due to strong community ties and the quick response times of local patrols.	manpower, and the need for formal training were highlighted as significant barriers to their success.
Nwokolo and Idowu (2019)	The role of vigilante groups in urban crime prevention, focusing on Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja.	Analytical approach of FGD	That vigilante groups were crucial in addressing the high levels of armed robbery in major urban areas, where formal police services often lagged behind	Vigilantes were instrumental in preventing crimes through early detection and surveillance activities.

The analysis presented in the above table revealed that vigilante groups had a significant impact on reducing armed robbery incidents in areas with poor police coverage. The community members expressed high levels of satisfaction with the vigilantes' rapid response times and their ability to deter criminals (Oladipo and Adedeji 2020). Community involvement was key to vigilante success, with the local population providing valuable intelligence and support to the vigilantes (Okafor and Eze 2017). (Adeyemi and Adebayo 2021) Vigilante groups in rural areas were especially effective in curbing armed robbery due to strong community ties and the quick response times of local patrols. The study revealed that vigilantes were often more trusted than the police, particularly in areas where police presence was low or absent.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted the survey type of research. A survey research design is one in which a researcher observes the object of study as they are without manipulating them with the aim of collecting firsthand information.

The population of the study is the selected Vigilante Group, Heads, and selected community members of Anyigba Metropolis which is targeted at 109. The population investigated in this study consisted of respondent picked at random.

S/N	Office	Selected Population	Percentage
1	KGVS Main Office, Anyigba	82	75

2	KGVS outpost	18	17
3	Community Leaders	9	8
4	Total	109	100

Source; Field Survey, 2025

Sample size refers to the selected number of people in the population whose opinions were actually sampled in order to draw conclusion about the entire population used for the study. The Taro Yamani formular for determining sample size was used. The formular adopted in determining the sample size is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = the sample size to be determined

N = the finite population

1= constant

e= margin of error

Therefore,

$$n = \frac{109}{1 + 109 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{109}{1 + 109 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{109}{1 + 0.2725}$$

$$n = \frac{109}{1.2725}$$

For the purpose of this study, the content validity method was adopted. The reason for the adoption of content validity was to ensure that there is a close relationship between the content of the structure questionnaire and the objectives of the study. While Reliability according to Mark et al (2019), refers to the dependability of the research instrument. Refers to the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings. The study was based on a description approach, relying on two sources for data collection and analysis. The sources are from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data comprise of only questionnaire, while secondary source of data provide information from books and journals article.

The data obtained through questionnaire was analysed using statistical instruments. They were quantified and presented in frequency distribution tables using absolute figures and percentages. The data was then analyzed using statistical instruments. The frequency distribution of responses was based on Likert’s five (5) point Scale of; Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) respectively.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Hypothesis One: Vigilante groups have no significant effect in reducing armed robbery in Anyigba metropolis.

Opinion	Responses	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	49	61
Agree	19	24
Undecided	2	2.5
Disagree	5	6.25
Strongly Disagree	5	6.25
Total	80	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Step 2: Observed and Expected Frequencies

Opinion	Fo (Observed)	Fe (Expected)	Fo – Fe	(Fo - Fe) ²	(Fo - Fe) ² / Fe
Strongly Agree	49	16	33	1089	68.06
Agree	19	16	3	9	0.56
Undecided	2	16	-14	196	12.25
Disagree	5	16	-11	121	7.56
Strongly Disagree	5	16	-11	121	7.56
Total	80	80	—	—	≈ 96.0

$\Sigma(Fo - Fe)^2 / Fe = 96.0$ (rounded from 96.05 as given)

Step 3: Determine Degrees of Freedom (df)

$df = k - 1 = 5 - 1 = 4$

Where k = number of response categories (5).

Step 4: Level of Significance

Typically, the significance level (α) is 0.05.

From the Chi-square distribution table:

$$\chi^2_{\{0.05, 4\}} = 9.49$$

Step 5: Decision Rule

If calculated $\chi^2 >$ table χ^2 , reject H_0 .

If calculated $\chi^2 \leq$ table χ^2 , fail to reject H_0 .

Step 6: Interpretation

$$\chi^2_{\{calculated\}} = 96.0 > \chi^2_{\{critical\}} = 9.49$$

Decision: Reject the null hypothesis (H_0).

Step 7: Conclusion

Since the calculated Chi-square value (96.0) is greater than the critical value (9.49) at 0.05 level of significance, we reject the null hypothesis. This means:

> There is a statistically significant relationship between the activities of vigilante groups and the reduction of armed robbery in Anyigba metropolis.

Step 8: Interpretation in Words

The data reveals that a majority of respondents (“Strongly Agree” = 61% and “Agree” = 24%) believe that vigilante groups play an effective role in curbing armed robbery. The chi-square analysis confirms that this observed pattern is not due to chance, indicating that vigilante groups have a significant positive effect on reducing armed robbery in the area.

Hypothesis Two: The strategies employed by vigilante groups in crime prevention in Anyigba metropolis of Kogi State is not adequate

The table below represents responses on whether “the strategies employed by vigilante groups in crime prevention in Anyigba metropolis are adequate.”

Opinion	Frequency (Fo)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	49	61
Agree	19	24
Undecided	2	2.5

Disagree	5	6.25
Strongly Disagree	5	6.25
Total	80	100

From this, most respondents (61%) strongly agree that the strategies are not adequate, and another 24% agree—a combined 85% in agreement that the strategies are insufficient.

Step 2: Hypothesis Formulation

To test whether the observed responses significantly differ from what would be expected by chance, a chi-square (χ^2) test is applied.

Null Hypothesis (H_0): The strategies employed by vigilante groups are adequate (no significant difference between observed and expected responses).

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): The strategies employed by vigilante groups are not adequate (there is a significant difference between observed and expected responses).

Step 3: Chi-Square (χ^2) Test Calculation

Opinion	Fo	Fe	(Fo - Fe)	(Fo - Fe) ²	(Fo - Fe) ² / Fe
Strongly Agree	49	16	33	1089	68.06
Agree	19	16	3	9	0.56
Undecided	2	16	-14	196	12.25
Disagree	5	16	-11	121	7.56
Strongly Disagree	5	16	-11	121	7.56
Total	80	80	—	—	96.0

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}} = \sum \frac{(Fo - Fe)^2}{Fe} = 96$$

Step 4: Degree of Freedom (DF)

$$DF = (k - 1) = 5 - 1 = 4$$

DF = 4 is correct.

Step 5: Critical Value and Decision Rule

At 5% level of significance and DF = 4,

the critical χ^2 value (from the chi-square distribution table) is 9.488.

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}} = 96 > \chi^2_{\text{critical}} = 9.488$$

Step 6: Decision

Since the calculated χ^2 (96) is greater than the critical χ^2 (9.488), we reject the null hypothesis (H_0).

Step 7: Interpretation

There is a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies.

This means that respondents do not believe the strategies employed by vigilante groups in crime prevention are adequate.

Step 8: Conclusion

Based on the chi-square test and descriptive statistics:

A majority (85%) agree that the vigilante strategies are inadequate.

The chi-square test confirms this perception is statistically significant.

Conclusion:

The strategies employed by vigilante groups in crime prevention in Anyigba metropolis are not adequate.

Results and Discussion

Objective 1: Examine the effectiveness of vigilante groups in reducing armed robbery in Anyigba metropolis of Kogi State. Data from table 4.2.6 and 4.2.7 shows that most respondents agree and strongly agree respectively that vigilante groups has been effective in reducing armed robbery in Anyigba metropolis of Kogi State. The outcome of the hypothesis test also aligns with the data presented, and rejects the null hypothesis which avers that vigilante groups has not been effective in reducing armed robbery in Anyigba metropolis of Kogi State.

Findings based on Research Objective 2:

To identify the operational strategies employed by vigilante groups in crime prevention. The findings of the study revealed that most respondents agree and strongly agree respectively that vigilante adopt various operational strategies to combat crime in Anyigba metropolis. The outcome of the hypothesis test also aligns with the data presented, and reject the null hypothesis.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the role of vigilante groups in curbing incessant armed robbery in Anyigba metropolis, with a focus on their effectiveness, strategies, and limitations in complementing formal law enforcement agencies. The analysis of field data obtained from respondents revealed several key insights which are discussed in relation to the study objectives and theoretical framework.

1. Effectiveness of the activities of Vigilante Groups in Reducing Armed Robbery

Findings from the first hypothesis, which stated that vigilante groups have no significant effect in reducing armed robbery in Anyigba metropolis, were contradicted by the majority of respondents. A total of 85% (Strongly Agree = 61%, Agree = 24%) affirmed that vigilante groups have played a significant role in reducing incidences of armed robbery. This implies that community-based security initiatives have contributed to improving safety and public confidence within the metropolis (Nwokolo and Idowu 2019).

This finding aligns with Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969), which states that social bonds and communal efforts act as deterrents to deviant behavior. The active presence of vigilante members—often locals familiar with the terrain and the residents—creates informal surveillance networks that discourage criminal activity. Similar results have been observed in other Nigerian communities where vigilante operations supplement inadequate police presence (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2014).

2. Adequacy of Operational Strategies Employed by Vigilante Groups

Despite their positive impact, findings showed that respondents expressed mixed opinions about the adequacy of the operational strategies employed by these groups. The data revealed that 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the strategies used by vigilante groups in crime prevention are not adequate. This suggests that while the groups are instrumental in crime control, they lack modern crime-fighting techniques, logistics, and operational coordination.

These limitations stem from poor training, lack of government support, and inadequate access to intelligence or equipment. The reliance on traditional methods such as community patrols, whistle alerts, and physical confrontation limits their effectiveness against sophisticated armed robbers who often operate with modern weapons and vehicles. This observation is consistent with findings by Eke (2018), who noted that most vigilante operations in Nigeria face capacity and logistical challenges that hinder long-term efficiency.

Summary of Discussion

In summary, the findings demonstrate that vigilante groups in Anyigba metropolis play a critical role in curbing armed robbery, primarily through community-based surveillance and rapid response. However, their efforts are constrained by inadequate resources, poor coordination, and lack of institutional support. To maximize their impact, there is a need for stronger collaboration with formal law enforcement agencies, training in modern crime prevention techniques, and proper regulation by government authorities.

Therefore, while vigilante groups have proven effective in mitigating armed robbery to an extent, sustainable community security in Anyigba will depend on a synergistic relationship between local vigilante initiatives and formal state policing structures.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Vigilante groups play a critical role in curbing armed robbery and other forms of crime, particularly in regions with limited law enforcement presence. The study has shown that the success of these groups in Anyigba is closely tied to the strength of social bonds within the community, the active involvement of local residents, and the cooperative efforts

between vigilantes and formal law enforcement. Social Control Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the motivations behind the formation of vigilante groups, which are driven by a desire to maintain order and reduce criminal activity. However, despite their positive contributions, vigilante groups face significant challenges. The lack of formal recognition, insufficient resources, and lack of proper training hinder their ability to effectively combat armed robbery in the long term. Additionally, the legal and ethical implications of vigilante justice remain a concern, particularly regarding issues of human rights and the potential for abuse. The study also identifies several gaps in the literature. Most existing research focuses on urban areas, neglecting the dynamics in rural and semi-urban settings, which have distinct security challenges. Furthermore, there is a lack of longitudinal studies that assess the long-term impact of vigilante groups on crime rates and their relationship with law enforcement agencies. For the continued success of vigilante groups in combating armed robbery, it is essential to address the challenges they face. There is a need for greater government support, including legal frameworks to guide the operations of vigilante groups, and more studies to better understand their long-term effectiveness and integration into the formal justice system.

The study recommended the following;

- i. It is essential for the Nigerian government to formalize the role of vigilante groups by creating legal frameworks that define their powers and responsibilities. This would allow vigilantes to operate within the bounds of the law while maintaining their effectiveness in reducing crime.
- ii. Vigilante groups need proper training in criminal justice procedures and community policing. Additionally, the allocation of resources such as communication tools, protective gear, and transport would enhance their operational efficiency and safety.

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