



SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report provides an analysis of the informal security actors in the Nigerian states of Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano and in the capital city of Abuja. Although it is not a state, Abuja was included because many informal security stakeholders are based there. The key issues considered are the types of informal security actors, the structures of these actors, their recruitment and training mechanisms, their accountability issues, their relationships with formal security actors, and perceptions of them. Interviews were conducted with sixty informal security actors and stakeholders in January and February 2015. The report contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the informal security structures in Nigeria.

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Ernest Ogbozor

Understanding the Informal Security Sector in Nigeria

Summary

- Informal security actors such as vigilantes play a variety of roles in African communities. Research has tended to focus on the negative impacts of informal security providers, including the perpetration of human rights violations, rather than on the essential roles these groups play in a community's safety and security.
- The study referenced in this report focused on Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano states in Nigeria. These states have long histories of ethnoreligious and political-related violence. A number of informal security actors are active in these states due to the high rate of violence. The study also considered Abuja because of the presence of informal security stakeholders in the nation's capital city.
- In Nigeria, vigilantes have both positive and negative impacts. Abuses by vigilantes must be addressed formally and structurally while preserving the important role of vigilantes as protectors of their communities.
- Among the various informal security actors in Nigeria, the Vigilante Group of Nigeria is the oldest recognized actor. The group is perceived as playing an important role in providing critical policing services to Nigerians, particularly in rural communities.
- The roles and functions of vigilante groups include providing security, early warning alerts, and traffic control; gathering intelligence; settling disputes; and conducting community development activities. Most groups carry out security roles; some combine security functions with community development activities or enforcing religious rights.
- The operational structures and administrative procedures of informal security providers vary from one group to another; some groups have well-documented operational guidelines and administrative procedures, whereas others have no written operational manuals or administrative and financial systems.
- Most informal security providers have weak internal and external accountability systems. Internally, group leaders or village heads provide oversight of a group's activities. External monitoring by official security agencies exists in some cases but is not formalized or enforced.

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- Some informal policing groups have cordial relationships with formal security actors; however, there are no formal working agreements or memoranda of understanding with official security agencies. Many vigilante groups do not receive training on state laws or on how to operate as a security outfit in the country.
- Perceptions about the activities of informal security actors vary, but many residents within the communities interviewed prefer vigilante groups to the police. The police are often unavailable when they are needed in rural communities.

Introduction

Informal security actors are key players in security provision in many African communities. Studies on informal policing structures often focus on victims of vigilantism and breaches of human rights perpetrated by vigilantes, neglecting the beneficial role vigilantes play in ensuring the safety and security of local communities.¹ In Nigeria, vigilantes have both negative and positive impacts: abuses by vigilantes must be addressed formally and structurally while preserving the important role of vigilantes as protectors of their communities. Informal mechanisms for protection have thrived in certain rural areas, where the majority of the people are excluded from mainstream security provisioning.² In these cases, nonstate security actors have increasingly bridged the vacuum created by the inability of formal security institutions to ensure the safety of citizens.³ Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano states have long histories of ethnoreligious and political-related violence. A number of informal actors are active in these states, which have high rates of violence.⁴ This report provides an analysis of the informal security providers in Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano. It discusses the informal security actors present in these states, their structures, their recruitment and training mechanisms, accountability issues, their relationships with formal security actors, and perceptions of them.

This report is based on previous studies of the informal security sector and on semi-structured field interviews. The specific questions addressed are: Who are the nonstate security actors in Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano states? What, if any, recruitment and training procedures and accountability mechanisms exist? How do nonstate security actors in these states interact with the formal security sector? How are nonstate security actors in Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, and Abuja perceived?

Semistructured interviews using open-ended questions were the main source of data collection. Interviewees included vigilantes and members of community neighborhood watch groups, community members, local leaders, private security guards, workers from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and formal security officials. Sixty individuals were interviewed in Plateau's Jos North and South local government areas (LGAs), Kaduna's Jema'a and Sanga LGAs, and Kano's Feggae and Nasarawa LGAs, as well as in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory. Abuja, the nation's capital, was included because of the presence of a large number of informal security stakeholders, such as NGOs, security agencies, and paramilitary agencies. Participants were identified and interviewed in January and February 2015.

The majority of participants expressed similar opinions about reasons for the existence of informal policing groups. A leader of an organization supporting such groups noted, "There are about 377,000 policemen in Nigeria for 170 million people. Sadly, half of the entire Nigeria Police Force is serving the politicians."⁵ He added, "Some senior government personnel have about fifty policemen attached to him and his family." Rather than patrol local communities, police officers prefer to take on jobs where they can earn additional income, such as working for politicians, guarding security checkpoints, or working as guards at commercial banks. In Nigeria, the ratio of police to the population is low—about 1 police officer for every 500 Nigerians. Compare these numbers with South Africa, where the ratio of police to

the population is about 1 police officer per 250 people.⁶ A member of a vigilante group in Plateau said, “Police are not enough; I volunteer for our community vigilante to safeguard our lives and properties.”⁷ Many respondents expressed concern about the necessity of the complementary roles of the vigilante groups, suggesting that many Nigerians feel they are underpoliced.

The Nigeria Police Force suffers from insufficient funding and equipment, mismanagement, abuse of power, and corruption. Vigilantes flourish not only in places where the state lacks the capacity to protect citizens from crime, but also where the state is believed to be corrupt or untrustworthy,⁸ including in Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano. In March 2014, President Goodluck Jonathan convened a national conference to discuss challenges to national cohesion and develop solutions to those challenges. One of the recommendations stemming from the conference, which 492 delegates attended, was the establishment of a state-level police force in Nigeria—a confirmation of the urgent need for alternative security arrangements. Reacting to this proposal, the national commandant of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), Usman Jahun, suggested that the VGN could play the role of state police by virtue of its structure and strength.⁹

Background on the Informal Security Sector in Nigeria

The informal security sector is sometimes referred to as the informal policing structure or the voluntary policing sector (VPS). In Nigeria, these groups are referred to as vigilantes, neighborhood watch, community guards, or traditional police;¹⁰ vigilante is the most common term. In traditional Nigerian societies, vigilantes are known as *ndi-nche* (guards), *yan banga* (vigilante), and *olodes* (hunters), among other names.

Vigilantism is “an organized attempt by a group of ordinary citizens to enforce norms and maintain law and order on behalf of their communities, often by resorting to violence, in the perceived absence of effective official state action through the police and courts.”¹¹ According to Alemika and Chukwuma, there are four main types of vigilantism:

- Neighborhood or community: Neighborhood watch and community vigilante groups organized by community associations
- Ethnic: Vigilante groups organized along ethnic lines to defend ethnic interest
- Religious: Vigilantes with faith roots
- State-sponsored: Groups that operate with the support of local governments¹²

These types are not rigid or exclusive; one group might combine the features of two or more of these types.¹³ For example, Hisba is an informal security group that has faith and state-sponsored roots. Another classification that has been used to distinguish among the different types of informal security actors is militant and nonmilitant groups. This classification is used loosely, however, because a nonmilitant group could become militant and vice versa, or even combine both features, thus making it difficult to draw a line between the two categories. Laurent Fourchard writes that vigilante groups protect lives and properties, defend ethnic groups, and work as thugs on behalf of elite political leaders.¹⁴ As Usman Jahun notes, unlike the Nigeria Police Force or the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps, which are coordinated through formal established systems with rules, informal policing units differ in structure and operation and operate independently from each other, with various methods of providing and ensuring security.¹⁵

Among the informal policing structures in Nigeria, the VGN, with millions of members, is probably the largest actor.¹⁶ Vigilantism dates to the precolonial era, when vigilante groups were small, characterized by loose and uncoordinated leadership and activities, and

operated independently in the various local areas of the federations. As time went on, the vigilante groups unified to form the VGN, with operations at the local, state, regional, and national levels.¹⁷

In comparison, the first police force in Nigeria was established in 1861 by the British colonial administration to control the restive population of Lagos state. The regional police forces in the north and southern regions of the country were merged in 1930 to form the Nigeria Police Force.¹⁸ Thus, the VGN essentially predates the establishment of formal policing in Nigeria.

The activities of vigilante groups are largely obscure because they operate without a legal mandate. The VGN officially registered on February 18, 1999, with the Corporate Affairs Commission Companies and Allied Matters, the federal agency charged with registering not-for-profit organizations. The status of the VGN as a not-for-profit organization reflects the perception of the group as a social welfare organization rather than as an auxiliary state security agency. In the absence of formal recognition by the state, the VGN gained some legitimacy with its not-for-profit status, even as the actions of some VGN actors in regard to alleged human rights violations continues to undermine its status. It is worth noting that the VGN registration coincided with Nigeria's return to democratic governance after fifteen years of military rule.

In 2000, the various state chapters of the VGN agreed to form a unified group at the national level to improve coordination and service delivery. Before then, VGN activities at the regional and national levels were nonexistent or limited. The purpose of a national platform was to attract support from the national authority by aligning the VGN's activities with those of federal government agencies. Regional and national coordination offices were set up as platforms for lobbying and advocacy with the relevant federal government agencies. The core support for these VGN operations was from state and local government authorities.

In 2011, Commandant Jahun moved the national secretariat of the organization from Kaduna state to Abuja. The move to Abuja brought VGN headquarters closer to the federal government ministries; however, the resources needed to sustain a national office in the nation's capital have almost overwhelmed the organization's budget. The federal government does not fund the VGN, although contributions from some state chapters have enabled it to maintain physical presence in Abuja.

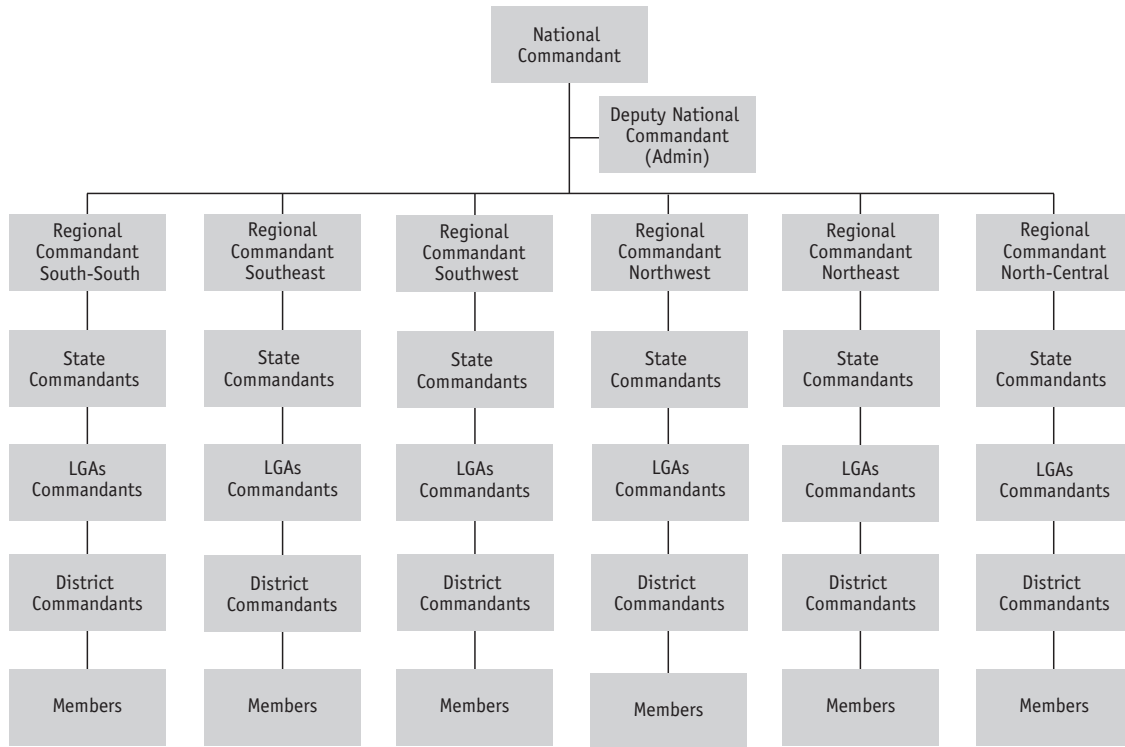
The VGN has a four-level governance structure: national, regional, state, and LGA; districts/members are units within the LGA. At the national level, twelve members, including the national commandant and the deputy national commandant, constitute the national executive council, which coordinates activities at the national level. Program areas include general operations, administration, finance, logistics, intelligence, training, anti-human trafficking, community policing, and government interrelations.

Six regional commandants are in charge of the six VGN regional offices. The regional offices are in the six geopolitical zones of the country—northwest, north-central, northeast, southwest, south-south, and southeast—that encompass thirty-six states. Each regional commandant controls five to seven states, and all regional commandants report directly to the national commandant. The regional offices coordinate activities at the state level. The structures at the state and LGA levels are similar to that of the national level, consisting of a management team and executive councils. There are 36 state and 744 LGA commands. The foot soldiers of the vigilantes are the members of the local government districts and units (see figure 1).

With millions of members at the federal, regional, state, and local government levels, the VGN is more widely distributed than any other policing group in the country. It thus has the capacity to play a complementary role to the formal security sector. As the VGN

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Figure 1. Structure of the VGN



Source: Author's field survey, 2015.

national commandant has underlined, “By virtue of VGN’s structure and rural base, it could serve as an auxiliary agency to the national security forces.”¹⁹ Assessments conducted in 2005, 2006, and 2007 by the Security, Justice and Growth Program (a project of the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development Nigeria) attest to the leadership role of the VGN and rank it above other informal policing groups in the country.²⁰ The vision of the VGN is “to reduce criminal activities and fear of crime in the society; reduce hazards to the community as a whole; and provide reassurance to the community.” Its mission is “to help secure a safe and just society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families, and communities are properly safeguarded.”

Lacking financial support, however, the VGN’s ability to function effectively is unclear. The federal government does not recognize or provide financial support to the VGN, and there is no national legislation to guide group operations. As *Vigilante* magazine pointed out in 2014, “The federal government does not recognize the vigilante group of Nigeria, but the services of the group are felt all over the country.”²¹ Yet, the contributions of the VGN and the Civilian Joint Task Force to the federal security forces to contain Boko Haram have been acknowledged.²² According to Borno VGN Commander Abdullahi Muhammad, by mid-2014, three hundred officers from the Borno VGN chapter had been killed fighting Boko Haram. “For instance, our former commander which I took over from was killed alongside his wives...our state secretary, and many others,”²³ he said. The VGN national commandant admitted that the national headquarters struggles to support the widows and orphans of deceased members.

Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano have all passed laws regarding the activities of vigilante groups. The legalization of and support for vigilante activities enables the VPS in these states to act as local police.

The organization and operation of the vigilante groups in the states and local governments differ from federal and regional organization and operation. State and local government VGN chapters receive significant financial support from local authorities. In some states, laws exist to guide the activities of the informal groups. Such legalization makes the VGN an agent of the state security apparatus, with financial implications on the part of the local authority. Abuja and seventeen states, including Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano, have enacted laws guiding the activities of the VGN. Six states—Sokoto, Katsina, Zamfara, Edo, Delta, and Bayelsa—have vigilante laws pending in their respective state governments. The VGN is working to persuade the remaining twelve states to enact legislation to guide vigilante operations.

Informal Security Actors in Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano

Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano have all passed laws regarding the activities of vigilante groups. The legalization of and support for vigilante activities enables the VPS in these states to act as local police. Operation Rainbow and Neighbourhood Watch (Plateau), the VGN (Kaduna), and the Hisba Commission (Kano) are the dominant informal policing actors. However, other VPS groups exist that are neither registered nor recognized by the local authorities. The activities of these groups are often hidden from public scrutiny because of the remote nature of their operations, which are mostly in rural communities. In Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano, the state-recognized actors operate alongside local voluntary policing groups.

Plateau State

Operation Rainbow and Neighbourhood Watch (collectively referred to as OR) was established by the Plateau State Operation Rainbow and Neighbourhood Watch Law of 2012.²⁴ Operation Rainbow is a formal security unit consisting of the police, the army, the State Security Service, and the air force; Neighbourhood Watch is a civilian unit. These two units function together, with the Neighbourhood Watch gathering intelligence information for Operation Rainbow to act on. It is alleged that the hybrid nature of OR, a combination of formal and informal policing components, led to the establishment and legalization of informal policing groups in Plateau.²⁵

Critics of OR argue that the Plateau state government cannot be trusted and that the government uses the state security outfit to police certain sections of the populace.²⁶ Plateau is divided between indigenes (mostly Christians) and nonindigenes (mostly Muslim settlers). The way in which the security forces have handled outbreaks of violence in the Plateau since the early 2000s has resulted in an environment of mistrust between indigenes and nonindigenes. The Operation Rainbow and Neighbourhood Watch structures were merged to create synergy between the federal (official security agencies) and state (Neighbourhood Watch) security infrastructures to satisfy the opposing forces. The added value of the state security structure is Neighbourhood Watch branches in all the state LGAs.

The VGN Plateau state chapter is the other major informal policing group in the state. According to a local vigilante leader, “The Plateau branch of the VGN started in the late seventies, but collapsed at a point in time due to inactivity.”²⁷ Traces of defunct VGN units were revived as the need for community security increased. These units include the Angwan Miango and Tudun Wada units in the Jos North LGA. The Angwan Miango unit started in 2009 and consists of only Christian members, whereas the Tudun Wada unit has only Muslim members. The homogenous membership of these groups is a reflection of the settlement patterns and divisions between the Christian and Muslim communities in the state. The relationship between these two groups is cause for concern: a series of outbreaks of mass violence in Jos—in 2001,

2004, and 2008—left hundreds of people dead and communities segregated. Violence broke out again in Jos in 2014 and 2015, with killings in several villages in the outskirts of Jos.

The Sarkin Arab Ward Neighbourhood Watch and the Rahwol Kaneng Neighbourhood Watch Du District are also active voluntary policing groups. They were established in the wake of security concerns in their respective wards and districts. The Sarkin Arab Ward Neighbourhood Watch started in 2001 to enhance peaceful coexistence between Christian and Muslim communities. The group evolved from various ethnic group associations. The collapse of some VGN units contributed to the establishment of such organizations to address security concerns in the urban slum communities of Jos North and South LGAs.

Kaduna State

On June 6, 2013, the Kaduna State House of Assembly ratified the State Vigilante Service Law, which legalized the operation of vigilante groups.²⁸ The law states: “Vigilance Service is a registered service of people in a community that have agreed to render assistance on crime detection, prevention, and promotion of security consciousness in the community.”²⁹ The law regulates the activities of the VPS to assist in securing lives and properties in the rural communities. Unlike in Plateau state, in Kaduna, the VGN is the dominant informal policing actor. The VGN in Kaduna dates to 1982, when it provided voluntary surveillance to the Tudun Wada community of Kaduna North local government, a safe haven for criminal activities. The operations of the group now cover the twenty-three LGAs in the state. The VGN Kaduna chapter is one of the most well-established branches, largely because the VGN’s national headquarters were based in Kaduna before they were relocated to Abuja in 2011.

Following the 2011 postelection violence in Kaduna, the Jema’a emirate of the Vigilance Service was established in Kafanchan to help protect the community from attacks. Kafanchan, the capital of Jema’a, had been adversely affected by the violence. Kafanchan is a semiurban settlement with predominantly Muslim and Christian communities. The structure of the vigilante group in Kafanchan is similar to that in Jos city, with homogenous Christian and Muslim member groups; an emirate imam heads a unit with only Muslim members, while a chaplain heads the Christian unit. “We have a good working relationship irrespective of the homogeneous make-up of the units,”³⁰ said a chaplain leader.

The other voluntary policing actors in Kaduna are the community and neighborhood watches, with operations at the LGA and district levels. The community neighborhood watches were established to monitor activities of unknown gunmen in the southern Kaduna communities. The Antang and Sanga community watch groups are typical examples. The Antang Community Watch grew out of the Antang Youth Development Association, a registered community development association. The Sanga Community Watch was formed after several attacks by unknown gunmen in the Sanga LGA. A member of the community watch discussed what motivated him to join the group: “I joined our community watch group after my spouse was killed in a police station attack.”³¹ “Security deteriorates in our community,” said another member of the group. “My brother was killed when he went to the farm to collect his farm implements.”³² Community watch groups are common in southern Kaduna areas that have experienced attacks from unknown gunmen.

Kano State

Kano legalized the operation of voluntary policing groups in 2012 with the Neighbourhood Watch (Vigilante Security) Groups Law.³³ The law provides for the establishment, registration, and monitoring of neighborhood watches. Vigilante policing groups operated in Kano state prior to the law, however. For example, Hisba, a notable voluntary policing actor with religious affiliation, has been operating in Kano since the late 1990s. Kano was among the

first states in northern Nigeria to establish a Hisba commission following the introduction of Sharia law in the country in 1999. Hisba, according to an interviewee, encourages “what is good and discourag[es] what is bad.”³⁴ Hisba enforces the Sharia legal system and serves as a mechanism for safeguarding the welfare and laws of the community. It operates alongside other informal state actors, such as the Kano state chapter of the VGN, the Kano State Security Guard, and the Kano Road and Transport Authority (KAROTA).

KAROTA was established in 2011 to control the free flow of traffic in the Kano metropolis and to eliminate street trading and illegal parking.³⁵ KAROTA also works to eliminate illegal motor parks and to prevent street hawking. KAROTA partners with the Platinum Parking and Management Services (PPMS), an agency that manages toll and parking fees collections. However, KAROTA and PPMS operatives sometimes infringe on people’s rights by arresting and impounding vehicles. The function of KAROTA overlaps with functions of state and federal agencies such as the Vehicle Inspection Agency, the Federal Road Safety Commission, and the police, creating unhealthy competitions among agencies. The VGN, Hisba, and KAROTA are the most popular informal policing structures in Kano state.

Overall, the various types of voluntary policing groups identified in Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano states can be categorized into neighborhood and community vigilantism, religious vigilantism, state-sponsored vigilantism, or a combination of the categories.³⁶ Hisba represents a combination of a state- and religious-sponsored group, but it is unclear if Hisba is a vigilante group, a religious institution, or a government welfare agency.

Operational Structures

The operational structures of voluntary policing groups vary. Some groups have well-documented structures, operational guidelines, and administrative procedures, whereas others have no written operational manuals or administrative or financial procedures. Most state-sponsored actors have structures at the state, zonal, local government, and community levels, whereas some voluntary policing groups have structures at the community level only. OR, VGN state chapters, and Hisba all have operations at various government levels, making their services available to many beneficiaries, particularly in rural areas.

OR has a state coordinator who oversees activities at the headquarters. Below this level are LGA supervisors, ward supervisors, and district operations. The group operates a centralized system with field operations in all the Plateau LGAs. Compared with other voluntary policing groups in Plateau, OR has functional operational guidelines and administrative procedures. In contrast, the structure of the Plateau state branch of the VGN is weak because there is no strong coordination unit. The collapse of the initial VGN units and the establishment of Operation Rainbow, a parallel security outfit, affected the development of the VGN Plateau chapter. This chapter of the VGN now exists as fragmented units, as represented by the Angwan Miango Vigilante and the Tudun Wada units. The members of the groups at the state, local government, and community levels consist of few executive and management officers. The Angwan Miango Vigilante has a chairman, a secretary, an elder’s forum, and about twenty field operatives.

The VGN’s operations in Kaduna and Kano are well structured. The Kaduna branch has a central headquarters and three zonal offices. At the LGA level, a commandant oversees each LGA division. Below the local government are traditional institutions known as a chiefdoms (for Christian communities) or emirates (for Muslim-dominated communities), each headed by a chiefdom or an emirate commandant, respectively. The number of chiefdoms and emirates varies in a given LGA. The standard VGN structure consists of a state headquarter, zones, LGAs, districts, and units. The number of VGNs per zone in Kano state is depicted in table 1.³⁷

Table 1. Members of the VGN Kano Chapter per Zone in 2011

S/N	Zones	Existing members	New members	Total members	Percentage
1	Kano Municipal	6,420	5,106	11,526	11
2	Rano	5,233	17,919	23,152	22
3	Dambatta	6,085	7,244	13,329	13
4	Wudil	5,333	12,106	17,439	17
5	Bichi	12,622	22,499	35,121	35
	State HQ	164	23	187	2
	Total	35,857	64,897	100,754	100

Source: Adapted from Vigilante Group of Nigeria Kano State Security Initiative Report (Vigilante Group of Nigeria, Kano Command, 2011).

Vigilantes considerably outnumber police in Kano: there were 100,754 vigilantes in 2011 compared to just 6,000 police.³⁸

Similarly, there are four levels in the Hisba structure: state, senatorial district, LGA, and community. At the state level, there are three divisions of Hisba: board, administration, and command. The board advises the government on Islamic matters, the administration handles administrative activities of the Hisba commission, and the command controls the enforcement of Sharia law. The Hisba command is the operations unit of the group, with four divisions and 10,000 Hisba corps. Within the Hisba command, the functions include special services (traffic control), a humanitarian unit (caring for the population), sensitization and reorientation units (settlement disputes), and a women’s division (handling issues relating to the abuse of women’s rights and domestic violence).

Hisba combines security duties with religion and social welfare services, including patrolling schools and communities to monitor behavior, gather information, monitor social activities, and participate in traffic control. According to a Hisba official, the activities of Hisba also include protecting the Islamic faith, supporting moral standards, discouraging immoral behaviors, fostering social standards, and ensuring that social norms are understood. Hisba preaches to couples about Islam, encourages singles to marry, funds marriages, and investigates divorce cases. It also carries out HIV/pregnancy testing and other unsolicited activities, such as patrolling communities and monitoring behavior. Some of these activities, according to a community member respondent, are parallel to the original purpose of Hisba. Seventy percent of all cases reportedly handled by Hisba are matrimonial issues in nature.³⁹

Regardless of their structures, all the informal security groups perform a similar function: safeguard lives and property in their communities. In a broad sense, the primary duties of vigilantes are to complement security agencies, gather intelligence information, and arrest and hand over suspected criminals to the police. Some groups combine security provisioning with social development activities (construction of roads, bridges, and environmental sanitation facilities), while some engage in land dispute settlement and monitor drug use. The operational structure and mandates of informal policing groups may vary, but their functions are similar.

Recruitment and Training

There are no standard procedures for recruitment and training among informal policing groups. Referrals by existing members of a group are the most common method of recruitment by most of the groups; they usually do not advertise openings in print, electronic,

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or social media. Vetting processes such as interviews, screening, and reference checks of potential members vary from one group to another. Some vigilante members interviewed noted that reference checks are carried out occasionally; others maintained that they are rarely carried out. Some state-sponsored groups like OR and Hisba have recruitment and training guidelines that are monitored by the state authority. In some VGN state chapters, the recruitment procedures are partially captured in the law, but implementation might be different than what the law prescribes. In the absence of a uniform recruitment system, the competence of those recruited by the vigilante groups is questionable.

A VPS candidate often purchases an application form. The application form and charges are at the discretion of the leaders or the managers of each group. For example, the Angwan Miango and the Tudun Wada VGN units sell application forms for N1500 (about \$10). The cost of the Sarkin Arab Ward Neighbourhood Watch membership application packet is N3300 (about \$20).⁴⁰ It includes charges for an application form, a uniform, an ID card, and a passport photo. The charges are moderate but often not affordable to prospective vigilante members. The Sarkin Arab Ward Neighbourhood Watch asks for a reference letter for or a guarantor's endorsement of a potential new member. Most voluntary policing groups require an applicant to be eighteen years old; there is no maximum age.

One individual interviewed said that female applicants usually need consent from their fathers or spouses to be accepted. This informal policy stems from cultural norms that relegate females to male domination. It is unclear how women from female-headed households and divorcees who have no one to seek consent from are handled.

Some groups do not screen potential members. In Kaduna, membership in a community watch group is compulsory for every youth, male and female, twenty years and older. Because community members know each other, there is no need for screening or interviews. A community member who refuses to join a community watch group or absconds from the group is charged a penalty. In these communities, joining the VPS is considered involuntary service to the community.

Regarding training and professional development, most members do not receive formal training from the police or other law enforcement agencies. VPS leaders and top officials often participate in training workshops organized by NGOs, but district-level operatives rarely are offered such opportunities. State-sponsored VPS groups may offer trainings facilitated by formal state actors. These trainings are usually on a needs basis and are usually given to new members. OR trains its members on intelligence gathering and human rights issues before deployment. Hisba conducts training for newly recruited members.⁴¹

Support for training differs from one group to another. Some vigilantes receive subventions or monthly financial support from their state and local government authorities; some groups provide their own working tools, such as uniforms, raincoats, sticks, flashlights, whistles, knives, machetes, and locally made guns. Some VPS groups receive support and motivation such as prayers and working materials from their communities. Kaduna and Kano state governments provide monthly subventions to their state VGN branches. The Kano state government pays a monthly allowance to the Hisba corps. OR pays allowance to its Neighbourhood Watch members at the district level. The benefits paid by the state government to the VPS are usually meager but appreciated. As a VPS member from Plateau noted, "Members of other informal groups in the state desire to work for OR where they could, at least, get something." The support from OR is thus a motivation for the group's members.

Informal policing groups employ various strategies to raise funds to purchase working materials and attract support for their operations. Private individuals may donate materials such as flashlights, raincoats, whistles, and bomb detectors. Some VPS members engage in jobs, such as farming, teaching, or trading to raise funds for group activities.

Regarding training and professional development, most members do not receive formal training from the police or other law enforcement agencies.

A community watch member in Kaduna said, “We work as cooperative farm laborers to raise money to buy working materials.”⁴²

Accountability Mechanisms

In general, vigilante groups have weak internal and external accountability systems. A group manager or local community leader may oversee the group’s activities. In the absence of standard disciplinary procedures or measures, leaders use their own discretion to direct activities and sanction members for misconduct. Externally, community members may find it difficult to hold vigilantes accountable for their actions. There is no formal system for complaints and feedback from the community about the activities of vigilantes, leaving communities at the mercy of the groups. For state-sponsored actors, the law that establishes the group spells out oversight mechanisms, but implementation of the law is often difficult due to the remote nature of most VPS activities. Some VPS activities are carried out in rural communities with no access to communication infrastructures.

The Operation Rainbow and Neighbourhood Watch law underlines that “the Plateau State Commissioner of Police shall oversee all the activities of registered Operatives of the Neighbourhood Watch within the State.”⁴³ The law also stipulates that Neighbourhood Watch maintain a minimum of four thousand operatives within an LGA. The local government chairman endorses the registration of each operative after identifying that the person meets minimum qualifications (has received a first school leaving certificate or attended primary school; is eighteen years or older; has no criminal convictions).⁴⁴ On the recommendation of the LGA supervisor or ward supervisor, the Neighbourhood Watch coordinator has the power to remove an operative for reasons of misconduct. However, the law does not provide guidelines on sanctions for misconduct.

In the VGN Plateau chapter, the state coordinator and the unit leader oversee and monitor group activities. The manager of the Sarkin Arab Ward Neighbourhood Watch oversees operations and sanctions offending members through suspension or outright dismissal. The Rahwol Kaneng Neighbourhood Watch has a disciplinary committee; depending on the gravity of a member’s offense, disciplinary measures might include seizure of membership ID card, suspension, or expulsion. For severe cases, such as rape, the suspect may be reported to the police or banished from the community. The majority of the vigilante members interviewed said that when a vigilante catches a suspected criminal, they often take the person to the police.

In the Angwan Miango community, a young woman returned home late one night after nightclubbing; she was interrogated, detained, and raped by a vigilante member. In Angwan Rukuba, an urban slum area of the Jos North LGA, a vigilante member was alleged to have killed a man who was going out with his girlfriend. In these cases, the accused were dismissed from the groups. Dismissal or suspension is sometimes the most severe punishment vigilantes face, for they often escape any punishment from the formal legal system for even severe crimes, such as rape and murder.

The Vigilance Service Law of Kaduna State vests control and command to the state VGN commander in liaison with the commissioner, the State Security Service, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps, and the LGA divisional police officers. The state VGN commander is responsible for monitoring the activities of the group and reporting infractions to the official security agencies. The VGN zonal and LGA commandants control activities of the various units in their jurisdictions. Village chiefs and leaders of community watch groups oversee the operations of the groups. Externally, according to an interviewee, “the divisional police officer [DPO] is supposed to monitor the VGN activities in its jurisdiction, but it’s not often the case as the DPO may be engaged in other activities.”⁴⁵

There is no formal system for complaints and feedback from the community about the activities of vigilantes, leaving communities at the mercy of the groups.

Laws exist to protect victims from abuses by vigilantes, but implementation of the laws is difficult and vigilantes do go unpunished for severe crimes.

An interviewee from Kaduna shared his personal observation of how vigilantes treated two people linked to stolen construction materials: “In mid-2014 at my house construction site, two people guarding the site collaborated to steal some of my building materials. They were later reported to the vigilante in the community.”⁴⁶ The respondent added, “In the process of interrogation, the suspects were flogged by the vigilante and one of the suspects died in the process. . . .The intentions of the vigilantes were not to kill the suspects, but the group lacked first aid skills to revive the suspects before assistance arrived. The vigilante members responsible were not charged for the crime. The victim was alleged to have caused his death.”⁴⁷ However, according to the Kaduna vigilance law, “No torture or any form of inhuman or degrading treatment shall be used on any person during arrest, except that reasonable force may be applied to prevent the suspect from escaping.”⁴⁸ Thus, laws exist to protect victims from abuses by vigilantes, but implementation of the laws is difficult and vigilantes do go unpunished for severe crimes.

The Kano state government oversees Hisba’s activities. Hisba’s disciplinary measures include suspension or dismissal for serious offenses and referrals to the Sharia court. The Kano state government also oversees KAROTA’s activities. KAROTA, according to a Kano metropolis resident, is a menace on the roads when members detain and impound vehicles. Another resident said that KAROTA and PPMS make money for the state government by policing the roads. These interviewees believe that it is difficult for the state government to curtail the activities of such organizations. One Kano resident suggested that if KAROTA’s activities were to be curtailed, operatives might engage in criminal activities. On the part of the government, curtailment could also lead to a reduction in revenue. The long-term effect is that commuters and the public remain at the mercy of the VPS groups.

Relationships with Formal Security Actors

Most of the respondents agreed that relationships between informal and formal security actors are very cordial or somewhat cordial (see table 2). However, the extent of that cordiality varies. Formal and informal security actors may share intelligence information and partner for joint patrols in the communities. Some VPS use photo identification cards issued by the Divisional Police Office (DPO), and some receive materials and cash donations from formal security agencies and state governments.

Table 2. Relationships between Formal and Informal Security Actors

Nature of relationship	Plateau	Kaduna	Kano	Abuja
Very cordial	41.2%	60.0%	41.7%	37.5%
Somewhat cordial	35.3%	26.7%	50.0%	25.0%
Somewhat hostile	11.8%	0.00	8.30%	18.8%
Very hostile	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.5%
No opinion	11.80%	13.3%	8.30%	6.30%
Number of respondents	17	15	12	16

Source: Author’s field survey, 2015.

The Sarkin Arab Ward Neighbourhood Watch and the State Task Force (STF) in Plateau have a well-established relationship. For example, members of the Sarkin Arab Ward Neighbourhood Watch conduct joint community patrols with the STF, and the neighborhood watch shares intelligence information with the official state actors. To support Sarkin Arab Ward Neighbourhood Watch activities, the STF donated working materials and cash to the group. The Sarkin Arab Ward Neighbourhood Watch uses photo identity cards issued by the police as proof of a working relationship with the formal security actor.

Similarly, vigilante groups in some communities in southern Kaduna complement the police in carrying out arrests. According to a vigilante unit leader, “The vigilante groups in southern Kaduna zones such as Kaura, Lere, and Sanga were licensed to use guns because of the activities of the unknown gunmen.” According to the state’s vigilance service law, vigilantes are not permitted to use weapons, but an exception is made in southern Kaduna due to frequent threats. A vigilante member said that this exception would not be possible without a working relationship and trust between the police and the vigilantes. However, there is no official agreement or memorandum of understanding between the VPS and the police, and formal actors do not train vigilantes on state laws or work ethics. The police and vigilantes collaborate on joint patrols in the communities but on little else.

According to the VGN Kano commander, “There is [a] good working relationship between the Kano state government and the state VGN chapter.” The state government provides material and financial support to the group—for example, the forty-four local government offices use vehicles donated by the state government. The VGN reciprocates by providing security services in various communities. In Kano, there is some friction between the state government and Hisba; some practices of Hisba, such as flogging, have declined after the government was forced to restructure Hisba operations due to community complaints. As for KAROTA, unchecked activities of the group sometimes result in confrontations between operatives and commuters or security agents. In one case, a KAROTA operative was involved in a fight with security agents for impounding a police officer’s vehicle.

In Abuja, respondents described somewhat hostile relationships between formal and informal security actors. Their perceptions may stem from the fact that informal security actors are less active in the cities. In this state, as in many others, vigilantes are centered in rural areas.

Perceptions of the Informal Security Sector

In most communities, the informal security sector is preferred to the formal agencies. Perceptions of the informal security sector are based on three factors: availability, trust, and effectiveness. According to one respondent, the police are often unavailable when they are needed in rural communities. Most of the respondents expressed this concern as a reason for their preference for vigilante groups. There are general perceptions about police being corrupt and untrustworthy; some respondents said that they prefer the local settlement of disputes without recourse to the police, even when the police are available. Other factors that contributed to general preference of the vigilantes over the police were the informal actors’ knowledge of the local environment, making vigilantes more effective in their local environments (see table 3).

Perceptions of the informal security sector are based on three factors: availability, trust, and effectiveness.

Table 3. Effectiveness of Informal Security Actors

Effectiveness rating	Plateau	Kaduna	Kano	Abuja
Very effective	47.10%	53.3%	41.7%	31.00%
Somewhat effective	23.50%	33.3%	50.0%	25.00%
Somewhat ineffective	11.80%	6.70%	8.30%	25.00%
Very ineffective	5.90%	0.00	0.00	6.25%
No opinion	11.80%	6.70%	8.30%	12.50%
Number of respondents	17	15	12	16

Source: Author's field survey, 2015.

In Kuru District, Jos South LGA, there is competition between the VGN unit and the OR. The OR claims to operate within the ambit of the law by restricting its activities to intelligence duties and information gathering. The VGN is linked to violations of human rights, arbitrary arrests, forced detention, and torture. It also levies and collects taxes from community members. Nevertheless, an OR ward supervisor confirmed that the VGN is preferred to the OR because of the VGN's prompt dispensation of justice without recourse to the police. According to another respondent, the police are not trusted when they have custody of perpetrators of crime, and have been accused of freeing perpetrators of crimes in Plateau.

In regard to Hisba, one respondent noted that "Hisba does not collect bribes unlike other formal and informal institutions."⁴⁹ This attribute makes Hisba different from other vigilante groups and most formal security actors, because bribery and corruption are major challenges for the Nigeria Police Force. But there are questions about Hisba's violations of people's rights, particularly those of women. KAROTA is perceived as having overlapping functions with other state agencies, such as the police, the Vehicle Inspection Agency, and the Federal Road Safety Commission. KAROTA acknowledges the overlap in function, particularly in enforcing traffic rules and regulations, but says, "There are lots of works for people to do," implying that the task of traffic management requires many resources. KAROTA employs youths who are not properly trained. The major complaints about KAROTA's activities were from commuters, who described KAROTA's operatives as harsh and a menace on Kano roads when they impound cars, fight, and engage in violent arrests.

Some respondents in Abuja expressed perceptions of informal security actors as somewhat ineffective or very ineffective. This perception could be due to the fact that informal security actors are mostly rural based and thus less noticeable in cities such as Abuja. The majority of city dwellers rely on formal security actors rather than vigilantes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As this report has demonstrated, vigilantes have both positive and negative impacts on the communities in which they operate. Abuses committed by the vigilantes must be addressed formally and structurally—but addressed in such a way that the role of vigilantes as protectors

of their communities is preserved and their effectiveness enhanced. The following recommendations would, if implemented, help to attain these goals.

Most states and local government authorities have legalized the activities of vigilante groups, but Nigeria does not have a national vigilante law. The absence of national legislation has made it difficult for the VGN to attract support from the federal government. Under the present arrangement, members of state vigilante groups are not formally held accountable for their actions. Looking ahead, vigilantes should be charged for violations of the disparate vigilance service laws, and justice should be sought for victims of vigilantes.

Vigilantes need to be trained about human rights and international humanitarian law so that they learn not to infringe on people's rights. There have been some attempts in this regard, targeting vigilante leaders, but the foot soldiers and grassroots members who have direct contact with communities need training as well.

The relationship between the police and vigilante groups needs to be redefined. A memorandum of understanding that spells out the terms of collaboration or partnerships should be written. Joint patrols and other needs-based relationships should be replaced with long-term partnership agreements that clearly define the terms of cooperation between the actors.

The role of women in the security sector needs to be defined. The existing security sector, including the informal security structure, reinforces the traditional culture of subjecting women to male control and domination.

Notes

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