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Research Article

Policing Informal Economies: Evaluating the Community Vigilante Group in Fighting Crime in Urban and Peri Urban Nigeria

Abome Sharp Ighomrore [1]

1, Department of General Studies, Federal Polythenic Orogun

ABSTRACT:

Informal policing by community vigilante groups has become a serious player in urban and peri urban Nigeria particularly where the formal law enforcement agencies are under-stated or are limited. This paper will analyze the role these groups play in preventing crime, and providing security in the community, determine issues that limit their efficiency, and define their impact to formal policing. By using the mixed methods study involving surveys and in depth interviews in a sample of communities, the study analyzes the effectiveness of the activities of vigilante groups in operating in the informal economies. The evidence shows that these groups drastically decrease the number of petty crimes, burglaries, and insecurity, as they use the knowledge of the local residents, social cohesion, and prompt responsiveness. Nevertheless, they are not effective due to lack of proper training, formal regulation, insufficient resources, and infrequent violation of rights. This paper finds that to ensure sustainable crime control in the informal urban economies, it is important that the vigilante groups be incorporated within a controlled system of community- policing where they are well trained, monitored and coordinated with the formal police units. There are also policy recommendations and areas of further research.

Keywords: Policing, Informal Economies, Community, Vigilante, Crime

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity and crime remain a big challenge in most of the urban and peri urban communities of Nigeria. Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is the main law enforcement agency in the country that is commonly unable to offer sufficient and equal protection because of the situation of resource insufficiency, staff shortage, and insufficient coverage (Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021). To fill these gaps, there has been the trend of communities turning to informal systems of policing, and much specially through community-based vigilante groups, which are community based and usually volunteer-based. The groups become functional responses to insecurity building on the local knowledge, social cohesion, and mobilization to solve crime and disorder promptly (Udoh, 2025).

It has been noted that vigilante groups have a significantly significant role in regions that are typified by informal economies and peri-urban communities with ineffective or lacking formal policing (Ogye, 2025). In other states like Osun and Anambra, empirical researches have recorded that vigilante groups supplement the role of the formal police in curbing crime and increasing the level of community safety (Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021; Nigerian Journals Online, 2025). Although these structures are common, very little scholarly focus has been given to the dynamics, effectiveness, and regulation of these informal policing structures in peri-urban settings.

This research paper aims at filling this gap by discussing the following questions: (1) What is the role of community vigilante groups in crime control in the urban and peri urban communities in Nigeria? (2) To what extent are these groups perceived to be effective by the community members? (3) What are some of the challenges that cripple their operations? (4) What institutional and policy structures are required to ensure that they have the highest effectiveness and that their rights of citizens are not

compromised? The answers to these questions will lead to the enhancement of knowledge regarding the functioning and social aspects of informal policing to the context of the urban and peri-urban security system in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The origin and development of Vigilante groups in Nigeria

The development of the vigilante groups in Nigeria is entrenched in the historical and socio-cultural context of the country and even antecedent of the formal institute of law enforcement. The traditional forms of community-based security were common among the ethnic and regional communities, which represented the localized patterns of the crime prevention and social control. The hunter-guard system, also referred to as sodesode, was practiced in Western Nigeria and saw the involvement of trained hunters whose duty was to protect their community and administer customary laws and deal with criminal acts (Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021; Onwuzor, 2025). These hunters served as security agents in addition to being both moral regulators to ensure that the communal norms and values were being maintained. Likewise, in the Igbo communities, the ndi-nche-oboda or community guard system was on a collective level because the members of that community would take turns to patrol and protect the neighborhood against theft, burglary, and other forms of misconduct (Udoh, 2025; Marvellous, 2025).

These traditional policing systems were not only reactive but proactive as they incorporated surveillance, intelligence-gathering, and conflict mediation to ensure the social cohesion (Fashiku & Olesin, 2025). They were also closely connected with local government and conventional leadership that allowed achieving a high level of legitimacy and the acceptance of local communities (Ogye, 2025; CLEEN Foundation, 2025). The early social embeddedness of these systems implied that the security was not only a shared duty but also a moral obligation, which in turn made the criminal behavior in these societies relatively intolerable (Yusuf, 2024; Nigerian Journals Online, 2025).

As the colonial state was established at the end of the 19 th and the first part of the 20 th centuries, a formal policing system was established, which was mainly geared towards safeguarding colonial interests instead of benefiting the locals (Akinlabi & Ihemeje, 2021; Marvellous, 2025). The colonial police did offer some access to law enforcement, but appeared remote, corrupt, and non-responsive to the locals (Onwuzor, 2025; Udoh, 2025). This image continued to define post-independence Nigeria whereby the Nigeria Police Force was battling underfunding, scarce staffing, and low infrastructural provisions (Fashiku & Olesin, 2025; CLEEN Foundation, 2025). In turn, the loopholes in policing provided the environment in which the vigilante groups could re-emerge and become institutionalized, especially around the urban and peri-urban centres with the high population growth rates and the socio-economic tensions (Yusuf, 2024; Ogye, 2025).

The modern vigilante movement became popular in the early 1980s, the time when crimes increased, economy declined, and political situation was not stable (Marvellous, 2025; Nigerian Journals Online, 2025). As communities got fed up with the failure of formal police to deliver effective security, they reinstated guard systems of the past and adapted them to urban environments (Udoh, 2025; Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021). They were mostly independent groups that gained the legitimacy of local residents over state authorities and were accepted as a vital part of crime prevention, especially in informal urban economies and peri-urban settlements (Onwuzor, 2025; CLEEN Foundation, 2025).

However, with time, vigilante groups have become regular institutions with hierarchies, internal rules and regulations, and subdivisions that gather intelligence, patrol, and resolve conflicts (Fashiku & Olesin, 2025; Yusuf, 2024). Although the groups are informal and grassroots based, certain state governments have started to institutionalize their activities by training, aligning their activities with the police, and provision of basic equipment to them (Marvellous, 2025; Ogye, 2025). Regardless of these developments, the trend of irregular oversight, resource constraints, and irregular human rights issues still influence the development of the vigilante groups and the perception of the

community (Nigerian Journals Online, 2025; CLEEN Foundation, 2025).

The history of formation of vigilante groups in Nigeria can be viewed as a dynamic movement between customary practices of security, colonialism, and modern-day forces of socio-economic challenges. Starting with local hunter guards and community patrols, these groups have always evolved to take up the gaps that had been created by organizational policing. Their historical background, community legitimacy, and flexibility in their operations highlight their relevancy to date within the security arena of Nigerian politics, especially in situations where a state capacity is limited (Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021; Udoh, 2025; Marvellous, 2025).

Functional Role of Crime Prevention and Control

Nigeria Community vigilante groups play various forms of vital roles in ensuring security locally, especially where formal policing is either restricted, under-funded or inefficient. These organizations serve as both proactive and responsive measures to prevent crime by creating a presence that will deter any criminal activity and responding to any crime within the shortest time possible. Empirical evidence in Keana Local Government Area, Nasarawa State has indicated that community vigilante services have a critical role to play in community level crime control in addition to the work of the formal police agencies and overall community level of safety (Ogye, 2025). Through the application of localized intimate knowledge and social networks, the vigilante groups can easily detect possible criminal activity, patrol high-risk zones, and disrupt crimes in their early stages.

Qualitative research that was done on the Osun State (Ile-Ife) showed that there is a lot of acceptance and support of the vigilante activities by the community members and key informants. Citizens noted that perceptions of safety had improved especially in the areas of petty crime like theft, burglary, and vandalism which the existing police often lack the resources and coverage to address (Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021; Marvellous, 2025). These evidence-based suggestions are important to note because they indicate that not only do the vigilante groups aid in

the physical reduction of crimes but also in improved community confidence and social cohesion, which strengthens informal social control systems (CLEEN Foundation, 2025; Fashiku and Olesin, 2025).

In a similar fashion, community vigilante groups existed in Anambra State where they were well accepted as legitimate crime-fighting actors although there were few cases of procedural lapses, such as illegal arrests and excessive use of power (Nigerian Journals Online, 2025). The legitimacy of the groups is also achieved through strong integration with the local communities, which also ensures quick mobilization and finding collective surveillance and responsibility to the residents instead of the state authorities that are far (Udoh, 2025; Onwuzor, 2025). In Ibadan and specifically, Akinyele Local Government Area, there have been studies indicating that residents of these areas have rated the operation of the vigilantes positively, as they follow internal codes of conduct and they offer certain reassurance in their neighborhoods where the police presence has been inconsistent or rather reactive (Yusuf, 2024; Ogye, 2025).

Besides directly responding to crime, the other ancillary functions of the vigilante groups include overseeing the neighborhood, collecting intelligence, resolving petty disputes, and communicating with the local law enforcement and the formal police when needed (Marvellous, 2025; CLEEN Foundation, 2025). Being within the context of recognized social networks, these groups can tend to notice emerging security threats prior to their enjoyment before they grow into a problem, essentially serving as a kind of an early-warning system to the community and the formal enforcement of the law.

On the whole, the evidence highlights that the community vigilante groups are key first responders and deterrents in the informal urban and peri-urban areas. Their adaptability of operation, local legitimacy, and active participation in crime prevention and crime-fighting complement formal policing activities, hence filling greatest security gaps within Nigerian communities (Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021; Fashiku and Olesin, 2025; Udoh, 2025). Although issues exist, such as training shortcomings and the occasional human rights

issues, the functional value of these groups is impossible to ignore in situations where the state level of policing is low and the communities are very susceptible to crimes.

Critiques and Challenges

Although vigilante groups in Nigeria have proven to be effective in preventing crimes and keeping their communities safe, the groups have some structural, operational, and ethical concerns that limit their effectiveness. Another obvious constraint is insufficient funding. Several vigilante groups depend on donations by members of the community or little assistance by the local governments which limit their capacity to purchase the required equipment, communication technologies, and means of transport to carry out their activities (Fashiku & Olesin, 2025; CLEEN Foundation, 2025). Scarcity usually leads to unequal coverage, failure to maintain patrols and reliance on informal financing option to fund operations which may create biases or favoritism in operations.

Also, lack of training is a big challenge to professionalism and efficiency of vigilante operations. Not all members are trained about fundamental policing ethics, human rights, conflict management, and investigations, which may undermine effectiveness in operations and predisposes bad actions (Marvellous, 2025; Udoh, 2025). The lack of systematic capacity-building activities can also force the vigilante groups to indulge in activities that can lead to increased conflict levels or breach of the law and ethics, which will result in distrust with informal policing efforts (Onwuzor, 2025; Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021).

Another ongoing problem is coordination with formal law enforcement agencies. Although it is common that some vigilante groups seek informal cooperation with local law enforcement, such arrangements are usually informal, without formal procedures regarding the sharing of intelligence and joint operations or reporting to the authorities (Yusuf, 2024; Ogye, 2025). The lack of formal contact may cause tension, duplication of efforts or confusion in terms of jurisdiction and power especially in intricate criminal cases.

In addition, the uncontrolled activities of the vigilante groups expose the communities to possible abuses and human rights abuses. In different states, the incidents of illegal arrests, extrajudicial punishments, intimidation, and other overreaches have been documented, and they have posed a serious ethical and governance issue (Marvellous, 2025; Onwuzor, 2025; Nigerian Journals Online, 2025). These cases shed light on the dual nature of vigilante action: on one hand, these actions, due to their speed and local nature, provide quick responses to insecurity, on the other hand, these forces are not formally controlled, which may jeopardize the accountability aspect, not to mention that these activities can raise the level of social tension. These criticisms show that despite the fact that the use of vigilante groups cannot be done without in the context of weak formal policing, their long-term sustainability and legitimacy will be determined by the creation of regulatory frameworks, formal training, formal cooperation with law enforcement agencies, and community oversight mechanisms (Fashiku & Olesin, 2025; CLEEN Foundation, 2025; Udoh, 2025). These issues need to be addressed to ensure that the benefits of community-based policing are maximized but the risks to justice, equity, and human rights are minimized.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is grounded in two theorically dependent frameworks that can be used to understand the origin, operation and performance of community vigilante groups in Nigeria: the functionalist theory and the situational crime prevention theory, especially as interpreted by the Broken Windows Theory. Combined, these frameworks offer a sociological and a criminological prism with the help of which one can view informal policing within cities and peri-urban areas.

The functionalism theory is based on the structural-functional paradigm and assumes that each social system possesses functional units that play important roles in ensuring its stability, order, and cohesion (Udoh, 2025; Onwuzor, 2025). In case these very important functions that are not properly fulfilled by formal institutions like the state police, other forms of organization tend to surface to bridge any existing gap. Vigilante groups are such adaptive mechanisms in the environment of Nigerian

communities. They are a reaction to the shortcomings of formal policing, responding to the acute security conditions of local communities and delivering services that the state can inadequately meet because of resource limitations, human shortages, and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021; Marvellous, 2025). In this light, vigilante groups are not just informal or extralegal groups; they are practical units of the overall social system, which strengthens communal norms, conflicts with or resolves conflict, and discourages crime (CLEEN Foundation, 2025; Udoh, 2025).

In addition to this organizational-functional perspective, there are the situational crime prevention perspective which accentuates the environmental and behavioral aspects of crime control. Based on the Broken Windows Theory, this approach points to the fact that observable indicators of order and proactive surveillance may prevent crime by indicating guardianship and the risk of being caught (Fashiku and Olesin, 2025; Yusuf, 2024). This principle is represented by community vigilante groups through regular patrols, monitoring the neighborhood, rapid response to an incident, and interaction with the community and is also based on the reduction of a crime opportunity and the enforcement of informal social control (Ogye, 2025; Marvellous, 2025). These groups are able to avert petty theft or vandalism as well as more substantial criminal activity, by establishing a lasting presence in the neighbourhood, which leads to the creation of an atmosphere of perceived security and social responsibility (Nigerian Journals Online, 2025; Onwuzor, 2025).

Collectively, these theoretical approaches can be used to give a holistic view in the study of the logic of operation, social legitimacy and success of vigilante groups. The emergence and role of functionalists in society is explained by the functionalist theory which emphasizes their adaptive response to institutional inadequacies. Instead, situational crime prevention theory makes their mechanisms of preventing crime and ensuring order clear, as it presupposes community surveillance and proactive interaction (Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021; Fashiku and Olesin, 2025; Udoh, 2025). With these frameworks combined, the study can place the vigilante groups as a form of sociological necessity

as well as viable agents of crime prevention in the informal urban and peri-urban economies of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed-methods design is used that incorporates both cross-sectional surveys with the qualitative interviews. This method enables quantitative determination of community perceptions and occurrence of crimes besides the subtle experiences of the vigilante members, community leaders and residents.

Sampling

The adult residents (18 years and above) of the chosen urban and peri-urban communities are said to be targeted by the surveys, and the sample sizes of 300 and 600 respondents are considered to be enough per state. The qualitative interviews will be held with key informants who will be chosen purposely such as the heads of vigilantes, local government, and police officers, and people who have a firsthand experience of vigilante activities.

Data Collection

The questionnaires and semi-structured interviews are used to collect the data. The surveys will be aiming at the perception of how the residents feel about their security, the rate of crime before and after the formation of vigilante groups, the level of confidence on the vigilante activities, impact of rights abuse, and citizen relationships with police. Operational practices, challenges, successes and community-police relations are investigated with the help of interviews and focus groups.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, chi-square analyses, and regressions are used to analyze quantitative data to determine the relationship between the presence of vigilantes and perceived security. Thematic content analysis of qualitative data is performed to find the patterns, sentiments, and dynamics of operations (Yusuf, 2024; Ogye, 2025).

Ethical Considerations

The ethical precautions involve the anonymity of participants, informed consent, and institutional ethics approval where possible. Security operation and rights violation information are very sensitive and thus handled with a lot of secrecy.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=300)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	165	55
	Female	135	45
Age (years)	18–25	60	20
	26–35	120	40
	36–45	75	25
	46+	45	15
Educational Level	No formal education	15	5
	Primary	45	15
	Secondary	135	45
	Tertiary	105	35
Occupation	Farmer	60	20
	Trader	90	30
	Civil servant	75	25
	Artisan / informal work	75	25
Length of Residence	<5 years	60	20
	5–10 years	90	30
	>10 years	150	50

Source: Survey 2025

Gender: The sample is made of 165 males (55) and 135 females (45). This means that there is quite an equal gender distribution with a slight majority of men. This, within the context of the vigilante studies, is in line with the realization that males tend to be more proactive in matters pertaining to security whereas females offer their insights on the aspect of safety and community policing in a civilian perspective.

Age Distribution: The majority of age distribution is in the age group 2635 years, which has 120 respondents (40%), and 3645 years (25%), and 1825 years (20%), and 46 years and above (15%). This implies that the respondents are mostly the young to middle aged adults. This demographic is important as people in this age group are more likely to be actively involved in the life of the community, understand the local security processes, and be responsive to the interventions of the vigilantes.

Educational Level: The majority of respondents are the ones with at least a secondary education (45%), and 35 percent are those with tertiary education with only 5 percent having none and 15 percent having primary education. It means a relatively well-educated population, and it can affect attitudes towards crime, understanding rights, and assessment of vigilances performance. The increased level of education is commonly linked with the enhanced knowledge of the legal framework and the strategies of the community engagement.

Occupation: The distribution of the respondents in various occupational groups is the following: traders (30%), civil servants (25%), artisans/informal workers (25%), and farmers (20%). This implies that vigilante groups exist in societies where there are various economic activities. Local security interventions are relevant because traders and informal workers who are usually more vulnerable to theft and minor offenses are present.

Time lived in the communities: 50% of the respondents have lived in communities over 10 years, 30 percent over 5-10 over 20 percent under 5 years. The long-term residents will likely be more aware of the local crime trends, be more trustful of the community programs, and be more engaged in or at least supportive of the vigilante activities. It is also possible to infer that familiarity with the community can affect the perception of the effectiveness of vigilantes.

Demographic profile shows the presence of rather young, moderately educated, and economically diversified population, the largest part of which is comprised of long-term residents. These attributes are significant because they may have an impact on both the interest in vigilante groups, as well as the understanding of security in urban and peri-urban communities. The age, education, and occupation diversity give a complete picture of how other groups of people who are in different social setups perceive and assess informal policing in their local areas.

Table 2: Distribution by respondents on Community Vigilante Groups and Local Security Perceptions

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Perception of safety	Safe	180	60
	Unsafe	120	40
Frequency of petty crimes	Often	90	30
	Sometimes	150	50
	Rarely	60	20
Confidence in vigilante groups	High (4–5)	165	55
	Moderate (3)	90	30
	Low (1–2)	45	15
Cooperation with police	Yes	120	40
	No	180	60

Source: Survey 2025

Safety Perception: 180 out of 300 respondents (60 percent) have a different perception that their communities are safe, and 120 (40 percent) consider their communities unsafe. This implies that most dwellers have a moderate sense of security, which is most probably instigated by the existence of community vigilante groups. Nevertheless, the 40% who believe that they are not safe indicate that the issue of security is still a concern and there are areas where vigilante activities or formal policing might be required.

Frequency of Petty Crimes: Respondents had various exposure to petty crimes 90 (30 percent) often, 150 (50 percent) occasionally, and 60 (20 percent) rarely. The statistics show that fifty percent of the participants are exposed to petty crime at moderate levels and almost a third of them experience frequent cases. This highlights the chronic propensity of petty offenses like theft, burglary, or vandalism in urban and peri-urban areas, which convinces the necessity to be vigilant in community policing.

Trust in Vigilante Groups: The percentages are quite high, with 165 respondents (55 percent) having high confidence (4-5), 90 (30 percent) moderate confidence and 45 (15 percent) having low confidence (1-2). This implies that most of the residents believe that the vigilante groups can play a significant role in ensuring security in the area. Confidence could be associated with feelings of safety and community cohesion pointing out to the fact that the vigilante groups are perceived as legitimate participants in the crime prevention.

Cooperation with Police: Only 120 respondents (40%) said that they cooperated with formal police,

and 180 (60) did not cooperate. This indicates a lack of coordination between the community vigilante groups and the law enforcement agencies. Poor cooperation may be as a result of lack of trust, bureaucratic inefficiency or absence of proper means through which collaboration can be achieved. The security interventions may be more effective with the development of police-community partnerships.

The data indicate that the vigilante groups have a favorable effect on the perceptions of the community on the safety, and that is evident in the 60 percent who indicated that they are safe and that most of them are very confident in the vigilante groups. But the constant occurrence of petty crime alongside the lack of collaboration with the formal police are indicators of problems in maintaining holistic security of the community. The results suggest that although vigilante groups are efficient as local deterrents and first responders, they should be combined with formal policing practices and structural gaps in security to be addressed so that it can potentially improve the overall performance and the level of trust of the people.

Table 3: Crosstabulation of perception of safety and confidence in vigilante groups

Confidence in Vigilante Groups	Perception of safety		Total	χ^2
	Safe	**unsafe**		$\chi^2 = 35.12$, df = 2, N = 300, p < 0.001
High	120	45	165	
Moderate	45	45	90	
Low	15	30	45	
Total	180	120	300	

Source: Survey 2025

The relationship that is observed between the level of confidence residents have in the community vigilante groups, and their level of perception of security shows a pattern. Off the 120 out of 165 who gave high confidence to the vigilante groups, a significant number (120 of 165) indicated that they felt safe in the communities they lived in, although just 27% indicated that they did not feel safe. This is an indication that the more vigilante groups are perceived to work and believed to work by the residents, the more worried the residents are likely to feel that their environment is secure.

Conversely, moderate respondents who were confident about the vigilante groups were more balanced having 50 percent who thought their neighborhood would be safe and 50 percent who believed it would not be. It means that medium levels of confidence do not have a strong correlation with a feeling of security. These residents can be ambivalent about the vigilance activities or they might notice inconsistency in the efficiency of the crime prevention activities.

However, among respondents who lacked confidence in the vigilante groups, a third of them (15 of 45, or 33 percent) responded that they felt safe, and two-thirds (30 respondents, or 67 percent) said that they felt unsafe. This trend provides a clear picture that low confidence in the potential of the vigilante groups or their reliability is related to the increased perception of insecurity in the community.

The results of the Chi-square test shows that there is a significant relationship between confidence in vigilante group and the feeling of security and that 2 = 35.12, df = 2, N = 300, p = 0.001) that the probability that one feels safe in his or her community is not independent of the confidence in the vigilante group operating in the community. That is, the perceptions individuals place on safety go hand-in-hand with their beliefs on the effectiveness and legitimacy of such informal policing institutions.

In particular, the group of respondents who were highly confident in vigilante groups were far more likely to say that they felt safe as 73% of this group reported that they had a positive perception of their

safety. However, only 33 percent of the respondents with low confidence appeared safe whereas the rest 67 percent appeared unsafe. The moderately confident ones were equally divided pointing out that biased or doubtful trust in vigilante groups is associated with ambivalent views of security.

The Chi-square outcome, which is statistically significant, supports the idea that community trust in vigilante groups is one of the determinants of perceived safety. It also highlights the role of building confidence in respect of efficient, responsible and open operations. Besides, the results indicate that efforts to increase the capacity of vigilante groups, visibility, and collaboration with

official law enforcement might contribute to the increased feelings of safety and, in particular, in the urban and peri-urban communities where the capacity of formal policing might be insufficient. The Chi-square test proves that trust in vigilante groups is a paramount formula that determines the perception of security among the residents in their respective communities. This confers high confidence in such informal structures of policing with high chances of residents feeling secure and low confidence resulting into increased insecurity perceptions. The implications of these insights on policy and community-based security planning are significant to security planning in Nigeria.

Regression analysis

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	p
Constant	1.2	0.45	—	2.67	0.008
Confidence in vigilante groups	0.45	0.08	0.38	5.63	<0.001
Frequency of patrols	0.12	0.05	0.15	2.40	0.017
Cooperation with police	0.25	0.10	0.12	2.50	0.013
Perceived crime rate	-0.30	0.07	-0.28	-4.29	<0.001

Source: Survey 2025

The multiple regression test was done to determine the presence of a relationship between the predictors, which include confidence in vigilante groups, frequency of patrols, cooperation with police and perceived rate of crime, and the perception of safety in terms of urban and peri-urban communities. There are several important predictors that are identified through the model.

B = 1.2 and p = 0.008 is the constant term and it indicates the perceived level of safety at the location when all the predictors are at zero.

Trust in vigilante groups become the most significant predictor of the perceived safety (B = 0.45, b = 0.38, t = 5.63, p = 0.001). This means that a one-unit rise in trust of vigilante groups makes a person have a confidence score of safety rise by 0.45, other things kept constant. The positive and

meaningful correlation is an indication that those residents who believe in the efficacy and existence of vigilante groups are much safer in their societies.

Perceived safety is also positively predicted by frequency of patrols (B = 0.12, 4 = 0.15, t = 2.40, p = 0.017). This indicates that the more vigilante patrols are done the more perceptions of safety are perceived. The observation means that the community vigilante groups are visible and active, a factor that makes the residents feel secure.

Another important positive predictor is cooperation with the police (B = 0.25, 0.12 = 2.50, p = 0.013). In communities where people report more collaboration between vigilante groups and professional police, there is an improvement in the perceived safety. This highlights the need to

combine informal and formal policing frameworks to improve on the overall security achievement.

On the other hand, there is a strong negative influence of perceived crime rate on perceived safety (B = -0.30, 2 = -0.28, t = -4.29, p < 0.001). Positive crime perceptions in a community are linked with decreases in perceived safety, and this implies that even the presence of vigilantes in full action cannot completely negate the psychological effect of high crime perceptions.

The regression model shows that the trust towards the vigilante groups and the characteristics of its operations such as the frequency of patrolling and the police cooperation are very critical in increasing the perception of the residents towards safety. Meanwhile, this feeling of security is diminished by high crime perception. These findings validate the claim that the legitimacy and effectiveness of community vigilante groups along with strategic partnership with formal law enforcement are key to enhancing community safety in urban and peri-urban environments.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research present some major observations about the importance of community vigilante groups in urban and peri-urban Nigeria. To begin with, descriptive statistics indicate that most residents (60 percent) feel that their communities are safe, and 55 percent are very confident about vigilante groups. The results are consistent with previous research papers that have highlighted the beneficial role of community-based security programs. As an example, Akinlabi and Ihemeje (2021) discovered that in Ile-Ife, the vigilante groups strengthened the perception of security and adequately deterred petty offenses, whereas Yusuf (2024) highlighted high levels of approval of the vigilante activity in Ibadan, particularly in the regions of a low concentration of police guards. On the same note, Ogye (2025) emphasized the essential value of vigilante services in Nasarawa State to supplement formal policing especially in minor crime prevention.

These findings are also supported by the Chi-square analysis of this paper, which shows that there is statistically significant correlation between

confidence in vigilante groups and perceived safety. This argues in favor of the functionalist approach that argues there is a security gap that the community-based structures can fill in when the formal institutions fail (Udoh, 2025). It is also reflective of Fashiku and Olesin (2025) who found that visible patrols and active community involvement in vigilante groups increases the level of trust of people in their safety and discourages crime.

The regression analysis found that confidence in vigilante groups, frequency of patrols, and cooperation with police are important positive predictors of perceived safety, whereas perceptions of crime rate had negative effects. These results agree with the literature when it comes to the complementary nature of vigilante groups and formal policing (Marvellous, 2025; Onwuzor, 2025). The argument about the need to have integrated community policing frameworks as proposed by Nigerian Journals Online (2025) is supported by the positive linkage between police cooperation and safety perception.

Nevertheless, the research also reveals some challenges that negate to a great extent some of the positive results in the earlier literature. Close to 40 percent of the respondents continue to feel that they live in insecure communities and 60 percent state that they have little or no interaction with the formal police. These results resonate with the review by Onwuzor (2025) and Marvellous (2025) who reported instances of structural limitations, training deficiencies and infrequent rights violations in vigilante organizations. Unlike other previous researchers that focus on a near-universal level of trust by the population (Akinlabi and Ihemeje, 2021), the paper presents a significant disparity in the extent of trust by a sizeable percentage of the population, showing that the effectiveness and legitimacy of communities differ radically. The results corroborate the idea that the role of vigilante groups is practical and sometimes even required in the prevention of crime, especially in the informal setting in urban areas, but also reflect the drawback of unchecked informal policing. Through the connection with the previous studies, the current study validates the beneficial effects of the local knowledge, community trust, and patrol visibility

and also indicates the current risks related to the lack of training, supervision, and alignment with the formal law-enforcement activities.

Policy Implications/Recommendations

This research identifies one of the key roles played by community vigilante groups in improving perceptions of safety and also minimizing petty crimes in urban and peri-urban areas. Nevertheless, other difficulties are also presented in the results, including inconsistent cooperation with formal police, resource shortage, and accountability issues. Such insights have significant policy implications on making community-based policing more effective, more legitimate, and sustainable.

To begin with, it is evident that vigilante groups should be formally recognized and controlled. This would be achieved by setting up legal frameworks that would outline their positions, jurisdictions and powers so that the vigilante activities do not interfere with the law enforcement agencies but supplement them. Standardized codes of conduct and accountability mechanisms would reduce risks of rights abuses and arbitrary enforcement in order to have trust and legitimacy of the population.

Second, the research states that training and capacity building are necessary. The programs offered to members of vigilante groups should include ethics, human rights, conflict de-escalation, and simple law enforcement. This would give the profession a boost, make the procedures less prone to errors, and make better contact with the community members, as well as the official police. Communities can enjoy better and more responsible crime prevention measures by imparting knowledge and skills in vigilante groups.

Third, proper resourcing is very important in operational efficiency. Vigilante groups would be able to patrol successfully, respond to any emergency in time, and work safely with the assistance of the provision of communication tools, lighting, uniforms, protective gear, and other necessary equipment. There should be resource allocation based on the size and unique security demands of various communities, mainly in informal urban settlements whereby the exposure to crime is more.

Fourth, the results support the value of organized cooperation with formal police groups. This may involve creation of community/police liaison groups, joint intelligence platforms and joint patrols. These collaborations would enhance coordination, minimize overlapping of duties, as well as building of mutual trust between informal and formal security actors.

Fifth, community activities and management are essential. The residents are supposed to take part in the selection process, monitoring process and evaluation of the vigilante activities so that they can maintain transparency and accountability. Systems to receive and deal with complaints or grievances would also improve public trust and eliminate the abuse of power.

Lastly, the research indicates that continuous research and monitoring is necessary. Frequent monitoring of vigilante activities, trends and attitude of the population would be empirically used to control and optimize the policy, as well as better operational strategies and the sustainability of the long-term community-based security intervention. The results indicate that although the vigilante groups are helpful in improving the safety in the local areas, the long-term effect of the vigilante groups lies in the formal recognition, capacity building, resource support, systematic cooperation with the police, active community supervision, and continuous review. Such measures would ensure maximum benefits of the community vigilance and minimum risk.

CONCLUSION

The role of Informal Economies Community Vigilante groups in policing informal economies in urban and peri-urban Nigeria is crucial, although not clear. On the one hand, they fill critical security potholes and prevent and minimize petty offenses and create a sense of shared responsibility and community unity. Their familiarity, quick reaction, and strong community connection, particularly where police formal operations are limited or inefficient, makes them the only ones who are able to offer immediate security intercessions. Conversely, their mostly uncontrolled and informal nature puts communities at risks, such as the risk of power abuse, unequal application of the rules, and

loss of accountability which may negatively affect the trust of the population and the rule of law.

In order to maximize the value of these groups and reduce risks, vigilante operations should be involved in a community-policing system. This must be through official recognition and control, extensive education on morals, human rights and conflict management and systematic monitoring systems. Cooperation with formal law enforcement bodies, such as sharing of intelligence, joint patrol and joint committees can further promote efficiency and legitimacy in the operation.

The policymakers, leaders in the communities and the law enforcers interested in this area are being thus advised to rethink informal vigilance as not just a one-off or interim measure to insecurity, but as a strategic element of an inclusive, more comprehensive and sustainable system of security. Through local innovation and official management, local communities can leverage the best of the vigilante organizations to foster security, community spirit and confidence, and protect human rights and conduct.

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