

Review Article

Vigilante Groups and Community Crime Prevention: Evidence from Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria

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The paper explored the Role of Vigilante Groups in Crime Prevention in Gombe Metropolis, Gombe State, Nigeria. The objectives of the paper were to identify the roles and origin of Vigilante Groups in crime prevention in Nigeria and specifically in Gombe metropolis, Gombe state. It attempted to identify the various strategies of crime prevention adopted by the Vigilante groups. Challenges affecting the effective roles of the Vigilante groups were identified. Situational Crime Prevention Theory were adopted as the theoretical framework of the paper. The paper recommends that the government should increase its funding to the activities of the Vigilante groups. The literature for this paper were sourced from the secondary data. The paper recommends that the government should closely monitor the activities Vigilante groups in order to reduce the abuse of suspects fundamental rights. Operational tools need to be improved in order to tackle the criminal activities in the Gombe metropolis. Formal security agents should consider Vigilante groups as partners in crime prevention.

Keywords: *Vigilantes, Community Policing, Situational Crime Prevention, Gombe, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

The role of vigilante groups in crime prevention is very common to many communities across the globe. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023) governments and vigilante groups have collaborated in many African societies in order to combat criminalities. For example, in Sierra Leone the Kamajors vigilante group emerged as a central community mobilizers and defenders. In Uganda, Arrow Boys of Teso significantly protected the villages, so also the Koglwego vigilante groups in Burkina Faso. Evidences has shown that there were over 300 vigilante groups in United States of America (Aminu et al 2023). Vigilante groups exist in many communities in Nigeria and their origin is traced to 1870 when a group of officers came together and made Navy Captain Abubakar Bakori Umar (RTD) as the commandant general of Vigilante Group of Nigeria. It was officially registered as a Non- Governmental Organization in 1999 by the federal government of Nigeria in order to assist the security agents in fighting criminal

activities in the country (Vigilante Group of Nigeria, 2019).

The roles of the vigilante groups in Nigeria, could also be linked to the precolonial times. In the south eastern Nigeria warrior cults were used to maintain law and order. In the northern and south western Nigeria palace guards were used to protect and defend their territorial entities as well as maintained law and order (Adamu & Mohammed, 2023). This informal security arrangement gained so much prominence in 1983 as part of the President Buhari regime's efforts of preventing crime. Etim Inyang the then Inspector General of Police introduced the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) and ordered the Commissioners of Police to see the fruitfulness of this dream through collaborating with the members of the public and the vigilante groups in order to prevent crimes across the nook and crannies of the country (Kehinde, 2021). The return to democratic governance in 1999 saw the sudden increase of criminal activities in the country. This has consequently make the police incapable of addressing the numerous security challenges in the

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country. Hence the need to collaborate further and co-opt the vigilante groups in the security architecture in order to manage, prevent and control the criminal activities at all levels in the country. This development saw the rapid increase of vigilante groups in the country in many states and local governments of the federation (Sheriff, 2020, Says & Ubong,2019). For instance, vigilante groups blocked the expansion of Boko Haram territories in Gombi, Adamawa state in 2013 and took over the town back from the insurgents (International Crises Group, 2022). Yisrael et al (2023) observed that the Bakassi Boys in the South eastern Nigeria effectively fought against crimes in Aba, Onitsha and other places in the zone. Recently, Amotekun was also introduced in the South western geopolitical zone in order to also address criminalities.

In Gombe metropolis, virtually all the residential areas are concern with their security and safety as the rates of criminal offences are getting higher by the day. For example, one of the renowned islamic cleric in the state Albanin Kuri and a 65 year old Aishatu Damori (residents of Jekadafari and Taura areas) have recently met their timely death due to the activities of the criminals in the metropolitan Gombe. Thus, this negative development and many other petty criminal offences has led to the formation of many vigilante groups in almost all the residential areas of Gombe metropolis. The roles of these groups in crime prevention is very effective in most of the areas of the metropolitan Gombe (Abubakar,2022). Also, Yisrael et al (2023) indicated that reports has shown that the recent successful measures against crime were done by the vigilante groups with the support of the other security agents especially the police. There is therefore the need to give them all the necessary support needed in order to stem the tide of criminal offences and also a mechanism should be put in place to checkmate the recorded abuse of human rights and allegedly extortion of valuable items of the members of the community by the vigilante groups. Nevertheless, Owumi & Ajayi(2013) retorted that the roles of the vigilante groups in crime prevention and maintaining law and order have proven to be effective in many communities in the country. It is against this background that this paper examines the role of vigilante groups in crime

prevention in Gombe metropolis, Gombe state. Thus, the paper focuses on identifying the statutory roles, performance and origin of vigilante groups in Gombe and Nigeria at large, and finally challenges of facing vigilante groups in their sacred role of crime prevention in the country and particularly in Gombe metropolis. Conventionally, it is the government's responsibility to protect the people and to also ensure that crimes are minimized to the barest minimum (Ariche and Awurimbe,2017). This constitutional role of the police and other security agents in maintaining law and order has further become questionable, largely because of the increasing rates of criminal activities in the country (Unya, 2022).It is disheartening to observed that the increasing dimensions of crimes with its consequential effects and the inability of the police to address it squarely has led to the establishment of the informal policing in order to control the crimes by the members of the community (Ikoh,2013).

Conceptual Issues

The following concepts are defined primarily because they are central to the paper under review:

Role - is defined as the expected behaviour or obligations from a particular person who is occupying a social position within the society. This concept is conceptualized in this paper as the specific functions of the vigilante groups in the art of crime prevention in Gombe metropolis, Gombe state.

Performance - is the process of performing a task. It is the act of doing something in a successful manner. In this paper, the concept is seen as the execution of an intended goal or otherwise by the vigilante groups based on their statutory roles of crime prevention in Gombe metropolis, Gombe state.

Assessment- is the systematic and ongoing method of gathering, analyzing and using information from the measured outcomes in order to improve something. Yambi (2020) sees it as a series of measures used to determine the attribute of something. This involves gathering and interpreting information of a given issue so as to determine its strengths and weaknesses. In this paper, the concept

is used as a criteria to assess the role of vigilante groups in Gombe metropolis in crime prevention. The indices used in the assessments are the code of conduct of the vigilante, statutory roles and their structural organization.

Crime- is as old as human existence. Adelani (2024) defines it as those actions that causes harm and violates the social norms of the society. Put it differently, Yisrael et al (2023) sees crime as an offence which violates the laws of the society, thus considered unacceptable by the members of the society because it is injurious to the existence of the society as an integrated entity. In this paper, crime is defined as any human conduct that is against the established criminal law of Nigeria and thus attract punitive sanctions.

Crime Prevention- is defined as any effort made by the government, private institutions or community with collaboration with the security agents in order to reduce crime to a barest minimum level through enforcing the criminal laws and providing a conducive atmosphere for people not to violate these laid down regulations(Abdulkadir et al 2023). Crime prevention is seen as any strategy or measure put in place by either the government, private, individual or group which focuses on reducing or eliminating crime before it occurs. To Dambazau (2011) crime prevention is the measures or strategies that are adopted by the police in order to reduce or minimize the occurrences of criminal activities in the society. It is the process of stopping criminal activities before they occur.

Vigilante Group: the word vigilante originates from English term 'vigilantism' which means " watch man" . The Latin root of the concept is " vigil" which means "awake" or " observe" (Kehinde, 2021). Vigilante is simply a group of people that are committed at the grass root level of the society, established to gather intelligence on suspected criminals and report it to the police in order to detect and prevent crimes in the community. Oyagi(2016) indicated that they are group of people who carry armaments to protect themselves and their community when they feel that the government has failed to do so. Vigilante group is also defined as groups established and sponsored by members of the community in order to address criminalities

(Erhurhu,2017). They usually operate in virtually all the communities in villages and cities. Vigilante is also an association of unarmed voluntary people established by the communities with the support of the government in order to secure their places of residence against suspected criminals and when apprehended they are handed over to the police (Aminu et al (2023). The term vigilante is seen as the effort of the people at various levels of residence in order to secure their community. The group usually carry whistles, sticks, knives, etc.In Gombe metropolis, vigilante groups are found in almost all the residential areas of the city serving the function of preventing and controlling criminal activities.

HISTORY OF VIGILANTE GROUPS IN GOMBE STATE

The origin of vigilante groups in Gombe state dates back to the pre-colonial period where indigenous groups were responsible for crime prevention and control. Then came the islamic rulership of the Sokoto caliphate in 1804, Gombe as one of the Northern Emirate was under the Shariah system, where islamic principles were used in the administration of judicial processes during Modibbo BubaYero, it was also used to prevent and control criminal acts (Umar & Bappi,2014). During the colonial era, the British government hijacked the role of crime prevention and control with the establishment of the Nigeria Police Force in 1930 which negatively affected the effective role of vigilante groups in crime prevention and control in the country (Yisrael et al 2023).

The post colonial North- Eastern region and Gombe state in particular witnessed the active role of vigilante groups known as (Yan- Banga) which has been in existence prior to the colonial rule. The Yan-Banga were the notable community based security outfit in Gombe state, who were believed to possess magical powers and they used that as a technique of crime prevention in many communities in the state. Additionally, the Maharba (Hunters Group) also plays a critical role in the prevention of crimes especially involving armed robbers and other well equipped offenders in the state. In 2012, the Gombe state government under the leadership of Alhaji Ibrahim Hassan Dankwambo introduced the Youth Rehabilitation and Empowerment

Programme nick-named as "Marshals" vigilante groups in order to prevent criminal activities in the state (Umar & Bappi, 2014).

Prevalence of Crimes in Gombe Metropolis

Crime is one of the inevitable feature of the human society as indicated by Durkheim. There are many explanations regarding the causes of crimes. Abdulkadir et al (2023) considered unemployment, food insecurity, inflation, poverty, weak system of rule of law, etc as drivers of crimes. In Gombe metropolis, since 1999 with the returned to democracy things have not been the same. The relatively peaceful atmosphere has changed to the emergence of the criminal and anti- social activities of the suspected criminals. These criminal elements are known for their criminal activities in the state which included assault, rape,extortion, burglary and murder, etc. Abba & Adamu (2019) observed that most of these criminal activities are believed to have been committed by the Kalare boys who operate with so much confidence and disrespect for law and order. Thus, this is a threat to the security of lives and properties in Gombe metropolis. The prevalent crimes in Gombe State are property crimes in form of theft,house/store breaking, phone snatching and possession of illegal drugs (Abdullahi et al 2019).

In 2009 the then chairman of Gombe local government area Alh. Ibrahim Jalo Waziri declared the activities of these suspected criminals called 'kalare' as unlawful and banned the group activities in the metropolitan Gombe. In 2012 Governor Ibrahim Hassan Dankwambo embarked on youth empowerment where a very significant percentage of the 'yankalare' group were put under a scheme " Marshall" vigilante group. This development have drastically reduced the violent and criminal activities of the group. Similarly, in 2022 Governor Inuwa Yahya introduced another youth empowerment and re-engagement named " Operation Hattara" vigilante group. Unfortunately, despite these formal attempts the ugly trend of criminal activities of 'yankalare' boys and that of other offenders is increasing and have become very worrisome in the metropolitan Gombe which creates fears and anxieties among the members of the public (Abba & Adamu 2019 & Adamu & Mohammed

2022).This calls for an investigation into tofhe activities the vigilante groups in Gombe metropolis.

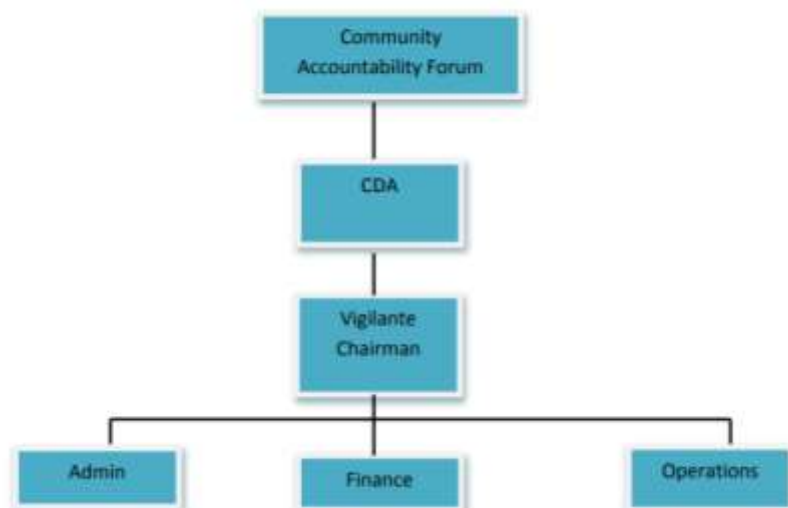
Roles and Performance of Vigilante Groups in Nigeria

Vigilante group is a voluntary security outfit who are assisting the conventional and formal security architecture in maintaining law and order in the society. They are primarily saddled with the responsibility of preventing and controlling crimes and other unlawful activities. They usually protect the lives and properties of citizens, arrest suspects and hand over to the police, intelligence gathering, etc(Adamu & Mohammed, 2022, Ibrahim, 2018, Saye & Ubong, 2019). The Operational Guidelines of Vigilante Groups in Nigeria (2019) states that the following are the statutory roles of the vigilante:

1. They organize and carry out crime prevention activities in the communities where they operate.
2. Participate in a joint patrol and surveillance with police in order to prevent crimes.
3. Report suspicious persons and activities to the police.
4. To protect life and property of people through preventing crime and violence in a given community.
5. To encourage members of the community to participate in the task of crime prevention.
6. To educate the members of the public on criminal threats.
7. To set rules and suggestions on preventive measures on criminal acts.
8. Assist the police to carry out other lawful activities in maintaining law and order.

Structural Organization of Vigilante Groups in Nigeria

Structurally, vigilante groups are accountable to traditional leaders, police and the members of the community. This is hinged to the fact that crime prevention is usually a collective responsibility. Based on the statutory guidelines of operations vigilante groups are structured as follows:



Adopted from Operational Guidelines of Vigilante Groups Manual (2019).

The organizational structure of the vigilante groups states that the Community Accountability Forum(CAF) comprises of traditional leaders, CommunityDevelopment Area (CDA), Divisional Police Officer(DPO), Religious Leaders, Women Group, Youth Group, Traders Associations and Land Lords.They are generally concern with monitoring and approving the activities of the vigilante groups.

1. The CDA plays an intermediary role between the government, community and the vigilante groups on issues pertaining social services, e.g construction of secretariat.
2. The vigilante chairman- serves as the leader of the group that gives directional functions to the vigilante members.
3. Head of Operations- this is the person in charge of operations of the group.
4. Head of Finance- this is the unit of Vigilante groups that handles all issues related to money.
5. Head of Admin- it is a unit of the vigilante group that is responsible for all the administrative and secretariat functions of the group.

ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF VIGILANTE GROUPS IN CRIME PREVENTION IN GOMBE METROPOLIS

The yardstick that is used in this paper, to assess the roles of vigilante groups is based on their code of conduct, organazational structure and the statutory roles of the group as contained in their Operational

Guidelines Manual (2019). Vigilante group's statutory mandate is to serve the members of the community. Thus, their powers of crime prevention is given to them by the community and the police authority. The following are some of the code of conduct for vigilante personnel:

1. Appeal for Money and Extortion are not Allowed for the Personnel- Vigilante members are discouraged from collecting money or bribe from the suspects. All fund-raising solicitations must be approved by the CAF or the chairman of the vigilante for a specific period of time. This code of conduct is often violated as some of the suspects in Gombe metropolis are conniving with the vigilante members to manipulate their process of arrest through financial or material inducements before they are taken to the police. The vigilante members are sometimes extorting the suspects (Abubakar, 2022).

2. Use of Brutal Force and Violence- Personnel of the vigilante are not allowed to employ the use of force or torture while preventing criminal acts. Therefore, jungle justice is not welcomed. The only circumstance that they are allowed to use force is for self-protection from the armed suspects or mob attack. International Crisis Group (2022) maintains that the vigilante groups in the North-Eastern Nigeria including Gombe engages in a grave human rights violation of the suspects. This is also in line with the study of Abubakar (2022), Umar & Bappi

(2014) who also alleged that the vigilante groups have turned into a monster due to the abuse of human rights. Suspects are subjected to torture and other inhumane treatments before they are handed over to the police in Gombe metropolis, Gombe state. There was a reported death of a suspect in the hands of the Operation Hattara Vigilante members at Nayi- Nawa Quarters, Gombe (Adamu & Mohammed, 2023).

3. Protection of Lives and Property - The vigilante groups are very proactive in terms of safe guarding the life and properties of the members of the community (Abdulkadir et al 2023). International Crisis Group (2022) indicated that some of the vigilante groups are allegedly found to be aiding the criminals to commit crimes through sharing of sensitive information or personalising the recovered stolen properties (Kehinde, 2021).

4. Carrying of Arms on Patrol Duty - Vigilante members are not allowed to carry weapons that are considered to be dangerous while on patrol. They are required to carry equipments like whistles, rain coat, torchlight, stick, etc. This code of conduct is also abused by the vigilante groups in Gombe metropolis as the members are carrying dangerous weapons without the permission from the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of their area of operation.

5. Reporting Intelligence Information to the Police - It is one of the sole roles of the vigilante members to aid the police in preventing crimes. They are therefore responsible to give useful information to the police that will help in preventing crimes in the community. Adelani (2024) retorted that the vigilante groups are providing security through crime prevention and intelligence gathering for the protection of properties.

6. Maintaining Peace and Order - Vigilante members are effective in providing peace and orderliness. For example, during social and political gatherings their services are been employed in order to help in ensuring a serene environment. On the whole, inspite of the identified shortcomings of the vigilante groups, their role of crime prevention is increasingly becoming more important in securing the communities they are operating from the activities of the criminal minds. It is therefore very

important that all hands must be on desk to give them all the necessary support needed for more productive and outstanding roles in ensuring a significant prevention or reduction of criminal acts in Gombe metropolis.

SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION THEORY

This paper is hinged on Situational Crime Prevention Theory (SCP), the theory is credited to Ronald V. Clarke in 1980, it is centrally concern with minimizing the criminogenic chances to the criminals by changing the environment in such a way that offending would become difficult and unproductive (Clarke, 1980). The principal assumption of the theory is to prevent crimes and develop strategies that would combat specific criminalities within the society. The theory maintains that the criminals are rationalizing the benefits or otherwise of committing a crime and that changing these considerations or choices can prevent crimes. Cornish & Clarke (2003) identified five methods of crime prevention: (1) increasing the effort for offending (2) minimizing the rewards (3) improving the risks of detection (4) blocking chances for committing criminal acts (5) minimizing provocations. Based on these strategies the goal of crime prevention is shifted from the criminal to crimes, thereby making crime commission more challenging without changing the motives of criminals (Adelani, 2024).

Many criminologists have contributed to the development of SCP through elaborating the applicability of the assumptions. Marcus Felson (2002) introduced the Routine Activity Theory, which emphasizes how everyday activities create opportunities for crime. Ibid also focused on the pragmatic applicability of the SCP in reality, especially in minimizing burglaries and street crimes. The theory is criticised on the ground that it tends to displace crime rather than prevent it, meaning that offenders can change their potential targets or strategies instead of abandoning the criminal intentions (Wortley, 2003). Also, the SCP is attacked for focusing so much on "target hardening", thus neglecting the socio- psychological factors that are pushing people to offend in the first place (Garland, 2001).

The Situational Crime Prevention Theory is very useful to this paper on the assessment of the role of vigilante groups in crime prevention in Gombe metropolis, Gombe state. Vigilante groups and the formal law enforcers especially the police can utilize the SCP theory assumptions through increasing the risks involved in criminal acts via community based surveillance and collection of intelligence information. The vigilante groups can also focus on specific crimes within their localities there by changing the environment in order to make it difficult for the offenders to commit criminal acts. Intelligence gathering through identifying the fundamental threats and understanding the criminal patterns can also supplement the SCP through increasing the risks of detection for offenders. Thus, these strategies would help to create a less favourable serene for crimes, which is inline with the situational crime prevention framework and can effectively improve the security efforts in Nigeria (Adebayo,2022).

Situational Crime Prevention theory is adopted in this paper, primarily because of the fact that the theory explains the importance of collecting information on the potential criminal acts and the possible environment where this negative conduct will take place. Vigilante groups in Gombe metropolis are relying on intelligence gathering and knowledge in performing their sacred role of preventing crimes or minimizing it, which is central to the SCP framework. The theory focuses on involving the community members in crime prevention methods. Vigilante groups in Gombe metropolis are also from the communities, who are primarily performing the role of monitoring and prevention of crimes, which makes them one of the cardinal agents of situational crime prevention in their various communities.

Challenges of Vigilante Groups in Nigeria

There are many challenges confronting the role of vigilante groups in Nigeria. Ibrahim (2018) indicated that 23.9% of the respondents agreed that bribery and corruption is among the operational challenges facing the activities of the vigilante groups, 36.3% selected governmental control, 38.9% financial constraints, 38.9% insufficient operational tools, 31.0% political influence, while

39.8% selected lack of cooperation from the members of the public as the biggest impediment to the effective role of the vigilante groups.

According to Kehinde (2021)" extreme anger, poor management, insufficient funding, jungle justice are some of the challenges confronting the community vigilante groups in Nigeria. Similarly, Adejoh(2013) indicated that there are five fundamental problems facing the activities of the vigilante groups which included: poor relationship with the police and legal system, legitimacy in the eyes of the community members, recruitment and management of personnel, choice of appropriate operations and maintenance of resources, incentives and motivation of the members. Virtually most of their offices are not permanent, therefore secretariats are renting most of their offices and they are not enough. This is also negatively affecting their mandate in many places in Gombe metropolis.

Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) observed lack of funding by the government, harassment from the police, lack of proper training with adequate tools, lack of basic operational equipments such as flashlights, warm clothing, rain coats, rain boots, etc. Other challenges include poor screening of new members, ignorance and illiteracy and presence of 'bad eggs' among the vigilante groups. Olaniyi(2002) indicated that the vigilante groups encounter threats from the hoodlums. He equally cited lack of cooperation among the vigilante members. One peculiar challenge with the activities of the vigilante groups in Nigeria and Gombe metropolis in particular is the inadequacy of funding and lack of adequate support from the members of the public for vigilantism to be effective in their localities. Notably to mention is the lack of synergy between the vigilante groups and the formal security agents like the police and other law enforcers (Sunday Tribune, 2021). Additionally, the vigilante groups in Gombe state are seriously facing the problem of finance and lack of lawful recognition from the government and community members (Umar & Bappi, 2014)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper assesses the role of vigilante groups in crime prevention in Nigeria with specific focus to

Gombe metropolis, Gombe state. There are many factors that have been identified which hinders the effective role of the vigilante members which are relatively beyond their capacity such as lack of collaborative synergy between them and the other security agents, inadequate funding, lack of permanent secretariats in most of the areas they are operating. Thus, if the conventional security agents will give them the necessary support in order to be efficient in carrying out their assignments more positive results will be witnessed. There is a strong need for the members of the public and the government to give them all the necessary support for them to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently.

The roles of the vigilante group has been very useful in preventing criminal activities in Nigeria and particularly in Gombe metropolis. For instance, peace and security is relatively returning to security volatile areas like Jekadafari, Tabra, Nayi- Nawa and Malam Kuri largely because of the activities of vigilante groups in these areas (Adamu and Mohammed, 2022 & Abubakar,2022). But there is the need for improvement which can be done through the following recommendations so as to achieve an effective and efficient operation of the vigilante members:

1. The Gombe state government should intensify her presence in the activities of the vigilante groups through the provision of adequate funding for their activities. The members of the community should also increase the financial support they are giving to the group during fund raising this will stimulate the

vigilante members to do more in stemming the tide of criminal acts in their communities.

2. The leadership of the vigilante groups should intensify the discouragement of violating the fundamental rights of the suspects. This will make the group more productive and professional in discharging their roles. This can equally be done through organizing workshops and seminars for the vigilante members on the need to act professionally. Those who are found to be violating the human rights should be sanctioned accordingly.

3. Conventional security agents should consider vigilante members as partners that are helping them to discharge their constitutional mandate. Crime prevention requires collective responsibility. Thus, if there is an effective synergy between the police and the vigilante groups more fruitful results will be witnessed in addressing criminalities.

4. There is also the need to provide secretariat facility to all the residential areas of the metropolis, this will ease the operations of the vigilante groups in places they are serving. Most of the offices they are using are not permanent. They are rented facilities.

5. The government should provide more professional trainings to the vigilante groups, in addition to establishing a more mutually friendly atmosphere between the police and the vigilante groups. Thus, this will ensure effective and efficient operations of securing the lives and properties of the people in Gombe metropolis and Nigeria as a whole.

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