

**BEHIND THE BADGE: UNRAVELING THE ATTITUDE OF THE  
POLICE TOWARDS VIGILANTE ACTIONS IN OSUN STATE,  
NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The Nigerian Police Force is the statutory body assigned with the protection of lives and property in Nigeria. Unfortunately, mistrust exists between the police and the citizens for perceived corruption and reported abuse of citizens' freedom. As a result, people resort to the use of vigilantes to protect lives and property. The normalization of vigilante groups for crime prevention poses a challenge to the security architecture of the country and ignores the attitude of the police to the indiscriminate use of vigilantes for crime prevention. Questionnaires were administered to police officers who have spent not less than five years of service in the Nigerian Police Force. Police officers expressed disapproval of the activities of the vigilantes, and contended that the activities of the vigilante groups undermined their statutory responsibility to curb crime and protect society.

**Keywords:** Nigeria Police, Vigilante, Community Policing, Crime Prevention, Attitude

## Background

The constitutional responsibility of the Nigerian Police Force is to protect society from crime, ensure people abide by the law, and prosecute those who infract on the law (Iheriohanma et al. 2020). However, the Nigerian Police Force seems not to have been very effective in crime prevention. In order to combat crime in communities, residents often resort to the use of vigilantes to contain crime. Regrettably, the activities of vigilante groups sometimes violate the law and rights of suspected criminals. Unfortunately, residents often condone the impunity that is sometimes associated with the activities of vigilante groups for reasons associated with their perceived effectiveness in containing crime, as well as disdain for the police.

The police constitute the statutory body that is responsible for the maintenance of law and order within the polity, and have a wide range of responsibilities within the criminal justice system. The Nigerian Police Act of 2020, Part II, Section 4, outlines the broad duties of the Nigerian Police Force, which includes, but is not limited to: safeguarding the lives and property of all Nigerians; upholding public safety, law, and order; preventing and identifying crimes; defending the rights and freedoms of all Nigerians as guaranteed by the Constitution; and facilitating free movement on highways, public roads, and streets, among other duties (Nigeria Police Act, 2020). The International Code of Enforcement Ethics also provides a detailed summary for the establishment of formal police systems in any society: “As a law enforcement officer, my fundamental duty is to serve mankind and property; to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception; the weak against oppression or intimidation; and the peaceful against violence and disorder; and to respect constitutional rights of all men to liberty, equity, and justice” (Qadri, 2005). As a result, vigilantes do not enjoy constitutional endorsement when it comes to crime prevention.

The International Victim Survey contends that crime rates are greater in developing than in industrialized nations (Grote & Neubacher, 2016). Nigeria is a developing country, and it is expected that crime rates would be high considering the country’s high level of poverty and unemployment. Though, the World Bank published data in 2023 states that unemployment in Nigeria has proved a difficult statistic to interpret (Jonathan & Pape, 2023). The unemployment rate in Nigeria in 2022 was 5.3% (Q4 2022) and 4.1% (Q1 2023) as against the previous rate in 2020 of 33.3% (Q4 2020) (National Bureau of

Statistics, 2023). Furthermore, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data in July 2022 suggested that the inflation rate was 463.6 (19.64%), relative to 387.5 (17.38%) in July 2021, which means the inflation rate in general price level changes was 2.26% higher than the previous year (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). These data suggest that a criminogenic environment conducive to criminality exists in the country. Studies have also concluded that the rate of crime is influenced by inflation. In their findings, Adekoya and Rasak (2016) implicated dire economic conditions in the analysis of crime causation. By the mandate of the Nigerian Police, it is statutorily empowered to play a crucial role in reducing crime and protecting society. However, the police and other law enforcement organizations cannot effectively contain crime and criminals on their own (Arisukwu et al., 2020); consequently, the efforts of the police would not provide the greatest amount of beneficial outcomes (Ordu & Nnam, 2017), especially to the citizens. Thus, vigilante organizations are required to assist the police in deterring crime in communities. However, a cursory assessment of the activities of vigilantes reveals that they do not represent a form of collaboration with the police to prevent and detect crimes. In addition, vigilante groups do not represent what Okiro (2007) referred to as the global community's effort to transition from a traditional form of policing to a formalized community policing.

The Nigeria Police Force is enmeshed in a conundrum of challenges that are structural and operational. In the context of a growing population experiencing deepening poverty, inequality, inflation, and swirling crime, the fact that the police are understaffed is one of the most evident problems. According to the Nigeria Police Force (2016), its staff strength was put at 371,800 employees in a nation with a population of over 200 million people. In order for the police to be effective in the containment of crime, the United Nations recommended a ratio of one police officer for every 450 citizens (Dambazau, 2007). However, the disturbing reality in Nigeria is that there is one officer for every 800 citizens and 6,756 police officers for every state (Business Day, 2022). Another issue is that the police, in spite of its enormous responsibility (compared to other military or paramilitary organizations), receive a paltry budgetary funding that is grossly and appallingly inadequate to monitor more than 200 million people in the 32nd largest nation in the world. In addition to this, the Nigeria Police receive the lowest funding among the country's military institutions. For example, the budgetary allocation in Nigeria in 2022, out of the total security budget, the share of the budget that goes to Nigeria Army was 3.40%, Navy was 1.01%, Airforce was 1.08%, Police was 0.44% and the Directorate of Secret Service (DSS) was

0.43%. This is a reflection that there is considerable underfunding of security agencies at a time when the country is experiencing crime such as banditry, insurgency, abduction, and agitations for separation. The 2022 budget further reveals that aside from the DSS, the police had the lowest budget amongst the armed forces institutions in the country (see below figure 1 and figure 2 of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022 budget).

Consequently, Nigerian police personnel are poorly motivated to carry out their gargantuan responsibility (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The cumulative result of poor motivation constrains the police's ability to be effective in crime containment. Despite the difficulties police officers encounter, there are allegations that they engage in behavior that subverts their idealized vision of what a decent police force ought to be. We can, therefore, deduce that the consequences of the underfunding of the Nigerian Police Force provide a context for the challenges the police experience in the exercise of its statutory responsibilities.

Due to the mistrust for the Nigerian police and the pervasive doubt about its competence to curb crime, a substitute for the roles of the police was conceived by the citizens. Community policing was created due to public mistrust of the police (Arisukwu et al., 2020) and the lack of confidence that the public has in the police. However, Alemika et al. (2012) argued that as result of the lack of trust of the general public in the capacity of the police to contain crime, it becomes imperative to strengthen the capacity of the Nigerian Police Force for effective service delivery to buoy the confidence of the general public in the Police Force.

Admittedly, using vigilantes to maintain peace in neighbourhoods is not a new phenomenon. In other words, vigilantes have preceded the development of Nigeria into a modern state. However, the widespread and indiscriminate deployment of vigilantes for crime prevention in communities gives the impression that they are completely appropriate and effective. It does become relevant to question the accuracy of such an assumption in the context of a study that investigates the perception of the police about the involvement of vigilante groups in neighborhood crime control. It therefore becomes not only important but appropriate to take into account the attitude of the police (as the statutory body recognized by the Nigerian Constitution for crime prevention and detection)

toward the activities of the vigilante groups in the architecture of crime prevention and detection in communities.

### **The Problem**

In Nigeria, the growing wave of criminality has posed a challenge for governance, the efforts of the government to revamp the ailing economy, and for lives and property. Unquestionably, the Constitution recognizes and entrusts the police with the responsibility of preventing and detecting crimes. Vigilante groups have emerged as an alternative to the police in crime management in communities as a result of the difficulties the police encounter in providing a seamless security protection. In spite of studies that have been done on the Nigerian Police, a scrutiny of literature reveals there is paucity of research on the attitude of the Nigerian police toward the activities of vigilantes. As a result, this study seeks to fill the gap in literature.

Furthermore, the state of literature suggests that little has been done on the consequences of the activities of vigilantes on the rights and liberties of individuals. To butt, citizens tend to ignore the arbitrariness and lawlessness of vigilante groups on the excuse that they are effective in crime prevention in communities. This study investigates the attitude of the personnel of the Nigerian Police to the activities of the vigilante groups in securing lives and property. In order to address the legal and ethical issues surrounding the activities of vigilante groups, it is imperative to include the narratives of the police since it is the statutory body that is given the responsibility of securing lives and property.

Significantly, the role of the vigilante in preventing crime in communities through the police's lens receives much less analytical scrutiny. It is, therefore, incongruous to examine the activities of the vigilante from the angle of those who recruit and pay for their services in respective communities. Furthermore, due to the widespread perception that vigilante members are successful at defending their neighbourhoods, there is a tendency to always gloss over their acts of impunity. More disturbing is the tendency of the public to oppose and sometimes assault the police when they attempt to hold vigilante members accountable for their sleazy and occasional criminal behavior in the exercise of their duties to protect lives and property in their respective communities. Sometimes, vigilante groups deploy extrajudicial measures to deal with suspected criminals without reporting to the police authority. Therefore, it is erroneous and egregious to ignore the narratives of a statutory body like the police in the evaluation of the

activities of vigilante groups. Excluding the narratives of the police officers from an assessment of the activities of the vigilante groups constitutes a significant gap in knowledge.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

In the context of this study, vigilante groups are a loosely organized group of people who do not enjoy constitutional protection to provide security services to citizens for which they earn a living. Our discussion will, therefore, be restricted to vigilante organizations that are recruited to provide security to residents of communities, and whose services are without statutory guarantee. In order to ensure the protection of lives and property in communities, this type of vigilante group “...operates without a legal framework or proper oversight” (International Crisis Group, 2022). As a result, these groups are equally vulnerable to the abuses and impunity that are also associated with the formal police. We have limited our research to this type of vigilante group.

It is also important to distinguish some vigilantes who enjoy the recognition and support of the state but whose existence are not drawn from the Constitution. These types of vigilante groups have a semi-legal status, like “Amotekun” in the South West of Nigeria, “Hisbah” in Kano, North West Nigeria, or “Ebubeagu” in South East Nigeria. To reduce crime in their respective jurisdictions, these semi-legal vigilante groups have government-state assistance in the form of funding, law, and enactment. Our focus of interest does not include these groups with quasi-status. However, there is a chance that these quasi-legal vigilante groups could be formed carelessly and then utilized for political goals/retaliation against perceived political rivals. The possibility of an increase of “ethnic vigilantes” who could harm “inter-communal relations” and/or compromise “national security” is another issue with this kind of quasi-vigilante (International Crisis Group, 2022).

### **Contextual Issues in the Failure of the Nigerian Police and Drivers of Vigilante Groups**

Vigilante groups typically emerged as a result of decisions made by local residents who share the same values and concern to protect lives and properties in their respective communities because they believe the police are ineffective and inefficient in dealing with rising issues of crime and criminality in society.

Due to the surge in crime and the incapability of the Nigerian Police to effectively contain crime, vigilante organizations are now required for community policing. But there are numerous vigilante organizations in Nigerian society for a variety of reasons, not just one. The International Crisis Group (2022) identifies the factors that fuel the growth of vigilante groups as “rising insecurity, the failure of the Nigeria Police Force and other official security agencies to curb crime, the justice system's deficiencies and the diminution of citizen trust in the federal government to protect all ethnic groups equally and impartially...and high youth unemployment.” Thus, the growth of vigilantism in Nigeria is partly explained by the International Crisis Group (2022) summary; though, these reasons are not exhaustive. However, vigilantism has morphed into different forms with different mandates, from those that are supported by the state to those who do not enjoy state support but draw their existence from the services they render to communities. As a result, the idea of vigilantism as a social practice is nebulous. It is incorrect to make a characterization that conceives vigilantes in a binary sense that is opposed to the state and the police. However, this social category sometimes conflicts with the police in the execution of its mandate. The ideal and lawful social expectation is for the vigilante to subsume its activities under the police. This means that vigilantes are expected to collaborate and provide support to the police in the architecture of crime management. The understanding that vigilante groups are an expression of identity construction and “protest identity” as a result of the state's failure to preserve public order serves as the foundation for this study. The tendency of vigilantes to execute jungle justice on suspected criminals without regard for the law, however, poses a challenge for public safety, criminal justice, and the application of the rule of law.

In most cases, vigilante organizations developed as a result of the failure of the police to stem the rise in crime. Importantly, understaffing and underfunding problems cannot be exonerated from the abysmal performance of the police to protect lives and property. The United Nations set a benchmark of 1:450 for police-to-citizen ratio; unfortunately, in Nigeria, the actual ratio is 1:540. However, it is claimed that only 20% of police officers are assigned to their constitutional duties to protect society. With a ratio of 1 police officer per 800 residents or 6,756 police officers to each state, this depressing figure demonstrates that less than 250,000 policemen are actually entrusted with the duty of securing so-called public order (Business Day, 2022) while the other policemen carry out protective duties that are not envisioned by the Constitution. Some of these duties include protecting top government functionaries, very

important personalities and politically exposed individuals while securing strategic buildings such as banks.

As a result of the inability of the Nigerian police to curb the growing criminality in society, Afrobarometer (2006) observed that Nigerians lack confidence in the ability of the police to reduce crime. The data by Afrobarometer (2006) revealed the disdain Nigerians have for the police to be about 51%, greater than the average level among Africans, which is about 45%. The data also suggest that the Nigerian police operates in the context of challenges occasioned by mistrust for police officers by those they are expected to protect.

In conclusion, the social ecology in which the Nigerian Police Force operates inhibits its capacity to perform; thus, the police is held hostage by the contradictions and negations of the society that has thrown up the vigilante phenomenon. The grossly insufficient funding the police receives for its operations, the way top government functionaries use police personnel for unconstitutional purposes, the distrust citizens have for the police, the lack of modern tools that are not made available to the police, poor salaries and unfavorable working conditions, and inadequate staff strength present a hostile environment for the police to be effective in protecting and policing the society against swirling criminality.

### **Overview of Nigeria Police Force: Membership, Years of Service, Pension Scheme, Posting Criteria and Professional Development Criteria**

According to the Nigeria Police Force official website, police is the primary law enforcement agency in the country. The force consists of officers at various ranks, including constables, corporals, sergeants, inspectors, and other higher-ranking officers through to the rank of inspector general of police (Nigeria Police Service Commission, 2006). Graduates of tertiary institutions in and/or outside Nigeria, upon the completion of one year national service, who successfully apply to be police officers would be sent to the Nigerian Police Academy in Wudil Kano, Nigeria. Once they graduate from the training school, they are employed as assistant superintendent police (ASP), while graduates of secondary schools who passed their school certificate examinations are recruited as inspectors. The length of service for police officers is usually determined by length of service and/or age. A police officer would either retire at the completion of 35 years in service, or upon reaching the age of 60. Police officers in Nigeria are entitled to pensions upon retirement (Nigeria Police Service Commission, 2006). The



pension system is designed to provide financial support to retired officers. The Nigeria National Pension Commission Reform Act (2004) is a significant legislative framework that addresses pension issues for police officers in their post-retirement period in Nigeria. Police officers in Nigeria may be posted to different regions, units, or departments based on the needs of the force and security considerations. Postings are often made to address specific law enforcement challenges in different areas. Professional development is crucial for police officers in Nigeria, and it includes ongoing training programs. Training covers various aspects, including law enforcement techniques, crime prevention, community policing, and human rights. The Nigeria Police Force collaborates with international organizations and training institutions to enhance the skills and knowledge of its officers (Nigeria Police Service Commission, 2006).

### **Objective**

This paper aims to investigate the attitude and disposition of the Nigeria Police toward the activities of vigilante groups in crime prevention in selected communities in Osun State, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

A questionnaire was developed for and filled out by police officers deployed to Osun State in the Nigerian police force. The majority of the junior cadre officers, ranging in rank from constable to assistant superintendent of police (ASP), were given the questionnaire. Junior officers are the ones typically and primarily assigned to night patrols and community surveillance, which is why they will receive the majority of the questionnaire. It took about 30-35 minutes to complete the self-administered English questionnaire. To safeguard respondents' identities, the questionnaires were anonymous and the analysis was done under strict confidentiality.

### **Research Design**

This study used a descriptive research design to investigate the attitude of the police toward the use of vigilantes. The study used cross-sectional research design for generating data.

## **Study Area and Population**

The study was conducted with police personnel in Osun State in a significant town chosen from each senatorial district. Three prominent towns in Osun State, namely, Osogbo, Ile-Ife, and Ejigbowere chosen on purpose for the study. The Osogbo Divisional Police Headquarters Dugbe is located within the Osun Central Senatorial District. Divisional Police Headquarters in Ile-Ife is located in the Osun East Senatorial District, while Ejigbo Divisional Police Headquarters is located in the Osun West Senatorial District.

## **Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique used for this study was simple random, quota, and purposive sampling techniques through self-selection sampling processes. Osogbo (OSUN CENTRAL), Ile-Ife (OSUN EAST), and Ejigbo (OSUN WEST) are the three senatorial districts in Osun State. The senatorial districts' largest towns were chosen at random. To reach a total of 120 respondents for the study, quota sampling was utilized to distribute 40 respondents to each senatorial district. Police officers on duty at their different stations were randomly given questionnaires to fill out. These questionnaires were completed independently and collected from respondents as soon as they were finished.

## **Inclusion Criteria**

The requirement for respondents to be included is that they must have served in the police force for at least five years. To ensure that respondents may discuss concerns related to the study's problem, this was done. Another need for inclusion was that they were willing to agree to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria for selecting the towns are based on the fact that they are significant historical towns in Yoruba history in Osun State with divisional police command.

## **Research Instrument**

The study instrument used to collect the data was a closed-ended questionnaire with pertinent items presented on a Likert scale. Respondents independently self-administered the questions.

### Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire that was given to 120 respondents who were chosen at random because there was no population or sample frame. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were performed using this computer-aided tool, using straightforward percentages and frequencies.

### Ethical Consideration and Approval

The confidentiality of the information provided and the anonymity of the respondents and interviewees were both guaranteed. Through the Office of the Commissioner of Police, the Osun State Police Command issued consent and clearance for the collection of data. The Office of the Commissioner of Police also gave the Divisional Police Command instructions on how to assist in the data gathering process. Prior to this stage, the permission to conduct the research was granted by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, which forwarded the researcher's letter of introduction to the Osun State Police command. After a thorough explanation of the goals of the research to the respondents, their consent was obtained and the questionnaires were administered to the respondents.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table 1.1**

*Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Variable		Frequency (n=120)	Percentage (100%)
Sex	Male	72	60.0
	Female	48	40.0
Marital	Married	112	93.3
	Widowed	8	6.7
Rank	Constable	16	13.3

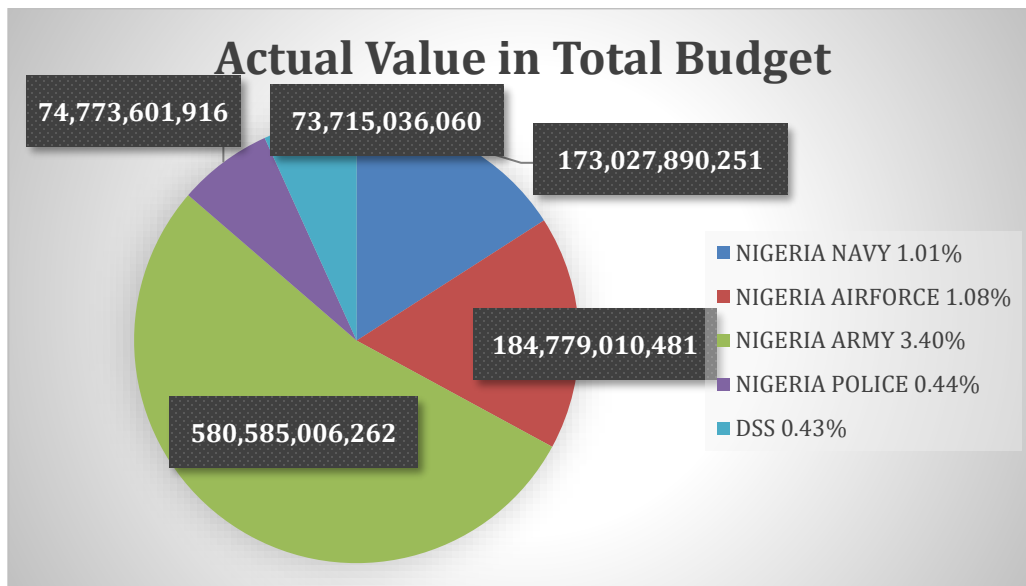
	Corporal	14	11.7
	Sergeant	50	41.7
	Inspector	30	25.0
	ASP	10	8.3
Years of service	Less than 10 years	30	25.0
	10-15 years	52	43.3
	16-20 years	24	20.0
	Above 20 years	14	11.7
Educational level	Primary	2	1.7
	Secondary	74	61.6
	Tertiary	44	36.7
Religion	Christianity	75	62.5
	Islam	45	37.5

Results presented in Table 1.1 outlines the respondents' socio demographic characteristics. The survey had 48 female participants (40%) and 72 male participants (60%). It was intentional that there was a disproportionately large number of men among the responders because it is typically the male police officers who conduct nighttime patrols and surveillance. By including female police officers, it was possible to mainstream gender into the research's foundational themes and ensure that their opinions were heard. Results on marital status revealed that 112 (93.3%) of respondents were married and 8 (6.7%) were widowed. According to rank, there were 16 constables (13.3%), 14 corporals (11.7%), 50 sergeants (41.7%), 30 inspectors (25%) and 10 assistant superintendents (ASP) in total. The fact that they frequently participate in night patrols was the inclusion criterion for this rank.

Results on the officers' years of service revealed that 30 (25%) had fewer than 10 years of experience, 52 (43.3%) had 10-15 years, 24 (20%) had 16–20 years, and 14 (11.7%) had more than 20 years. Officers with this many years of service were required to meet inclusion criteria so that they could contribute their knowledge to the study's focus on those concerns. In addition, two respondents (1.7%) had an elementary education, 74 respondents (61.7%) had a secondary education, and 44 respondents (36.7%) had a higher degree. This indicated that respondents have the necessary levels of education to provide educated answers on the topic with little to no guidance. In addition, 45 (37.5%) are Muslims and 75 (62.5%) are Christians.

**Figure 1**

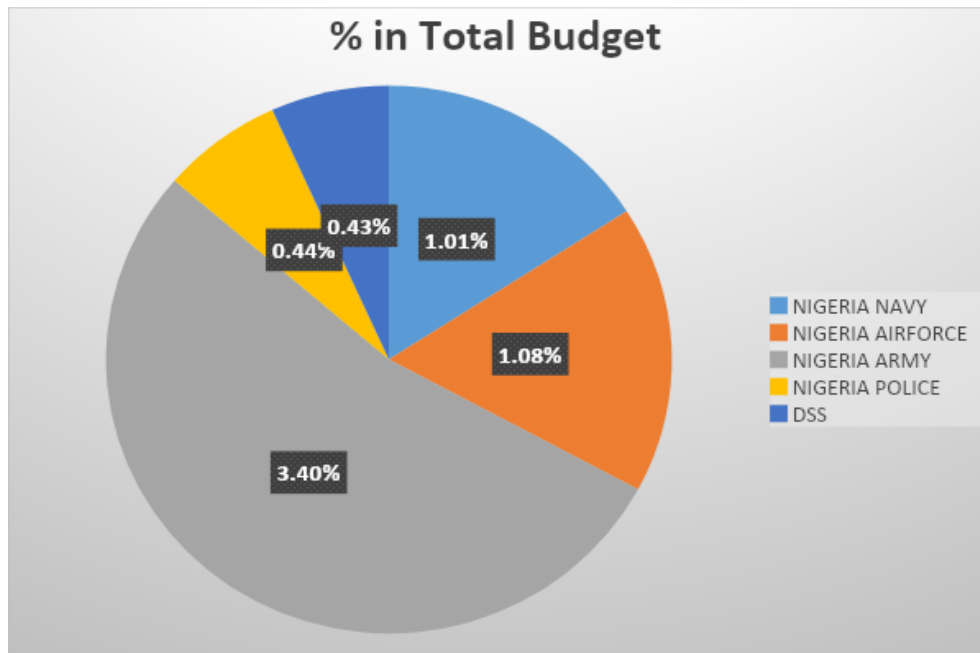
*Pie Chart showing the state of funding for Nigeria Army, Navy, Airforce, Police and DSS*



Source: 2022 Budget of Federal Republic of Nigeria.

**Figure 2**

*Pie Chart showing the percentage in total of funding for Nigeria Army, Navy, Airforce, Police and DSS*

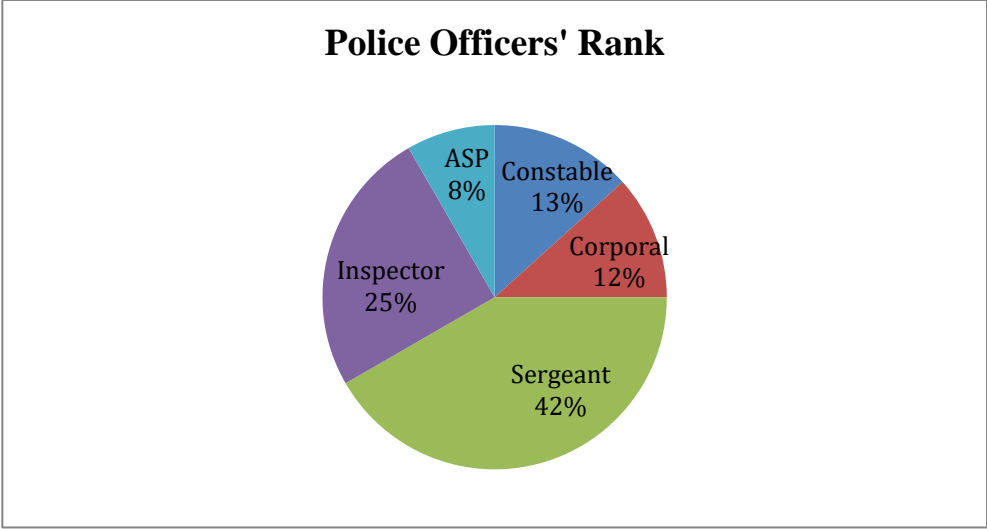


Source: 2022 Budget of Federal Republic of Nigeria.

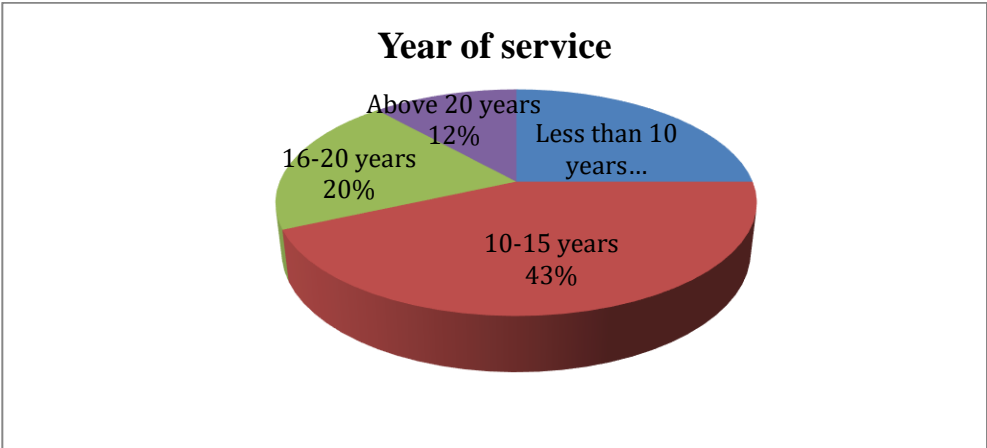
The above pie charts revealed the current state of funding for the major security forces in Nigeria for the 2022 budget. With the extant budgetary allocation shown above, out of the total budget of ₦17, 126 000 000 000K, the share of budget that goes to Nigeria Army was 3.40%, Navy was 1.01%, Airforce was 1.08%, Police was 0.44% and the DSS was 0.43%. The pie chart reveals there is considerable underfunding of the security agencies at a time the country is experiencing crime, banditry, insurgency, abduction and agitations for separation. The pie chart further reveals that the Nigeria Police Force, which is saddled with huge responsibilities to protect and detect crime as well as respond to internal insurrection, is grossly underfunded compared to the other security forces except for the Directorate of State Security Services that it has a marginal budgetary allocation over.

**Figure 3**

*Illustrated Rank of Police Officers*



**Figure 4**  
*Illustrated Police Officers' Years of Experience*



**Research Objective: The attitude of the Police towards the Activities of Vigilantes**

**Table 1.2**

*Distribution of Responses on Police Attitude toward the Activities of Vigilantes*

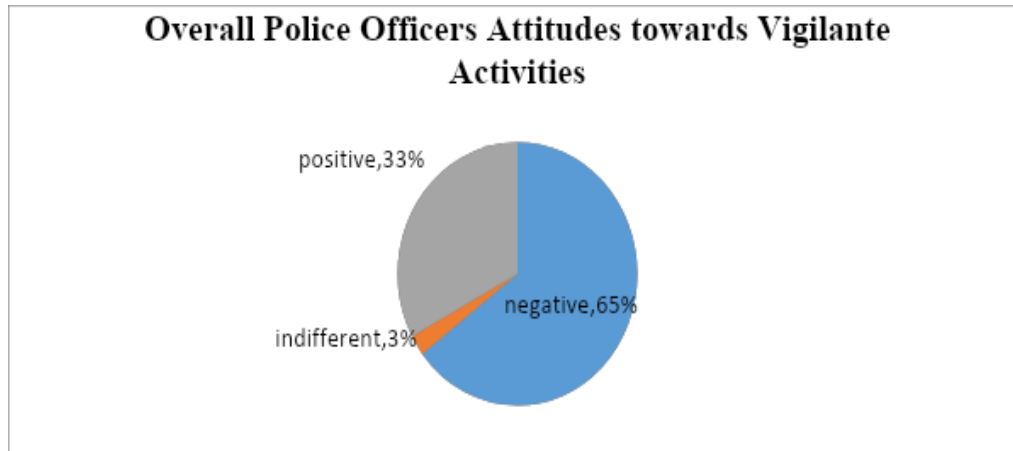
Questions	SA	A	UN	D	SD
Vigilantes' actions undermine police efforts to conduct effective community policing.	14 (11.7%)	49 (40.8%)	7 (5.8%)	40 (33.3%)	10 (8.3%)
If the vigilantes are to operate in communities, the police should examine them and grant them a license.	22 (18.3%)	73 (60.8%)	11 (9.2%)	10 (8.3%)	4 (3.3%)
The police are more likely to face difficulties from vigilantes when it comes to upholding the safety of people and property.	12 (10.0%)	27 (22.5%)	-	60 (50.0%)	21 (17.5%)
Communities that use vigilantes as security are more likely to experience robberies and other crimes.	8 (6.7%)	42 (35.0%)	10 (8.3%)	54 (45.0%)	6 (5.0%)
A result of social support for vigilantes and the relative lack of such backing for the police is the high occurrence of crime in the neighborhood.	9 (7.5%)	29 (24.2%)	-	65 (54.2%)	17 (14.2%)
Many vigilantes issue bogus alerts in order to draw unwarranted attention from the community.	6 (5.0%)	60 (50.0%)	25 (20.8%)	24 (20.0%)	5 (4.2%)

*Note.* Key: SA=Strongly Agreed; A=Agreed; UN=Undecided; D=Disagreed; SD=Strongly Disagreed



**Figure 5**

*Illustrated Overall the Police Officers Attitudes Towards the Activities of Vigilantes*



Results as presented in table 1.2 and figure 3 illustrated how the police felt about neighborhood watch and other vigilante organizations' operations. Results revealed that 77 (65%) of police officers had unfavorable attitudes concerning vigilante crimes on the grounds that they interfere with their ability to enforce the law. Significantly, 40 respondents (33%) voiced support for vigilante organizations' usage in reducing crime in local areas. In addition, 3 police officers (2%) had no opinion on the usage of vigilante organizations. On the question of granting licenses to vigilante organizations so they can operate in communities, 95 (79.1%) of police officers thought the police should first grant the groups permits before allowing them to do so. This indicates that the majority of police officers may be inclined to agree that vigilante organizations should be organized to strengthen regulatory control by the police over their registration and/or use by local communities. However, a very small percentage of respondents (11.6%) held the opinion that obtaining police consent was not necessary, and 11 (9.2%) said they didn't care whether or not vigilantes had their permission to operate in their neighborhoods. Additionally, 60 (50%) of respondents believed that vigilante communities were more likely to commit crimes than non-vigilante communities, whereas 50 (41.7%) did not share this opinion. Additionally, it was found that 66 (or 55%) of respondents thought vigilantes frequently raise false alarms to draw unwarranted attention from areas. The findings imply that the police have a bad opinion of using vigilante groups to protect communities.

### Discussion

Despite the fact that this survey is restricted to Osun State, it offers important insights into how the police feel about using vigilantes. The study highlights key points that reflect the perspective of the police on vigilante activities in communities and challenges the assumption that vigilantes are effective and lawful in their activities. The study also sparks scholarly debates and invites areas of inquiry for future research.

It is interesting to note that the police are aware that community security is everyone's duty and they value vigilantes as players in community crime management strategies. However, police officers expressed a negative attitude towards the activities of vigilantes. The police contend that the activities of vigilantes are usually unlawful in the way they deal with suspected criminals when they are apprehended. The police contend that the lawful thing for the vigilante is to report suspected criminals for investigation and prosecution. Additionally, the police respondents argued that vigilante members sometimes sponsor crime in the communities where they operate to create the impression that they are working. The police went further to argue that some vigilante members give clues to men of the underworld about the movement of individuals in the community they oversee. The police expressed dissatisfaction with vigilante members who undermine their constitutional responsibility to prevent and detect crime by appropriating their responsibility.

### Recommendations

- The police need to be well-funded to be responsive to curb crime in the country.
- Police leadership must pay deserving attention to (re)training of police officers to ensure issues around human rights abuses are considerably reduced.
- To meet the benchmark of the United Nations police-to-citizen ratio, which is 1:450, the current actual ratio in Nigeria of 1:540 is far below the global standard. The government needs to recruit more competent Nigerians into the Police Force. To achieve this objective, the Nigeria Police Force Commission should come up with a bill to the National Assembly to approve a 5-year consecutive recruitment plan of 30,000 officers each year to meet up with the United Nations recommendation.

- The Police Community Relation Committee (PCRC) must be reinvigorated to include respectable community members who should have periodic meetings with the police about ways to safeguard people and property in neighborhoods. These gatherings ought to be used to dispel popular mistrust of the police and soothe public concerns about them.
- The police must be saddled with the responsibility to license those who want to form vigilante groups, and must regulate their operations.
- The police must ensure that communities who want to use vigilante members in their communities must seek approval from police authorities.

### **Conclusion**

The inability of the Nigerian Police Force to be effective in the prevention and detection of crime provides the context and rationale for the use of vigilantes in communities. Class-based policing, including concentration on areas where the political elite and the rich live and the exclusion of where poor and vulnerable groups live, has prompted the latter communities to organize themselves to recruit the services of vigilante groups to secure their neighbourhoods. The police alleged that citizens frequently overlook vigilantes' highhandedness and acts of impunity because of their perceived effectiveness in reducing crime. The opinions of the respondents were that vigilantes often exaggerate crime to justify their effectiveness. The police further argued that there were instances during their investigations that have found that vigilante members are equally accomplices in the commission of crime within the jurisdiction they have the mandate to oversee. In curbing the unlawful activities of the vigilante groups, the police respondents said community residents often accuse them of an attempt to cover the "crimes" of suspected criminals. The police respondents averred that citizens usually assume that they had been bought off when in reality, the process of investigation is sometimes slow as a result of a conscious need to avoid miscarriage of justice. This frequently leads to tension between the police on one side and residents of communities and the vigilantes on the other side, who believe that the police are shielding alleged criminals from prosecution. The police further espoused that citizens have little confidence in the ability of the police to curb crime in neighbourhoods as a result of perceived corruption and highhandedness of some police officers. The police respondents suggest that the

police should be entrusted with the sole responsibility to register vigilante groups and set their regulations; and that communities must get approval from the police before they are used in respective communities. By refusing to trust the police, the citizens are, in a sense, unintentionally aiding criminal activity.

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