

# The Effectiveness of Community-Based Security Initiatives Across Different Nigerian States

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the effectiveness of community-based security initiatives (CBSIs) across multiple Nigerian states, analyzing their contributions to crime reduction, the challenges they face, and the factors that differentiate successful programs from ineffective ones. Drawing on empirical studies from Plateau, Kwara, Kogi, Ekiti, Ondo, Lagos, Kano, and Enugu states, the article synthesizes evidence on the performance of community policing collaborations, vigilante groups, regional security outfits (Amotekun), and forest guard units. Findings indicate that CBSIs have demonstrated measurable success in urban crime reduction (up to 20% in select states) and intelligence gathering in rural areas. However, their effectiveness is severely constrained by inadequate legal frameworks, insufficient funding, lack of standardized training, and accountability deficits. The article proposes a multi-dimensional framework for assessing CBSI effectiveness and recommends a structured legal and policy foundation to formalize community security arrangements while mitigating risks of abuse. This research contributes to the growing literature on hybrid security governance in fragile states and offers practical insights for policymakers seeking to optimize community-based approaches to insecurity in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** community policing, vigilante groups, Amotekun, crime reduction, Nigeria, hybrid security governance, non-state security actors

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## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria faces a complex and escalating security crisis characterized by banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, and urban crime. Between 2019 and 2024, Nigeria experienced a 45% increase in kidnapping incidents, with ungoverned forest spaces serving as operational bases for armed groups. Forest-related conflicts, including farmer-herder clashes, accounted for more than 8,000 deaths within the same period. The conventional security architecture—comprising the

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Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and military—has struggled to address the localized and multi-dimensional nature of this violence.

The police-to-citizen ratio in Nigeria falls far below international standards, with approximately one police officer serving 400-500 citizens (compared to the UN-recommended ratio of 1:220). This gap has created a security vacuum that communities have increasingly filled through self-organized initiatives. From vigilante groups in the north-central and south-east to the regional security outfit Amotekun in the south-west, community-based security initiatives (CBSIs) have proliferated across Nigeria's diverse states.

The effectiveness of these initiatives, however, remains contested. Proponents argue that CBSIs leverage local knowledge, enhance intelligence gathering, and provide rapid response capabilities that formal security forces cannot match. Critics contend that unregulated vigilante groups pose risks of extrajudicial violence, ethnic profiling, and legal violations that may ultimately undermine the rule of law. This article addresses the question: **Under what conditions are community-based security initiatives effective in reducing crime, and how does effectiveness vary across Nigerian states?**

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is anchored in three complementary theoretical perspectives:

### **Social Control Theory**

Social Control Theory posits that society has the capacity to institute and maintain social norms through formal and informal mechanisms. Community-based security initiatives represent informal social control mechanisms that leverage community cohesion, shared values, and collective efficacy to prevent crime. When formal institutions (police, courts) are perceived as weak or illegitimate, communities may activate informal controls as substitutes or complements.

### **Hybrid Security Governance**

The concept of hybrid security governance recognizes that in many post-colonial and fragile states, security is co-produced by state and non-state actors operating within complex, often ambiguous, institutional arrangements. This framework moves beyond binary distinctions between "formal" and "informal" security provision to examine how different actors negotiate authority, share responsibilities, and compete for legitimacy. In Nigeria, hybrid arrangements range from state-sanctioned outfits like Amotekun to community-organized vigilantes operating without explicit legal recognition.

### **The Functionalist Perspective**

The functionalist perspective, as developed by Talcott Parsons, provides a macro-sociological lens for understanding how social institutions (including security arrangements) contribute to social order and stability. From this viewpoint, CBSIs emerge as functional responses to the failure of formal institutions to perform their designated roles. Their effectiveness depends on integration with broader institutional frameworks rather than operating in isolation.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This article employs a comparative case study design, analyzing CBSI effectiveness across multiple Nigerian states. The research synthesizes findings from empirical studies conducted between 2020 and 2025, including quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and secondary data from government reports and academic publications.

**Table 1: Data Sources**

Source Type	Description	States Covered
Peer-reviewed articles	Studies on community policing, vigilantes, and regional security	Plateau, Kwara, Kogi, Ekiti, Ondo, Lagos, Kano, Enugu
Government reports	Nigeria Security Tracker (NST), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)	National
Institutional publications	NALTF, SOAS, AJOL	National and regional
News media	Investigative reports on vigilante activities	Multiple states

**Table 2: Analytical Framework**

CBSI effectiveness is assessed across five dimensions:

Dimension	Indicators
<b>Crime reduction</b>	Changes in reported crime rates, victimization surveys
<b>Intelligence gathering</b>	Information sharing with formal security forces, disruption of criminal networks
<b>Public trust</b>	Community satisfaction, willingness to cooperate
<b>Accountability</b>	Adherence to legal standards, oversight mechanisms
<b>Sustainability</b>	Funding stability, training quality, institutional support

**CASE STUDIES: COMMUNITY-BASED SECURITY INITIATIVES ACROSS STATES**

**Plateau State: Community Policing Collaborations**

A study by researchers at the University of Jos assessed the impact of community policing collaborations between the NPF and local communities in Plateau State. Using a survey design with 386 respondents and chi-square analysis via SPSS, the study found that despite the implementation of community policing initiatives, there is a prevailing public perception that crime continues to occur with considerable frequency. Across all crime types examined—kidnapping, armed robbery, theft, banditry, and other offenses—respondents most frequently reported that these crimes occur "sometimes."

**Key Findings:**

- Community policing structures have been introduced but their impact on significantly reducing crime remains limited
- Weak collaboration between police and local communities

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- Lack of trust between security forces and citizens
- Insufficient training for community policing groups
- Poor logistical and institutional support from government

The study concluded that without proper integration, adequate resources, and sustained public engagement, community policing may not achieve its intended outcomes.

### **Kwara State: Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN)**

Lawal and Offorha (2026) assessed the activities of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) in Kwara Central, employing mixed methods with 432 respondents. The study found that while collaborating with traditional rulers, community members, and other security agencies, VGN plays crucial roles in securing Kwara Central by providing security to rural and urban communities.

#### **Key Findings:**

- VGN is effective in reducing crime in Kwara Central
- Success factors include collaboration with traditional rulers and community members
- Major challenges: lack of legal backup, inadequate funding, insufficient training

The study recommended constitutional recognition, professional training, and government funding to strengthen VGN operations.

### **Kogi State: Public Assessment of Vigilante Effectiveness**

Sule Okutepe (2025) investigated public assessment of vigilante security groups in Anyigba Community, Kogi State, surveying 386 respondents. The findings revealed that crime is a frequent and pressing issue in Anyigba, with 91.2% of respondents confirming awareness of crime and 60.1% describing its occurrence as "very frequent," especially at night. The most common crimes reported were burglary (24.6%), armed robbery (19.7%), theft (16.1%), and kidnapping (14.5%).

#### **Key Findings on Vigilante Effectiveness:**

- Vigilante groups play vital roles in community surveillance, intelligence gathering, and rapid incident response (mean scores: 3.5-3.6)
- Strategies include regular patrols (86%), engaging local informants (80.3%), native tracking skills (80.6%), and dividing communities into security zones (83.2%)

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- Public perception is generally positive, with over 90% acknowledging their role in deterring crime
- **However, 94% of respondents expressed concerns over human rights abuses** such as extrajudicial killings and illegal detentions
- Major challenges: inadequate funding (82.4%), lack of training (80.8%), insufficient equipment (76.4%), and lack of legal recognition (70.7%)

### **South-West Nigeria: Amotekun and Technology Integration**

The Amotekun Corps, established in 2020 by six south-west states (Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, and Lagos), represents a formalized regional approach to community security. Awotayo et al. (2025) examined Amotekun's role in crime fighting, focusing on technology integration. The study argues that when states are allowed to manage security policies under federal guidance, they can respond more effectively to local security issues like armed robbery and kidnapping.

#### **Key Findings:**

- Amotekun demonstrates how technology (data analytics, mobile communication tools, surveillance systems) can boost crime prevention
- The hybrid model blends innovation with localized governance
- Challenges include potential misuse of firearms and weak oversight
- Success depends on strong regulations and accountability mechanisms

### **Forest Guards: Ondo and Ekiti States**

Research by NALTF (2025) evaluated the effectiveness of reactivated Forest Guard units in Ondo and Ekiti states. These units disrupted forest-based criminal networks, including kidnapping syndicates and bandits operating from forest hideouts. The study employed a mixed-methods approach combining statistical data from NBS and NST with qualitative insights from state-level case studies.

#### **Key Findings:**

- Community policing initiatives in Lagos, Kano, and Enugu demonstrated a reduction in urban crime rates of up to 20%
- Reactivated Forest Guard units in Ondo and Ekiti disrupted forest-based criminal networks

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- Despite successes, weak coordination, underfunding, and political interference limit effectiveness

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EFFECTIVENESS**

**Table 3: Summary of State-Level Performance**

State/Region	Initiative Type	Crime Reduction Evidence	Key Challenges	Overall Rating
Plateau	Police-community collaboration	Limited; crime persists	Trust deficit, weak collaboration	Moderate
Kwara	VGN	Positive; effective in rural/urban areas	Legal recognition, funding, training	Good
Kogi	Community vigilantes	Positive; public trust high	Human rights abuses, funding, legal status	Good with concerns
South-West	Amotekun (regional)	Promising; technology-enabled	Firearm regulation, oversight	Promising
Ondo/Ekiti	Forest Guards	Successful network disruption	Coordination, funding	Good

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State/Region	Initiative Type	Crime Reduction Evidence	Key Challenges	Overall Rating
Lagos/Kano/Enugu	Various community policing	Up to 20% urban crime reduction	Sustainability	Strong

**Differentiating Effective from Ineffective Initiatives**

Analysis of the case studies reveals several factors that distinguish more effective CBSIs from less effective ones:

**Table 4: Factors Associated with Greater Effectiveness:**

Factor	Evidence
<b>Legal recognition</b>	VGN and Amotekun perform better where they have formal or semi-formal state backing
<b>Integration with formal security</b>	Information sharing and joint operations enhance effectiveness
<b>Community trust</b>	Initiatives perceived as legitimate and fair receive better cooperation
<b>Adequate resourcing</b>	Funding, equipment, and training correlate with positive outcomes
<b>Local knowledge utilization</b>	Familiarity with terrain, language, and social networks is a key advantage

**Table 5: Factors Associated with Limited Effectiveness:**

Factor	Evidence
<b>Trust deficits</b>	Plateau State's weak police-community trust undermines collaboration
<b>Legal ambiguity</b>	Unclear legal status creates operational constraints and accountability gaps
<b>Human rights violations</b>	Reports of extrajudicial killings erode legitimacy and invite legal sanctions
<b>Inadequate training</b>	Untrained personnel are less effective and more prone to abuses
<b>Political interference</b>	Recruitment and operational interference undermine professionalism

### Regional Variations

The effectiveness of CBSIs varies significantly across Nigeria's geopolitical zones:

**South-West:** The formalization of Amotekun as a regional security outfit represents the most institutionalized approach to community security. Technology integration and state government support have enhanced effectiveness, though coordination with federal security agencies remains challenging.

**North-Central (Kwara, Kogi, Plateau):** Vigilante groups play crucial roles, but effectiveness is mixed. In Kwara and Kogi, public perception is generally positive, while Plateau's police-community collaboration shows limited impact. Legal ambiguity and funding deficits are common constraints.

**North-West/East:** In states like Kano, community policing initiatives have demonstrated urban crime reduction, while vigilante groups in other northern states raise concerns about ethnic profiling and extrajudicial violence.

## **CHALLENGES CONSTRAINING CBSI EFFECTIVENESS**

### **Legal and Policy Gaps**

Ekpenisi et al. (2025) argue that effective community policing in Nigeria remains unrealized due to the absence of a comprehensive legal and policy framework. Key gaps include:

- No national legal framework defining the roles, responsibilities, and limitations of CBSIs
- Inconsistent policy directives across states and between state and federal levels
- Lack of clear mechanisms for coordination between CBSIs and formal security forces
- Absence of standardized accountability and oversight provisions

The study recommends enacting a comprehensive Community Policing Act to formalize and operationalize community policing in Nigeria.

### **Resource Constraints**

Across all states, inadequate funding emerges as a primary constraint. VGN operations in Kwara, vigilantes in Kogi, and Forest Guards in Ondo/Ekiti all report insufficient financial resources, equipment, and logistical support. This limits their capacity to conduct effective patrols, maintain communication systems, and respond rapidly to incidents.

### **Training Deficits**

The lack of standardized, professional training is consistently cited as a challenge. Untrained or poorly trained personnel are less effective in crime prevention and more likely to commit human rights violations. The absence of training curricula that address legal standards, de-escalation techniques, and human rights principles undermines both effectiveness and legitimacy.

### **Accountability and Human Rights Concerns**

Perhaps the most significant constraint on CBSI effectiveness is the risk of human rights abuses. In Kogi State, 94% of respondents expressed concerns over extrajudicial killings and illegal detentions by vigilante groups. Similar concerns have been raised in other states, where vigilante members have been accused of torture, extortion, and extrajudicial executions. These abuses erode community trust, invite legal sanctions, and may ultimately undermine the legitimacy of CBSIs.

## **Political Interference**

Political interference in recruitment and operations compromises the professionalism and effectiveness of CBSIs. When security initiatives are co-opted for political purposes—such as election violence or ethnic enforcement—they lose community trust and may become sources of insecurity rather than solutions.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Legal and Policy Framework**

Establish a comprehensive national legal framework for community-based security initiatives, including:

- Clear definition of roles, responsibilities, and operational boundaries
- Standardized protocols for coordination with formal security forces
- Accountability mechanisms and oversight structures
- Recognition of state-level variations while maintaining national standards

### **Capacity Building**

Invest in standardized training programs covering:

- Legal standards and human rights principles
- De-escalation and conflict resolution techniques
- Intelligence gathering and information sharing protocols
- Use of technology in crime prevention

### **Resource Provision**

State and federal governments should:

- Allocate dedicated funding streams for CBSIs
- Provide equipment (communication devices, protective gear, transportation)
- Establish maintenance and replacement schedules

### **Accountability Mechanisms**

Establish robust accountability systems:

- Independent oversight bodies to investigate complaints
- Clear disciplinary procedures for violations
- Community feedback mechanisms
- Regular performance audits

### **Integration with Formal Security Forces**

Strengthen collaboration between CBSIs and formal security agencies through:

- Joint training exercises
- Information-sharing protocols
- Coordinated response procedures
- Clear command and communication channels

### **CONCLUSION**

Community-based security initiatives across Nigerian states demonstrate both promise and peril. In states like Kwara and Kogi, vigilante groups have earned public trust and contributed to crime reduction. In Ondo and Ekiti, Forest Guards have disrupted criminal networks operating from forest hideouts. Urban community policing in Lagos, Kano, and Enugu has achieved measurable crime reduction. The regional Amotekun initiative in the south-west represents an innovative approach to formalized community security.

However, significant challenges constrain effectiveness. Legal ambiguity, inadequate funding, training deficits, and accountability gaps undermine performance across multiple states. The risk of human rights abuses—including extrajudicial killings and illegal detentions—remains a serious concern that could delegitimize otherwise effective initiatives.

The evidence suggests that CBSIs are neither panaceas nor inherently dangerous. Their effectiveness depends on context-specific factors including legal recognition, community trust, adequate resourcing, and accountability mechanisms. A structured legal and policy framework—as proposed by Ekpenisi et al. (2025)—could formalize community security arrangements while mitigating risks of abuse.

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For Nigeria's security crisis, CBSIs are not substitutes for effective formal policing but essential complements that leverage local knowledge, enhance intelligence gathering, and fill critical gaps in state capacity. The path forward requires integrating community initiatives into a coherent national security architecture—one that recognizes their contributions, addresses their weaknesses, and holds them accountable to legal and human rights standards.

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