

An Assessment of the Performance of Informal Security Structures in Community Crime Control in Metropolitan Lagos

Adejoh Pius Enechojo

Sociology Department, University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria

E-mail: piusadejoh@yahoo.com; piusadejoh@gmail.com

Tel: +234-8023599648

Abstract:

Informal security structures (ISS) have become a part of the everyday security landscape of most communities across Nigeria, due to the cluelessness of the formal police to the security challenges in the country. Some state governments have also endorsed ISS as part of their campaign against crime. In Lagos State, three broad categories of ISS are identifiable namely, state-organised, community-organised and individual house-owner/occupant employed. This study examined the perceptions of residents across four local government areas of metropolitan Lagos regarding the performance of ISS groups in community crime control. Cross-sectional survey design was used to generate quantitative data from 1,107 community members aged 18years and above while in-depth interviews and focus group discussion methods were used to generate qualitative data from members of ISS, Police personnel and community leaders. The qualitative data were content analysed while simple percentages were used to analyse the quantitative data. Informal security groups were found to play remarkable role in neighbourhood crime control; they also enjoy support despite reported excesses. It was recommended that all ISS have to be duly registered and made to operate within the law in order for the State to maximize their full crime control potentials.

Key words: Neighbourhood policing, Community governance, Neighbourhood safety, Vigilante.

1. Introduction

Peace, safety and security are both necessary and indispensable requirements for development and the attainment of good quality of life for any human society. They provide the requisite enabling environment for citizens to live and work towards social, economic and political development of the society (Groenewald and Peake, 2004)

By the same token, their absence stifles the human capacity to develop and heavily compromises the dignity and quality of life of both individuals and society. Furthermore, insecurity impacts negatively on all citizens through losses of property, life and limb, or through loss of confidence from fear of violence. It is against this backdrop that the delivery of safety and security is considered a justifiable public good and the very essence of the state (Lubuva, 2004). Human safety and security are indeed human rights having a value of their own and serving an instrumental function in the construction of human contentment and prosperity (Odinkalu 2005).

Unfortunately, social life in Nigeria has remained largely characterized by fear and insecurity (Odekunle, 2005; Odinkalu, 2005; Bach, 2004; Alemika and Chukuma, 2004). In a manner that suggests that the country lacks the capacity to discharge its security functions especially that of policing, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, an erstwhile Inspector General of Police, told the National Assembly on August 6, 2006 that the mobile police are ill equipped to match the sophistication of the modern day robbers in the country (Jamiu, 2006). As proof of the worsening crime situation, the force acknowledged in its annual report for 2008 that offences against persons in Nigeria witnessed an increase in the immediate past year, rising from 34,738 in 2007 to 35,109 in 2008(NPF, 2008). The offences against property were equally high.

Crime is also getting more sophisticated and deadlier with every passing day. There are reports about armed robbers now using dynamites and hand grenades to blow up the doors of bullion vans conveying money with full police escort and using rocket propelled grenades to attack helicopters (Soyombo, 2009). Similarly, kidnapping which used to be a localized problem of the Niger Delta area targeting expatriate oil workers, has assumed a national character, targeting the rich and powerful especially, in the society and making them to live in grave fear and uncertainty.

The profundity of the country's security problem is heightened by the daring disposition of the criminals as evidenced by their temerity to take their trades to the door steps of the men of the agency that is charged with the responsibility for protecting lives and property in a manner that suggests that they have conquered the territory. The climax of these attacks on the law enforcement agents was the bombing on June 16, 2011, of the headquarters of the Nigeria Police by a suicide bomber who drove a car laced with bombs, narrowly missing the then Inspector General of Police. Needless to add here that the police men and their stations have since then become major targets of attack.

As a response to the security challenge in the country, many communities and neighbourhoods have made increasing recourse to informal security providers or what are sometimes called community based security structures in a bid to improve their safety and security particularly since the country's return to civilian rule on May 29, 1999. Reports indicate that as high as 50% of Nigerians patronize the services of these community based security operatives for their protection from criminal attacks (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2005). Some state governments in Nigeria are also known to have tacitly or openly endorsed armed vigilante groups as part of their campaign against crime (Amnesty International, 2002; Akinyele, 2008). Recently, the Governor of Plateau State in north central Nigeria was reported to have encouraged various communities in the state to organize vigilante groups in the light of the frequent invasion of these communities by extremists. In Lagos State, three

forms of community based or informal security groups with distinct structures and modus operandi are identifiable. These are groups that are state-organized, those that are the collective initiatives of community members through their leaders, and those that are engaged by individual house owners and/or residents.

Among other things, this study sets out to gauge public opinions regarding the performance of these security outfits in neighbourhood crime control in metropolitan Lagos.

2. The Problem

Nigeria has a palpable security challenge. Crime has become so pervasive that the country is ranked among the high risk countries to live and work in (<http://lagos.osac.gov>). The high incidence of crime and insecurity in the country portends danger for the peace, progress and development of the country. This is because security is a key consideration by any investor wishing to invest in any country. The citizens also need peaceful and safe environment to be able to attain their social, economic and political dreams.

The police whose duty it is to provide security have consistently admitted that they are handicapped because of a combination of factors among which are: lack of resources, poor government support and poor conditions of service resulting in ill-motivated, ill-trained and ill-equipped workforce (NPF, 2008). Other reasons for the poor performance of the Nigeria police include corruption and the fact that they are alien and structurally distant to the people they are supposed to police (Okafor, 2007).

The emergence and proliferation of community based security groups at local government and state levels across Nigeria is thus a derivative of the general air of insecurity and the low performance of the formal police. In other words, these structures, like their private security counterparts emerged to fill an unmet need.

It is thus the increasing proliferation and visibility of these structures that recommend them for a rigorous interrogation in order to determine their effectiveness in crime control and whether they can serve as viable platforms that could be leveraged upon for a more inclusive and holistic response to the problem of insecurity in the country. This is especially so in the light of concrete evidence from other parts of Africa to the effect that community based security arrangements have very rich credentials and amazing public acceptance that recommend them as part of the wider strategy of law and order (Baker, 2005). Herein lies the object of this study. It was conducted in four local government areas in metropolitan Lagos.

3: Definition of Concepts

Informal Security Structures: This concept is used in this study to refer to all forms of unconventional security groups organized by people to protect lives and properties in the community. It ranges from neighbourhood watches, communal guards, age grades and other forms of vigilante groups that are formed to enhance the safety and security of residents especially in neighbourhoods where the formal police are unable to effectively guarantee this. They are called different names in different communities and also vary structurally and organizationally from community to community.

Security: This term is used here to refer to the guarantee of citizens' properties from theft and unwarranted destruction. It is sometimes used interchangeably with safety which relates to the condition of freedom or protection of the human person from victimization and avoidable injuries and death.

4: Previous Research

Long before the formation of the Nigerian Police, local communities across the country, as in many other countries in Africa and elsewhere, had created their own community based policing arrangements to ensure the security of the population. Usually,

these groups were composed of individuals from the local community, and often derived their credibility, and unofficial authority from the community in which they serve. These structures continued even after the formation of the formal police mainly to complement the police in identifying and handing over criminal suspects to the appropriate judicial authorities. Sometimes, they also tried to settle other conflicts between individuals in the community. Throughout the mid 1990s, state authorities, the police, and traditional rulers called upon villages to set up vigilante patrols or village/community guards (Human Rights Watch and CLEEN, 2002).

There is a common trend in literature to equate informal security structures with vigilantism which is just one form of the former. It was in this sense that Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) spoke of four typologies of vigilantism. These are: religious vigilantism, ethnic vigilantism, state-sponsored vigilantism and neighborhood or community 'vigilantism'. As their names suggest, religious vigilantism where it is found, exists to enforce religious laws and doctrines while its ethnic counterpart are organized along ethnic or tribal lines to defend narrow ethnic interests and sometimes carry out crime control functions (Chukwuma, 2002). Good examples of state-sponsored vigilantes in Nigeria are the "Bakassi Boys" that were active in the three eastern states of Abia, Anambra and Imo State, and the Lagos State Neighbourhood Watchers. The former began as a sincere response by traders in Aba, the commercial city of Abia State, to stem the high rate of violent property crimes in their markets. The groups were however, later hijacked and transformed into state vigilantes by the state governments. The one in Lagos State was established in the days of Brigadier General Buba Marwa as governor of the State to assist with intelligence gathering and surveillance.

The fourth typology is the popular neighbourhood or community vigilantes which consist of groups of people organized by street associations in the cities or villages in the rural areas, to man street entrances or village gates as the case may be, at night. They also carry out foot patrols at night to reassure members of the community that some people are watching over their security. Their *modus operandi* usually includes traditional divining methods, traditional protection methods, praying and fasting, and mob action. Okafor (2007) adds that typically, these groups consisted of able bodied young men of each community members, supported financially and materially by other community members and charged with the task of securing the community and enforcing the law, often with the aids of small weapons, such as machetes, bows and arrows, spears, and some guns. They are also mostly active in the night than during the day.

Some other studies have tried to categorize informal security structures on the basis of their jurisdictions. In a recent study in Lagos, Alemika and Chukwuma (2008) spoke of street-based, village based, local government area wide, state-based, ethnic based and faith-based groups. For Shaw (2002: 48) however, the most meaningful thing to do is to disaggregate informal security groups on the basis of their structures and methods of operation. In this regard, informal security groups which seek to provide 'due process for arrested criminals' are to be distinguished from those which operate as a bunch of death squads that mete out jungle justice on their victims.

Several literatures focused on the excesses of informal security groups involved in crime control in most communities where they exist. (Ajayi and Aderinto, 2008; Alemika, 2008; HRW and CLEEN, 2002; Ozekhome, 2003; Akinyele, 2008). Writing about the OPC in Mafoluku and Oshodi part of Lagos, Akinyele (2008) observed that "...the usefulness of the OPC is currently being called to question by the residents of our area of study. First, it is alleged that thieves and bad eggs have infiltrated the ranks of the OPC to an extent that the OPC has become part of the problem rather than the solution to the crime wave in Oshodi and Mafoluku. Secondly, the armed robbers developed the strategy of deceiving their victims by posing as OPC guards and calling on them to come out at night to identify fictitious

household members or co- tenants". Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) also report that there have been incidents in the past whereby a complaint of stealing was brought against members of other forms of informal policing groups.

5: Theoretical framework

The paper was anchored on the twin theories of relational cohesion and community participation. The relational cohesion theory is associated with E.J Lawler and David Apter and argues that social groups, networks or communities are formed and maintained through social interactions and repeated exchanges by members. Such interactions foster shared sentiments, beliefs, values and shared activities, and provide a basis for attachment and commitment to the group based on shared identity and interest.

The attachment to informal security structures is thus to be understood from this notion that they are part and parcel of the communities and therefore share similar sentiments and aspirations with the rest members of the community. Their commitment is also defined by their membership of the community and identification with its collective interests. This position approximates Okafor's (2005) argument that the informal security structures endure because they are rooted in the traditions, customs, and native practices of the people. By the same token, the public police have failed thus far because they are detached from the people and are not bound by their sentiments and values.

Also considered relevant to the understanding of informal policing structures is the theory of community participation. The theory underscores the need to give control of affairs and decisions to people most affected by them, in this instance, community people. The advocates of community participation believe that besides serving as a means of getting things done, involving people in solving their own problems also brings many lasting benefits to people. First, it allows for the redistribution of power that in turn enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included (Arnstein. 1969). It also brings people together in creating and making decisions about their environment. Participation brings about individual empowerment, as people gain skills in assessing needs, setting priorities, and gaining control over their environment (Kreuter, M.W, Lezin N.A and Young L.A, 2000). Involvement by community members is a way to incorporate local values and attitudes into any programme and to build the layman's perspective into the programme. Community member involvement can also provide access to local leaders, resources, and technical skills not otherwise available (Bracht N. and Tsouros A, 1990). Above all, participation engenders a sense of identification and continuing responsibility for any programme, often referred to as the principle of ownership.(Carlaw R.W, Mittlemark M.B, Bracht N. et. al, 1984).

The aptness of this theoretical orientation is underscored by the increasing realization that no government or authority has the means to solve all the public problems adequately, and in the case of security, that the local people as stakeholders in their communities not only understand their neighbourhoods better but share the common aspiration of promoting and protecting it. It is also this realization that explains the increasing demand for state police, an arrangement which proponents believe would bring policing closer to the local people.

6: Methodology

Survey research design was adopted to generate quantitative data for this study while in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussion (FGDs) methods were utilised to generate qualitative data. The study area covered Ikeja, Mushin, Ikorodu and Eti-Osa Local Government Areas of Lagos State, which were selected based on reported high crime rate. Copies of a questionnaire were administered to 1,017 respondents aged 18years and above who were sampled through multistage sampling technique involving the random selection of

LGAs, enumeration areas (EAs), households and finally, respondents. Forty-six In-depth Interviews were conducted with purposively selected members of identified ISS, police personnel, executives of community development associations and traditional rulers. Five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with purposively selected groups of adult male, adult female, and youth community members. The qualitative data were content analysed while simple percentages were used to analyse the quantitative data. The study was conducted in the last quarter of 2010.

7: Discussion of Findings

7.1: Demographic and socio economic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 below shows the socio economic features of the respondents in the study. As is seen, there were near equal proportions of male and female respondents in the study. Respondents whose mean age stood at 39 years were mostly Yoruba, even though there was a fair representation of Nigeria's other major as well as a few other minority groups. Nearly 70% of the respondents were married at the time of the study while majority (96.7%) had a minimum of primary school education. Similarly, about 83% of the respondents were employed with the average monthly income of respondents standing at N44, 610.97.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents by background characteristics

Demographic/Socio-economic Characteristics	Frequency N= 1017	Percent (%)
Sex Distribution		
Male	559	55.0
Female	458	45.0
Age Distribution		
Less than 20 Years	14	1.4
20 – 29 Years	242	24.0
30 – 39 Years	307	30.5
40 – 49 Years	265	26.3
50 – 59 Years	111	11.0
60 Years +	69	6.8
Mean age=39years		
Marital Status		
Single	261	25.7
Married	710	69.8
Divorced	14	1.4
Separated	15	1.5
Widowed	17	1.7
Ethnic Background		
Yoruba	692	68.0
Igbo	226	22.2
Hausa	21	2.1
Others	78	7.7

Education		
No formal education	34	3.3
Primary education	103	10.1
Secondary education	516	50.7
Tertiary education	364	35.8
Monthly Income		
Less than N20,0000	106	10.4
N20,000 –N39,999	263	25.9
N40,000 – N59,999	176	17.3
N60,000 -N79,999	80	7.9
N80,000 – N99,999	40	3.9
N100,000+	122	12.0
No Response	230	22.6
	Mean Income= N44, 610.97	

7.2: Emergence and proliferation of informal security structures

The study found that the emergence, proliferation and persistence of informal policing structures are tied to several factors. These include the perceived rise in criminality which was mentioned by over a third (35.4%) of the respondents, inadequacy of the formal police services which was mentioned by 25.2% of respondents, poor perception about the ability of the police to respond to the needs of the victims of crime owing to corruption and lack of integrity according to 24.1% of respondents and the feeling that ISS groups are closer to the people which was mentioned by 12.4% of them. Fifteen of the respondents (1.5%) gave other undisclosed reasons why their communities engaged or set up ISS groups, while an equal proportion (1.5%) of them declined to volunteer information on the subject.

Data from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions also reflected these sentiments. Responding to an in-depth interview question on why his community engaged a night watch group or vigilante as they are popularly called, a male community leader in Ikeja said:

Sometimes in the past, thieves were coming here to disturb the entire neighbourhood, especially at night. They would break into people's shops and cart away their goods, pilfer parts of people's cars such as stereos, mirrors and even tires. Over time they got more daring....With the aid of charms and some powder-like substances, they would enter homes at night while people were asleep, ransack houses and steal valuables without the people waking up. This was happening on sustained bases. The community elders then met and decided to engage the Odua People's Congress to patrol the streets at night. This helped to restore the peace of the community. (IDI, adult male, Ikeja)

Stressing the same point, another adult male respondent in Mushin said:

The vigilante group in my neighbourhood dates way back to the military days of General Sani Abacha (one time Head of State). Crime became so pronounced in the area...gangs of armed young boys (and sometimes

*girls) would go from one street to another at intervals dispossessing residents of their money and other valuables. At one time, they(the robbers) wrote to inform residents of my street that they were coming and requested that **it would be in our interest** to set money aside for them...they warned that it will not be pleasant for anyone who failed to set money aside for them or who decided to run away. We took the letter to the police station at... (location name withheld) but the Police told us that they did not have the resources to respond...It was after this incident that the landlords met and decided to mount gates in all the routes leading to the street and to hire vigilantes to regulate movement and oversee the security concerns of the street. (IDI, adult Male respondent, Mushin)*

Participants in an adult female focus group discussion session in Mushin agreed that another probable reason why many people resort to ISS is because the police are thought to be irredeemably corrupt and untrustworthy. In the words of one of them,

The police have lost the respect of most decent members of society as a result of bribery and corruption, coupled with hard drinks and drugs. Many of them want to become millionaires over night, and as such they indulge in things that are unlawful: they rob directly and even collaborate with robbers. They are part of the problem and therefore cannot be a solution. (FGD, adult female participant, Mushin)

The findings from this study agree with those of earlier studies on the subject. For instance, in separate studies, Amnesty international (2002), Alemika and Chukwuma (2005), Abrahamsen and Williams (2005), Adinkrah, (2005) and Kantor and Persom (2010) found that informal security groups emerge in response to the citizens' quest for safety and security and flourish when there is the perception of increased criminality or social deviance which threatens social order. Informal security structures also blossom where the state lacks the capacity to protect its citizens from crime or where the state itself is believed to be corrupt or untrustworthy (Heald, 2002; Ginifer and Ismail, 2005; Nina, 2000), and where the formal security outfits are considered alien and detached from the people (Okereafeze, 2002, Elechi, 2006; Okafor, 2007).

7.3: Forms of informal security structures in Lagos State

Three broad categories of informal policing groups were identified in the four local government areas that were studied. These are community organized watch groups, state organized neighbourhood watchers and individual house-owner/occupant employed ISS or the residential security guards popularly called *mai guards*. The community organized watchers were the most pronounced in the communities that were covered by the study, having been mentioned by 74.8% of respondents.

Table3: Types of IPS Groups in Respondents neighbourhoods

Name of ISS	Frequency	Percentage
Community organized Night watchers (vigilante/olode, OPC)	760	74.8
Individual house-owner/occupant employed ISS (Mai-guards)	37	3.6
State organised Neighbourhood watchers	10	1.0
No Response	210	20.6
Total	1017	100.0

7.3.1: Community organised watch groups

These consist of diverse forms of community self policing initiatives, voluntary or paid, which are organized at various levels – streets, groups of streets or quarters, and entire neighbourhoods or communities, to provide security for residents especially at night, but sometimes during the day. Included here are such groups as youth groups who organize often on voluntary basis to provide security for their streets or neighbourhoods, groups of OPC members who provide security services to streets, institutions or neighbourhoods usually at a fee, and the one man or few men night guards (*Olodes*) who are also hired by streets or neighbourhoods to provide security at night..

The variant of community night watch arrangement adopted or engaged by communities varied in accordance with their (communities) peculiar internal structures and characteristics. In the less cosmopolitan settlements where social relations were still reasonably simple, informal and interpersonal, and in a few of the cosmopolitan settings that have managed to retain a measure of their traditional structures as well as in settings where members are predominantly poor, neighbourhood policing was mostly conceived of as a communal activity. In such settings, community members took it upon themselves to safeguard their neighbourhoods at night, especially and sometimes during the day. More often than not, this service was provided by youths working closely with the traditional leadership or other respectable members of the communities to respond to the immediate security challenges of their neighbourhoods. According to a male respondent in Odi-olowo part of Mushin:

The youths are the people who provide security in this community at night.

When we discovered that people were coming from outside to steal and rob here, we decided to intervene by patrolling the streets at night. Usually, we organise ourselves into groups and dissolve into different streets at night to keep vigil.... If we arrest any criminal, we normally take them to the Police.... We contribute small amounts of money from time to time to buy things like torch light and whistle that are used at night.... Sometimes, the baale (traditional ruler) and his chiefs also support us with logistics, but usually, we bear the bulk of the cost of our operations at night... our members are trusted people who must be above board in character. (IDI, youth Male respondent, Mushin)

Another respondent, a member of the Police Public Relations Committee (PCRC) in the community clarified that there is a difference in the character or nature of youth vigilante groups in the cosmopolitan and non cosmopolitan areas. Specifically, he indicated that while youth vigilantism is a more enduring feature of the security administration of the hinterland communities, in the more cosmopolitan settings, youth vigilante groups occur usually when there is an invasion or attack on a community as stop gap measures. In his words:

In most urban settings, youth vigilante occurs when there is an invasion or attack on the community. May be hoodlums invaded some number of houses on a particular street and carted away money and other valuables. The youths might now decide to resist these invaders...sometimes they may arm themselves with batons, bottles, cudgels or cutlasses to defend themselves in case of aggression. But usually, the life span of such responses is short...say a week or two. In other words, the youths act when there is a threat to security and immediately afterwards, they fizzle out. The picture may be slightly different in the hinterlands where the villagers know themselves more intimately...by name, they know when Mr. A is not around, when he comes back, what he does for a living etc. Here, the

youths are part and parcel of the security administration of the neighbourhoods. These cannot happen in the urban areas.

(IDI, adult male respondent, Mushin)

In the more cosmopolitan areas where social relations are much more complex and formal, it was found that informal policing functions were usually contracted out to people who were paid monthly or as agreed upon. In such settings, members of ISS resume at night and close in the morning. They may be residents and they could as well be non-residents. They could also be indigenes or non indigenes. As an Imam who was interviewed in Ikeja noted:

We have vigilantes in this area. Most of them are old men who retired from the military or the police. They come in the night and close in the morning. I don't know where they live and where they are from, but I know that they exist...we hear them making noise and brandishing cutlasses at night. Their identities are not always made open but they operate... (IDI, adult male respondent, Ikeja)

The study also discovered that each of these variants of community night watch groups had its modes of recruitment, sustainability, supervision and of ensuring discipline and accountability.

7.3.2: State organised neighbourhood watch group

Another form of informal security group that was identified in the study communities was the neighbourhood watch which is an informal security outfit established by the Lagos State government in 1996 to complement the efforts of the formal police through surveillance and intelligence gathering. As in-depth interview as well as focus group discussions indicate, members of the outfit are usually recruited through the Community Development Associations (CDA) and posted to work within their communities and local government areas of residence. In the words of one of the group's Coordinator in Mushin local government area,

Neighbourhood watch is a type of community policing working for 24/7 (24 hours daily) for surveillance. We were established in 1996 by the Brig. Buba Marwa military regime. We are recruited by the state government and posted to various LGAs, Ministries, hospitals, schools and everywhere mainly for surveillance. We have our own control room ...we report to the police and they respond immediately. We are under the State Ministry of Rural Development.

Findings from this study indicated that the operations of the state sponsored neighbourhood watchers was originally a part-time thing until lately when the upsurge in crime made the authority to change from a strictly voluntary service to a regular one. According to a Neighbourhood Coordinator (NECO) in Mushin,

Our job is full time now.... Before we used to have volunteers but now due to the security pressure on the state, it is now regular. Our men work 24/7 (twenty four hours daily)....Sometimes, our female watchers also work at night, but usually it is our men that work at night. (IDI with a Neighbourhood Coordinator (NECO) in Mushin) Mushin)

7.3.3: Individual house-owner/occupant employed ISS (Mai-guards)

The third form of informal policing structures which was found in the study communities were those employed by individual house owners or occupants otherwise called residential security guards or what most respondents referred to as *mai-guards*. Participants in nearly all the focus groups discussions as well as respondents to the in-depth interview are agreed that this category of guards are useful in manning residential gates and that sometimes their presence wards off petty thieves. As a participant in a female focus group discussion in Eti-osa said:

Mai guards are not the same as vigilante or olode. They are abokis or mallams (an adulterated reference to persons mostly of northern descent) who are engaged by individual house owners or residents as gatemen. Sometimes they double as security men. Usually, their work does not cover entire street or community. (Adult female participant FGD, Eti-OSa)

Findings from the qualitative data indicated further that the demand for mai-guards is linked to the activities of petty thieves who sneak into compounds to remove household items while people are away. Some respondents also linked the presence of *mai-guards* to the loss of cars to robbers who lurk around residences as people come back from work. Usually these robbers would pounce on unsuspecting victims as they step out of their cars in a bid to open the gate and drive in. Also mentioned by a number of respondents is the use of radio and aged persons in certain homes as security strategy. These two forms of arrangements are driven by the belief that much of the fight against crime is psychological. In this instance, noise from a radio or the physical presence of someone in the house regardless of how old or infirm is deemed to be capable of scaring away certain thieves

Both qualitative and quantitative data from the study point to slight variations in the organizational structures and modes of operations of the various forms of informal security structures identified in the communities that were studied. However, they also agree that most of the informal policing groups operate during the night, essentially as night watchmen. Usually, they are stationed at strategic locations, but occasionally they patrol their neighbourhood to frustrate and possibly apprehend anyone suspected of crime or of violating regulations on movement during the night. Also, except for the very few instances where security was said to be provided by just one man, most of the groups that operated in the study communities patrolled the streets and neighbourhoods in groups. Usually, this category of informal security groups employs such tools as torch lights, whistles, horsewhips, sticks, boots and sometimes cutlasses and commence work after dusk (anytime from 11pm or even earlier in some places).

In communities where community members have to pay the night watchers however, the number in a patrol team is usually less. In some instances, some of these security groups do not necessarily patrol the areas they are charged to guard. Instead they just plant or sprinkle certain charms in the area under their watch, mutter certain incantations and simply go to sleep. Criminal minded persons who trespass into such areas would literally lose their minds and would continue to roam within the vicinity until dawn when they will be apprehended. According to one of the community leaders in Ikorodu:

The vigilantes in my street were recruited from Ijebu Ugbo. Their operation is very simple. Every night beginning from 11 o'clock, they would just move around the street making some incantations. After that, they would go back to their base. If you have criminal intent and pass there, you will remain there until they come to meet you, but if you have

no skeleton in your cupboard, you will have no problem. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints the community could not afford to maintain them so they left. They were armed to the teeth with voodoo. (Adult male community leader, IDI, Ikorodu)

When asked of the likelihood of the charm harming innocent persons, our respondent added:

Never! It cannot hurt anyone who is innocent or even a criminal whose mission is not to rob in the given neighbourhood. Only those who have bad mind towards that particular neighbourhood or who plan to rob or do evil in that neighbourhood will become victims. We may not be able to explain this, but it is true and effective. (Adult male community leader, IDI, Ikorodu)

The members of the Odua People's Congress (OPC) were also found to rely heavily on the use of charms. According to one of their members in Mushin, 'we normally arm ourselves to the teeth with charms. We make incantations and use voodoo. When we hit you with our charms, you can become paralyzed or even die'. Part of the reservations of the Nigerian Police and several other Nigerians derives from this reliance on charms to determine culpability of suspects, especially because this has no logical or empirically provable foundation.

Apart from charms and incantations, it was also found that some ISS groups make use of native guns, double barrel guns, cutlasses and other poisonous substances. As indicated earlier, many of these ISS members are erstwhile hunters or servicemen who have used guns before. Some of them are permitted by the police to carry guns. In the word of one member of Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) in Mushin,

They (the night watchers) can apply to the police indicating their intention to carry guns. The moment the Police can confirm that they have used guns before; they would grant them the permission. But they must also account for how they use these guns. (IDI, adult male respondent, Mushin)

This does not however extend to the state sponsored neighbourhood watchers or even the youth based vigilantes. The state sponsored neighbourhood watchers are generally not armed but usually have walkie-talkies which they use to report incidences of crime or other threats to their neighbourhoods to the police or other relevant bodies like the fire service, in event of fire out breaks. They also carry electric shocking batons, knives and hand cuffs, and make arrests when it is necessary.

7.4: Effectiveness of informal security structures in crime control in Lagos State

Most of the respondents who took part in the study had positive assessment of informal security structures in their neighbourhoods in the area of crime control. Specifically, 995 or 93.9% of the respondents adjudged the informal security groups in their neighbourhoods to be effective in crime control. Only 37 (3.6%) and another 25 (2.5%) considered the ISS groups in their neighbourhoods to be ineffective or could not say whether or not they were effective. This finding agrees with earlier studies by Ajayi and Aderinto(2008), Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) which found that informal security structures have high rating among the people for being effective in curbing criminality.

Table 4: Opinions of respondents about the effectiveness of informal security structures in Lagos State

Assessment of ISS	Frequency	Percentage
Effective	995	93.9
Ineffective	37	3.6
Don't Know	25	2.5
Total	1017	100.0

Discussions with IDI respondents and participants in the FGDs also supported the survey result. The general sentiment across the local government areas covered by the study was that the presence of the ISS groups in the neighbourhoods has helped in scaling down the rate of crime in most of the neighbourhoods. This can be explained from the point of view of the common understanding among security experts that sometimes the physical presence of security regardless of how well equipped can be a deterrent to criminals. As a male youth respondent in Ikorodu observed:

The presence of the olodes (vigilantes) has reduced the level of crime because those who perpetrate this evil acts can no longer do it since there is a time restriction of movement within our neighbourhood from 12 mid night to 5am. (Male youth respondent, IDI, Ikorodu)

Majority of the participants in the focus group discussions also concurred with the above assertion. In the words of one of the female participants in Ijede area of Ikorodu,

They (vigilantes) have been able to control crime effectively because their presence is enough to scare away thieves... you will meet them where you do not expect they can be. They are everywhere. They walk around and when they see you they know the type of person you are ...They are very effective because they walk around everywhere in the night protecting the lives and properties of the residents. (Adult female participant, FGD).

The police participants in the study also agreed that the presence of ISS groups have been quite helpful in stemming crime in the state. Their usefulness in alerting the police of the presence of hoodlums came across strongly. As one of the Divisional Police Officers reported:

We encourage communities that are under incessant attacks by robbers to form vigilantes to protect themselves because the police cannot be everywhere. Even our religions encourage self defense, so our people have to come out and protect themselves. What they do is to divide themselves into groups and take turns to patrol their communities. Sometimes they quarrel among themselves because some will not cooperate. Even this last week some groups in.... came to complain that some of their members were not turning out for vigilante activities when it is their turn. Normally I invite them to the station and address them on the need to support the police because we cannot do it alone. In most cases they alert us when they notice the presence of criminals and we respond. This has been quite helpful (A Police Respondent, IDI, Mushin)

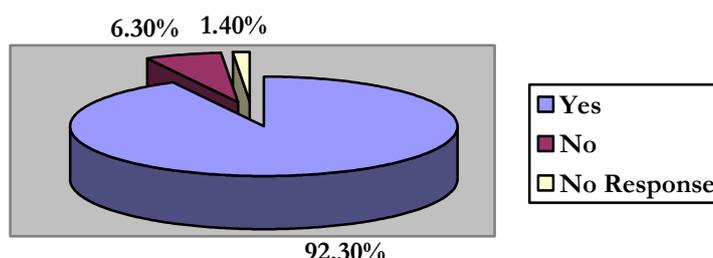
The respondents who adjudged the ISS groups as effective said they were faster and nearer to the people (58.5%), more reliable and efficient (49.7%), quick in responding to distress call (48.5%), and incorruptible (27.1%). These findings agree with those of similar studies by Alemika and Chukwuma (2004), Ajayi and Aderinto (2008) and Harnischfeger, (2003) to the effect that the services of informal security groups are engaged in order to provide speedy safety and security services which the formal police are unable to offer, and because they are closer to the people than the formal police (Okafor, 2007). Baker (2002) and Ana Kantor & Mariam Persson (2010) also allude to the general distrust of the formal police as one reason for the resort to informal policing groups while Okafor (2007) spoke of the distant or alien character of the formal police for the preference of the ISS by most people.

Most respondents to the in-depth interviews and participants in the FGDs who considered ISS groups ineffective reasoned that these outfits are limited in the kind of crime they could fight since most of them do not bear arms while others alluded to fact of the ill-training of most members of these groups.

7.5: The effectiveness of ISS groups on improving security in Lagos State

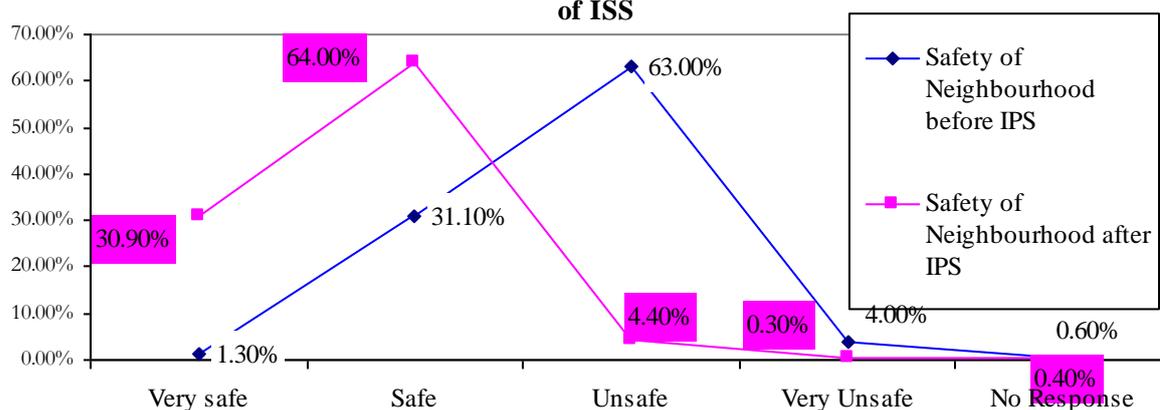
Figure 1 below shows respondents' opinions on whether they thought that the security situation in their communities improved in any way as a result of the presence and activities of informal security groups. As is seen, nearly all (92.3%) of the respondents reported that the security situation in their neighbourhoods actually got better as a result of the activities of the presence of informal security groups. Only 6.3% of them thought otherwise while another 1.4% failed to respond to the question.

Fig. 1: Whether security situation improved due to ISS



Respondents were further encouraged to compare the level of safety before and after the establishment or introduction of informal security groups in their neighbourhoods. As is seen in figure 2 below, only 13 or 1.3% of the respondents considered their neighbourhoods very safe before the introduction of ISS. This was a sharp contrast with the 314 or 30.9% of them who reported that their neighbourhoods were very safe after the engagement of ISS. Similar contrasting revelations were also noticed in the proportion of respondents who thought their neighbourhoods were safe before (316 or 31.1%) and after (651 or 64.0%) the engagement of ISS groups. Importantly too, while as high as 641 or 63% of the respondents considered their neighbourhoods unsafe before the introduction of ISS, only 45 or 4.4% of them adjudged their neighbourhoods as unsafe after the engagement of ISS groups. Only an insignificant 0.3% of the respondents still felt very unsafe in their neighbourhoods after the engagement of ISS as against 4% who felt same prior to the engagement of IPS in their neighbourhoods.

Fig. 2: Level of safety of neighbourhood before and after the engagement of ISS



7.6: Respondents' satisfaction with the services of ISS groups

Majority of the respondents who took part in the study expressed satisfaction with the services provided by informal security groups in their neighbourhoods. As is seen on table 5 below, 74.2% and 11% of them respectively indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the services provided by the ISS groups in their communities. This was against the 1.7% and 1.3% that were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied in that order, and the 11.8% of them that expressed outright indifference about the services of the ISS groups in their areas.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents based on their levels of satisfaction with the services provided by ISS Groups

Level of satisfaction with ISS	Frequency	Percentage
Very satisfied	112	11.0
Satisfied	755	74.2
Indifferent	120	11.8
Dissatisfied	17	1.7
Very dissatisfied	13	1.3
Total	1017	100.0

Respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with ISS groups complained that some of them abuse suspects' rights, bear arms illegally and in some cases, were not registered.

7.7: Unacceptable behaviours of informal security groups in Lagos State

Despite the wide spread public acclaim for the informal policing groups in Lagos State, the study found that respondents still had reservations about certain aspects of their conducts. As is seen on table 6 below, well above a quarter (31.0%) of all the respondents in the study alleged that some ISS groups administer physical punishments on suspects, 11.3% complained that many of them take laws into their hands while another 4.7% of the respondents alleged that some of the operatives of ISS groups were themselves criminals. Few other respondents accused some ISS groups of such other misconducts as extortion (2.4%), being used by influential people for illegal arrests (2.9%), bribery (2.2%), tribalism (3.0%) and being used as political thugs.

Table 6: Respondents Opinions regarding unacceptable behaviours of ISS Groups

Unacceptable behaviours of ISS	Frequency	Percentage
Administration of physical punishment on suspects	315	31.0
Taking of laws into their hands	115	11.3
Extortion of money from community members	24	2.4
Being used by powerful people for illegal arrests	29	2.9
Take bribes to release suspects	22	2.2
Used by politicians as thugs	37	3.6
Being suspected as being criminals	48	4.7
They are tribalistic	31	3.0

Most of the respondents in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions reported that these problems could not be generalized for the IPS groups and that the most culpable are the Odua People's Congress which had a history of violence and cultism. Even then, these problems were in the past because there have been conscious efforts by the leadership of the organization to rebrand and distance it from its terrible past. In the words of one of the OPC Co-ordinator in Mushin, "OPC has stopped their excesses because the bad eggs have been flushed out and the organization is now being reformed and redefined. It was so bad in the last 5- 10 years, but now it is better"

8: Maximizing the crime control potentials of informal security structures in Lagos State

One of the key findings of this study is the consensus that informal security structures have helped in no small ways to curb the rate and incidence of crime in the respective neighbourhoods where they exist. They help to arrest certain categories of criminals and more importantly, furnish the police with information about crime and criminals that are beyond their ability to deal with. These organizations also enjoy tremendous goodwill of majority of the people because they are closer and friendlier to the people, and less bureaucratic in dispensing justice.

This also suggests that any meaningful and holistic law and order policy or programme of the state and indeed Nigeria, must of a necessity take these groups into account, albeit with some fundamental reorganizations. In deed in this era of constant threats of terrorist attacks across the country, nothing can be more important than intelligence gathering by community members, and especially by members of the informal security groups.

It was against this backdrop that the study sought to find out from respondents what they thought should be done to make informal security groups more effective in fighting crime and criminals. Their views are captured below. As table 8 below indicates, 64.7% of the respondents who took part in the study suggested that most of the ISS groups need some form of training to be able to perform to their full potentials; another 60% suggested that some form of funding would assist in the effective performance of the ISS groups while well over a half (54.9%) thought that assisting ISS groups with basic equipment would enhance their effectiveness. Furthermore, nearly a half (45.1%) of the respondents recommended that the government should assist to organize these informal security groups so that their full potentials can be realized.

Table 7: Nature of Support Needed by ISS Groups to make them more Effective

Nature of support Needed by ISS	Frequency	Percentage
Assist to better organize the groups	459	45.1
Training	658	64.7%
Provision of Equipment	558	54.9
Funding	610	60.0
Others	87	8.6

Participants in the study viewed that informal security groups offer very rare opportunity to the government in its crusade against crime and that rather than lump all ISS groups together and brand them either as militants or criminals, the government at both the local and state levels, should objectively isolate and empower those that are genuinely committed to law and order. This of course would have to be done either through the traditional institutions or through residents', landlords or community development associations. As an in-depth interview respondent in Ikorodu said,

The general insecurity we have today will be drastically curtailed if the government can give just 10% of the support they are giving to the formal police or to other security bodies, to the ISS groups. As you know, we have CDAs in almost every community in this state. All that the government-local or state- need do is to get these CDAs to organize credible vigilante groups who would enjoy government support in terms of kitting, logistics and periodic training on intelligence gathering, surveillance and the like. This of course, will be with the full involvement and supervision of the police. Part of the so called security votes which the governors and the Chairmen of local government areas are sitting on can be utilized along this line.

Participants in the focus groups discussions agreed with the above views and suggested that government should work in concert with the CDAs or community leaders to standardize the activities of ISS groups provide them with basic training on strategies for crime prevention and detection, basic equipments for operational efficiency and modest stipends to motivate them to work harder. These suggestions agree with those made by respondents in an earlier study that was conducted by Alemika and Chukwuma (2004).

The need to strengthen and empower credible ISS falls in line with the observation by Johnston (2001: 965) to the effect that the broad trend is that "citizens, rather than being the passive consumers of police services, engage in a variety of productive security activities", and which was corroborated by Scharf (2003: 38) in the celebration of what he calls "the rich diversity of non-state justice systems". Baker (2005) crowned this in his advocacy for a strategy of law and order that "integrates, regulates, mobilizes and empowers all those willing to preserve law and order in an acceptable manner".

Conclusion

There has been a global gravitation towards the decentralization of policing functions lately. In the west especially, the buzz word is 'community policing' wherein policing becomes a collaborative effort between the police and the community to identify the problems of crime and disorder and to develop solutions from within the community. However, in most of Nigeria as in the rest of Africa and many parts of non western world, informal security actors have remained very prominent part of society's entire security landscape (Kantor &

Persson, 2010). Indeed, rather than being the monopoly of the formal or public police, policing function is being carried out by formal and informal agencies outside the realm of the state such that from the citizen's point of view, the formal and informal security actors are part and parcel of a complex pattern of overlapping actors rather than appearing as incompatible alternatives. As Baker (2008:27) is wont to argue, what obtains in most of African societies is that as people move about their daily business or as the time of the day changes, people also move from one sphere of security agency to another one, which may be better suited for their protection at that very moment. This co-existence of formal and informal policing groups has become reinforced by the grave security challenges of our time and the clear inability of the formal police to effectively arrest the situation.

This study was conceived against the above background, the main objective being to assess the performance and level of public satisfaction with informal security structures in community crime control in Lagos State. This was coming against the background of the need to know if they could be strengthened and leveraged upon in the quest for an inclusive response to the current security challenges being faced across the country.

The study established that informal security structures are deeply entrenched in the communities that were covered and that they form an integral part of the security architecture of these communities. The reasons for their existence, proliferation and endurance lie deeply in the obvious inability of the police to guarantee safety and security in the study communities and the state at large, and even more so in the cultural root, closeness and accessibility of the ISS to the people.

The study established that there are aspects of the operations of the informal security groups that are cause for concern especially as it borders on abuse of suspects rights, bearing of arms and in some cases, the existence of unregistered ISS. However, despite these problems, there were unanimity of views about the relevance and positive contributions of these organizations to the improvement of safety and security in the communities where they exist and in the state as a whole. Indeed many of them operate with the knowledge and silent consent and nudging of the formal police and will continue to do so in the light of a poor functioning police and criminal justice system.

Based on the foregoing, a conclusion is reached in the study to the effect that rather than dwell on the reported weaknesses and limitations of the informal security outfits, or even for that matter, castigating the fact that they do not conform to western standards, any genuine initiative that is committed to improving the human security of the local populations should instead acknowledge the centrality of these outfits in the security landscape of the society and work on their weaknesses with a view to strengthening and improving their performance. It will also be needful to study and understand the ways in which the formal police and their informal counterparts inter-penetrate, mingle and merge with a view to enriching and strengthening this relationship in a manner that would enhance more robust security arrangement. In this era of terrorism and of the need for more involvement of the community especially as it relates to intelligence led policing, the existence of informal security groups presents an enviable platform that could be leveraged upon for more inclusive policing of our communities. Since it has been established that informal security structures work and satisfactorily so, focus should be on why it is working and how it can be supported and improved upon. This may as well be what is needed to come to terms with the prevailing insecurity across the country.

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