



PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF VIGILANTISM IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIGHWAY CRIME IN MORO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines public perception of the effectiveness of Moro Community Vigilante Group (MCVG) in the fight against crimes along major highways that run through Moro Local Government Area, Kwara State. This study employs the mixed method research design utilizing both the quantitative and qualitative research designs using questionnaire, in - depth interview and focus group discussion. The respondents were selected through a purposive sampling technique and the participant exclusion criterion was used to recruit and prepare the participants. Key individuals who are familiar with the topic were nominated. The study reveals that the MCVG is a useful tool for curbing highway crimes in Moro Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. However, the study also discovers some major challenges undermining the effectiveness of the MCVG in the prevention against highway crimes and other related crimes in the region. Thus, the study recommends that there is the need to strengthen the supervisory capacity of the Nigerian Police Force so that it can effectively monitor the activities of vigilante groups and proactively respond to distress calls from these irregular security outfits. There is also the need for government support in the areas of training and basic operational equipment. Above all, there is need for the urgent rehabilitation of the roads that run through the council areas connecting Ilorin, the state capital to Kwara North Senatorial District and the rest of Southwest Nigeria up to Northern Nigeria.

Keywords: Crime, highway crime, vigilantism, Moro Local Government, Non-State Policing

INTRODUCTION

Policing is an acceptable modality for preventing crime which many countries of the world adopt to promote security. Baker (2008) posits that policing remains a universally accepted instrument for maintaining social order. It is a combined technique which is set up to combat crime and disorder. Traditionally, policing is the primary role of the Police but as it is today, policing has become the responsibility of virtually everyone in the society. Therefore Baker (2008) argues that policing is not solely the duty of the state police, but an activity that is organized and directed at ensuring the maintenance of communal order, security and peace through elements of prevention, deterrence, investigation of breaches, and punishment.

In Nigeria, like other states across the globe, the institutions charged with crime prevention can be classified into two. At one end, are the formal state actors notably the Nigerian Police Force, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps and other security/paramilitary agencies. At the other end are informal actors in the policing business which include organizations like community vigilante groups, ethnic-militia, neighborhood watch [Olóde], religious vigilante groups, and commercial security service providers among others. While former actors comprise of state-owned and statutory institutions saddled with the responsibilities of security provisioning, the latter are regarded as non-state policing outfits (Fusiek, 2020: 266-267; Amusan and Saka, 2018: 105; Asomah, 2017: 61; Inyang and Abraham, 2013: 53; Baker, 2008: 6).

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Vigilantism represents one form of non-state policing. It is globally recognized as an informal process of security provisioning in both developed and developing societies (Okeke 2013: 307). The idea of vigilantism is rooted in the necessity to combat crime that is pervasive in less advanced communities where there is need to fill a policing gap. For example, Brownyn (2001) opines that the “vigilante activities in Sierra-Leone were motivated by police ineffectiveness in combating crimes.” However, the methods, patterns and activities of vigilantes differ from country to country. Therefore, the reports on the effectiveness of vigilante groups vary from one region to another. While some localities may be happy with vigilantes, some have exceedingly found vigilantism problematic and a threat to security.

The practice of vigilantism as mechanism for communal policing has a long history in Nigeria. The practice of vigilantism dates to the pre-colonial era. It entails the practice whereby young men of certain age group performed the role of local enforcers of law and order and by extension informal police forces. In the context of crime fighting in colonial Nigeria, crime prevention was often linked with the spiritual and religious institutions of the society and local community structures. To that end, the “Oro Cult” and the “Egungun Masquerade Cult” often performed the functions of community enforcers of law and order among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria. In the same manner, in Southeast Nigeria, the “Ndiche” performed the role of community guard, apprehending criminals and taking them through the process of community sanction and punishment (Felbab-Brown, 2021: 12-13).

In the Nigerian context, vigilantism has gained acceptance as communal response to crime prevention (Fourchard 2007: 27). Indeed, societal tolerance of and condoning of excesses of vigilante groups and increasing resort to vigilantism becomes understandable in the context of rising crimes and criminality and rising violent conflicts amidst the failure of state security institutions. In Southern Nigeria and the North, kidnapping and violent robberies, including along highways have intensified, prompting communal responses mostly through the formation of vigilante and crime fighting militia groups (Felbab-Brown, 2021: 12). While some of these groups operate in a manner that complements the efforts of the Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies and enjoy tacit supports from state; national and sub-national, others often act in parallel to state institutions (Obado-Joel, 2020: 1).

According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2004: 12), the manifestations of vigilantism in Nigeria ranges from religious, ethnic, state-sponsored, communal, to neighborhood groups. The weakening and underperformance of state policing institutions has galvanized communities across Nigeria to explore informal alternatives, thus establishing vigilantes, neighbourhood watch and militias (Johannes 2003: 23). In recent years, there seems to be an increasing attention and recognition for the institutionalization of vigilantism by Nigerians as they pay increasing attention to security while shifting confidence away from formal policing structure to that of informal ones (Bakare 2014: 2).

While the activities of the vigilantes have increased tremendously in Nigeria, research specific to the roles of vigilantism in the fight against highway crime as perceived by the public is negligible. The basic assumption of this study is that the involvement of vigilantes in preventing crimes along major highways that run through Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State may have helped in the prevention of highway crimes or not. One key question is whether the Moro Community Vigilante Group (MCVG) has been effective enough in its fight against highway crimes or not. It is therefore crucial to investigate the public perception of the Moro Community Vigilante Group (MCVG) in the fight against highway crimes along Moro Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. The paper is structured into nine parts. Following this introduction is the section on conceptual discourse and review of literature. The third section focuses on theoretical foundation. Subsequent sections entail a brief on the study area; overview of highway crimes in the study area; and discussion on the origin and nature of vigilantism in the study area. These are followed by sections on methodology; findings and discussion; and conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Concept of Vigilantism

The concept of vigilante has its roots in the Latin word, *Vigilans*, denoting a 'watch-man', 'guard' or someone who watches (Hunsu, 2011: 8). The term "vigilantism" has been variedly defined by different scholars and the term seems not to have a consensual meaning (Hine 1998: 3; Lar, 2015: 54) as it connotes different things to different people, across different cultures and countries. The conceptualization of vigilantism is daunting given the number of terms that have close affinity to the concept, such as paramilitaries, militias, neighborhood patrols, killer squads among others (Manuel, 2014). However, it is important to state that discourse on the vigilante is incomplete outside of the broader context of vigilantism, thus discussing vigilante must necessarily start from the premise of what vigilantism entails.

Typical of most social science, nay political science concepts, vigilantism defies a generally acceptable conceptual meaning. To this end, Abraham (1998: 6) avers that vigilantism is not easy to define in rigorous, authoritative terms. Indeed, in political science literature, vigilantism can be deployed to referred to radically differing behavior that range from uncivil disobedience (Kirkpatrick, 2008) to terrorism (de la Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca, 2011) to establishment violence (Rosenbaum and Sederberg, 1974) among others acts of unlawful response to crimes. Thus, Bateson (2021: 925) argues that the issue of conceptual ambiguity, makes the measurement of what constitutes acts of vigilantism and cross-case comparison somewhat an exercise in futility. While political science scholarship on vigilantism is rich and expanding, (Rosenbaum and Sederberg, 1974; Kirkpatrick, 2008; Stan; 2011; LeBas, 2013; Smith; 2015; 2019; Phillips, 2017; Zizumbo-Colunga, 2017; 2019; Jung and Cohen, 2020) yet political science studies on the topic has not coalesced into a coherent research agenda. This can largely be attributed to lack of a common vocabulary to understand, measure and study vigilantism (Moncada, 2017).

Although it is often seen more as an uncivil or unlawful response to crime, vigilantism is much more than a reaction to crime as it is also an exercise in power. This is because vigilantism often shapes the terms of public debate on crime, criminality, criminal justice and public security (Bateson, 2021: 923-924). Aside this, in power relations and dynamics, intuitively, the act of vigilantism is often conceived as the practice of "taking the law into one's own hands" (Rosenbaum and Sederberg, 1974: 542). This also approximates Baker's (2002) conception of vigilantism as "lawless enforcement of law" and vigilantes as "lawless law enforcers". This conception largely approximates popular perception and notion of vigilantism across cultures and social contexts. However, a major flaw of this conception, at least for social science research according to Bateson (2021: 925-926), relates to lack of clarity on what taking the law into one's own hand entails, at least for the purpose of academic research.

According to Encarta (2009) a Vigilante is somebody who punishes law breakers personally rather than relying on the legal authorities. Vigilantism therefore means undertaking law enforcement with or without legal authority. It is in this context that Moncada (2017: 403) conceived of vigilantism as "the collective use or threat of extra-legal violence in response to an alleged criminal act". The notion of collectiveness in the act of vigilantism is also reinforced by Fourchard (2001: 609) when he defines vigilantism as an organized effort made by a group of citizens to enforce certain norms and maintain law and order on behalf of their communities. From Fourchard's perspective, vigilantism depicts organized efforts on the parts of citizens (individual and corporate) towards fighting criminal activities that threaten social order at the sub-state level.

In trying to conceptualize vigilantism, Brown (1975: 92) avers that it is a manifestation of "morally sanctimonious" activities directed at correcting a "structural flaw" in society. Aside the sanctimonious perception, Brown (1975: 95-96) also states that vigilante tradition relates to organized, extra-legal groups that take the law into their own hands. This conceptualization considers vigilantism as a social response contrary to perceiving it as a social movement (O'Connor, 2010: 3). Furthermore, it implies that vigilantism will be episodic in nature given that once a flaw is rectified; the need for the remedy is diminished. Aside, "sanctimonious" morality is

also highly unlikely to be sustainable in the long run. However, for the purpose of criminological explanation, the above stated definition treats vigilante in the mold of criminals. Both are perceived as the manifestations of the same social forces, the inherent, “structural flaw”. To this end, vigilantes are victims of flawed society in the same manner that one can argue that criminals are victims of society (O’Connor, 2010: 3). However, there is difference in that criminals are enemies of society while vigilantes strive to advance societal causes, and thus are friends of society. The position that vigilantes are victims of society is reified in criminological thought on the subject matter (O’Connor, 2010:3).

Abraham (2003: 126) describes vigilantism as organized efforts by collective of individuals to compel observance of norms and effect adherence to law and order on behalf of their communities. In doing this, they often employ violence given the perception of ineffectiveness of state institutions notably the police and courts. Denkers (1985: 15) defines vigilantism as “any spontaneous or immediate actions by individuals, suspects/victim or a direct witness as a bystander.” Although Denkers’ conception is said to be functional, yet it can be criticized for being too constricted. The definition excludes all intentional vigilante actions and those not directly impacted by vigilantism and are not bystanders, but who act on behalf of others. In contrast to Denkers’ conception of vigilantism, Black (1983) in assessing instances of self-help portrays vigilantism as a form of enforcing social control which entails management of a grievance through unilateral aggression. Black posits that most premeditated homicide in contemporary society is self-help; the same can be said of other crimes such as assault and arson.

Burrows (1976: 6) in his own conception of vigilantism notes that vigilantes are: members of an organized group; notable individuals within community; act in each time with defined objectives; claim that their actions serve as last resort given the ineffectiveness of institutionalized law enforcement; and claim that their efforts are directed to the protection and advancement of the subsisting system. In a more recent study, Bateson (2021: 926) conceives of vigilantism broadly as the extralegal prevention, investigation, or punishment of offenses. It is extralegal because it is “beyond the law”. It relates to prevention, investigation, or punishment because vigilantism requires action. Essentially, Bateson (2021: 928) argues that vigilantism is not an attitude, an ideology, or an identity, but rather a series of extralegal actions directed at fighting crime. Thus, instead of focusing on vigilantes, Bateson’s (2021: 928) conceptualization shifts the focus to the extralegal behaviors that constitute vigilantism i.e., prevention, investigation, or punishment. From the foregoing, vigilantism constitutes extralegal responses to crime and criminality while vigilantes can be conceived of as private individuals whose objectives are to ensure security provision for their communities and whose methods are reactive, ad-hoc in organizational term and who deploy violence as mechanism for crime control.

Vigilantism and Crime Management

The role of vigilantes in preventing crime in local communities has attracted considerable interest in the literature. While attempts have been made to provide justifications for vigilantism as a vehicle for policing and maintenance of order, there are also manifest concerns about the good standing of vigilantism in preventing crimes across cultures and societies. The application of jungle justice that is outside the framework of the rule of law by members of vigilante groups present an ugly side of vigilantism that is troubling for academic and policy makers (Nolte, 2007: 219; Adinkrah, 2005: 415).

Notwithstanding, literature also underscores efficacy of vigilante groups and there are recorded instances where effectiveness of vigilante resulted in dramatic reduction in crime and criminality (Oomen, 2004; Buur, 2003; and Abraham 1987). Scholarship has shown that history of vigilantism is replete with incidences of mistaken identity and miscarriage of justice (Kantor and Person 2009:12), wherein someone else was made to answer for crimes they did not commit (Adinkrah 2005: 415). But in the real sense, vigilantism is meant to provide a community that notices the existence of a security lapse with alternatives. Thus, it can be a response to the

lack of presence of state policing institutions and the need to complement the efforts of an under-resourced and under-performing police force (Goldstein, 2003: 23), or response to a situation of breakdown of law and order (Oomen, 2004: 155), or to enforce order in a seemingly ungoverned space (Buur and Jensen, 2004: 144). Vigilante organizations provide security (Chavez, 2006:35) and enhance the delivery of social order to their communities. They present themselves as alternative social response to insecurity (Oomen, 2004: 160). They aspire to perform similar functions as the police force in 'the maintenance of law, social order and prevention of the outbreak of conflicts' (Jarman, 2006: 31).

As argued by Buur and Jensen (2004: 140), vigilantism should be perceived as a mechanism of everyday policing of a community. However, this is not to repudiate the fact that vigilantism undermines the notion of rule of law, challenge the state's right to monopolize the use of legitimate force and undercut individual's rights (Sulke, 2001). Buur and Jensen (2004: 140) suggest that vigilantism should not be reduced to either expression of jungle justice or to mere alternative to formal law. In fact, Pratten (2008: 65) argues that often vigilante activities are not solely directed at security; vigilantism performs a range of other functions in a community, such as disciplining children, aiding unemployed youth, recovering debts, screening political candidates, patrolling national borders, and securing political rallies. This position is validated by the work of Hunsu (2011) on Zangbeto group in Badagry, Nigeria. Sen and Pratten (2008: 6) also argue that the vigilante groups come in handy to occupy the security vacuum left by weak, incapable or unwilling institutions of the state. However, Rosenbaum and Sederberg, (1974), Galeotti, (2008) have expressed the position that the feasibility of vigilantes providing security is misplaced giving the many drawbacks that characterized the activities of vigilante groups.

Vigilantism has been said to be problematic (Zimring, 2003). Zimring (2003) aver that vigilante groups exhibit impatience for the thoroughness that characterize police investigation and care less about the needs to ascertain proof of guilt or innocence like the courts. What vigilantes care about is quick, final, and cost-effective dispensing of justice. Thus, vigilantes believe that punishment should be meted out to those deserving it with dispatch and that the harsher the punishment, the better. Ajayi and Adefolaju (2013) in their study about crime and self-help in Southwestern Nigeria found that the performance of the Odu'a Peoples' Congress (OPC), in crime prevention was commendable but methodically crude and extra-judicial in nature. Nolte (2007) and Akinyele (2001) noted elsewhere that OPC has combated armed robbers, criminals and other social miscreants in places like Akure, Ibadan and Lagos, while operating as communities' night guards.

While some studies raise more problems about vigilantism, the Vanderbilt University study (2014) on the phenomenon shows that there was an appreciable increase in the percentage of citizens from Latin America and the Caribbean that expressed support for the deployment of citizen's actions and self-help in crime prevention from 2012 to 2014. Indeed, the percentage of citizens that expressed support for vigilantism in 2014 spiked compared to reports of supports between 2004 to 2012. Studies quoted by Minnaar (2005; 2001: 21) on public perception in communities with records of vigilante activities in South Africa affirm that the people believed that vigilantism was effective in crime prevention and aver that the rise of vigilantism was a response to ineffectiveness of the police and other criminal justice institutions. A large household survey conducted in Tanzania in 1996 reported that local vigilante groups were seen to be more effective in combating criminality than the police (CIET International report, 1996). Although, vigilante groups are perceived in bad light in some places, in others they enjoy popularity and have the reputation of been effective. For example, contemporary Chinese community policing system continues to hinge on informal policing at the local level with established resident committees vested with informal policing duties (Chen, 2002).

Highway Crime Situation in Moro Local Government Area

For some years, crime has been a recurring issue along the highways that run through Moro Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. The highways that pass through Bode Sa'adu, Jebba, Shao, Oloko-nla, Kambi, Olooru, Budo-Amon among others seem to be terrifying

sometimes. Robbers are often reported to have been seen using sophisticated weapons such as pistols, modern rifles, scimitars, long bladed hatchets etc. These weapons are by far more superior to the ones used by the men of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and the vigilantes. The robbers are unidentified as they often make use of masks while operating. Indeed, the introduction of the highway crime prevention task force to complement the patrol of the regular police by the federal government to ensure adequate security on the highway across the country to include this zone is commendable. However, despite the operations of the Federal Highway Crime Task Force in this zone, the prevalence of robberies along these roads persists. As rooted in the structural-functionalism theory, the emergence of MCVG was to complement the efforts of the formal policing structures in providing security in these communities and the highways that pass through them. Yet, the problem cannot be said to have been solved.

Some of the contributory factors to highway crime in Moro Local Government Area include the deplorable nature of the highways; the lack of police posts and regular patrols; and the non-availability of lane markings, road signage and traffic control indicators such as signal lights and stop signs along these roads. Crimes on these highways have taken different forms to include culpable homicide, armed-muggings, carjacking, rape and sexual assaults among other criminal acts. While the examples provided below are by no means exhaustive, the significant categories of these criminal acts and their nature between May to November 2014 are captured in the table below.

Table 1: Crime Waves in Moro Local Government Area (May 2014-November 2014)

Dates	Places of Incidence	Nature of Acts	Targets/Casualties
31 st May, 2014	Jebba Road	Armed mugging	A man was raided in his private car.
13 th June 2014	Bode Sa'adu	Culpable homicide	A man was found dead from stabbing in his car.
22 nd June, 2014	Bode Sa'adu	Criminal Conspiracy and theft	Inhabitants' goods were stolen.
16 th June, 2014	Budo-Amon	Criminal Conspiracy and theft	Travellers were gagged and robbed of their properties
26 th July, 2014	Oloko-Nla	Culpable homicide	2 Vigilantes were found dead.
6 th August, 2014	Shao	Armed mugging	Travellers were raided of their belongings
30 th August, 2014	Olooru	Criminal Conspiracy and theft	Tanker drivers were attacked and raided
2 nd Sept, 2014	Jebba Road	Armed mugging	Travellers were gagged and raided
4 th Sept, 2014	Bode Sa'adu	Criminal Conspiracy and theft	Marketers were raided of their goods
24 th Sept, 2014	Bode Sa'adu	Rape and sexual assault	Sexual assaults were made on travellers and a lady was raped
16 th Sept, 2014	Lanwa	Mischief and damages	Attacks were made and peoples' properties were destroyed
14 th Oct, 2104	Lanwa	Mischief and damages	Government's properties were destroyed
20 th Oct, 2014	Jebba Road	Culpable homicide	A worker of IBEDC was found dead on the road
25 th Oct, 2014	Bode Sa'adu	Armed mugging	A motorcycle and phones were stolen from a private individual
16 th Nov, 2014	Bode Sa'adu	Criminal Conspiracy and theft	16 Batteries volt each which belong to Airtel Nigeria Plc. were stolen
27 th Nov, 2104	Bode Sa'adu	Criminal Conspiracy and theft	Bags of soya beans were stolen from businessmen while transiting the road

Source: Police Headquarters, Bode Sa'adu. Retrieved by the authors on 11thDecember 2014

An Overview of Vigilantism in Moro Local Government Area

The emergence of vigilantism in Moro Local Government Area can be traced to early 2000s when the need to address the rising criminal activities in the communities that makes up the council and the highways that run through it became pressing. Prior to this period, there was the existence of unorganized local hunters (Olode). Meanwhile, the inability of the Nigerian Police Force to stem the rising tide of criminal activities led to the creation of an organized and functional group of vigilantes. Thus, the formation of the MCVG was as a result of the need to organize the local hunter (Olode) into a formal outfit with clear structure and operational modality. The main objective that informed the formation of the MCVG was to complement the efforts of the Nigerian Police Force in the provision of security in other to ensure equilibrium of the system as reflected in the structural functionalism theory.

At inception, the MCVG began as neighborhood vigilantism as members were inspired by the desire to ensure adequate security of lives and properties of the people in general. However, with the intervention of the Local Government in the management of the group, the MCVG became more of a state-sponsored vigilantism. The Local Government now place members of the MCVG on stipend and monthly salary, provides health facilities for wounded members and provides training and funds when necessary. While the local government takes the responsibilities upon itself, the Kwara State Vigilante Group (KSVG) is responsible for the recruitment, promotion, dismissal and supervision of members of the MCVG. At present, the MCVG is registered under the Kwara State Vigilante Group (KSVG) and the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) respectively.

The MCVG is charged with myriad of functions among which includes the protection of people's lives and properties in the council area; maintenance of communal peace and security; patrolling the streets of major towns at any time of the day; aiding the Nigerian Police in the task of crime prevention; provision of useful information on criminals to the police; and questioning

and handing over to the police any person of questionable character or of suspicious movement. The functions of the MCVG speaks to the fact that non-state policing outfits like vigilante groups can also perform policing function as provided in structural-functionalism theory explanation of the working of human society.

Much as the authority of Moro Local Government council and the communities in the area try to aid the activities of the outfit, the MCVG still faces some challenges. These includes lack of modern weapons (for instance the local riffles used by members of the group would require more than ten minutes before caulking another round after the first shot as illustrated by a member during the focus group discussion); poor funding; lack of modern communication gadget; lack of basic operational equipment such as buses, baton, flashlight etc; lack of instant police support as a result of bureaucratic bottleneck; and lack of support from the Kwara State government.

Theoretical Foundation

This study deploys structural functionalism as a theoretical prop in explaining the impacts of MCVG in the fight against highway crime in Moro Local Government Area. The theory is selected based on its suitability to explain the subject matter. Structural functionalists hold the view that it is not only formalized social institutions that make the society work (Inyang and Abraham, 2013: 54), but those other functional cultural institutions are often deployed to perform socio-cultural and other related roles as might be assigned by society at specific point in time. Thus, there is the need to understand and accept that there exist other structural and functional informal alternatives that can perform specified task assigned to a particular formal social institution in a society (Ritzer, 1996: 18). The central proposition of structural functionalism is that institutions (formal or informal) play an equilibrium role within the society. It is on this basis that structural-functionalism theory is criticized for its total reliance on equilibrium assumption (system maintenance), whereas human relationships often produce instability within society. However, this neither diminishes nor undermines the importance of the theory in explaining the role of social institutions in maintaining social stability.

Structural-functionalism theory portrays crime as a deadly phenomenon capable of causing disequilibrium within society. Therefore, there is the need for, not just the formalized social institutions such as the police, but also an informal policing structure (such as the vigilantes) to engage in crime prevention. This implies that vigilante groups are needed to complement the efforts of formal policing institutions in the performance of the task of crime control and prevention. The theory of structural functionalism is brought to bear on this situation, owing to numerous structural challenges that are undermining the capacity of the Nigerian Police Force to effectively combat rising criminalities in general and highway crimes. To this end, the importance of vigilante groups as society response to rising incidence of crime and the MCVG as part of community response to highway crime in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State becomes instructive. Thus, MCVG represents community effort at combating incidences of highway crime on the major roads that runs through the study area.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed the mixed method research design. The mixed method approach is the type of research design that combines elements of quantitative research and qualitative research (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2013). This means that the study utilized both the quantitative and qualitative research designs in order to integrate the benefits of both methodologies. The quantitative research design which was adopted in this study is a survey research design. The adaptation of survey research design in this study enables the researcher to seek for numerical data to discover the opinion of the public on the effectiveness of the MCVG in tackling highway crimes in Moro Local Government Area. The qualitative method involves the use of in-depth interview and focus group discussion. The adoption of both the

focus group discussion and interview allows the researchers to probe and understand the extent at which road users perceive the MCVG as an effective mechanism in crime prevention in communities and highways in the study area. These methods (focus group discussion and interview) are useful in getting a deeper insight into people's perception of the activities of the MCVG. According to Kitzinger (1994: 104), the focus group approach to data gathering is ideal for exploring information relating people's stories, lived experiences, belief, perceptions, wants and individual concerns.

The Study Area

Moro Local Government Area is one of the sixteen local government areas in Kwara State. It was created in 1976 with its headquarters at Bode Sa'adu. The local council is made up of five districts which include Lanwa, Ejidongari, Olooru, Malete and Ipaye. It has an area of 3,273 km² and is populated by Yoruba, Nupe, Hausa, and Fulani ethnic nationalities. Politically, Moro Local Government Area is in Kwara North Senatorial District. The local government has a complex identity as it belongs to Kwara North and is a constituent part of Ilorin Emirate respectively (Olarongbe 2014). In this council area, there are highways which are strategic roads for many purposes and crime along these roads is a recurring problem hampering the free flow of people, goods and commercial activities. This informed why this area was chosen as the study area.

Population of the Study

The population of the study covered all motorists and inhabitants of the communities under study as well as members of the MCVG. The motorists were the ones transiting the highways along Moro Local Government Area.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to select 170 respondents among motorists, travelers and commuters who often transit the roads along Moro Local Government Area. The purposive sampling method was adopted for the quantitative component of the study because participants for the survey are intended to be people that regularly ply the Ilorin-Bode Saadu-Jebba road. This road constitutes the main highway that runs through Moro Local Government and connects Kwara State and by extension Southwest Nigeria, with Niger State and onward to the rest of Northcentral and Northwest Nigeria. The Ilorin-Bode Saadu-Jebba highway is largely the focus of attention of the Moro Community Vigilante Group. The MCVG have conspicuous presence on the highway and carried out routine patrol mainly to deter and prevent highway robberies and other related highway crimes and apprehend criminals. The intention been that if the researchers administered the survey based on simple random sampling procedure, the researchers might not be able to capture travelers that have the experience of regular usage of the highway and a familiarity with the presence and the activities of Moro Community Vigilante Group on this important stretch of highway in Kwara State.

In selecting the participants for the focus group discussion and interviews, the participant exclusion criterion was used to select discussants and interviewees. Key individuals who are knowledgeable about the issue and known for their ability to respectfully share their opinions and interested in sharing their views were selected. Like the purposive nature of the quantitative survey, the participant exclusion criterion is essentially an intentional method of participant selection that pays attention to the knowledge of respondents about the issue under consideration, and thus bases the selection on knowledge and experience of the selected participants.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Given to the type of research design selected, focus group discussions, interviews and questionnaires were considered the major instruments of data collection in this study.

Two focus group discussions (FGD) with a total of 12 participants were staged. The first session was held with 6 members of the MCVG at the Kwara State Vigilante Centre, Seriki Ndaji Hall, Gaa-Saka in Ilorin, Kwara State. It was held on 24th of November 2014. The discussion session commenced around 11:07am and ended 1:45pm Nigerian time. The first focus group discussion examines the history, nature and problems facing the MCVG. The second focus group discussion was held with 6 inhabitants of the communities under study. It was held on the same date but at the Local Government Secondary School, Olooru, Moro LGA, Kwara State. The second discussion session commenced at about 3:50pm and ended 5:00pm Nigerian time. The focus group was structured around a set of predetermined questions and the respondents were allowed to express their thoughts and opinions. The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity was given to the participants as solicited for.

For the interviews, in-depth interviews were conducted with 8 respondents who were with motorists and inhabitants of the communities under study. Both the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Yoruba language and were tape-recorded. The data was first translated into English language and then transcribed verbatim. While transcriptions are not always complete, this study supplemented the transcript with some additional observational data that were obtained during the interviews and focus groups discussion. The observational data included notes that the researchers made during the fieldwork.

The third instrument was a structured questionnaire titled “Vigilantism and Highway Crime Management Questionnaire (VHCMQ).” The questionnaire consisted of 15 close-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions. The questionnaires were administered in and around the motor parks where people get buses transiting the study area. They include Maraba Motor Park, Shao Garage, Gambari, Bode Sa’adu, Olooru and Jebba.

Data Analysis Techniques

In analyzing the data gathered from both the interviews and focus group discussions, the Scissor and Sort technique was adopted. Only the important segments of the transcript were utilized. While this technique gives room for subjectivity and likely expression of bias, it shares many of the characteristics of more sophisticated and less time-consuming approaches. The study makes use of content analysis and verbatim quotation of important issue that emerged from the in-depth interview and focus group discussion. The questionnaire was analyzed using the descriptive statistical methods. The secondary data was sourced from existing records such as, journals, newspapers articles, editorials, commentaries and other government records.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Local communities that are neglected by state policing agencies sometimes create their own informal structures in their bid to ensure the security of lives and property of their people (Baker, 2008: 11). The ineffectiveness of the formal state policing institution in the discharge of its crime prevention and general security management roles galvanize individuals and groups to engage in self-help and thus, take the laws into their own hand. In their bid to uphold norms, values and laws of their communities, they often deploy lawless methods and break the laws they seek to uphold (Baker, 2002). The study finds out that the emergence of the Moro Community Vigilante Group (MCVG) is tied to the challenges facing the state security agencies in the fight against crime and the perceived rise in criminality and communal distress associated with it. In order to determine the factors that gave rise to the MCVG, the respondents were asked what they thought gave rise to the MCVG. The option was limited to the failure of the state and state actors in crime control, rise in criminality, traditional reasons or other unspecified reasons. The response of respondents is illustrated below:

Table 2: Reasons for the emergence of the MCVG

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Failure of the state actors in crime control	52	34.6
Rise in criminality in the communities	67	44.7
Traditional reasons	13	8.7
Other reasons	18	12
Total	150	100

Source: Researchers' Survey, 2014

Out of the 150 respondents, 52 (34.6%) respondents believed that the inability of the state or state actors to combat criminality gave rise to the establishment of the MCVG. 67 (44.7%) respondents held the opinion that the rise in criminality gave birth to the MCVG. Thirteen (13) respondents representing (8.7%) held the view that MCVG was established for traditional reasons; while 18 (12%) respondents believed that there are other factors that informed the emergence of the MCVG. The findings of the survey were corroborated by positions/perspectives/views shared with the researchers by participants during interviews and focus group discussions. A discussant during one of focus group discussion noted that:

The vigilantes have emerged in response to the growing threat of armed robbery that prevails on the roads along our communities. The problem of armed robbery along our roads is a long-time issue which the police have not been able to mitigate. The inability of the Police to mitigate this problem made the elders in various communities to come together to form a vigilante group which the sole aim is to prevent armed robbers from operating on our roads at will (FGD, Anonymous 24thNov 2014).

The position above corroborated the earlier studies of Roberts and Oladeji (2001), Ekeh (2002), Amnesty International (2003), Alemika and Chukwuma (2005), Enechojo (2003), Nolte (2007), Pratten (2008), Okeke (2013), Abrahamsen and William (2005), Ajayi and Adefolaju (2013), Hore, Ngwerume and Muchemua (2013), and Lar (2018, 2015), who found out that Nigeria's informal security structure (including the vigilantes) is a consequence of the deficits in security provisioning by the state as well rising criminality. These findings suggested that the proliferation and institutionalization of vigilante groups in several states across Nigeria can be explained as being the consequence of the inability of state agencies to ensure security of Nigerians from crimes and criminality.

The result of question on public perception of the effectiveness of MCVG in combating highway crimes along the roads that runs through Moro Local Government Area is presented below

Table 3: Respondents' opinion on the effectiveness MCVG in the fight against highway crimes in Moro Local Government Area.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	16	10.7
Just a little	30	20
Some what	78	52
A lot	76	17.3
Total	150	100

Source: Researchers' Survey, 2014

Table 3 depicted the perception of the respondents on the effectiveness of MCVG in combating highway crimes along the highway that criss-cross the study area. Sixteen (16) respondents representing 10.7% of the total respondents in the survey believed that the vigilantes have done nothing in combating crime along these roads. Thirty (30) representing 20% of the respondents held the opinion that the vigilantes have done just a little job in combating crime along these roads. Seventy-Eight (78) representing 52% of the respondents are of the view that the vigilantes have somewhat done well in the fight against crime, while 26

representing 17.3% held the position that they have done a lot in combating crime along the highways in the study area.

Complementing the above result are the opinions of respondents gathered from the interview and focus group discussions. In an interview held with a respondent (motorist) the interviewee averred that:

Crimes on the roads along Jebba, Bode Sa'adu have reduced drastically with the intervention of the MCVG. They are always on patrol, and they never give the criminals rest of mind. Many criminals have been apprehended by these vigilantes. By and large, we motorists transiting these roads owe the vigilantes a lot of appreciation for the job they are doing. (IDI, Anonymous 8thNov 2014, Maraba Motor Park).

In another interview with Baba Elero (a Maize Grinder) he expressed the position that:

The vigilantes have been doing very good in our communities. If not for the vigilantes, hunger and plague would have been the order of the day. Before the advent of the vigilantes, we could not go to marketplaces because robbers always attacked us on regular basis. But the situation of things has changed to good with the presence of the vigilantes. (IDI, Baba Elero. 31stOct 2014, Bode Sa'adu).

Ajayi and Aderinto (2008), Nolte (2007), Abdulazeez (2013), Ajayi and Adefolaju (2013), Lar (2018) had earlier found that informal security structures have high rating among the people for being effective in combating crime and mitigating criminality. However, Haysom (1989), Minnaar (2001) held contrary position on public perception of vigilante. For instance, while Minnaar, (2001) argued that vigilantism in South Africa is a brutal indictment of the whole criminal justice system, Haysom (1989) was of the view that the vigilantes are themselves victims and objects of an inequitable society. To these scholars, vigilantism cannot be the solution to crime. The reason why Haysom (1989) and Minnaar's (2001) studies results were contrary to the results of this present study is intelligible considering the destructive nature of vigilantes in Leandra, Kwa Ndelele, Mdantsane and so on. In relating people's experience about the operational effectiveness of vigilante group in Plateau state, in North-central Nigeria, Lar (2015) notes that at inception vigilante group in the state were seen as effective in combating crimes and criminality, however, with time, they become enmeshed in misdemeanor, thus tarnishing the organizational as agent of change.

The position above also relates the assertion by Nolte (2007: 231) that the activities of the Odua People's Congress must be considered 'uncivil' because of the group's violence and the glaring lack of accountability to the society that characterized its operations and engagements in Southwest Nigeria. Felbab-Brown (2021) also reiterated the same crisis of lack of accountability and the inevitability of vigilante and militia groups becoming a terror to society as their members often routinely engage in egregious abuse of the people they purported to defend and protect. In line with the opinions of Haysom and Minnaar, this study also found that the vigilantes are somewhat terrifying. The violent illegality that often-characterize vigilante group's operations and relations with localities in Nigeria has also been documented by rights groups (Human Rights Watch, 2003). An attempt was made to examine the perception of the respondents on the impact of vigilantism on the feelings of safety along the highways that runs through Moro Local Government Area. A question was posed to the respondents to determine how safe they feel going by these roads with the vigilantes on patrol. The result is illustrated below.

Table 4: Respondents' opinion on how safe they feel going by these roads with vigilante patrol

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very safe	30	20
Safe	74	49.4
Unsafe	38	25.3

Very unsafe	8	5.3
Total	150	100

Source: Researchers' Survey, 2014

Out of the 150 respondents, 30 representing 20% of the respondents noted that they feel very safe with the vigilante on patrol. Seventy-four (74) respondents representing 49.4% of total respondents in the survey said that they always feel safe. On the other hand, 38 representing 25.3% of the respondents held the opinion of being unsafe, while 8 representing 5.3% of the respondents claimed to be very unsafe. Supporting the view of those who felt unsafe with the vigilante guards, a discussant during the focus group discussion averred that:

The vigilantes are terrifying. Many suspects have been put to various forms of psychological torture, abuse and humiliation. Cases abound where suspects were stripped naked, severely beaten, flogged, kicked and cut with machetes and knives (FGD, Anonymous, 24thNov 2014).

This violence seems to have characterized vigilantism across the globe. The legality of vigilante to punish and prosecute offenders is very low in literature if not unfounded. This problem has put vigilantism in a state of legal limbo. A vigilante, during the focus group discussion, noted that:

One of the problems we are facing is the fact that there is no law that permits our actions. We cannot arrest, apprehend or investigate criminal matters. All we do is to hand over a suspect to the police. By this obstacle, fact-finding vigilantism cannot make the grade. (FGD, Anonymous, 24thNov 2014).

Another discussant stated that:

The vigilantes are trying their best to combat crimes in our communities, but the truth of the matter is that these crimes still occur. Public perception of the legality of vigilantism in our community is minimal. The people do not regard the vigilantes as those who have the legal right, authority and responsibility to combat crime and provide security (FGD, Anonymous, 24thNov 2014).

This finding corroborates the findings of Olong (2010), Inyang and Brown (2014) and Ikuteyijo and Rotimi (2010) who find that much constitutional regards have not been given to vigilantism in Nigeria. Michie (1996) also finds that no state in the United States currently recognizes a "justified vigilantism" or "community protection" defence to criminal prosecution. As a result, the established legal system treats vigilantes no differently than other citizens. Therefore, vigilantism and the activities of vigilante groups can be said to be more of a product of social construct rather than an alternative to formal policing that is backed by and informed by law.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that crime has been a serious threat on the highways that criss-cross Moro Local Government Area in Kwara State. The efforts of the vigilantes in stemming the surging crime waves in the study area cannot be undermined. The Moro Community Vigilante Group (MCVG) emerged as a community response to criminal activities in this area. While most of the respondents believed that the vigilantes have been making remarkable progress in the fight against highway crimes in Moro Local Government Area, this has however not resulted in the reduction of highway crimes to the barest minimum. This notwithstanding, this study suggests that vigilante groups can make positive impact in curbing neighborhood crime and help to enhance quality of life in any given society if well utilized and managed. The MCVG can evolve to be a veritable outfit that can complement the efforts of state policing agencies especially the Nigerian Police Force in the fight against highway crimes on the major roads that run through the study area and general security. However, this cannot be achieved if the outfit which is but a

community response to surging crime is not aided to evolve into a well-coordinated, resourced and monitored organization.

In order to help the outfit to achieve the objectives that informed its establishment, there is the need for the Local Government Authority, the communities and transport unions to aid the outfit's efforts by providing it with basic equipment that will help it to better serve the communities and road users in the area. There is also the need to help provide basic policing training for members of the MCVG. This can be done by the Kwara State Government in partnership with the Nigerian Police Force, Kwara State Command and/or the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corp. The local government should encourage periodic interaction sessions between the MCVG personnel and the police command at the local government level. The essence of such interactive sessions is to enhance the communication between the police and the vigilantes as well as facilitate police support for the vigilantes.

Finally, while it is understood that the MCVG personnel cannot bear arms and ammunitions as stipulated by laws, the fact that these arms and ammunitions are much needed is evident. In this regard, the study calls for the provision of some permitted arms and ammunitions for the members of the group with proper monitoring by the Nigerian Police Force command at the local government level. More than all these, the fact is that the major highways that run through the council are in a serious state of disrepair. Indeed, that is the state of many federal roads in Nigeria. The poor state of these roads aids the ease with which armed bandits operate on the roads. Thus, as a matter of urgency, the concerne authorities (Federal and State Governments) need to address the poor state of the highways that runs through the study area, and this goes for the road network in Nigeria in general.

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Field Reports

Focus Group Discussion, Kwara State Vigilante Centre, Seriki Ndaji Hall, Gaa Saka, Ilorin Kwara State, 24th November 2014, 11:07am.

Focus Group Discussion, Local Government Secondary School, Olooru, Moro Local Government, Kwara State, 24th November 2014, 3:50pm.

In-depth Interview, Anonymous, Maraba Motor Park, Ilorin, 8th November 2014, 11:30am.

In-depth Interview, Baba Elero, Bode Saadu, Moro Local Government, Kwara State, 31st October 2014, 11:00am.