

**VIGILANTISM AND CRIME CONTROL IN CONTEMPORARY  
NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*The inability of the Nigerian Police to control the increasing wave of crime has led to proliferation of vigilante groups in contemporary Nigeria. This study was initiated to investigate the impact of vigilante groups on crime control in contemporary Nigeria, particularly in Udenu L.G.A of Enugu State. Seven hundred and twenty (720) respondents were sampled from Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu State. Multi-stage, cluster and simple random sampling methods were used as the sampling techniques. Questionnaires were administered to respondents by six (6) research assistants whereas interviews were conducted with two (2) traditional rulers, chairman of Udenu L.G.A vigilante group, chairman of vigilante monitoring group and 24 vigilante group members. The result indicated that Nigeria Police is ineffective with regard to crime control and vigilante groups in its current form sprang up to make up for this ineffectiveness. It also showed that vigilante groups are gaining prominence as agents of crime control in contemporary Nigeria, particularly, Udenu L.G.A of Enugu State. The result equally revealed that vigilante group members are recruited and monitored through their communities and that they are effective in crime control. Also, the result indicated that the best way of solving the problem of crime in Nigeria is by increasing the activities of vigilante groups. Howbeit, lack of fire arms, poor funding, lack of patrol vehicles are the major problems confronting vigilante groups. More so, based on the major findings, it was recommended that vigilante group members should operate within the frame work of law. Finally, security committees should be established at the local government level and these committees should meet periodically to discuss security matters in their areas.*

**Introduction**

Provision of adequate security is a social pre-requisite for the survival of any society. Every society takes appropriate measures to protect the lives and property of people living within its boundaries. Business and social activities may not go on freely without adequate security. This fundamental essence of security may be the reason why societies from time immemorial made efforts to police their neighbourhoods in order to secure them from criminal victimization. Security has to do with the act of preventing and protecting in order to ensure that certain facilities, equipment, persons or activities are safe from damage, pilferage, destruction, murder or disruption. However, as societies became increasingly complex, social life was disrupted. Existing changes. As a result, night watch system was introduced. This system involved bellmen who walked round the city, ringing bells and providing policing services. The bellmen were later replaced by untrained citizens and much later by paid constables. However, in 1829, Sir Robert Peel established the first

modern uniformed police force, the metropolitan police of London, whose primary responsibility was the prevention of crime.

In Nigeria, vigilantism existed in the pre-colonial era. Human Right Watch and Center for law enforcement and education report, (2002) noted that “vigilante and other self – defense groups currently operating in Nigeria have roots that reach deep into the country's history. In the colonial era, some though not all independent local communities, especially in the South east maintained their own standing Army to defend their territory against the threat of invasion from neighbouring communities. Although there was no equivalent modern day structure at that time, some parallels can be drawn between these groups which were created by local communities for their own protection, and the more recently formed self –defense groups”. This is also true in Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu State where vigilantism was used as a means of both social and crime control before the advent of colonial rule.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the rate of crime in Udenu L.G.A ?
2. To what extent does crime constitute a social problem in Udenu L.G.A ?
3. To what extent has vigilantism helped in controlling crime in Udenu L.G.A ?
4. To what extent have police controlled crime in Udenu L.G.A. ?
5. What is the relationship between the police and vigilante groups in Udenu L.G.A. ?
6. what is the community perception of vigilante groups in Udenu L.G.A. ?
7. What is the relationship between the police and the public in Udenu L.G.A. ?

In Nigeria, the term vigilante is used loosely to refer to a range of different groups, each with different motives. The term has been applied to groups such as the Bakassi Boys, who were initially set up with the purpose of fighting crime without an explicit political agenda, as well as to others such as Odua peoples Congress (OPC), the Yoruba ethnic militia active in south west of Nigeria. The OPC was initially created to advocate for autonomy for the Yoruba people. However, from 1999, the OPC changed its fundamental objective of seeking self-determination for the Yoruba people to crime fighting activities and the settlement of personal disputes. In some of the Northern States in Nigeria., there are other groups known as Hisba groups referred to as vigilantes, which are used to monitor and enforce the observance of sharia laws. Some of them have administered instant punishments to those caught violating sharia law. (the legitimization of torture 2002, Ethnic militia groups of Nigeria) In Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu State, the term vigilante denotes a group of people formed by the members of the community to control and prevent crime due to the inability of the formal criminal justice system to bring the increasing crime wave in the local government under control.

### **Origin of Vigilantism**

As noted by Human Right Watch (HRW) and center for law enforcement and education (CLEEN), vigilantism and other self-defense groups currently operating in Nigeria have roots that reached deeply into the country's history. Their study identified southeast (Igbo) states as the main areas where vigilante groups were predominant in the pre-colonial era. On the contrary and as the report from HRW and CLEEN testifies to, what we know is that the modern employment of vigilante groups in contemporary Nigeria is widespread and ranges beyond Igbo territory (legitimization of murder and torture. 2002).

Throughout human history, ordinary men and women have paid onerous prices in order to ensure that they and their families will be protected from life choking dangers. That human impulse is no less prevalent in Nigeria than else where. Governments in western Europe, in Africa, and else where..... originally arose because they could offer such protection to those under their domain (Eke, 2002). To Eke, it does not make sense to talk of government which is divorced from protection that it can offer to those under its control.

### **Age of respondents**

Respondents ages were arranged into an interval of 7 years as indicated in the table below

**Table I : Age of respondents**

<b>Age range</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
18 – 25	185	28.0%
26- 33	126	19.1%
34 – 41	173	26.2%
42 and above	176	26.7%
Total	660	100.0%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table II above indicates that 185 (28.0%) of the respondents fall within the age range of 18- 25 years, 126 (19.1%) fall within the range of 26-33 years, 173 (26.2%) fall within the age range of 34-41 years while 176 (26.7%) fall within the range of 42 years and above. This shows that the highest proportion of respondents are between 18-25 years, followed by 42 years and above and then 34-41 years and finally by 26-33 years

### **Sex of Respondents**

Both male and female are the respondents in the study. Table III below indicates this.

**Table 2 : Sex of respondents**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	363	55%
Female	297	45%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table III above shows that 55% (363) of respondents are male while 45% (297) of them are female.

### **Marital status of respondents**

**Table 3: marital status of respondents**

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	218	33.0%
Married	399	60.4%
Divorce	9	1.4%
Widow	34	5.2%
Total	660	100.0%

**Source: field work 2021**

The above table iv shows that 218 (33.0%) of the respondents are single, 399(60 . %) are married, 9 (1. 4%) are divorced and 34 (5.2%) are widowed. From the above table, it is clear that the highest proportion of respondents are married, followed by those who are single and then those that are widowed and finally those that are divorced

### **Respondents' educational attainment**

**Table 4: educational attainment of respondents**

<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
No school	96	14.5%
Elementary school	187	28.3%
Secondary school	271	41.1%
NCE \ HND	76	11.5%
First degree and above	30	4.6%
Total	660	100.0%

**Source: field work 2021**

As shown by table V, the group with the highest frequency is respondents who had secondary school education. That is 271 (41.1%). This is followed by those with elementary school education representing 187 (28.3%) of the respondents. This is followed accordingly by those with no education, 96 (14.5%), NCE/HND, 76 (11.5%) and first degree and above, 30 (4.6%).

### **Respondents' occupation**

**Table 5: occupation of respondents**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Student	207	31.4%
Farming	43	6.5%
Trading	291	44.1%
Civil servant	99	15.0%
Professional	20	3.0%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table vi above indicates that 291 (44.1%) of the respondents ,representing the category with highest frequency are traders. This is followed by 207 (31.4%) of respondents who

are students and 99 (15.0%) who are civil servant. Accordingly, 43 (6.5%) of the respondents are farmers and 20 (3.0%) of the respondents are professionals.

**The respondents were asked to indicate whether vigilante groups exist in their locality.**

Table 6: percentage distribution of respondents on the formation of vigilante groups in their locality.

<b>Formation of vigilante groups</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	660	100%
No	Nil	0%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table VII shows that 660 (100%) respondents that duly completed the questionnaires accepted that vigilante groups exist in their locality. Their views agreed with the current trend in literature as exemplified by the views of Eke, 2002 in a critical review of the HRW and CLEEN report. He maintained that the modern employment of vigilante groups in Nigeria is wide spread.

The respondents were asked to assess the rate of crime in their community before the formation of vigilante groups in its current form.

Table 7: percentage distribution of respondents on assessment of crime rate in their community before current vigilantism.

<b>Rate of crime before current vigilantism</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
High	370	56.06%
Low	130	19.70%
Normal	60	9.09%
Don't know	100	15.15%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

As indicated by table 7, 370 (56.06%) Of the respondents accepted that crime rate was high before the formation of vigilante groups in its current form while 130 (19.70%) of

the respondents are of the opinion that crime rate was low. 60 (9.09%) of the respondents held that crime rate was normal and 100 (15.15%) said that they don't know.

The respondents were asked to assess crime rate in their community after the formation of vigilante groups in its current form.

Table 8: percentage distribution of respondents on assessment of crime rate in their community after the formation of vigilante groups in its current form.

<b>Crime rate after current vigilantism</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
High	110	16.67%
Low	355	53.79%
Normal	55	8.33%
Don't know	140	21.21%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table 8 shows that 110 (16.67%) of the respondents agree that crime rate was high after the formation of vigilante groups while 355 (53.79%) said that crime rate was low after the formation of current vigilante groups. 55 (8.33%) agreed that crime rate was normal and 140 (21.21%) held that they do not know.

The respondents were asked what crime was prevalent in their area.

Table 9: percentage distribution of respondents on prevalent crime in their area

<b>Prevalent crime</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>

Armed robbery	370	56.1%
Murder	45	6,8%
Burglary	175	26.5%
Rape	10	1.5%
Other	60	9.1%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table 9 indicates that 370 (56.5%) of the respondents said that armed robbery is prevalent in their community. 45 (6.8%) of them accepted that murder is prevalent, 175 (26.5%) said that burglary is common, 10 (1.5%) said that it is rape while 60 (9.1%) of the respondents mentioned other crimes.

The respondents were asked the period crime usually occur in their area.

Table 10: percentage distribution of respondents on time of occurrence of crime in their area.

<b>Time of occurrence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Morning	150	22.7%
Afternoon	100	15.2%
Night	410	62.1%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table XI shows that 150 (22.7%) of the respondents agreed that crime usually occur in the morning period in their area while 100(15.2%) said that it is in the afternoon hour, 410 (62.1%) of them were of the view that crime usually occur in the night in their community.



The respondents were asked whether increasing crime wave constitutes a social problem.

Table 11: percentage distribution of respondents on whether crime constitutes a social problem

<b>Constitutes a social problem</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	580	87.9%
No	80	12.1%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table XII above indicates that 580 (87.9%) of the respondents representing the frequency with the largest proportion are of the view that crime constitutes a social problem and only 80 (12.1%) of them held that it do not constitute a social problem.

The respondents were asked how increasing crime wave constitutes a social problem in their community.

Table 12: percentage distribution of respondents on how crime constitutes a social Problem.

<b>Social Problem</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Loss of life and property	90	13.6%
Disruption of busi	34	5.2%
Sleepless night	56	8.5%
All of the above	480	72.7%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table XIII above shows that 480 (72.7%) of the respondents, representing the category with the highest frequency said that crime constitutes all the problems stated above.

This is followed by 90 (13.6%) of the respondents who admitted that crime leads to loss of life and property. Accordingly, 56 (8.5%) of the respondents said that crime leads to sleepless night and 34 (5.2%) of them believed that crime leads to disruption of business activities.

The respondents were asked what they think was responsible for crime in their community.

Table 13: Percentage distribution of respondents on what they think is responsible for crime in their community.

<b>Causes of crime</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Poverty	100	15.1%
Unemployment	135	20.5%
Bad company	245	37.1%
Youth taking hard drugs	180	27.3%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

From the above table XIV, 245 (37.1%) of the respondents, representing the highest proportion of the respondents agreed that Bad company is responsible for crime in their locality. This is followed by 180 (27.3%) of them who said that youth taking hard drugs is the cause of crime. Accordingly, 135 (27.3%) said that unemployment is responsible for crime in their area and 100 (15.1%) were of the view that poverty leads to crime.

The respondents were asked if they have fallen victim of crime in their area. Table XV: Percentage distribution of respondents on whether they have fallen victim of crime in their area.

<b>Victim of crime</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	410	62.1%
No	250	37.9%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table 14 above indicates that larger proportion of the respondents, 410 (62.1%) admitted that they have fallen victim of crime in their community while 250 (37.9%) of them said that they have not fallen victim of crime in their area.

The respondents were asked how often they see police in their community.

Table 15: Percentage distribution of respondents on how often they see police in their area.

<b>See police</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Daily	200	30.3%
Once a week	246	37.3%
Once a Month	118	17.9%
Twice a month	96	14.5%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table XVI above shows that 200 (30.3%) of the respondents see police daily, 246 (37.3%) See police once a week and 118 (17.9%) of them See Police once a month and 96 (14.5%) See police twice a month.

From the above data, it means that 460 (69.7%) of the respondents see police once a while. the 200 (30.3%) of them that see police on daily basis may be those that are living around Obollo-Afor, Orba and Obollo-Eke where there are police station and police post respectively. This information is in alliance with the views of Igbo (1999:128) that the Nigerian police is understaffed.

The respondents were asked to rate the performance of the police in controlling crime in their area.

Table 16: percentage distribution of respondents on how they rate police performance in controlling crime in their area.

<b>Police performance</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Excellent	2	0.3%
V. Good	48	7.3%
Fair	122	18.5%
Poor	488	73.9%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table 16 above indicates that 2 (0.3%) of the respondent agreed that police has performed excellently. 48 (7.3%) rated police performance as V. Good, 122 (18.5%) of them rated the performance of police as fair, while 488 (73.9%) are of the view that police performance in terms of crime control is poor.

The respondents were asked what they think led to the formation of vigilante groups in its current form in their area

Table 17: Percentage distribution of respondents on what they think led to the formation of vigilante groups in its current form in their community.

<b>Present vigilante groups</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Police ineffectiveness	152	23.0%
Lack of presence of police	198	30.0%
Increasing crime wave	280	42.4%
Don't know	30	4.6%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table 17 above shows that 152 (23.0%) of the respondents agreed that police ineffectiveness led to the formation of vigilante groups in its current form. 198 (30.0%) said that it is lack of presence of police, 280 (42.4%) are of the view that it is increasing crime wave while 30 (4.6%) said that they don't know.

The respondents were asked how often they see vigilante group members in their area.

Table 18: Percentage distribution of respondents on how often they see vigilante group members in their community.

<b>See vigilante</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Daily	498	75.5%
Once a week	144	21.8%
Once a month	6	0.9%
Twice a month	12	1.8%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table 18 above shows that 498 (75.5%) of the respondents see vigilante group members on daily basis, 144 (21.8%) see them once a week, 6(0.9%) of them see vigilante group members once a month while 12 (1.8%) see them twice a month.

The respondents were asked to rate the performance of vigilante groups in crime control in their community.

Table 19 : Percentage distribution of respondents on how they rate the performance of vigilante groups in their area.

<b>Vigilante groups performance</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Excellent	120	18.2%
V. good	206	31.2%
Fair	318	48.2%
Poor	16	2.4%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table 19 above indicates that 120 (18.2) of the respondents agreed that vigilante groups are excellent in crime control. 206 (31.2%) said that they are v. good, 318 (48.2%) are of the view that they are fair in terms of crime control while 16 (2.4%) said that their performance is poor.

The above data is an indication of the fact that the highest proportion of the respondents are of the view that vigilante groups are effective in crime control in their community.

The respondents were asked whom they think should be given the responsibility of crime control in their community.

Table 20 : Percentage distribution of respondents on whom they think should be given the responsibility of controlling crime in their area.

<b>Controlling crime</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Police	108	16.4%
Vigilante group	509	77.1%

Village chief	20	3.0%
Don't know	23	3.5%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table 20 above shows that 108 (16.4%) of the respondents said that the police should be given the responsibility of controlling crime, 509 (77.1%) of them opined that vigilante groups should be left with that responsibility, 20 (3.0%) said that it is the village chief while 23 (3.5%) of them don't know.

The respondents were asked the best way of solving the problem of crime in Nigeria.

Table 21 : Percentage distribution of respondents on the best way of solving the problem of crime in Nigeria.

<b>Solving crime problem</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Increasing the number of policemen	120	18.2%
Increasing the activities of Vigilante	352	53.3%
Providing equipment to police	80	12.1%
Enhancing police cooperation	108	16.4%
Total	660	100%

**Source: field work 2021**

Table 21 above indicates that 120 (18.2%) of the respondents said that increasing the number of policemen is the best way of solving the problem of crime in Nigeria, 352 (53.3%) of them believe it is by increasing the activities of the vigilante group while 80 (12.1%) said that it is by providing equipments to the police and 108 (16.4%) opined that enhancing police cooperation is the best way of solving the problem of crime in Nigeria.

### **Test of hypotheses**

This section deals with the test of hypotheses.

Three hypotheses were tested

**Hypothesis 1**

The formation of vigilante groups in Udenu L.G.A. is significantly related to people's perception of the role of police in crime control in the area. To test this hypothesis, variables such as what the respondents think led to the formation of vigilante groups in its current form in their area and their rating of police performance completed by the respondents were cross tabulated.

**Table: Distribution of respondents by rate of police performance and cause of formation of vigilante groups in its current form.**

Rate Police Performance	Cause of Formation of vigilante groups				
	Police ineffectiveness	lack of police presence	Increasing crime wave	Don't know	Total
Excellent	0 0%	1 0.5%	1 0.4%	0 0%	2 0.3%
V. Good	4 2.6%	20 10.1%	18 6.4%	6 20%	48 7.3%
Fair	48 31.6%	50 25.3%	18 6.4%	6 20%	122 18.5%
Poor	100 65.8%	127 64.1%	243 86.8%	18 60%	488 73.9%
Total	152 100%	198 100%	280. 100%	30 100%	660 100%

$X^2 = 75.1$ ;  $df=9$ ;

$p < 0.05$ ;

$c=16.919$

**Source: field work 2021**

$X^2$  calculated = 75.1

$X^2$  critical (0.05,9) =16.919

**Conclusion**

With the  $X^2$  calculated (75.1) greater than the  $X^2$  critical value (16.919) at 0.05 level of significant, we accept the alternative hypothesis which states that the formation of vigilante groups in Udenu L.G.A. is significantly related to people's perception of the role of police in crime control in the area.

**Hypothesis 2**

There is a significant relationship between people's level of education and their reliance on vigilante services in Udenu L.G.A. To test this hypothesis, variables such as educational attainment completed by the respondents and their rating of the performance of vigilante groups in controlling crime were cross tabulated. They are items 4 and 20 of the questionnaire respectively.

See table below

**Table: Distribution of respondents on reliance on vigilante groups by education.**

Education Attainment	Rating of vigilante groups				
	Excellent	V. good	Fair	Poor	Total
No school	20 16.7%	3014.6%	4413.8%	2 12.5%	96 14.6%
Elementary	3428.3%	60 29.1%	88 27.7%	5 31.2%	18728.3%
Secondary school	56 46.7%	9043.7%	12138.0%	425%	27141.0%
NCE/HND	86.7%	199.2%	4614.5%	3 18.2%	7611.5%
First degree &above	21.6%	7 3.4%	196.0%	212.5%	304.6%
Total	120 100%	206 100%	318 100%	16 100%	660 100%

**Source: field work 2021**

$X^2=17.7$ ;  $df = 12$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $c=21.026$

$X^2$  Calculated = 17.7

$X^2$  critical (0.05, 12) =21.026

**Conclusion:**

With the calculated  $X^2$  (17.7) less than the critical  $X^2$  value (21.026) at 0.05 level of significance, we reject the alternative hypothesis (H1) which holds that there is a significance relationship between people's level of education and their reliance on vigilante services in Udenu L.G.A.

**Hypothesis 3**



“There is a significant relationship between people's occupation and their perceived effectiveness of vigilante groups in Udenu L.G.A.” To test this hypothesis, respondents occupation and their rating of vigilante groups performance were cross tabulated.

**Table: Distribution of respondents on rating of vigilante groups performance on crime control by occupation.**

Occupation	Rating of vigilante groups performance				
	Excellent	V. good	Fair	Poor	Total
Student	4638.3%	9747.1%	6119.2%	318.8%	20731.4%
Farming	86.7%	115.3%	237.2%	16.2%	436.5%
Trading	5848.3%	8641.8%	14144.3%	637.5%	29144.1%
Civil servant	54.2%	83.9%	8225.8%	425.0%	9915.0%
Professional	32.5%	41.9%	113.5%	212.5%	203.0%
Total	120100%	206 100%	318 100%	16 100%	660 100%

$X^2 = 92.5$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ,  $C = 21.026$

**Source: field work 2021**

$X^2$  Calculated = 92.5

$X^2$  = critical (0.05, 12) = 21.026

With the calculated  $X^2$  (92.5) greater than the critical  $X^2$  value (21.026) at 0.05 level of significance, we accept the alternative hypothesis which holds that “there is a significant relationship between people's occupation and their perceived effectiveness of vigilante groups in Udenu L.G. A.

**Conclusion** The main objective of this study was to examine the impact of vigilante groups on crime control in Udenu L.G.A of Enugu state. The proliferation of vigilante groups in contemporary Nigeria and the controversy surrounding its existence necessitated this study.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made Vigilante activities should be carried out by well trained, able bodied persons recruited from the community.

State government should encourage vigilante activities. Incentives and adequate logistics should be made available to vigilante groups. This is to ensure effectiveness in their operation.

To enhance the relationship between the police and vigilante groups, there should be adequate legislative frame work for the operation of vigilante groups.

Vigilante group members should be trained in aspects of crime detection and knowledge of the law. This is to enable them to operate within the provision of the law.

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