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INFORMAL POLICING ORGANIZATIONS AND THE CHALLENGES OF CRIME CONTROL IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The prevention and control of crime in Nasarawa State has remained elusive in spite of the effort of security agencies. Crime of all sorts exists in the State. Losses of lives and property that cannot be easily quantified have occurred in several communities. In all these, the formal security agencies have been helpless. These necessitate the formation of Informal Policing Organizations (IPOs) by community members in order to complement the efforts of formal police (FP) in crime control. In spite of the existence IPOs, the rate of crime is on the increase in Nasarawa State. This study was carried out with the main objective of determining challenges facing informal policing organizations with respect to crime prevention and control in Nasarawa State. Data were drawn from 501 respondents from the three (3) Senatorial Districts in the State using questionnaire and key informant interview. Data generated from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while hypotheses were tested using chi-square and Multiple Linear Regression. Data generated from KII were analyzed using manual content analysis and used to compliment the findings from quantitative data. The study found that lack of financial support from community members as well as government to informal policing organizations. Informal police group members were found to be political thugs. The study therefore recommends that, financial support to IPGs in the State to buy operational tools, politicians should stop using members of informal policing groups as thugs and legal recognition of informal policing groups for an enhanced policing in Nasarawa State.

Key words: Informal policing, Challenges, Operation, Crime Control

1. Introduction

From time immemorial, man has been pre-occupied with the challenge of finding the most effective means of securing lives and property. Security means a stable, relatively predictable and peaceful environment in which individuals could do their legitimate work without obstruction or harm and without fear of disturbance or injury (Ajayi, 2008). The provision of adequate security therefore, is a social necessity for the smooth running of all society. In Emile Durkheim (2014) analysis, security becomes so central for man's survival such that the absence of it, which makes crimes possible, trigger the common conscience of community members. It fosters unity and common reaction against those who flout the norms and values of the society.

It was noted in Nigeria that informal policing existed even in pre-colonial days. They existed through the intermediation of various traditional informal institutions, and this included the use of secret societies, oracles, priests and priestesses of various shrines, diviners and organizers of trials by ordeal. The involvement of traditional chiefs and village elders, guards, messengers, and age-grades for maintenance of law and order was recognized. But with the advent of colonial rule in Nigeria much of the customary law practices were abolished thus paving way for British concepts of law and justice. The formal police force in Nigeria was created by the British colonial administration. The force primarily emerged in response to the immediate need to protect and enhance British Commercial (and later religious) interests were considered. In post-colonial Nigeria, the

emergence of informal policing and subsequent government recognition received scholarly analyses in the advent of the Bakassi Boys in Aba, Abia State. The Bakassi Boys originated as a self-help group to confront crime in Aba and Onitsha market towns. The group was later legalized and commandeered by the State, which was later criminalized because of severe human rights abuses (Alemika, 2000; Onwudiwe, 2009).

In recent years, Nasarawa State has witnessed crime of different types. Security challenges caused by suspected Fulani herders attack in the Southern part of Nasarawa State has resulted to displacement of thousands of people from their ancestral homes, loss of lives, and property that cannot be easily quantified. This is one security challenge that the formal police have found difficult to solve. Many of the communities cannot be reached in three hours after report of crime as the formal police seem to lack proactive approach that can check mate such incessant security challenges. These security challenges necessitate the formation of informal policing organizations in Nasarawa State. A study conducted on the problems facing informal policing groups in four states of Jigawa, Enugu, Ekiti and Benue states of Nigeria revealed problems and shortcomings which include: (a) Lack of support by government. (b) Extortion and harassment by the formal police when performing their work with the use of their locally made guns. (c) Lack of basic operational tools, such as flashlight, warm clothing, rain coat and boot, whistles, uniforms, identity cards and so forth (d) Lack of formal recognition by local government authorities in some local government areas (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2004). This study was carried out elsewhere but no evaluation on challenges facing information in Nasarawa State has been evaluated.

The main objective of this study is to assess the challenges facing informal policing organizations in crime control in Nasarawa State. The specific objectives are:

- i. To identify types of informal policing organizations that exists in Nasarawa State.

- ii. To determine economic challenges confronting informal policing organizations in crime control in Nasarawa State.
- iii. To examine political challenges facing informal policing organizations in crime control in Nasarawa State.

Hypotheses

- i. Ho: Economic challenges have no effect on performance of informal police groups in respect to crime prevention in Nasarawa State.
- ii. Performance of informal police groups in Nasarawa State is not affected by political challenges.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Issues

Concept of Informal Policing

This is a voluntary and unconventional security outfit which members of a particular community form in order to maintain law and order preserve their norms and values, safe guard the lives and property of its community members (Ajayi, 2008). The structures of informal policing group include voluntary community members, like the OPC, Ombatse, the Bakassi Boys, and so forth. The involuntary ones like the vigilantes and Peace Corps are recognized and paid by community members.

Concept of Crime Control

This implies efforts and activities aimed at stopping or checking the spread of crime. To control crime is to combat crime, to reduce crime or at least keep the phenomenon from expanding beyond present level (Igbo, 2006).

In the analysis of Alemika and Chukwuma (2004), there are four types of vigilantism. These are: ethnic vigilantism, religious vigilantism, State sponsored vigilantism, and neighborhood or community vigilantism. Ethnic vigilantism is organized along tribal line to defend narrow ethnic interest and sometimes carry out crime control role. The religious

vigilantism counterpart exists to enforce religious laws and doctrines. Good examples of State sponsored vigilantes in Nigeria include the disbanded “Bakassi Boys” that were active in three eastern States of Abia, Anambra and Imo, and the Lagos State Neighborhood Watchers. The former began as sincere response by traders in Aba market, the commercial city of Abia State, to stem the high rate of violent crimes in their markets.

In Western Nigeria, the *Odua* People’s Congress (OPC) served as good example of massive organization of Neighborhood Crime Watch (Ekpenyong; 1999, Otite and Albert, 2004). Engagement of OPC in Lagos is done in smallest political unit (ward). After engagement, the boys are trained through workshop and seminar during which negative effects of selling out or conspiring with criminals are taught. Ifeanyi (2005) reported positive result of OPC operating in many areas of Lagos and argued that these were signs of increased community cooperation and territoriality.

Economic Challenges of Informal Policing Organizations in Crime Control

Informal policing organizations suffer financial constraint in their effort of control of crime in the society. Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) acknowledged that the informal policing groups face a number of problems and shortcomings, which require assistance from government and donor agencies in Nigeria in addressing them. Some of the problems which were identified by authors in the study conducted in Benue, Ekiti, Enugu and Jigawa include finance and operational equipment. In another by the same authors, lack of funding by government except in Ilejemere Local Government Area of Ekiti State, where the council authority where members IPOs were place on monthly salary (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004).

In a related development, Offor (2023) has it that funding of vigilante groups is one of the challenges that affect their work in our environment. Most of vigilante groups are maintained through levies paid by

the traders or people who they are policing. As a result of poor funding, the vigilante groups in Nigeria do not find it easy to buy materials such as lantern, torchlight and patrol van for effective patrol and policing. Furthermore, the attitude of governments (federal, state and local) against the welfare packages for vigilante groups in Nigeria is a thing of serious concern. During an interview with Akpan at Afaha Eket revealed that government instead of paying the vigilante groups, they prefer to pay their political thugs and the “repentant militants”. Again, where vigilante members are killed, there is no compensation for the family members.

Political Challenges and Informal Policing Organizations in Crime Control

Informal policing organizations are bedeviled with political influence and interference in an effort to control crime in societies. Dike (2015) opined that in the excessive action due to government backing, vigilante presence pervades the entire Nigeria. Political thugs are commonplace and work parochially for the welfare of the affluent it serves. There is no difference between vigilante that protect government interest and the one that protect ordinary citizens. No vigilante group with avoidance of doubt can withstand the interest of the government in power. This political backing by government was common as seen when Bakassi Boys were regarded to be the victims of ‘political hijack’ (Meagher, 2007). The backing of the Bakassi Boys by former governor of Anambra State, who held that he was the commander-in-Chief of these boys, was evident in the aspect of financial support; for he gave them financial backing in the name of popular community force.

According to Folashade (2013), Godfatherism also affects the operation of informal policing organization. In his work, he found that funding may be a great problem which vigilante groups are confronting, but godfatherism also exerts negative influence. Godfathers who support or fund the organization always direct them for their personal interests. The Godfathers include government agents, captains of

industry and politicians. This has become a dominant issue in African politics and impedes the course of justice in almost in many instances (Onyeozili, 2005). In a related development on factors influencing the legitimacy of Nyanya Gwandara Vigilante Group (NGVG) and Mission Village Vigilante Group (MVVG) in Nyanya Gwadara in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Plangshak (2014) revealed that the legitimacy of NGVG and MVVG depends strongly on whether members of the community can be able to pay for the services of these groups in an effort to reducing crime in the communities. Due to the successes of these groups, at first quarter of 2014, the rate of crime was perceived to be low. This made dwellers of the communities to support vigilantes financially. However, as from April on, due to increase in the level of crime, vigilantes were perceived ineffective and many communities' members had to withdraw their financial support.

The political backing had gradually led to popular opinion that Governor Mbandinuju was using Bakassi Boys to intimidate his political opponents. To buttress this, in the run up elections of 2003, citizens and the various agencies of media began to raise alarm that politicians might use Bakassi Boys and other informal policing groups to intimidate even voters (Harnischfeger, 2003).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Group Conflict Theory was adopted to provide framework of analysis in the paper. The proponent of group conflict theory is Georg (1958). The general line of argument of group conflict theory given by Georg (1958) is that men naturally formed themselves into

organized groups for two principal reasons. One is because their psychological make-up compels them to seek association with other fellows; two, because of the practical advantage which group or collective strength/power offers (over personal or individual efforts) in the furtherance of men's interests.

3. Methodology

The study used survey design in order to collect data from large number of respondents. The study was conducted in Nasarawa State. It has a total population of 1,869,377 as at 2006 census. Today, this population is projected to be 2,822, 114 (NPC, 2022) but the target population was 1,140,629. The sample size of this study is 480 (Yemane, 1967). Multi-stage sampling techniques which involved simple random, systematic and purposive were used to select sampled respondents. Respondents were proportionally selected from 6 selected LGAs out of 13 LGAs across the three Senatorial District of the state. Both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (Key Informant Interview) were used as instruments of data collection. 2 research assistant from each of the sampled LGA were trained in the administration of instruments. They help in the location of places and translation of instruments into local dialects. The paper adopted descriptive statistics to analyze data collected while hypotheses were tested using Chi-square and Multiple linear regression. Data generated from KII were analyzed using manual content analysis and used to compliment the findings from quantitative data.

4. Results and Discussion

Types of Informal Policing Organizations in Nasarawa State

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by types of Informal Policing Structures in Nasarawa State N= 474

Types of IPO	Frequency	Percentage
Community/village vigilante	306	62.9
Tribal informal policing group	74	15.7
Youth volunteers	47	10.1
Neighbourhood crime	39	8.5

watch group		
Religious informal	14	2.1
policing group		

Source: field data, 2023

As shown in table 1, Majority of the respondents (62.9%) were aware of Community/Village vigilantes. This Informal Police Structure seems to be community based and is coordinated by community leaders. Another popular vigilante groups are those formed by the tribal union. Although the purpose of the Tribal Informal Policing Organization (TIPO) may extend beyond crime control to politics, members look up to it as an umbrella that protects them against insecurity that can be perpetrated by other tribal union. Another Informal Police Structure, the Neighbourhood Crime

Watch (NCW), appears to be popular in the rural areas of the state. More than 8% of the respondents acknowledged the existence of the NCW. Informal Policing Structures formed by youth volunteers to keep watch on the community both in the night and days was acknowledged during the study (10.10%). As the name implies, this IPS consists of youth volunteers, with patriotic commitment to police their community.

Problems Confronting Informal Policing Groups in Nasarawa State

Table 2: Problems confronting IPGs in Nasarawa State N= 474

Types of Problem	Rating (%)					Mean	Standard deviation
Poor funding	SA	A	UD	D	SD		
Lack of operational tools	53.7	32.8	2.1	3.8	2.5	4.22	1.16
Lack of financial motivation	60.5	25.2	3.4	3.6	7.3	4.28	1.17
Lack of support from government	26.6	43.9	5.4	18.6	5.4	3.68	1.21
Political influence	43.4	35.4	8.0	6.9	6.3	4.03	1.17
Use of IPGs as thugs	4.9	5.8	3.9	34.9	56.6	1.75	1.04
	5.4	6.0	18.5	25.8	44.3	2.02	1.36

Source: Computed from Field data 2023

In assessing the challenges of crime control, respondents were asked to rate the five problems that confront IPGs in the study area. Under a mean scale of 5, lack of equipment ranked the highest among the problems (Mean = 4.28), followed by poor funding by community members (Mean = 4.22) and lack of support from government (Mean = 4.03). The finding here suggests that a circle of problem tied to funding. Many of the IPGs are either formed by the community

members or volunteers who contribute money to buy equipment. For sustainability purposes, therefore, there must be support, mostly in cash than in kind, for the purpose of either buying new equipment to replenish old ones or give financial support to IPGs members.

Lack of financial motivation was rated above average (Mean = 3.68). This could have multiplier effect on the use of IPGs members for intimidation purposes (Mean

= 1.20), like political thuggery to earn money and/or settle some score in favour of some members of the public who may pay for such service. Like Emile Durkheim would argue, crime evoke the collective conscience of the people, and when the society is faced with crime problem, religious and tribal consideration, as well as political sentiments ought to give way for overall community interest.

4.1 Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Ho.1: There is no economic effect on the performance of Informal Police Groups in respect to crime prevention in Nasarawa State.

The reason for hypothesis four was to test the extent to which availability and/or lack of economic factors influence the operation of the IPGs with respect to crime prevention. Economic factors were operationalized to include (a), lack of financial motivation for members, (b), poor funding by community members, and (c), lack of financial support from government.

Table 3: Multiple Linear regression Analysis of the influence of Economic factors on the Operation of IPG on Crime Prevention in Nasarawa State

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R	Std. Error		
1	.317 ^a	.101	.094	.829		
2	Sources of variance		Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F
	Regression	33.668	3	11.223	16.319	.000 ^b
	Residual	301.212	438	.688		
	Total	334.880	441			
Independent Variables		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.863	.216		13.253	.000
2	Lack of financial motivation for members	.029	.033	.040	.867	.386
3	Poor funding by community members	-.091	.035	.120	-2.634	.009
4	Lack of financial support from government	-.205	.034	.272	-5.944	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of IPGs in crime prevention

Source: Field Data 2023

From the findings in table 3 the analysis of variance result supports the existence of significant relationship between the dependent and the independent variables [$F(3; 438) = 16.319, p < .05$]. However, the model summary (R-square) suggests that only 10.1 percent of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables. Although the finding here suggests that other factors more than financial supports are needed to support crime prevention operation activities of the IPGs, the low relationship between the dependent and the independent variables indicate that

available economic support for the operation of IPGs is poor.

When the coefficients were analyzed further, it revealed that out of the three variables, only “lack of financial motivation for members” was not significant ($\beta = .040; t = .867, p > .05$). The rest “poor funding by community members” ($\beta = .120; t = -2.634, p < .05$) and “lack of financial support from government” ($\beta = .272; t = -5.944, p < .05$) were significant. To the extent of these two factors, the null hypothesis was rejected. It appears

that community members who formed the IPGs are unable to sustain their patronage by continuous financial support. And the likelihood of financial support from the government was not encouraging. In this context, a one unit poor funding by community members of the operation of IPO was likely to cause 2.634 unit increases in crime prevention. Similarly, a unit increase in lack of financial support by government would affect crime prevention by 5.944 units. Surprisingly, lack of financial motivation for members

of IPOs was not significant in this study. Members of informal policing organization continue with their duties of crime prevention; as “lack of financial motivation for members” constitute only 0.040 eta weight discouragement for their daily operation.

Hypothesis Two

Ho2: Performance of Informal Police Groups in Nasarawa State is not hindered by political challenges.

Table 4: Multiple linear regression analysis of the influence of political factors on the performance of IPGs in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R	Std. Error		
1	.061 ^a	.004	-.001	1.087		
2	Sources of variance	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
	Regression	1.948	2	.974	.824	.439 ^b
	Residual	522.241	442	1.182		
	Total	524.189	444			
Independent Variables		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.769	.129		29.120	.000
2	Political use of IPG members in thuggery.	-.056	.045	-.060	-1.237	.217
3	Political influence in selection of IPG members	-.007	.054	-.006	-.132	.895

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of IPGs in crime prevention

Source: Field Data, 2023

From the findings in table 4, the relation between the independent variables and the dependent variable indicates a positive relationship that was moderate ($R = .61$). And about 64.00 percent of variances in the dependent variable were explained by independent variables. This indication here is that the IPGs may be used for crime prevention activities, but the operation of IPGs has some political influence too. Analysis of the variances in the respondents' rating was not significant [$F(2; 442) = 0.824$, $p = .439$]. Based on this finding, the null hypothesis was retained.

The Beta weight coefficient of “political use of IPGs members in thuggery” ($\beta = .670$, $t = 237$, $p > .05$) and “political influence in selection of IPG members” ($\beta = .436$, $t = .132$, $p > .05$) suggest the impact that political influence has on the operation of IPGs. In terms of comparison, it indicates that IPGs members were used for political thuggery ($\beta = .670$) more than in the selection of IPGs membership ($\beta = .436$).

4.2 Discussion of Major Findings

From the data collected in this study, the following types of informal policing groups exist in Nasarawa

State: community/ or village vigilante and tribal informal policing organization. The community/ or village vigilante groups are formed and financed by members of community or village people in order to protect community members against crime and invasion by herdsmen. Other than the membership of the tribal groups that are a mixture of youth and elders, other vigilante members are mostly youth volunteers who are drawn from the villages/communities to safeguard their community/village against attacks. The religious informal policing organizations are formed to maintain order and safeguard their places of worship, while the Neighbourhood Crime Watch is formed to prevent and control crimes in their streets and neighbourhood. The finding in Plurality of informal policing groups agrees with the position of Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) who argued that informal policing structures could range from religious vigilantism, ethnic vigilantism, state sponsored vigilantism, neighbourhood/ village vigilantism.

As a confirmation from key information interview (KII) revealed:

In my territory, we have Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), Fulani vigilante committee, Anti-secret society group (KII with paramount chief: age 75 years, male). In another KII, a formal police was in line on the information from paramount chief. This division has Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), Neighbourhood crime watch group, and Nigeria Legion, Mass Transport Scheme (KII with DPO: age 42 years, male).

These informal policing organizations found in this study are made up of people from the village/or community who police their community against crime and invasion. This goes in line with the view of Broken Widow theory by Wilson and Kelling (1982) that prevention and control of crime must start from within the community against the outside the community.

It is found in this study that except lack of financial motivation for IGP; lack of financial support from government and poor funding from community members were strong economic

challenges to the operation of the IGP in the state. This concord with revelation of Rasheed (2007) who observed that vigilante in Kano state experienced funding problems and depended largely on donations from individuals and government. In the opinion of one of the leaders of the vigilante group in the study area:

There is no financial support received from local government council to vigilante for now. Then when local government had partial autonomy, the council was supporting vigilante group with ₦150,000.00 (one hundred and fifty thousand naira) per month for three months which was share among ten units under this command. On the side of operational equipment, we use our personal money to buy all operational equipment we are using. However, member representing Kokona East constituency in Nasarawa State House of Assembly donated patrol van for this vigilante command but because of lack of financial support to service the van, you can see for yourself, it is down (KII with leader of vigilante group: age 52 years, male).

The study revealed that members of IGP were used for political thuggery. In this context, political influence in the selection of IGP members has become a challenge in the operation of IGP in the study area. This concord with the observation of Harnischfeger (2003) that the political backing of the “disbanded Bakassi Boys” receives from Governor Mbandinuju was for the purpose of using them to intimidate his political opponents.

In the study area, the major challenge facing Informal Police Groups was lack of government support. As a leader of a vigilante group argued:

Nasarawa State House of Assembly enacted bye-law on 15 December, 2004 which made provision for ₦100,000.00 (one hundred thousand naira only) per month from local council to support vigilante group. But as I speak to you even one kobo is not received from local government as support. Operational materials such as cutlasses, bow and arrow, dane gun, uniforms, whistles, torchlight, identity cards and so forth are bought by our personal money. We lack mobility such as

motorcycle and van for patrol (KII with leader of vigilante group: age 35 years, male).

It is found in this paper that economic and political factors constrained the operation of IPGs. This is in line with Group Conflict theory as postulated by Vold (1958) that the various interest group exist within society to struggle with one another in the course of social, political and economic existence, to preserve and maintain and advance own interests above the values and interest of others.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the major problems of informal policing organizations in Nasarawa State are poor funding by community members and lack financial support from government. These result to lack of supply operational tools such as uniform, cutlass, patrol motorcycle or van. The study also

concludes that there is political manipulation of informal policing members in Nasarawa State. This happens as a result lack of legal recognition in the study area.

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

- i. Financial support to members of informal policing organizations in Nasarawa State should not be left in the hands of community members and local government council alone.
- ii. Politicians should not use IPGs for political thuggery, rather IPG members should be used to maintain order in electioneering campaigns and elections.
- iii. There should be legal recognition of informal policing organizations. The recognition will help to streamline their activities and expose dubious members to the law.

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