

VIGILANTISM AND CRIME CONTROL: A STUDY OF MARARABA, KARU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the efficacy and usefulness of vigilante groups or vigilantism in selected communities within Mararaba in Karu Local Government Area (LGA) of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Primary data were derived from questionnaires and in-depth interviews with members of vigilante groups, other stake holders such as the Nigeria Police, community leaders and some residents who were purposively selected. The communitarian theory was adopted to explain people's perception of vigilantism. It was revealed that vigilante groups and variants of neighborhood watch groups who manned gates and streets were preferred methods of crime prevention and control in the communities studied. This was due to their dependability and the deterrent effects such arrangements have on offenders or prospective law breakers. Vigilante groups also provide a form of local intelligence and a platform for community policing. It is believed that the presence of vigilante groups reduced the fear of crime and creates safer communities. However, in spite of the positive effects, there were few incidents of abuse of human rights, torturing of suspects, bullying and intimidation of residents by vigilante groups. Vigilante or neighborhood watch groups were formed as a result of community and citizens concern for security and the fear of crime. Thus, the paper recommends that within Mararaba communities, the Nigeria Police working with relevant Non-Governmental Organizations should create a vetting and training platforms for vigilante or neighborhood watch groups (similar to that of the private security industry) to ensure that the rule of law is not breached and to enhance the synergy between the Nigeria police and informal security organizations.

Keywords: *Crime Control, Crime Prevention, Perception, Vigilante Groups.*

Introduction

The use of personal or private security guards, vigilante groups or any form of neighborhood watch has developed over the years as a result of the interest of citizens to enhance their personal security and that of their communities by complimenting the police force. In some communities the vigilante groups are preferred to the police and other formal policing agencies because of the perception of their availability, trust and effectiveness (Ogbozor, 2016). Sekhonyane (2002) had earlier note that people patronize vigilante groups due to the rise in crime, poor perception about the ability of the criminal justice system and the inadequacies of the police in dealing with crime within their communities. This view is also supported by Abrahams (1989); Scharf (2000); Shaw (2002) & Huggins (2009) who argue that vigilante groups or what they called community initiated policing arises out of a perceived failure of the state to provide citizens with the protection they require. Various communities have varying needs with regard to crime and security. Thus, expectations and demands from the police in particular may differ. This also applies to the expectations and service delivery of vigilante groups or neighborhood watch which is determined

by the nature of crimes (e.g. murder, rape, theft, pick pocketing, phones and bags snatching, assault, burglary, armed robbery among others) that are prevalent or anticipated in a particular area and more importantly in Mararaba, karu local government area of Nasarawa State. Hence, this paper examines the perception of members of Mararaba community on vigilante groups. In the course of this paper, the concept of vigilantism, vigilantism and the Nigerian experience, types of vigilante groups, nature of vigilante groups, the role of vigilante groups, effectiveness of vigilante groups, theoretical framework were discussed. Methodology, findings, conclusion and recommendations were made.

The Concept of Vigilante Groups

According to Adejoh (2013), in Nigeria the practice of using vigilante groups predates the formation of the Nigeria police and that most local communities across the country had their own community policing arrangement which ensure the security of the population. Usually these groups were composed of individuals from the local communities and often derived their credibility and unofficial authority from the community in which they serve (Adejoh, 2013). Adejoh (2013) adds that these structures continue even after the formation of the police in identifying and handing over criminal suspects to appropriate judicial authorities as well as settling of conflicts between individuals in the communities. Vigilante justice has been carried out for centuries but it gained a great deal of recognition in the United States in 1980 with vigilante committees which ostensibly fought crime but actually persecuted immigrants and blacks. They conducted public lynching and other forms of punishment in an attempt to frighten members of the minority out of town. Vigilante justice was also used as a tool to dispatch political rivals and anyone who owned substantial land was at the risk of being executed by a vigilante mob under the direction of an acquisitive enemy.

However, there is a lack of conceptual clarification and agreement by scholars as regards the concept of vigilante groups and community policing. While noting that vigilante groups and community policing are different, it should also be noted that the two concepts tends to perform the role of crime prevention in the community. Vigilante groups refer to organized local initiative groups or grassroots association whose purpose is to secure and protect the community from both internal and external aggression. Johnson (1996) asserts that vigilante appears as a reaction to state's perceived inability or willingness to enforce the law and supplies security to the population's demand for crime prevention. In addition, Jensen (2008) described vigilantism as activities performed by citizens who organized themselves into groups to take the law into their hands in order to reprimand criminals and protect their community.

On the other hand, community policing is a philosophy and organizational strategy that promotes a partnership based collaborative effort between the police and members of the community to address deviant and criminogenic situations more effectively thereby improving quality of life. This arrangement involves identifying, preventing and solving problems of crime, eliminating the fear of crime, reducing physical and social disorder, enhancing safety and security, preventing neighborhood decay and fostering well-being (OSCE, 2011). Similarly, Okeshola & Mudiare (2013) opines that it is a proactive philosophy that promotes solving social problems that are either criminal, affect the quality of life or increase citizen's fear of crime. It entails community partnership with the police to effectively combat crime and create a safe and secure environment for all. For Ogunlowo (2007), such participation is necessary because the informal policing structures created by concerned members of the public together with the police efforts can facilitate crime prevention. The participation of citizens might be in the form of providing

information to the police on criminal activities, forming association and creating security awareness in the community.

Vigilantism and the Nigerian Experience

Vigilantes are group of people who try to prevent crime or punish criminals in their community especially because they think the police are not doing their job effectively. Umeobika (2012) define vigilante as a person who seeks to avenge a crime by taking the law in his hands and a vigilante is a civilian who enforces law with or without legal authority. In Nigeria, these definitions are classical descriptions of the activities of the defunct *Bakassi Boys* that operated in the southeast of the country as well as the *Odua People's Congress*, a Yoruba ethnic group in southwest formed to fight criminal activities and the *Hisbah* vigilante group operates in north western and eastern states of Nigeria. While carrying out their operations, these vigilante groups exhibit unlawful acts and took drastic measures. They also conduct investigations, arrest suspects, detain people for long periods of time, torture them, conduct summary trials and even execute judgment in public such as the market places (Umeobika, 2012). According to Umeobika (2012), the *Bakassi Boys* were extremely brutal, ruthless and callous in their actions though they succeeded in reducing the incidence of crime to a reasonable extent and were applauded by many people and groups for killing notorious criminals. Umeobika (2012) asserts that they have ceased to exist following criticisms arising from the way and manner with which they carried out their operations which lacked due process and fair hearing as well as causing the death of some innocent citizens.

However, other vigilante groups are different from the above mentioned groups. The more organized groups also referred to as vigilante groups and operates differently as they do have the legal mandate to work with other law enforcement agents to achieve desired goals. They are also vested with power which include the power to arrest but are required to hand over suspects to the police for investigation and prosecution. Further, in some states, the local vigilante groups have been accorded legal recognition as local vigilante services working in the communities for the state - they are to arrest or collaborate with the police in maintaining law and order in the communities of operations (Umeobika, 2012). Vigilante groups have made successes in combating crimes in Nigeria. Their operations have restored some sense of safety for the people mostly in some commercial cities where armed robbers almost crippled social and economic activities (CLEEN, 2002). Stovenson (2015) conclude that vigilantes have been the most effective vehicle at disrupting terrorist attack by *Boko Haram* insurgents in the north eastern part of the country. Their combined operations with the military have reduced terrorist attacks as they understand and are familiar with the terrain. In addition, they also provide good intelligence and have succeeded in rescuing some of the abductors.

For Hassan (2012) the relative success of the vigilante groups in counter-insurgency in northern Nigeria affirms the underlying thinking in human security literature that security is best provided by the people and not for the people. The experience in northern Nigeria has shown that they are well acquainted with the terrain under which they operate against the troops deployed who also experience language difficulties. The International Crisis Groups (2014) states that the apparent success of vigilante groups in the fight against insurgency have been acknowledged by many observers including government and military. It is for this reason Burchard (2014) asserts that vigilantes are uniquely poised to contribute to local security because the groups are staffed by local volunteers who have knowledge of the community and often have trust of the local communities.

As a response to security challenges in the country, many communities have made increasing recourse to the vigilante groups to improve their safety and security conditions. A report by Alemika & Chukwuma (2003) indicates that 50% of Nigerians patronize the services of vigilante groups for their protection from criminal attacks. Singer (2003) argue that the effectiveness of vigilantes could be seen on the role they play as undercover agents outside the formal authorities. Thus, for Singer (2003) the vigilante groups have assisted in reporting and suppressing cult activities in some of our educational institutions across the country. Hence, the involvement of the vigilante groups has help in curbing cultism in Nigeria particularly in the study area. There have been certain concerns about the efficacy and operations of vigilante groups in Nigeria. Some of these concerns are discussed below.

Obiageli (2015) asserts that vigilantes manned gates and entry points or routes in commercial (e.g market places) and residential areas. These gates have closing and opening periods thereby providing restriction of movements. Vigilante members are known to collect money (extortion) from and bend rules especially for strangers. Obiageli (2015) observed that if money was not forthcoming, citizens are man-handled or bullied. Also, vigilante groups sometimes abuse their powers or authority. Some members of the group occasionally indulge in some unlawful acts by intimidating some members of the community with their weapons and exhibiting acts of torture before handing the culprit to the police (Obiageli, 2015). Ajayi & Adefolaju (2013) notes that it is general knowledge that vigilantes use intoxicants to enable them be bold and fearless. Among the items they indulge in are alcohol and drugs. For Ajayi & Adefolaju (2013), this induced boldness is usually counter-productive to security. Vigilantes have been used as political thugs by office seeking individuals and groups (Dike, 2014).

Finally, Amnesty International (2014) observes the complex nature of vigilante groups as these groups often combine activities of the fight against crime to other social, political, ethnic and economic interests. In addition, numerous allegations have been made by national and international human rights organizations, the Nigerian press, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and individuals that these groups carry out extrajudicial executions, illegal detention, acts of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment of innocent citizens and criminals. For Amnesty International noted that in all but exceptional situations, policing functions should be carried out by the official security forces. Further, in any case, the federal authority is directly responsible and accountable for the actions of those who conduct law enforcement functions, including private groups to whom these functions have been devolved and for ensuring that standards of human rights protection are met. Dike (2014) conclude that some vigilante groups have added to the spate of insecurity in Nigeria and that their primary loyalty is the welfare of the master that engaged them. For Dike (2014), opponents and rivals use the vigilantes to extend conflict or exacerbate problems which might affect those outside the enclaves of the opposition.

Types of Vigilante Groups in Nigeria

The informal policing structure is sometimes referred to as the voluntary policing sector. In Nigeria, these groups are referred to as vigilante groups, neighborhoods watch, community guards or traditional police; vigilante is the most common term. Vigilante is an organized attempt by a group of ordinary citizens to enforce norms and maintain law and order on behalf of their communities often by resorting to violence in the perceived absence of effective official state action through the police and courts. Most of the studies on informal policing available for review focus essentially on the structures and activities of vigilante groups. A closer examination by Chukwuma (2002) of the modes of operations and structures of some of the groups that are

referred to as vigilantes revealed that not all of them fit the classical understanding of the phenomenon of vigilantism. This was pointed out by Shaw (2002) who argues that care must be taken not to generalize on the subject of vigilante groups. Some seek to provide “due process for arrested criminals” in the absence of a viable state institution in the areas. Chukwuma (2002) outlines four main types of vigilante groups as the neighborhood vigilante; ethnic vigilante; religious vigilante; and state sponsored vigilante.

Alemika & Chukwuma (2004) notes that neighborhood or community vigilante groups are group of people that are organized by street associations in the cities or villages in the rural areas to manned street entrances or villages’ gates as the case may be at night. They also carryout foot patrols at night to reassure members of the community that some people are watching over their security. They do not carry weapons but armed with whistles which they use in arousing the neighborhoods if there are unwholesome guests. The ethnic vigilantes refer to groups that organized along ethnic or tribal lines to defend their narrow interest and also carryout crime control functions. Chukwuma (2002) notes that this type of vigilante group in Nigeria is known as the Odua People’s Congress which is mostly active in the south-western part of Nigeria.

The Odua People’s Congress as they are popularly called in Nigeria started as a self-determination group for the Yoruba in 1994 and made incursions into vigilante activities in 1999. Their activities go beyond crime fighting to include agitation for ethnic autonomy. Their motto is “by any means necessary” as their methods of operations include streets procession, protest matches, brutality, robbery torture, lynching and neck lacing of both criminal suspects and opponents during inter-ethnic conflict (Tertsakian, 2003). They have on occasions been victims of police brutality and extra-judicial killings under a government policy banning their activities and hunting down their operations.

The religious vigilantes refer to a type of vigilante in Africa that first sprang up in South Africa in the middle of the nineties with the establishment of the new democracy and has since spread to Nigeria with the introduction of sharia laws in parts of northern Nigeria. Chukwuma (2002) note that religious vigilantes that were formed with the introduction of sharia laws are known as the hisbah groups. They made it a duty to enforce sharia laws as ban on sale and consumption of alcohol, indecent clothing (wearing of trousers and skimpy dresses by women) and arresting of petty thieves often without authorization by the sharia courts. They often impose punishment for such offences on their own without taking the suspect to the designated sharia courts for trial.

The state-sponsored vigilantes refer to a type of vigilante which operates with the support of government or state agencies. The emergence of this type of vigilante is traceable to South Africa during the apartheid era. Scharf (2000) states that during this era, vigilante took the form of specialized police or military units trying to destabilize and intimidate the political opposition and by sponsoring civilians with interests (pecuniary, personal or political) to do the same. In Nigeria, the group that best described this typology is the “Bakassi Boys” that were active in the eastern part of Nigeria. They began as an initiative of traders in Abia State who were worried about the high rate of property crimes in their markets. But the Bakassi Boys were later hijacked by state governments which added partisan political ends in their objectives and armed with dangerous weapons including firearms without police check (Tertsakian, 2002). They make routine public spectacles of some of the criminal suspects they capture who were often paraded naked on the streets, body parts chopped into pieces and later burnt to the cheering of surging and urging crowds (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004).

Nature of Vigilante Groups

According to Okafor (2007), vigilante groups consists of able bodied young members who are supported financially and materially by other community members and charged with the task of securing the community and enforcing the law often with the aid of small weapons such as machetes, bows and arrows, spears and locally made firearms. The groups are mostly active at night than during the day and station themselves at strategic locations but occasionally patrol their neighborhoods. For Adejoh (2014), except for few instances where security is provided by just one man, most of the community crime preventive groups patrol the streets and neighborhood in groups. Also, in communities where members have to pay the night watchers, the number in the patrol team is usually less.

Traditionally in Nigerian societies, vigilante groups usually co-opt traditional divining and protective methods in their management and operations. Adejoh (2014) observes that some vigilante groups do not always physically patrol the areas they are charged to guard. Instead, they plant or sprinkle certain charms in the area under their watch, mutter certain incantations and simply go to sleep. Criminal minded persons who trespass on such areas are expected to literally lose their minds and continue to roam within the vicinity until dawn when they will be apprehended. However, apart from charms and incantations, Alemika & Chukwuma (2004) notes that some vigilante groups use locally made weapons (guns, cutlasses and poisonous substances). It is not unusual to find vigilante members who are hunters and ex-service men who are familiar with firearms and are permitted by the police to carry guns. In addition, the state sponsored vigilante who are not armed usually have walkie-talkies which they use to report incidents of crime or other threats of their neighborhoods to the police or other relevant authorities (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004).

Furthermore, vigilante group's action differs from area to area and from situation to situation. Minnaar (2001) asserts that the necklace method of burning tyre filled with petrol around the neck of a criminal became synonymous with South Africa during the 1980s and throughout the 1990s and was also used by the *Bakassi Boys* in the south eastern part of Nigeria in 1998. According to Minnaar (2001) it is a painful death and the victim suffers excruciating pains in the process with death sometimes being caused not only by the burns but by asphyxiating either from the fumes released by burning rubber or the sudden extraction of the oxygen surrounding the tyre as it burns into flame. Minnaar (2001) adds that when a suspect steal, rape or robbed a person and the angry community get hold of the suspected criminal, the vigilantes beat him to death or leave him in a serious injured state. Also, the community in some instances damage or burn family homes of the suspected criminal and in extreme cases chase the suspects and their families out of the neighborhood.

For Hund (2004), lack of police intervention on crime incidents gets residents frustrated and such frustration could result in citizens taking the laws in their hands. This could lead to a mob declaration of guilt on the suspect and on-the-spot dispensation of severe penalties including lynching. Hund (2004) notes that in many African societies, mob justice is common where cultural practices such as witchcraft which transcends police intervention are practiced. Mob justice is also common when citizen's patience with slow police response runs out or where police response is completely unavailable (Kole, 1999). This cultural practice is difficult to monitor and may as a result, give way to activities that are criminal in nature or associated with crime. For Kole (1999), containing such vices requires the leadership of persons who belong to the community to identify with the people and hence, the use of local law enforcement agents.

To sum up, Abraham (1987) notes that in some African societies, vigilante groups have been very popular amongst local population and have been credited with reducing the rate of violent crimes, apprehending suspected criminals. Those who commit crime are subjected to brutal methods of investigation and punishment. He observed that charges were not laid before the suspect rather the entire village population were expected to cooperate in ostracizing the individual and their families until they were ready to confess their misdeeds to the vigilante groups. Those who refused to confess to an offense were subjected to torture and punishment which sometimes results to death (Abraham, 1987).

Role of Vigilante Groups

The exist of the military from power and the run-down police force that they bequeathed to civilian regime made it impossible to cope with crime upsurge in the country. To fill this gap, people form vigilante groups. These vigilante groups go by different names across the country. The primary reason for setting them up was to protect the people from incessant raids by armed robbers in their neighborhood. This was captured by CLEEN (2002) when it put it thus; "local communities across Nigeria, as in many other countries in Africa and elsewhere have created their own informal policing structures to ensure the security of the populace. These vigilante groups have usually been composed of individuals from local community they belong to. They have derived their credibility and unofficial authority from the community in which they serve. One of the main purposes of these initiatives has been to complement the police in identifying and handing over criminal suspects to the appropriate judicial authorities. They also settle conflicts between individuals in the community. Local leaders have on some occasion abused their power and used this groups for other purposes.

At this point it will be useful to draw attention to the functions of vigilante groups as articulated by Obeagu (2014) who states the functions to include: the prevention of crime by improving security through joint patrols with the police, reducing opportunities for crime by increasing crime prevention awareness campaigns, developing neighborhood crime prevention programs, assisting the police in identifying criminals and finding solutions to crime prevention. Vigilante groups also assist the police to detect crime through promoting effective communication with the police, prompt reporting of suspicious criminal activities to the police and providing information or intelligence to the police and community members on suspicious persons and on the nature or types of prevalent crimes within the community.

Vigilante crime detection is an important part of community security work. Every vigilante organization have detective unit in its various commands. This division is charged with solving or reporting crimes to the relevant security agencies. After taking the suspect vital information to the police, a detective or investigator interviews the victim of the crime and any witness, collect evidence and processes the crime scene. The detective or investigator also conducts canvasses (searches area for witnesses), interrogate possible suspects, arrests the alleged perpetrators (Yahaya & Bello, 2019).

Effectiveness of Vigilante Groups

Vigilante groups have proven to be effective in the fight against crime in Nigeria. With proper understanding of the terrains of counter insurgency, the vigilante groups have assisted in identifying and overriding important structures of the insurgents through local intelligence. They

have facilitated arrests of high profile boko haram suspects as well as the rescue of some of their abductors. Hassan, (2012) argues that the relative success of the vigilantes in counter insurgency in Nigeria affirms the underlying thinking in societal/human security literature that security is best provided by the people and not for the people. Owumi & Ajayi (2013) maintains that vigilante groups are still functioning effectively and people consult them on security issues probably because of the perceived ineffectiveness of the police. This is similar to the view of Burton, Plessis, Legette, Louw, Mistry & Vuuren (2003) who had the view that people repose confidence on vigilante services for the fear they have on crime and for the loss of faith in the state's ability to protect them. Alemika & Chukwuma (2003) are of the view that vigilante groups were committed to their duty and this level of commitment and effectiveness lay primarily on the fact that members are from within the communities in which they operate and also for the fact that they have a determination to ensure security, the interest in curbing crime and are under the control of and accountable to the community. Olaniyi (2002) observes that in many regions, vigilante groups have proven to be effective in combating crime than the state law enforcement agencies. In addition, Olaniyi (2002) remark that in several cases the communities trust vigilante groups more than the police because of their effective, reliable and prompt ways to tackle crime issues.

However, the facts that vigilante groups have not been able to bring lasting solution to criminality in their various areas and communities due to their own setbacks in getting the total support they needed both from government and willing individuals and because of their own shortcomings of not being completely committed to their duty the people they serve still patronize them. Adejoh (2013) upheld this view that despite the weaknesses in the commitment and effectiveness of vigilante groups they still have the support and mandate of the people to ensure their security and safety through preventing and detecting crime as well as dealing with minor criminals.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of vigilantism is an outcome of problem solving with regard to community safety and security. This paper is anchored on the Communitarian Theory. However, before examining communitarian theory, a brief look at the philosophy behind problem oriented policing is highlighted to enhance our understanding and philosophy behind vigilantism.

The concept of Problem Oriented Policing (POP) was articulated by Goldstein in 1979 which states that it is a policing strategy that involves the identification and analysis of definitive crimes and disorder issues with a view to developing effective response strategies. This approach requires proactive rather than reactionary policing. Goldstein's 1979 model was enhanced in 1987 by Eck & Spelman into the SARA model (Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment) for problem solving (Eck & Spelman, 1987). This strategy encourages research and analysis of crime control and the engagement of public and private organizations in the lessening of community problems. Okeke (2013) notes that problem solving is a process of engaging in a proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and rigorously evaluate effective response. Thus, in formal policing, the Community Policing Model requires the police to become proficient in the SARA model. Community policing differs from traditional policing in a number of ways. In community policing, the police involve residents of a community in critical decisions, and in areas of interest such as:

- i. Community partnership - This is concerned with collaborations between the security agencies and the residents. It involves confidence and capacity building. This may involve the establishment of ad-hoc community liaison offices where community police officers engage the community by working with appointed leaders and volunteers (Bohn & Haley, 2002).

ii. Change management – This requires the reviewing of initiatives, decision making and responsibilities within the police organization. For Okeke (2013) this component of community policing involves transforming or changing the organizational culture, leadership and management structure, labor relation, strategic planning processes, performance evaluation technique and operational transparency or *modus operandi*, the geographic assignment of officers, the allotment of fiscal resources, training and hiring practices as well as information gathering systems. Hence, an organizational infrastructure that can support proactive operations aimed at crime prevention is created.

To sum up, community policing is not devoid of criticisms. It has been suggested that problem oriented policing projects often fail to investigate crime displacement (Goldstein, 1990). Crime displacement is the relocation or shifting of crime from one area to another or from the area being addressed to another area with less police attention. In addition, it has also been noted that it is difficult for law enforcement and the community to relate with each other all the time without having friction from divergent views, strategies and interests (Goldstein, 1990).

With regard to the concept of communitarianism, this refers to a philosophy that places attention on the connections between individuals and their communities. Its principal philosophy revolves around the belief that a person's social identity and personality are largely molded or formed by community relationships. Thus, the greater parts of one's self and community development are not placed on the individual. According to Avineri & de-Shalit (1992), community can be referred to as family. Also, that communitarianism is commonly understood in the broader philosophical sense as a collection of interactions, among a community of people in a given place (e.g. geographical location), or among a community who share an interest such as similar history. Hence, they conclude that communitarianism usually opposes extreme individualism and disagrees with extreme *laissez-faire* policies that neglect the stability of the overall community (Avineri & de-Shalit, 1992).

Some sociologists have related to this concept in their research. For example, Ferdinand Tönnies identified attributes associated with *Gemeinschaft* (oppressive but nurturing communities) and *Gesellschaft* (liberating but impersonal societies). Emile Durkheim's also had concerns about the integrating role of social values and the relations between the individual and society. Both authors drew attention to the dangers of anomie (normlessness or the lack of generally accepted norms and values in society) and alienation in modern societies which is made up of atomized individuals who had gained their liberty but lost their social sensitivities. A leading proponent of communitarian theory Etzioni (2003) observes that we have gone too far toward extending rights to our citizens and not too far enough in asking them to fulfil their responsibilities to the community as a whole. Etzioni (2003) argues that the communitarian philosophy implies that people should be made to understand that they need to actively participate not just by opinions but by their time, energy and money. Thus, communitarian theory maintains that any deteriorating trend in quality of life is not just because the elected political representatives have done a bad job but because they have not attended to what citizenship is all about. As such, communitarian supports processes such as problem solving where neighborhoods have taken matters into their hands by closing off streets and creating other physical barriers to disrupt criminal acts. Hence, the recognition that many of the answers to community problems lie not with governments, but the community at large and advocates of this theory believes that rights comes with responsibilities (Etzioni, 2003).

Finally, communitarianism stands for the protection of common good and community policing is a communitarian justice program or initiative that broadens the role of citizens from the constitutional obligation of protecting individual's rights into a more progressive approach based on the protection of the common good. The theory maintains that individuals are ultimately shaped by the communities to which they belong and as such, they owe those communities a duty of respect and consideration and one of which is to cooperate with law enforcement agencies for peace and order in their respective communities.

Responding to criticism that the term 'community' is too vague or cannot be defined, Etzioni (2003) believes that this is not the case, and that one of the leaders of the American communitarian movement, pointed out that communities can be defined with reasonable precision as having two characteristics: One being a web of affect-laden relationships among a group of individuals, with relationships that often crisscross and reinforces one another (as opposed to one-on-one or chain-like individual relationships). The second being a measure of commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, which involves a shared history and identity or a particular culture. Communitarian theory is also criticized on grounds that it has failed to produce the avenue for the safeguard of individuals against a repressive majority. It also failed to take adequate account of the relationship and structures of power within as well as between communities. Etzioni (2003) have also states that the theory may help in the understanding of the reasons responsible for crime, anti-social behavior and the benefits of community/police collaboration – however, that crime prevention schemes and community policing strategies have a narrow range of interest. They maintain that although these schemes are labelled 'community,' they generally mean a small number of sectional interests.

To conclude, communitarian theory holds that community strategies along with policing strategies can result in positive and effective responses to crime control. The usefulness of this theory can be seen by the increasing realization that no government has the means to solve all the problems adequately mostly in the case of crime, and that the local people are stakeholders in their communities. Stakeholders understand their neighborhoods better, and share common aspirations of promoting and protecting their communities.

Methodology

Mararaba is a sub-urban in nature with twenty-six (26) communities, located in Karu Local Government Area (LGA) of Nasarawa State. Karu was created out of Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa state in 1991. Karu LGA has five indigenous ethnic groups - Gbagyi, Koro, Gwandara, Yeskwa and Gade. Karu LGA shares boundaries with Nasarawa LGA in the southeast, Panda in the north and Abuja (the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria) in the west. The population of Karu has been projected to be 1,068,480 as at 2019 (NPC Projection, 2019) with Mararaba having a population of about 303,495. In this study, the sampled population of the study was 79,980. With this population and the margin of error of 0.05 confidence level of 95% and with the recommended sample size of the study based on the total population of the five (5) selected communities is 382 using the Research Advisors (2006). 382 questionnaires were administered to respondents in the sampled communities only 370 were filled and returned. Chi square and spearman rank correlation coefficient were used for the analysis at 0.05 level of significance. Focus Group Discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted with five (5) leaders of vigilante groups and three (3) community chiefs in the selected areas. An in-depth summary and coding were used for the analysis.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from this research revealed that 269(72.6%) of respondents sampled in Mararaba believe that vigilante groups play significant roles in problem-solving and other forms of community partnerships. On the relation between vigilante group members and community members, about 212(57%) of respondents do not have any form of cordial relationship with the vigilante groups – this is an indication that vigilantes interact mainly with the community leaders or community members that are responsible for their upkeep or maintenance. In this study the field survey revealed that about 138(37.2%) of respondents asserts that vigilantes are not always readily available when needed unlike the majority of residents who felt that the groups are responsive to their needs. Overall, residents in Mararaba believes that vigilante groups impact positively in the community and as such they play constructive roles in crime prevention and detection in the community. Vigilante groups are said to be effective in maintaining streets, manned gates and monitoring movements at odd hours of the day. They also alert the police and stakeholders on security issues of concern to the neighborhoods. Interviews conducted with the vigilantes and community chiefs in Mararaba have shown that vigilante groups carry out under covered role on suspected criminals in their communities through information and intelligent gathering from members, they mount surveillance mostly in uncompleted buildings to track down criminal, they apprehend suspects in their neighborhoods but such suspects are handed over to police as well as settlement of disputes like fighting, quarrelling etc.

Conclusion

The study attempts to show how the vigilante groups have complemented the efforts of the police in identifying and handing over criminal suspects to appropriate authorities and settling disputes between individuals in the community. In Mararaba, the vigilante groups are of great importance in the prevention of crime in the community. Members of the vigilante groups live within the community and are in a better position to fish out criminals operating within the community relatively quicker than other law enforcement agencies. These vigilante groups offer effective response to distressed calls, apprehend offenders and are capable of settling of disputes among individuals within the community. However, in spite of the achievements made by the vigilante groups there exist some negative perceptions by members of the community, national and international human rights organizations, the Nigeria press, the Nigeria bar association on the activities of vigilante groups. In addition, the perception about vigilantes taking laws into their hands by carrying out extra judicial killings, illegal detention, acts of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment on criminals, acting as political thugs to politicians mostly during elections among others are areas of public concern.

Recommendations

In Mararaba, vigilante groups should endeavor to be properly organized to enable the group be assisted and monitored by the police in particular and the government. For instance, recruitment should be transparent based on proper referrals, medical checks, behavior and criminal records checks as this will strengthen their relationship with the police. Vigilante groups members should also be routinely trained in various aspects of crime prevention and upholding of human rights. Adequate equipment and logistics should be made available to vigilante groups in other to enhance their duties effectively. Awareness should also be created and information given to the public concerning the duties of the vigilante groups. Hence, communities should be ready to contribute significantly to the funding of vigilante groups. This will enable members of the community have a cordial relationship with the vigilante groups. Finally, the Police should endeavor to carry out strict supervision on the vigilantes in other to check any abuse of powers.

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