



## INFLUENCE OF INFORMAL SECURITY ACTORS ON LOCAL SAFETY OUTCOMES: A STUDY OF VIGILANTE GROUPS AND CRIME CONTROL IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA



**Samuel, Aretha Rekiya,**  
Department of Sociology,  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Jos,  
08036661742; samuelaretha799@gmail.com

**Anna Awukun Wash-Pam**  
Department of Sociology,  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Jos,  
08035970808; washpam@yahoo.com

**Solomon Atser Iorshasher**  
Department of Sociology,  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Jos,  
08036706081; sollymody41@gmail.com

### Abstract

This study examined the influence of informal security actors on local safety outcomes, with particular focus on the role of vigilante groups in crime control in North-Central Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted to collect quantitative data from participants at a single point in time. The population consisted of all informal security actors in North-Central Nigeria, and a minimum sample size of 384 was determined using Cochran's formula, with purposive sampling employed to select active participants. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed with descriptive statistics, while Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to test the hypotheses. Findings revealed that informal security actors have a moderate positive and significant relationship with local safety outcomes ( $\rho = 0.469$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and that vigilante groups have a moderate positive and significant relationship with crime control ( $\rho = 0.478$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). In conclusion, informal security actors contribute meaningfully to crime reduction in local communities. Therefore, the leadership of vigilante groups should collaborate more closely with the Nigerian Police Force and other formal security agencies to expand organized patrols, intelligence gathering, and crime monitoring.

**Keywords:** Informal Security Actors, Local Safety Outcomes, Vigilante Groups, Crime Control, North-Central Nigeria.

### Introduction

The question of security challenges has remained a defining concern of modern societies, particularly in regions where rapid social change, population growth, economic pressure and political transition place heavy demands on formal institutions. In many parts of the world, the responsibility for maintaining safety no longer rests solely with the state, as communities increasingly seek local solutions to persistent threats (Sowale 2025). This pattern is especially

visible in developing countries like Nigeria where policing capacity is often stretched and public trust in official security agencies fluctuates. In Nigeria, debates around safety are shaped by a long history of communal self-protection, colonial legacies and post-independence struggles to build effective security systems (Olaniyan & Omotola 2015). The country's diverse social structure, marked by ethnic plurality, religious difference and uneven development, has created complex security needs that vary across regions. In the North Central Nigeria Zone, communities occupy a strategic middle belt that connects northern and southern parts of the country, making the area both culturally diverse and politically sensitive (Mohammed & Zango 2024). Recurrent conflicts, banditry, communal disputes and everyday criminal activities have contributed to a sense of vulnerability among residents. Against this backdrop, informal security actors such as vigilante groups have emerged as prominent figures in local safety arrangements. Their presence reflects broader global conversations about how non state actors respond to gaps in formal governance and how community based security practices interact with state authority (Iloh & Nwokedi 2019).

In contemporary Nigeria, the relevance of informal security actors is closely tied to the daily experiences of citizens who navigate insecurity in their neighborhoods, farms and marketplaces. Eliakim (2024) argued that while the Nigerian Police Force remains the constitutionally recognized body of law enforcement, limitations related to manpower, logistics, response time and public confidence have encouraged communities to seek complementary forms of protection. Vigilante groups, neighborhood watch and community patrols have therefore become familiar features of local security domains (Modise 2023; Wambai, H. A., Tijani, H. I., & Iroye, S. O. (2024). These groups are often rooted in traditional norms, shared identities and communal solidarity, which gives them social legitimacy in the eyes of residents. In North Central Nigeria, where rural settlements coexist with growing urban centers, informal security actors play visible roles in monitoring movement, resolving disputes and deterring petty crime. Their relevance is heightened by ongoing security challenges such as cattle rustling, kidnapping, highway robbery, and youth related violence (Aliyu, D. A., Ahmed, A., & Mustapha, D. H. (2024). At the same time, discussions around local safety outcomes emphasize not only the reduction of crime but also the feeling of safety, trust and order within communities. Vigilante groups are frequently perceived as accessible and responsive compared to formal agencies, especially in remote areas (Adelani 2024). However, their operations also raise important questions about legality, accountability and human rights. In today's Nigerian environment, the interaction between informal security actors and crime control reflects broader tensions between state authority and community agency, making the subject a critical area of scholarly and policy attention. For clarity, informal security actors refer to non-state security groups such as vigilante organizations, local guards, or community-based security networks; local safety outcomes refer to the level of perceived and actual security experienced within a community; and crime control refers to actions and measures aimed at preventing, reducing, or managing criminal activities.

Arguably, informal security actors influence local safety outcomes through a range of mechanisms that shape how security is produced and experienced at the grassroots level (Sowale & Ukeje 2025). Vigilante groups often rely on local knowledge, social networks and familiarity within the terrain to identify suspects, gather intelligence and respond quickly to threats. This proximity enables them to deter crime through visible presence and social pressure, which can discourage would be offenders within the community (Egwuaba & Egboh 2024). In North Central Nigeria, such groups frequently collaborate with traditional leaders and sometimes with

formal security agencies, creating hybrid arrangements that affect crime control patterns. Their influence can lead to reductions in certain crimes, particularly theft and burglary, as residents perceive a higher likelihood of detection. At the same time, vigilante involvement in dispute resolution can contribute to social order by addressing conflicts before they escalate. However, the impact of these groups on local safety is not uniformly positive. The absence of formal training and oversight may result in excessive use of force, selective justice or targeting based on suspicion rather than evidence (Ojeizele 2022).

The responsibility for protecting lives and property is clearly defined in a well-functioning security environment, coordinated and carried out within a legal framework that promotes accountability and public trust (Olowo 2025). Communities ought to rely on formal security institutions that are adequately staffed, properly trained and well equipped to prevent crime and respond effectively when it occurs. In such a setting, collaboration between security agencies and local communities strengthens information sharing and reinforces mutual confidence (Egwuaba & Egboh 2024). Citizens feel safe moving within their neighborhoods, engaging in economic activities and resolving disputes through lawful means. The presence of legitimate authority helps ensure that crime control measures respect human rights and due process, while safety outcomes are measured not only by reduced crime rates but also by social stability and confidence in public institutions. Within Nigeria, this type of security arrangement is embedded in constitutional provisions that assign law enforcement duties to recognized agencies, supported by community cooperation and clear oversight mechanisms.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The reality in many parts of Nigeria, particularly in North-Central Nigeria, presents a different picture. Persistent security challenges such as theft, banditry, communal violence and rural crime continue to strain formal security structures (Fabian 2023). In several communities, limited police presence, slow response times and inadequate resources have weakened confidence in state led crime control efforts. As a result, informal security actors, especially vigilante groups, have assumed prominent roles in maintaining order and protecting communities (Agwanwo & Lawal 2025). These groups operate with varying degrees of organization and legitimacy, often drawing authority from local traditions and communal approval rather than formal law. While their presence responds to immediate safety concerns, their activities frequently exist outside established legal and regulatory frameworks. Coordination with formal security agencies is inconsistent, and standards guiding their conduct are often unclear. This situation has created a complex security landscape where informal actors play significant roles without clearly defined boundaries, raising concerns about consistency, accountability and long term effectiveness in crime control (Onah et al. 2021).

The consequences of this situation are far reaching for local safety outcomes and governance. On one hand, reliance on vigilante groups may provide short term relief from crime and create a sense of protection within communities (Adelani 2024). On the other hand, the absence of clear oversight exposes residents to risks of abuse, wrongful punishment and selective enforcement of rules. When informal security actors operate without standardized procedures, disputes can escalate rather than be resolved peacefully, undermining social cohesion. The blurred line between lawful authority and community enforcement can also weaken the legitimacy of the state, as citizens begin to view informal groups as substitutes rather than complements to formal institutions. Over time, this can erode trust in the justice system and normalize extrajudicial

practices. These consequences highlight a critical problem in understanding how informal security actors influence crime control and local safety, and why systematic examination of their role in North Central Nigeria is necessary for informed policy and sustainable security solutions.

Despite the growing body of research on informal security actors and vigilante groups in Nigeria, significant gaps remain that justify further investigation. While Gidado (2025), Olowo (2025), and Agwanwo et al. (2025) explored the roles of non-state actors in crime prevention and community safety across different states, their studies largely focused on specific areas such as Nasarawa, Ondo, and Taraba, leaving limited attention to North-Central Nigeria as a whole. Similarly, Sowale et al. (2025) and Egwuaba et al. (2024) examined the relationships between formal and informal actors and community involvement in anti-kidnapping efforts. However these studies did not comprehensively quantify the direct impact of vigilante groups on local safety outcomes using standardized measures. Doma et al. (2024) and Idowu et al. (2024) highlighted community perceptions and the effectiveness of local policing initiatives, yet their findings were contextually limited to specific rural or urban communities. Adelani (2024) and Iloh et al. (2019) emphasized the complementary role of vigilante groups in crime control, however did not examine correlations between informal security activities and safety outcomes across multiple North-Central states. Moshood et al. (2017) and Adejoh (2013) investigated informal security structures in Ilorin and Lagos, respectively demonstrating reductions in crime, yet these studies lacked broader regional representation and did not focus on the integration of vigilante groups in enhancing safety outcomes. Therefore, there is a need for a systematic, region-wide investigation in North-Central Nigeria to assess how informal security actors, particularly vigilante groups, influence local safety outcomes and contribute to community-level crime control, filling a clear gap in both scope and empirical evidence.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions will serve as a guide for this research work

- What are the roles of informal security actors in mitigating crime in the North-central Nigeria?
- What is the relationship between informal security actors and local safety outcomes in North-central Nigeria?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to examine the influence of informal security actors (Vigilante groups) on local safety outcomes. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- Access the roles of informal security actors in mitigating crime in the North-central Nigeria.
- Understand the relationship between informal security actors and local safety outcomes in North-central Nigeria.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The study tested the following null hypotheses:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between informal security actors and local safety outcomes in North-Central Nigeria.

H<sub>02</sub>: Vigilante groups have no significant relationship with crime control in North Central Nigeria.



## **Conceptual Review**

### **Influence of Informal Security Actors on Local Safety Outcomes**

Informal security actors refer to community-based or non-state security groups such as vigilante organizations and neighborhood watch teams that assist in maintaining order and supporting formal policing within a locality (Adejoh 2013). They can also be defined as non-governmental security providers that contribute to crime prevention and community protection. On the other hand, local safety outcomes refer to the level of security experienced by residents in a community, particularly in terms of reduced crime, fear, and threats to personal and property safety (Lawanson et al., 2013). They can also be understood as observable conditions that reflect how safe and protected people feel and are within a given area.

Informal security actors have become central to the way safety is produced and experienced at the community level, particularly in societies where formal policing structures struggle to meet local demands (Moshood et al., 2017). In Nigeria, these actors include community vigilantes, neighborhood watch groups and other locally organized security formations that emerge from shared identities and collective responsibility. Their closeness to the community gives them an advantage in understanding local security threats, social relationships and movement patterns. This familiarity often enables faster responses to suspicious activities and minor crimes, which can improve residents' perception of safety (Adejoh 2013). In many communities, their presence reassures people and encourages collective participation in maintaining order, thereby strengthening social bonds and mutual trust (Iloh & Nwokedi 2019).

At the same time, the influence of informal security actors on local safety outcomes is shaped by how they operate and the context in which they exist. In areas such as North-Central Nigeria, their activities can contribute to calm and order, but they can also introduce new forms of insecurity. Without clear rules guiding their conduct, some groups apply authority unevenly, favoring certain individuals or groups within the community. This can lead to fear, exclusion and tension, particularly among youths or minority groups. As a result, local safety outcomes are not determined solely by crime reduction but also by how safe people feel in their daily interactions (Sowale & Ukeje 2025). Informal security actors therefore shape safety in complex ways that blend protection with potential risks to fairness and social harmony.

### **Influence of Vigilante Groups on Crime Control**

Vigilante groups play a direct role in crime control by filling gaps left by limited formal law enforcement presence (Agwanwo & Lawal 2025). Their influence is most visible in their deterrent effect, as constant patrols and close monitoring of community spaces reduce opportunities for criminal activity. In many Nigerian communities, vigilante groups regulate movement at night, monitor strangers and respond quickly to theft and property related crimes. Their ability to mobilize rapidly and their strong local networks often lead to early detection of criminal behavior. This has contributed to noticeable reductions in petty crimes such as pickpocketing and petty theft and has strengthened community participation in crime prevention (Egwuaba & Egboh 2024).

However, the effect of vigilante groups on crime control extends beyond deterrence and raises serious concerns about sustainability and justice. Many of these groups operate without formal training in investigation or conflict management, which can result in the use of force and punishment without proper evidence (Adelani 2024). Such practices may suppress crime temporarily but can also encourage retaliation, silence legitimate grievances and weaken

confidence in lawful processes. When vigilante groups dominate crime control, formal institutions may become sidelined, making long term coordination more difficult (Agwanwo & Lawal 2025). This creates a system where crime control depends heavily on local power dynamics rather than consistent legal standards. Consequently, while vigilante groups influence crime control in meaningful ways, their impact remains mixed, combining immediate benefits with deeper challenges for lawful and balanced security management.

### **Review of Existing Empirical Findings**

The empirical literature consistently shows that informal security actors play a significant but complex role in enhancing local safety outcomes across Nigeria and related West African contexts. Studies such as Gidado (2025) and Olowo (2025) provide strong evidence that non-state actors, including vigilante groups and community-based security outfits like the Amotekun Corps, contribute meaningfully to reducing violent crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, banditry, and communal clashes. However, Gidado (2025) further highlights that despite their effectiveness, these actors are constrained by inadequate training, weak institutional recognition, and poor coordination with formal security agencies, which limits their overall efficiency. Similarly, Olowo (2025) identifies structural drivers of insecurity such as unemployment and corruption, suggesting that while informal actors are responsive and locally embedded, they are addressing symptoms rather than root causes of insecurity. These findings collectively suggest that informal security actors are effective complements to formal policing, but their sustainability depends on institutional support and governance reforms.

Further empirical evidence strengthens the argument that vigilante groups and community-based networks significantly enhance crime control, particularly in areas where state security presence is weak. Egwuaba and Egboh (2024) found that vigilante participation in Ajaokuta Local Government Area significantly improved anti-kidnapping efforts, although coordination challenges and limited resources occasionally led to excesses of vigilantism. In a similar vein, Doma et al. (2024) reported that residents perceive vigilante groups as effective in reducing crime and improving feelings of safety, reinforcing their legitimacy at the community level. Adelani (2024) also demonstrates that vigilante groups outperform intelligence gathering mechanisms in influencing security outcomes, although the combination of both strategies yields stronger results when properly integrated. Collectively, these studies indicate that vigilante groups are not only reactive security providers but also key contributors to preventive security through local intelligence and rapid response, though their effectiveness is moderated by institutional capacity and professionalization gaps.

Complementary studies further emphasize the importance of collaboration between formal and informal security structures in achieving improved safety outcomes. Idowu and Usifoh (2024) show that community policing initiatives such as the Atalakpa-Edo State Security Network enhance trust between citizens and law enforcement, optimize police resources, and reduce crime rates, particularly in rural areas. Similarly, Sowale and Ukeje (2025) demonstrate that cooperative relationships between state and non-state actors in border regions help control smuggling, drug trafficking, and illegal migration, although challenges such as human trafficking persist. These findings suggest that synergy between formal and informal actors are essential for effective security governance, particularly in complex and porous environments. However, the persistence of coordination gaps indicates that such collaboration remains uneven and context dependent, limiting its full potential.

Earlier foundational studies also reinforce the relevance of informal security actors in internal security management, while highlighting long-standing concerns about regulation and legality. Iloh and Nwokedi (2019) argue that vigilante groups have emerged as community responses to rising criminality and weak state capacity, complementing rather than replacing formal security institutions. Moshood et al. (2017) similarly found that informal security structures in Ilorin significantly reduced crime rates, emerging as a response to weaknesses in formal policing. However, Adejoh (2013) cautions that while registered community-based patrols enhance neighborhood safety and cooperate effectively with police, unregulated groups sometimes engage in illegal practices. Taken together, the empirical evidence presents a converging view that informal security actors significantly improve local safety outcomes and crime control, but their effectiveness is shaped by issues of regulation, coordination, capacity, and institutional integration.

### **Theoretical Framework and Development of Research Hypothesis**

Plural Policing Theory emerged from scholarly efforts to explain changing patterns of security provision in modern societies, particularly from the late twentieth century when state centered models of policing began to face growing limitations (Jones & Newburn 2006). The theory is widely associated with the works of Ian Loader and Neil Walker, whose writings in the late 1990s and early 2000s examined how policing functions were increasingly shared among multiple actors beyond the formal police (Loader 2017). Around 1997, their contributions highlighted the reality that security delivery had expanded to include private firms, community groups and informal actors operating alongside state institutions. This theoretical position developed in response to social changes such as urbanization, rising crime concerns and declining confidence in exclusive state control of policing. Plural Policing Theory therefore originated as a way to describe and analyze the growing diversity of actors involved in maintaining order and safety within societies (Boels & Verhage 2016).

The main postulations of Plural Policing Theory rest on the idea that policing is no longer the sole responsibility of the state (Rogers 2016). The theory argues that security is produced through the combined efforts of public, private and community based actors, each playing different roles depending on context. It recognizes that these actors operate with varying sources of authority, ranging from legal mandates to social acceptance and economic power. According to the theory, effective policing involves cooperation, negotiation and sometimes competition among these actors (Jones & Newburn 2006). It also emphasizes that policing outcomes are shaped by how responsibilities are distributed and coordinated. Rather than viewing informal or non-state actors as abnormal or temporary, the theory presents them as permanent features of contemporary security systems. Accountability, regulation and legitimacy are seen as critical issues within this arrangement, as the involvement of multiple actors can either strengthen or weaken public trust depending on how they function (Boels & Verhage 2016).

Plural Policing Theory explains the shift from state monopoly over policing to a system where security is delivered by a mix of state, private, and community actors (Rogers 2016), but it appears to be normalizing the expansion of non-state security providers without adequately addressing issues of inequality and accountability. While Loader and Walker's framework highlights cooperation among diverse actors, critics argue that it underestimates the risks of fragmented authority, inconsistent enforcement standards, and the potential abuse of power by informal or private security groups that may lack formal oversight (Loader & Walker 2001).

Competing perspectives maintain that security should remain primarily a public good under democratic control, warning that excessive reliance on plural arrangements can weaken legitimacy and public trust in law enforcement (Myslin 2026). Additionally, the theory appears limited in its ability to explain contexts where informal actors operate outside legal frameworks, sometimes exacerbating violence rather than reducing it, especially in developing countries where regulation is weak.

However, Plural Policing Theory is highly relevant to the study of informal security actors and vigilante groups in North Central Nigeria. The theory provides a useful framework for understanding how vigilante groups operate alongside formal security agencies in responding to local crime and safety concerns. It explains why communities turn to informal actors when state policing is limited and how these groups become integrated into everyday security practices. By viewing security as a shared responsibility, the theory helps explain the influence of vigilante groups on local safety outcomes and crime control without treating them as isolated or illegal anomalies. It also draws attention to issues of coordination, authority and accountability that shape the effectiveness of these groups. Through this lens, the study can better examine how informal security actors fit into Nigeria's broader policing environment and how their actions affect both safety and governance at the community level.

### Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the influence of informal security actors on local safety outcomes, with particular focus on the role of vigilante groups in crime control in North-Central Nigeria. The cross-sectional design is appropriate for collecting data from a wide range of respondents at a single point in time, allowing the study to capture current perceptions and experiences regarding the contributions of informal security actors and vigilante groups to community safety (Nworie et al. 2023; Meshack et al. 2022). By collecting quantitative data from participants, the design enables the study to assess the relationship between the presence and activities of informal security actors and local safety outcomes, as well as the impact of vigilante groups on crime control within the communities.

The population for this study comprises all informal security actors, including vigilante group members, operating in North-Central Nigeria. Since no official records provide the exact population size of informal security actors, the population was considered effectively infinite. Therefore, Cochran's formula for infinite populations was applied to determine the minimum sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{(Z)^2 \times p \times q}{(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

Z = standard normal deviation (1.96 for 95% confidence level)

p = estimated proportion of the population with the characteristic (assumed to be 0.5)

q=1-p

e = margin of error (0.05)

Substituting the values:



$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times .5 \times .5}{(.05)^2}$$

$$n = 384$$

A minimum of 384 respondents was thus targeted for the study. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants were active informal security actors or members of vigilante groups engaged in community safety activities. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Very Low Extent” to “Very High Extent.” The questionnaire focused on the roles of informal security actors, frequency and nature of vigilante activities, perceived contributions to crime prevention, and their influence on local safety outcomes. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires across Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, and Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) in North-Central Nigeria.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in criminology and security studies, and a pilot study involving 20 respondents was conducted in a community outside the study area. Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach’s Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.918, indicating high reliability. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents’ views, while Spearman’s rank-order correlation was employed to test the hypotheses. Hypothesis testing was conducted at a 5% significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), with p-values below this threshold considered statistically significant. This analytical approach enabled the study to determine the relationship between informal security actors and local safety outcomes, and the effect of vigilante groups on crime control in North-Central Nigeria.

## Data Analysis

### Descriptive Analysis

**Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics**

| S/N | Informal Security Actors                                                                           | VLE | LE | N  | HE  | VHE | Mean |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|----|-----|-----|------|
| 1   | Informal security actors contribute to maintaining safety in the community.                        | 8   | 30 | 52 | 185 | 109 | 3.93 |
| 2   | Informal security actors collaborate with formal security agencies to address security challenges. | 10  | 19 | 50 | 145 | 160 | 4.11 |
| 3   | Informal security actors help resolve minor conflicts within the community.                        | 63  | 62 | –  | 221 | 38  | 3.28 |
| 4   | Informal security actors provide useful information to prevent crime.                              | 32  | 6  | 37 | 110 | 199 | 4.14 |
| S/N | Local Safety Outcomes                                                                              | VLE | LE | N  | HE  | VHE | Mean |
| 5   | Local safety outcomes in the community have improved due to active security measures.              | 48  | 68 | –  | 224 | 44  | 3.39 |
| 6   | Residents feel safer in areas where informal security actors are active.                           | 44  | –  | 23 | 75  | 242 | 4.23 |
| 7   | Incidence of petty crimes has decreased in areas with strong local security presence.              | 27  | –  | 11 | 231 | 115 | 4.06 |
| 8   | Community members trust the efforts of informal security actors to maintain safety.                | 57  | 36 | –  | 196 | 95  | 3.61 |

| S/N | Vigilante Groups Activities                                                                | VLE | LE | N  | HE  | VHE | Mean |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|----|-----|-----|------|
| 9   | Vigilante groups respond promptly to security threats in the community.                    | 39  | –  | 50 | 195 | 100 | 3.93 |
| 10  | Vigilante group activities help prevent serious crimes like robbery and kidnapping.        | 27  | –  | 36 | 164 | 157 | 4.17 |
| 11  | Vigilante groups engage residents in monitoring and reporting suspicious activities.       | 48  | 68 | –  | 224 | 44  | 3.39 |
| 12  | Vigilante groups operate within legal and ethical guidelines while controlling crime.      | 44  | –  | 23 | 75  | 242 | 4.23 |
| S/N | Crime Control Efforts                                                                      | VLE | LE | N  | HE  | VHE | Mean |
| 13  | Crime control efforts in the community have led to reduced criminal incidents.             | 56  | 62 | –  | 219 | 47  | 3.36 |
| 14  | Coordination between formal security forces and informal actors strengthens crime control. | 42  | –  | 24 | 83  | 235 | 4.22 |
| 15  | Crime prevention initiatives effectively protect lives and properties in the community.    | 28  | –  | 11 | 235 | 110 | 4.04 |
| 16  | Crime control measures improve residents' confidence in community safety.                  | 63  | 36 | –  | 189 | 96  | 3.57 |

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 4.1 presents descriptive statistics for the study variables, showing how respondents rated the activities and impact of informal security actors, vigilante groups, and crime control efforts in North-Central Nigeria. For the first item on informal security actors contributing to maintaining safety in the community, most respondents indicated a high extent, with 185 selecting high and 109 very high, leading to a mean of 3.93. This suggests that community members recognize the role of informal actors in enhancing local safety. Collaboration with formal security agencies received even stronger support, with 145 high and 160 very high, producing a mean of 4.11, indicating that coordination is perceived as effective. Helping resolve minor conflicts showed a lower frequency of strong agreement, with 221 high but only 38 very high and a notable 63 very low and 62 low responses, resulting in a mean of 3.28, suggesting that this function is less consistently observed. The provision of useful information to prevent crime had strong positive responses, particularly very high at 199, giving a mean of 4.14, showing significant community reliance on informal actors for intelligence.

Regarding local safety outcomes, the improvement of safety due to active security measures recorded 224 high and 44 very high responses, with a mean of 3.39, indicating moderate agreement. Residents feeling safer in areas with active informal security actors were strongly supported, with 242 very high responses and a mean of 4.23. The decrease in petty crimes due to a strong local security presence had 231 high and 115 very high responses, resulting in a mean of 4.06, highlighting a notable impact on minor criminal activity. Trust in informal security actors was moderately positive, with 196 high and 95 very high responses and a mean of 3.61, showing room for further improvement in community confidence.

For vigilante group activities, prompt response to security threats had a mean of 3.93, with 195 high and 100 very high responses, indicating strong perceived responsiveness. Their role in preventing serious crimes like robbery and kidnapping received high approval, with 164 high and 157 very high responses, leading to a mean of 4.17. Engagement of residents in monitoring

suspicious activities had a mean of 3.39, reflecting moderate involvement, as 224 indicated high but only 44 very high. Operating within legal and ethical guidelines was strongly recognized, with 75 high and 242 very high responses, producing a mean of 4.23.

Finally, crime control efforts showed moderate to strong perceptions. Reduced criminal incidents had a mean of 3.36, with 219 high responses but 56 very low and 62 low, suggesting uneven effectiveness. Coordination between formal security forces and informal actors was rated highly, with 235 very high responses and a mean of 4.22. The effectiveness of crime prevention initiatives in protecting lives and properties had a mean of 4.04, supported by 235 high and 110 very high responses. Improving residents' confidence in safety recorded a mean of 3.57, with 189 high and 96 very high responses, indicating a generally positive but slightly varied perception among respondents.

### Test of Hypotheses

***H<sub>01</sub>*: There is a significant positive relationship between informal security actors and local safety outcomes in North-Central Nigeria.**

**Table 4.2 Test of Hypothesis I**

| Correlations                                                 |                          |                         |                          |                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
|                                                              |                          |                         | Informal Security Actors | Local Safety Outcomes |
| Spearman's rho                                               | Informal Security Actors | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000                    | .469**                |
|                                                              |                          | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .                        | .000                  |
|                                                              |                          | N                       | 384                      | 384                   |
|                                                              | Local Safety Outcomes    | Correlation Coefficient | .469**                   | 1.000                 |
|                                                              |                          | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .000                     | .                     |
|                                                              |                          | N                       | 384                      | 384                   |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). |                          |                         |                          |                       |

Source: SPSS V. 26 (2025)

In Table 4.2, the Spearman's rank-order correlation between informal security actors and local safety outcomes is presented. The correlation coefficient ( $\rho = 0.469$ ) indicates a positive association, meaning that as the activities of informal security actors increase, local safety outcomes tend to improve. The significance value ( $p = 0.000$ ) shows that this association is statistically significant at the 5% level, suggesting that the observed pattern is unlikely due to chance. Although the correlation is moderate, it implies that informal security actors have a notable but not overwhelming marginal influence on local safety within communities in North-Central Nigeria.

**H<sub>a2</sub>: Vigilante groups have a significant positive relationship with crime control in North Central Nigeria.**

**Table 4.3 Test of Hypothesis II**

| Correlations   |                             |                         |                             |                       |
|----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
|                |                             |                         | Vigilante Groups Activities | Crime Control Efforts |
| Spearman's rho | Vigilante Groups Activities | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000                       | .478**                |
|                |                             | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .                           | .000                  |
|                |                             | N                       | 384                         | 384                   |
|                | Crime Control Efforts       | Correlation Coefficient | .478**                      | 1.000                 |
|                |                             | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .000                        | .                     |
|                |                             | N                       | 384                         | 384                   |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS V. 26 (2025)

Table 4.3 presents the Spearman's rank-order correlation for vigilante groups and crime control efforts. The correlation coefficient ( $\rho = 0.478$ ) indicates a positive association, showing that higher levels of vigilante group activity correspond to greater effectiveness in crime control. The p-value of 0.000 indicates that this association is significant at the 5% level, confirming that the relationship is statistically reliable. The coefficient suggests a moderate marginal influence, meaning that vigilante group activities contribute meaningfully to crime control, but other factors may also play a role in shaping community safety outcomes.

### Discussion of Findings

The results showing that informal security actors significantly improve local safety outcomes in North-Central Nigeria can be understood in light of the ways these actors complement formal security arrangements and provide community-centered interventions. Informal actors are often embedded within the communities they serve which allows them to detect early signs of criminal activity and provide timely information, mediate conflicts, and maintain order in ways formal security forces may not achieve due to resource constraints or limited local presence. This finding aligns with Gidado (2025), who emphasized the role of non-violent non-state actors in reducing violent crimes in Nasarawa State, and Agwanwo et al. (2025), who highlighted how vigilantes and neighborhood watch groups in Taraba State enhance community safety through local knowledge and rapid response. Similarly, Olowo (2025) found that community-based security outfits such as Amotekun strengthen local intelligence and responsiveness, while Doma et al. (2024) reported that communities perceive vigilante groups as increasing their sense of security. The positive and significant correlation in this study suggests that when informal security actors are actively engaged, they reinforce public confidence and contribute to measurable improvements in safety outcomes, indicating that their presence is not merely symbolic but functionally beneficial. Challenges noted in prior studies, such as limited training or poor recognition, may moderate their effectiveness, yet the statistical evidence here confirms their tangible contribution to local security. The finding aligns with Plural Policing Theory, which argues that security is no longer the sole responsibility of the state but is shared among multiple actors, including informal groups. The positive and significant relationship shows that informal security actors and vigilante groups function effectively within this plural security arrangement by contributing to improved local safety outcomes and crime control.

Major findings shows that vigilante group activities positively affect crime control in North-Central Nigeria reflects their operational role in responding to security threats, preventing serious



offenses, and engaging residents in surveillance and reporting. Vigilante groups often fill gaps left by formal security institutions, especially in areas with high crime rates or insufficient police presence, by providing rapid interventions and monitoring community activities. This aligns with Egwuaba and Egboh (2024), who found that community participation via vigilante groups enhances anti-kidnapping efforts in Kogi State, and Adelan (2024), who observed that vigilante activities substantially improve security outcomes beyond intelligence gathering. Similarly, Iloh and Nwokedi (2019) and Moshood et al. (2017) documented that informal security actors complement state security measures, reducing crime where formal enforcement is limited. The strong and significant positive correlation observed in this study suggests that active vigilante operations directly contribute to crime reduction, reinforcing the notion that community-led security interventions can be both practical and effective when integrated with local awareness, rapid response mechanisms, and collaboration with formal authorities. This result supports Plural Policing Theory by confirming that non-state actors are legitimate and active contributors to security provision alongside formal institutions. It also demonstrates that the interaction of multiple policing actors enhances overall security performance, especially in contexts where state policing capacity is limited.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The results of this study suggest that informal security actors and vigilante groups play a substantial role in shaping community safety and crime management in North-Central Nigeria, highlighting the importance of local participation in maintaining security. The positive associations observed indicate that community-based interventions complement formal security arrangements, creating an environment where residents feel more protected and engaged in safety initiatives. This demonstrates that the presence of organized local actors fosters a sense of collective responsibility, enhancing trust between community members and those involved in security activities. It also points to the potential for informal mechanisms to fill gaps left by formal policing, especially in areas where official security agencies may be stretched thin or less accessible. The findings further reflect that communities recognize and respond to proactive measures, suggesting that social cohesion and local knowledge are critical in identifying and addressing security threats. The significant correlations also highlight the effectiveness of structured coordination within communities, showing that even non-state actors can contribute measurably to reducing crime and promoting order. Beyond the immediate reduction of crime, these results indicate that such participation strengthens overall societal resilience, as communities are able to respond collectively to emerging threats. Additionally, the study highlights the broader role of local actors in fostering compliance with safety norms, monitoring potential risks, and facilitating communication between residents and formal security agencies. The data suggest that local safety outcomes are not solely dependent on state interventions but are substantially influenced by the organized activities and engagement of informal actors, which contributes to an overall perception of enhanced security. This highlights the dynamic nature of community-based security efforts and the capacity of local initiatives to shape both the lived experiences of residents and the broader patterns of crime prevention within the region.

Based on the first finding, it is recommended that local government authorities in North-Central Nigeria actively integrate informal security actors into community safety planning and coordination. By providing structured platforms for communication, training, and recognition, government agencies can enhance the effectiveness of these actors in maintaining public safety,

ensuring their efforts are coordinated with formal security structures and aligned with legal and ethical standards.

For the second finding, it is recommended that the leadership of vigilante groups collaborate more closely with the Nigerian Police Force and other formal security agencies to expand organized patrols, intelligence sharing, and crime monitoring. This collaboration can strengthen crime control efforts, improve rapid response to security threats, and build public confidence in both formal and informal mechanisms of maintaining law and order.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to the existing literature on informal security actors and vigilante groups in Nigeria by offering deeper theoretical and empirical insights beyond mere geographical expansion. Rather than limiting analysis to state-specific experiences, the study situates vigilante activities within the broader framework of plural policing and informal governance, thereby demonstrating how non-state security providers interact with formal policing structures to shape local safety outcomes in North-Central Nigeria. In doing so, it advances understanding of how security governance is negotiated in contexts where state capacity is uneven and community-based actors become central to crime control.

A key contribution of this study lies in its engagement with plural policing discourse. It provides empirical evidence on how vigilante groups complement, substitute, or sometimes overlap with formal security institutions, showing that their effectiveness is not uniform but shaped by institutional collaboration, community legitimacy, and resource availability. This moves the discussion beyond descriptive accounts of vigilante presence to a more analytical explanation of the conditions under which informal security actors enhance or undermine local safety outcomes.

Methodologically, the study strengthens the literature by applying standardized quantitative measures to assess the relationship between vigilante group activities and local safety outcomes across multiple contexts. This allows for more systematic comparison and pattern identification than earlier studies that relied largely on qualitative narratives or localized case studies. The findings therefore contribute more robust empirical evidence on the measurable impact of informal security arrangements, offering a stronger basis for policy and academic generalization within similar governance settings.

Empirically, the study identifies broader regional patterns that have not been sufficiently captured in earlier localized research. It shows that the effectiveness of vigilante groups varies not simply by location, but by the degree of integration with community structures and formal policing agencies. This insight extends informal governance scholarship by highlighting that outcomes are shaped more by institutional relationships and operational coordination than by geography alone.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study faced some limitations that may have affected the findings. Data were collected only from informal security actors who were available and willing to participate, which might not fully represent all such actors in North-Central Nigeria. Some respondents may have given answers that reflected what they thought was expected rather than their actual experiences. The study also relied on self-reported information, which can be influenced by memory or personal

bias. Additionally, the cross-sectional design captured data at a single point in time, making it difficult to determine changes in safety outcomes or crime control over longer periods.

### **Suggestion for Further Studies**

Future studies could expand the research by including more states and a larger, more diverse sample of informal security actors. Researchers could also use interviews, observations, and official crime records to gather more detailed and accurate data. Longitudinal studies that track safety outcomes over time would help to understand how the activities of vigilante groups and other informal actors change and influence crime control. Comparative studies between regions could reveal differences in effectiveness and identify best practices for improving local safety.

### **References**

- Adejoh, P. E. (2013). *Informal security structures and community crime control in Lagos state, Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Adelani, S. (2024). Intelligence gathering and the role of Vigilante group in combating insecurity in Nigeria. *International Journal of Conflict and Security Management*, 11(2), 122-143.
- Agwanwo, D. E., & Lawal, R. (2025). Non-state security actors and security governance in Taraba State: *Humanities*, 5(2), 41-48.
- Aliyu, D. A., Ahmed, A., & Mustapha, D. H. (2024). An assessment of community-based security strategies in combating armed banditry in Jibia Local Government, Katsina State, Nigeria. *Fuoye Journal Of Criminology And Security Studies*, 3(1).
- Boels, D., & Verhage, A. (2016). Plural policing: A state-of-the-art review. *Policing: an international journal of police strategies & management*: 39(1), 2-18.
- Doma, J. A., Isikalu, A. A., Irmiya, U. M., & Osah, G. (2024). The fragmentation of public power: non-state security actors and community security in rural Southwest Nigeria. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 42(4), 596-611.
- Egwuaba, E. U., & Egboh, F. A. (2024). Implications of community involvement in combating kidnapping in Ajaokuta Local Government Area of Kogi State, North-Central Nigeria *GVU Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 10(1), 100–115.
- Eliakim, A. (2024). A comprehensive analysis of the Nigeria police force's inability to curtail crime and conflict: causative factors and prospects for reform. *International Journal of Law, Politics and Humanities Research*, 4(6)
- Fabian, H. (2023). Globalization and insecurity in north central Nigeria: an evaluation of farmer-herders conflict and national security in Nigeria. *Journal of Advance Research in Business, Management and Accounting* (ISSN: 2456-3544), 9(3), 16-26.
- Gidado, L. A. (2025). Effectiveness of non-state actors in crime prevention in Nasarawa State, Nigeria: *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Reviews*, 15(1), 99–107.
- Idowu, O. O., & Usifoh, D. E. U. (2024). Community policing: “Atalakpa” (Edo State Security Network) and the Management of Crime and Internal Security in Edo State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Stability and Development*, 16(2), 337-370.
- Iloh, E. C., & Nwokedi, M. E. (2019). Non State actors and internal security management in Nigeria: The case of vigilante groups. In *Internal Security Management in Nigeria: Perspectives, Challenges and Lessons* (pp. 523-545). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Jones, T., & Newburn, T. (2006). Understanding plural policing: In *Plural policing* (pp. 1-11) Routledge

- Lawanson, T., Oluwole, S., & Omole, F. (2013). Achieving safety and security in Nigerian cities: matters arising: *Emerging issues in Urban planning and development*, 1.
- Loader, I. (2017) Policing, securitization and democratization in Europe: In *Crime and security* (pp. 423-451) Routledge
- Loader, I., & Walker, N. (2001). Policing as a public good: Reconstituting the connections between policing and the state *Theoretical criminology*, 5(1), 9-35
- Meshack, A., Orji, M. G., Aggreh, M. S. & Nworie, G. O. (2022). Achieving sustainable development agenda of 2030: the role of accountants: *Britain International of Humanities and Social Sciences (BIOHS) Journal*, 4(3), 543-556
- Modise, J. M. (2023). Community policing strategies include community patrols, neighborhood watch and community policing. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 8(7), 3467-3472
- Mohammed, I. S., & Zango, A. A. S. (2024). The middle belt of Nigeria: estrangement and controversies. *Journal of Political Discourse*, 2(2), 1
- Moshood, I., Amali, S. E., Omolabak, A. B., & Olabisi, Y. R. (2017), Informal security structures and crime control and prevention in Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria. *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology*, 30(5), 170-192.
- Myslín, J. (2026). Public trust as the cornerstone of national security policy: legitimacy, governance, and risk management. *Crisis and Resilience*, 2(1), 17-27.
- Nworie, G. O., Okafor, T. G. & Mba, I.C. (2023) financial performance of public companies in Anambra state amidst the scourges of covid-19 pandemic outbreak: *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 7(1), 1215 – 1228.
- Ojeizele, M. O. (2022). Insecurity and state: the consequential surge of informal security apparatus in Nigeria. *Fuoye Journal of Criminology and Security Studies*, 1(2)
- Olaniyan, A., & Omotola, S. (2015). Ethnic crises and national security in Nigeria: *Defense & Security Analysis*, 31(4), 303-318.
- Olowo, O. O. (2025). Community security responses to insecurity in Ondo state, Nigeria: an assessment of causes, effects, and the role of Amotekun and other security agencies. *EduLaw: Journal of Islamic Law and Jurisprudence*, 7(2), 69-81.
- Onah, V. C., Ugba, I. U., Uzodima, A. P. Q., & Igoli, T. (2021), State security failures and the formation of informal zonal security networks in Nigeria. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy*, 11(2)
- Rogers, C. (2016). *Plural policing: Theory and practice*. Policy Press
- Sowale, A. (2025). State and Non-State Security Actors in the Complex Borderlands Between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. *African Security*, 1-28.
- Sowale, A., & Ukeje, C. (2025). Hybrid security in Nigeria–Benin borderlands: Formal and informal security actors’ collaboration and implication for cross-border security (2010–2023). *African Security Review*, 34(2), 134-151.
- Wambai, H. A., Tijani, H. I., & Iroye, S. O. (2024) Vigilante groups and management of security in Nigeria’s Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. *WAUU Journal of International Affairs and Contemporary Studies*, 4(1), 121-196.