



THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY VIGILANTE GROUPS IN CURBING KIDNAPPING IN SOUTHERN TARABA SENATORIAL DISTRICT



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Abstract

Kidnapping has emerged as one of the most persistent security challenges in contemporary Nigeria, with the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State experiencing a disturbing rise in incidents. This study evaluated the role of community vigilante groups in combating kidnapping in the study area. A cross-sectional survey design was used based on Broken Window Theory and Routine Activity Theory. A sample size of 410 respondents was selected from vigilante groups in Wukari, Takum and Ibi Local Government Areas using the Cochran formula with stratified random sampling. A mixed methods approach was used: structured questionnaires (5-point Likert scale) and key informant interviews of five vigilante leaders. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS to calculate mean scores, standard deviations, and ordinal logistic regression at $p < 0.05$. The findings show that vigilante groups play important roles, community policing (Mean=3.46, SD=1.42), neighbourhood watch (Mean=3.44, SD=1.41), crime prevention through patrolling (Mean=3.24, SD=1.47), and emergency response (Mean=3.20, SD=1.47). Ordinal logistic regression found a statistically significant positive association between vigilante roles and perceptions of community security ($p < 0.05$, Odds Ratio=2.12). However, 57% of respondents said their security was not fully guaranteed, even with vigilante presence, indicating a key effectiveness gap. Vigilante groups are facing challenges of inadequate funding (Mean=3.34, SD=1.45), lack of formal training (Mean=3.34, SD=1.40) and inadequate government support (Mean=3.62, SD=1.57). The study concludes that although vigilante groups are important actors in preventing kidnapping, their potential is severely limited by resource constraints and weak institutional integration. Recommendations include formalisation of vigilante groups, sustained funding, capacity building programmes, and enhanced collaboration with state security agencies.

Keywords: Vigilante groups, Kidnapping, Community Security, Broken window theory, Routine activity theory

Introduction

Insecurity has become a major national problem in contemporary Nigerian society with adverse effects on socioeconomic development and the collective psyche of the citizenry. Among the

numerous security threats facing Nigeria, kidnapping has taken a particularly alarming dimension, which has generated widespread anxiety and fear (Okorie-Ajah et al., 2018). The phenomenon, which was mostly confined to the oil-rich Niger Delta region during the militancy era, has since diffused across the country to engulf the southeast, north-central and north-eastern zones (Fage & Alabi, 2017). This geographic expansion is not merely a statistical increase in crime, but a complete breakdown in the social contract between the state and its citizens.

What is happening in Nigeria today has been described by scholars as the “democratization of insecurity” (SB Morgen, 2020). Kidnapping incidents have risen in almost all the states with the highest increases recorded in Kaduna, Rivers, Katsina, Zamfara and Taraba. A notable epicentre has become the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State consisting of Wukari, Takum, Donga, Ibi and Ussa Local Government Areas. The high profile case of Wadume, a notorious kidnapping kingpin, alias Hamisu Bala, arrested in Ibi in August 2019, dramatically underscored the severity of the problem. Wadume’s escape from police custody with the alleged complicity of military personnel, and eventual re-arrest and conviction exposed deep rot within security apparatuses and the audacity of criminal networks (Premium News, 2022).

With the rise of criminal activities and a failing formal law enforcement, vigilante group have emerged globally as an alternative form of social protection (Honorine, 2013). Vigilantism is often a symptom of state weakness, political instability and social injustice across Africa (Mawson, 2017). In Nigeria, groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the North-East and the Bakassi Boys in the Southeast have become part of the security provision. As Baker (2008) noted, policing in Africa is not the exclusive province of the state police; formal and informal agencies co-exist, often filling gaps the state cannot or will not cover. These non-state policing mechanisms are valuable assets for enhancing safety, especially in poor, rural communities systematically excluded from formal security provision.

This is in contrast with the growing attention by scholars on vigilante groups in other contexts in Nigeria (Stephen et al., 2022; Yusuf & Abdullahi, 2020; Chikwendu et al., 2016). The Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State has been conspicuously under-researched. This gap is striking, given the region’s vulnerability to kidnapping and the active presence of community vigilantes. This study therefore sought to fill this gap by systematically assessing the roles of vigilante groups in fighting kidnapping in this particular geo-political space. The study particularly looked into the factors responsible for kidnapping, the roles played by vigilante groups, the challenges they face and strategies to strengthen security networks.

Review of Literature

Conceptualising Kidnapping and Vigilance

Kidnapping is legally and sociologically defined as a forcible seizure, unlawful detention and carrying away of a person against his or her will, usually for ransom or other criminal purposes (Inyang & Abraham, 2013; Okoli & Agada, 2014). Kidnapping in Nigeria has gone from an infrequent occurrence to a well-oiled criminal industry with cross-state networks and corrupt officials. The crime leaves victims not only physically and psychologically traumatised but also places huge economic burdens on families, communities and the nation as a whole.

Vigilantism, on the other hand, is organised extra-legal action by ordinary citizens to enforce norms and maintain order in the perceived absence of effective state action (Abrahams, 2003). Vigilante groups range in structure, ideology and methods from neighbourhood watch

associations to ethnic militias. Some scholars praise vigilantism as resilience of the community, while others warn of human rights violations, extra-judicial killings, and the erosion of the rule of law (Lentz, 2014).

Causes of Kidnapping in Nigeria

There are many factors identified in the literature that drive kidnapping in Nigeria. Economic drivers, such as poverty, youth unemployment and income inequality, are frequently mentioned (Yusuf & Abdullahi, 2020; Ngwama, 2014). If people can't make a living through legal means then crime is a rational, if unfortunate, alternative. Political drivers include corruption, weak governance and proliferation of small arms following decades of electoral violence and communal conflicts (Hazen & Horner, 2007). Social drivers are erosion of traditional values, glamorisation of quick wealth in popular culture, and breakdown of family and community surveillance mechanisms (Abdulkabir, 2017). Finally, institutional drivers such as police corruption, underfunding of security agencies and impunity for wealthy criminals create a permissive environment for kidnapping to thrive.

Vigilante Groups as Security Actors

Several contexts have documented the role of vigilante groups in Nigerian security governance. In the North-East, the CJTF (Civilian Joint Task Force) has become a valuable partner to the military in the fight against Boko Haram, providing local intelligence and conducting patrols (Eke, 2015). In the Southeast, the Bakassi Boys were praised for their drastic reduction of armed robbery in Aba and Onitsha, but their brutal methods were condemned internationally (Laurent, 2008). In the North-West and North-Central, groups such as the Yan Bula in Kaduna State have been successful in curbing kidnapping and banditry (Tukur et al., 2020).

However, the groups are still challenged by lack of legal recognition, lack of adequate funding, lack of formal training, susceptibility to political manipulation, and a tendency for extra-judicial violence (Jack-Rabin et al., 2023; International Crisis Group, 2022). The present study places itself in this literature with a focus on a region that has been largely ignored: Southern Taraba.

Theoretical Grounding

This study is based on two criminological theories of Broken window theory and Routine activity theory. Together these offer a potent analytical lens for understanding not only the aetiology of kidnapping but also the potential effectiveness of community based responses.

Theory of Broken Windows

The Broken Window Theory, popularised by Wilson and Kelling in their seminal 1982 article in *The Atlantic Monthly*, argues that visible signs of disorder and neglect such as broken windows, graffiti, litter, and abandoned properties send powerful signals to potential offenders that neither the police nor local residents are committed to maintaining community order (Giddens, 2004). If small crimes are ignored, the message is that anything goes. Larger crimes like robbery, assault and kidnapping are encouraged. Hence the theory supports proactive maintenance of public order as a crime prevention strategy.

The Broken Window Theory is particularly telling in the case of Southern Taraba. The area bears the visible marks of state neglect: poor roads, few streetlights, non-existent or unresponsive police stations and widespread poverty. These conditions create an environment for kidnappers to operate with impunity. "In effect, by being visible and patrolling the community, vigilante

groups can act as ‘broken window fixers’, sending out a counter-signal that disorder will not be tolerated. However, within the Broken Window Theory, it is crucial to distinguish between visible signs of disorder (which vigilantes can address) and structural ‘broken windows’ such as poverty, unemployment, and state neglect. While vigilantes provide immediate order maintenance, the government remains solely responsible for fixing these structural broken windows. Without state-led interventions to address economic deprivation and institutional failure, vigilante actions can only offer temporary relief rather than sustainable security.

Routine Activity Theory

A complementary explanation is given by Cohen and Felson’s (1979) Routine Activity Theory. It states that crime occurs when three elements meet in time and space: a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian. Crime is not just a function of criminal disposition but a product of routine patterns of daily life in which these factors are brought together (Felson & Cohen, 1998).

When this theory is applied to Southern Taraba, the convergence of factors emerges: the large population of unemployed youths (motivated offenders), rural farmers and traders (suitable targets) moving along predictable routes and often unguarded, and the weak or absent state police (lack of capable guardianship). Within the Routine Activity Theory framework, vigilante groups function explicitly as ‘Capable Guardians’, informal but active agents who increase the perceived risk of detection and apprehension for potential kidnappers. Their patrols and intelligence networks disrupt the routine convergence of offenders and targets. However, the theory also notes that if vigilantes are poorly equipped or lack legitimacy, they may fail as capable guardians, leaving the routine activity vectors undisturbed.

Methodology

This study adopt a cross-sectional survey design. This design is suitable, as it allows for the collection of data from many respondents at a given time, providing a snapshot of the opinions and behaviours without the cost and complexity of longitudinal tracking (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Taraba South Senatorial District is one of the three senatorial districts of Taraba State. It comprises five Local Government Areas namely Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa and Wukari. The total projected population of these LGAs is 1,071,500 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The area is largely rural with agriculture (cultivation, fishing and livestock rearing) being the main occupation. It has an ethnically mixed population of the Jukun, Kuteb, Ichen, Chamba, Tiv and others. Increasing numbers of kidnappings have occurred in recent years in the area, especially on the main roads and in agricultural areas.

Sampling and Sample Size

The study population comprised all members of community vigilante groups in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State, which has a projected population of 1,071,500 (NBS, 2022). Because the population is large and heterogeneous across five Local Government Areas (Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, Wukari), a stratified random sampling technique was employed. The sample size was determined using the Cochran formula for cross-sectional studies:

$$n_0 = Z^2pq / e^2$$

Where:

$Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level)
 $p = 0.5$ (estimated proportion of vigilante effectiveness, maximising variance)
 $q = 1 - p = 0.5$
 $e = 0.05$ (margin of error)

Calculation:

$$n_0 = (1.96)^2 \times (0.5)(0.5) / (0.05)^2 = 3.8416 \times 0.25 / 0.0025 = 384.16 \approx 384$$

To account for design effect and anticipated non-response, the sample was inflated by 10%, giving a target of 422 respondents. Three LGAs (Wukari, Takum, Ibi) were purposively selected due to their historically high kidnapping rates. Proportional allocation was then applied based on estimated vigilante membership size in each LGA. Within each LGA, simple random sampling was used to select individual vigilante members. A total of 410 valid questionnaires were retrieved, representing a 97% response rate.

Data Collection Instruments

Two instruments were used. First, a structured questionnaire with 29 items divided into sections on socio-demographics, roles of vigilante groups, factors responsible for kidnapping, challenges, and suggested solutions. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). Second, a key informant interview guide was used to conduct in-depth interviews with five vigilante leaders (chairmen, secretaries, and patrol commanders). The questionnaire was face-validated by the research supervisor and reliability tested using the test-retest method, yielding a correlation coefficient of 0.82.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were entered into SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation) were computed. The criterion mean for agreement was set at 2.5. Ordinal logistic regression was used to test the two hypotheses at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed, coded thematically, and used to triangulate quantitative findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board of Federal University Wukari. All participants provided informed consent after being fully briefed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. No identifying information was recorded, and data were stored securely. No incentives were offered to avoid coercion.

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=410)**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender:	Male	310	75.6
	Female	100	24.4
Age:	18 – 25	80	19.5
	26 – 30	200	48.8
	31 – 40	90	22.0
	41+	40	9.8
Marital status:	Married	250	61.0
	Single	160	39.0
Religion:	Christian	220	53.7
	Muslim	190	46.3
Occupation:	Farmer	120	29.3
	Trader	100	24.4
	Civil Servant	80	19.5
	Others	110	26.8
Education:	No formal Edu.	30	7.3
	Primary Edu.	60	14.6
	Secondary	130	31.7
	Degree/HND	190	46.3

Among the 410 respondents, male participants dominated (76%, n=310), reflecting the gendered nature of vigilante membership in the region. The majority (49%, n=200) were aged 26–30 years, indicating that young adults form the backbone of community security efforts. Married respondents constituted 61% (n=250), Christians 54% (n=220), and farmers 29% (n=120). In terms of education, 46% (n=190) held a degree or HND, suggesting relatively high literacy among vigilante members. This profile is important because educated young men may bring both energy and critical thinking to security roles, but they also face acute economic pressures that could be mitigated by formal support.

Roles of Vigilante Groups in Fighting Kidnapping**Table 2: Mean Rating of Vigilante Roles (N = 410)**

Role	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
Community Policing	8.0	12.0	20.0	38.0	22.0	3.46	1.42
Neighbourhood watch	9.0	11.0	21.0	37.0	22.0	3.44	1.41
Crime Prevention Patrolling	12.0	15.0	22.0	30.0	21.0	3.24	1.47
Emergency response	13.0	16.0	23.0	28.0	20.0	3.20	1.47

Source: Author's Computation, 2026.

Note: Scale 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree. Criterion mean for agreement = 2.5.

Community policing and public safety scored highest (Mean=3.46), closely followed by neighborhood watch (Mean=3.44). Both were rated above the criterion mean, indicating broad endorsement. Crime prevention through patrolling and emergency response also showed moderate agreement, though with slightly higher standard deviations, suggesting divergent experiences across communities.

Key informant interviews provided rich qualitative corroboration. A vigilante leader from Wukari explained:

“Our role is to act as the eyes and ears of the community. We work closely with law enforcement agencies to gather intelligence and provide information on suspicious activities. Our presence alone serves as a deterrent to kidnappers.” (KII, Male, 48 years)

Another from Takum added:

“We educate and empower local residents to be vigilant and report suspicious activities. By building a strong relationship with the community, we are able to mobilize support quickly and effectively in the event of a kidnapping incident.” (KII, Male, 41 years)

These statements underscore the dual role of vigilantes as both intelligence assets and community mobilizers.

Security Guarantee from Vigilante Presence

Despite the positive ratings of specific roles, a majority of respondents expressed insecurity. As shown in Table 2, only 43% (n=190) felt their security was guaranteed by vigilante presence, while 57% (n=220) did not.

Table 3: Security Guarantee from Kidnapper Activities

Guarantee of Security	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Yes	190	43
No	220	57
Total	410	100

Source: Author’s Computation, 2026

This gap between role recognition and felt security is a critical finding. It suggests that while vigilantes are perceived as active, their activities may not be sufficiently robust to subdue the fear of kidnapping, possibly due to resource constraints or the sheer scale of the threat.

Table 4: Respondents’ Perceptions on Root Causes of Kidnapping with Likert Distributions (N = 410)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
Economic factors (poverty/unemployment)	4.0	7.0	16.0	38.0	35.0	3.93	1.19
Poorly equipped/underfunded security agencies	8.0	12.0	22.0	30.0	28.0	3.50	1.56
Political instability and corruption	10.0	15.0	25.0	28.0	22.0	3.29	1.47
Lack of inter-agency cooperation	15.0	18.0	28.0	22.0	17.0	3.00	1.47
Societal acceptance of kidnapping	18.0	20.0	30.0	18.0	14.0	2.88	1.47

Source: Author’s Computation, 2026

Economic factors emerged as the strongest driver (Mean=3.93), with 73% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. A vigilante leader from Donga corroborated:

“Poverty and unemployment are significant factors driving individuals to engage in kidnapping. With limited economic opportunities, some people feel compelled to turn to crime as a means of survival.” (KII, Male, 36 years)

Political instability and corruption also received moderate endorsement (Mean=3.29), as did the inadequate resourcing of security agencies (Mean=3.50). Interestingly, “societal acceptance of kidnapping” scored lowest (Mean=2.88), suggesting that most community members do not morally condone the crime, even if some are driven to it by desperation.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The roles of vigilante groups have no significant relationship with the security of the people in Southern Taraba.

Table 5: Ordinal Logistic Regression Results (Vigilante Roles)

Coefficient	Odds Ratio	P – value	Decision
0.75	2.12	< 0.05	Reject null hypothesis

Source: Author’s Computation, 2026

The p-value (0.001) is less than 0.05, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. The odds ratio of 2.12 indicates that for each unit increase in the perception of vigilante roles, the odds of feeling secure increase by approximately 112%. This confirms a significant positive relationship between vigilante roles and community security perception.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Challenges confronting vigilante groups have no significant relationship with the security of the people in Southern Taraba.

Table 6: Ordinal Logistic Regression Results (Challenges)

Coefficient	Std. Error	Z-value	P-value	Odds Ratio
-0.55	0.11	-4.55	0.001	0.61

Source: Author’s Computation, 2026

The p-value (0.001) is less than 0.05, rejecting the null hypothesis. The odds ratio of 0.61 implies that as challenges increase by one unit, the odds of feeling secure decrease by approximately 39%. This indicates a significant negative relationship between challenges facing vigilante groups and community security perception. In substantive terms, the more that vigilantes struggle with funding, training deficits, and governmental neglect, the less safe residents feel.

Table 7: Challenges Confronting Vigilante Groups with Likert Distributions (N = 410)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
Inadequate government/community support	7.0	10.0	18.0	34.0	31.0	3.62	1.57
Lack of resources/funding	10.0	15.0	22.0	30.0	23.0	3.34	1.45
Lack of formal training/expertise	9.0	14.0	24.0	32.0	21.0	3.34	1.40
Suspicion/mistrust from community	12.0	16.0	20.0	28.0	24.0	3.34	1.45
Conflict with law enforcement	14.0	18.0	25.0	23.0	20.0	3.17	1.46
Lack of oversight/accountability	15.0	20.0	24.0	22.0	19.0	3.13	1.44

Source: Author's Computation, 2026

Inadequate government and community support ranked highest (Mean=3.62), with 65% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. A vigilante leader from Ussa lamented:

"Limited resources and funding serve as obstacles to our men. Without adequate financial support, we struggle to maintain our operations and carry out effective anti-kidnapping initiatives." (KII, Male, 40 years)

Lack of formal training and expertise, alongside community mistrust, also scored high (both Mean=3.34). These challenges create a vicious cycle: poor training leads to ineffective or abusive actions, which erodes community trust, which in turn reduces local cooperation and funding.

Proposed Solutions

Respondents suggested a number of measures to improve the effectiveness of vigilantes. The highest mean was for increasing funding and resources (3.86), followed by building community trust and communication (3.56), improving collaboration with law enforcement (3.51), and community support and involvement (3.46). Formal training programmes (3.29) and clear policies (3.21) were also supported. The data highlight the need for an integrated approach combining financial investment, capacity-building and institutional linkages.

Discussion of Findings

This finding that community policing (Mean=3.46) and neighbourhood watch (Mean=3.44) are the most highly rated vigilante roles is in consonance with prior studies by Chikwendu et al. (2016) and Tukur et al. (2020). These roles leverage vigilantes' local knowledge and social embeddedness to spot suspicious activities missed by state police. The relatively low rating of emergency response (Mean=3.20) indicates that many vigilante groups lack the transport, communication or medical capacity to respond rapidly to kidnapping incidents a critical weakness given that rescue operations are time-sensitive.

The use of stratified random sampling based on the Cochran formula enhances the generalisability of these findings compared to previous studies in the region that relied on convenience or quota sampling (cf. Jack-Rabin et al., 2023). The expanded Likert response distributions in Tables 2, 4, and 7 provide a more nuanced picture: for example, while the mean for community policing is 3.46, nearly 30% of respondents either disagreed or remained neutral, indicating that vigilante effectiveness is not uniform across communities.

The significant positive association between vigilante roles and the perception of security (OR=2.12) provides empirical support for the theoretical framework. Visible vigilante patrols are a signal of order and deterrence from a Broken Window perspective and therefore reduce the acceptability of criminal behaviour. Consistent with Routine Activity Theory, vigilante groups operate explicitly as ‘Capable Guardians’, their presence increases the perceived risk for motivated offenders, which is reflected in the positive odds ratio. However, consistent with a nuanced application of Broken Window Theory, the data also show that vigilantes cannot fix ‘structural broken windows.’ The high endorsement of economic factors as drivers of kidnapping (Mean=3.93) indicates that poverty and unemployment, government-level structural issues, persist regardless of vigilante activity. This explains why 57% of respondents still feel insecure, vigilantes provide order, but only the state can address the root causes. Routine Activity Theory suggests that vigilantes increase the perceived risk of offenders and act as capable guardianship, but this optimism is countered by the fact that 57% of respondents still feel insecure. It implies that the present quantum of vigilante activities is not enough to combat the deep-rooted causes of kidnapping, particularly poverty and unemployment.

Economic factors were the strongest driver of kidnapping (Mean=3.93) and this finding is consistent with a robust body of literature (Inyang & Abraham, 2013; Yusuf & Abdullahi, 2020; Ngwama, 2014). This means that even the best vigilante groups cannot eliminate kidnapping on their own. Security interventions need to be complemented with economic development programs that offer licit livelihood options for at-risk youth. As Routine Activity Theory reminds us, it is just as important to decrease motivated offenders as it is to increase guardianship.

The strong negative association between challenges and security perception (OR=0.61) highlights the ways in which institutional neglect undermines community efforts. The highest ranking challenge is the lack of government support (Mean=3.62). This is indicative of a state failure to provide its basic security functions. Vigilante groups, when operating with limited resources, may resort to crude methods such as extra-judicial violence, further alienating the community and eroding legitimacy (Jack-Rabin et al., 2023; International Crises Group, 2022).

The findings are of significance for the Broken Window Theory. The “broken windows” in places like Southern Taraba aren’t just physical disorder but systemic neglect: unlit roads, no police, a state that appears oblivious to the suffering of rural populations, left to their own devices. Vigilantes can board up these windows temporarily, but until the state replaces the glass the disorder will return.

Policy and Practice Implications

This has some practical implications. “First, the Taraba State government should consider legalising and formalising community vigilante groups through a legislative framework that spells out their powers, limits and accountability mechanisms. This would enable them to operate with more confidence and reduce conflicts with formal security agencies. Second, sustainable funding mechanisms must be established, such as a state-run community security fund, co-funded by local government and donor agencies. This fund could buy basic equipment, communication devices, first aid kits and small monthly stipends to reduce corruption. Third, regular training programmes developed in conjunction with the police and civil society should incorporate human rights, de-escalation techniques, intelligence gathering and first responder skills. Fourth, there is need for public sensitisation campaigns to rebuild trust between

communities and vigilante groups, correcting misperceptions and highlighting successes. Finally, any long-term strategy must confront the economic causes of kidnapping, by creating jobs, supporting agriculture and providing skills training for young people.

Study limitations

Nevertheless, the present study has some limitations, in spite of its useful insights. First, the cross-sectional design is limited in that perceptions are captured at one point in time, thus precluding causal inference. It would be better to use a longitudinal design to establish the directionality of relationships. Second, the study used self-reported data from vigilante members and may be affected by social desirability bias. Future studies may include official crime statistics or community surveys that include non-members. Third, the study was limited to three out of the five LGAs in the senatorial district because of accessibility and security challenges. The findings may not be fully generalisable to Donga and Ussa LGAs with different demographic and geographical characteristics. Fourth, the study did not include interviews with kidnapping victims or offenders, which could add to our understanding of the effectiveness of vigilantes. Despite these limitations, the study offers a solid empirical foundation for policy debate. Furthermore, while the Cochran formula and stratified sampling improve statistical representativeness, the exclusion of Donga and Ussa LGAs (due to accessibility and security challenges) means the findings may not fully reflect conditions in those areas. Future studies should include all five LGAs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to assess the roles of community vigilante groups in curbing kidnapping in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. The evidence conclusively shows that vigilante groups perform significant and varied roles, including community policing, neighborhood watch, crime prevention patrols, and emergency response. These roles have a statistically significant positive relationship with residents' perception of security. However, the majority of residents still do not feel safe, pointing to a substantial effectiveness gap. The primary drivers of kidnapping are economic poverty and unemployment not merely a failure of policing. Moreover, vigilante groups themselves are hamstrung by inadequate government support, lack of funding, and absence of formal training. These challenges have a significant negative relationship with security perception, meaning that the more vigilantes struggle, the less secure communities feel.

In theoretical terms, the study affirms the relevance of both Broken Window and Routine Activity theories in explaining how community action can influence crime patterns, while also highlighting that state action is indispensable for addressing structural drivers. Without a holistic approach that combines community policing with economic development and institutional reform, kidnapping will likely persist.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Formalisation and Legal Backing:** The Taraba State Government must enact legislation to formally recognise community vigilante groups, specify their operational boundaries and establish oversight mechanisms to prevent abuses.
2. **Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:** A dedicated Community Security Fund should be created with funding from the state government, local government areas, and international development partners. The fund should include basic equipment, communication tools, first aid supplies and modest incentives for active vigilante members.

3. Capacity Building and Training: Regular training programs that address human rights, conflict resolution, intelligence gathering, patrol tactics and emergency first response should be institutionalised. Police, civil defence and human rights agencies should provide training.
4. Improved Collaboration with Security Agencies: There should be the establishment of Memoranda of Understanding among vigilante groups, the Nigeria Police Force, the Army, and the Department of State Services to delineate roles, share intelligence and coordinate operations.
5. Economic Empowerment Programs: Federal and state governments should provide targeted poverty reduction and youth employment programs in the region, such as agricultural extension services, small business loans, and vocational training.
6. Public Sensitisation Campaigns: Community leaders and local media should be engaged to restore confidence between the public and vigilante groups, emphasising positive roles and providing channels for reporting abuses.
7. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework: There should be an independent body to regularly assess performance of vigilante groups, look into complaints and suggest improvement.

Future Research Directions

Further studies should expand this work to cover the other LGAs of Southern Taraba (Donga and Ussa) and the Central and Northern Senatorial Districts for comparison. Longitudinal research designs would help establish causal relationships between vigilante interventions and rates of kidnapping. In addition, qualitative research on the views of victims of kidnapping and convicted offenders may shed more light on the deterrent effect of vigilante groups.

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