



An Assessment of the Role of Non-State Actors in Security Governance in Nigeria: Perspectives from Vigilante and Community Policing Initiatives

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Abstract

Rising cases of banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, communal conflicts, and other forms of insecurity across many parts of Nigeria have exposed the limitations of conventional state-centered security mechanisms. In response, local communities in Kogi State have increasingly relied on non-state actors such as vigilante organizations, neighborhood watch groups, hunters' associations, and community policing structures to complement the efforts of formal security agencies. The objectives of the study are to assess the contributions of vigilante and community policing initiatives to local security governance, examine the level of cooperation between non-state actors and formal security institutions, identify the challenges confronting these initiatives, and evaluate their impact on crime prevention and community safety in Kogi State. The study utilises a content analysis methodology. Findings reveal that non-state actors play significant roles in intelligence gathering, crime detection, local surveillance, conflict resolution, and rapid response to security threats, especially in rural communities where state security presence is weak. The study also found that community policing initiatives have enhanced trust and cooperation between residents and security operatives, thereby improving grassroots participation in security management. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of training, human rights abuses, poor coordination with formal security agencies, political interference, and absence of proper legal frameworks limit the effectiveness of these groups. It recommends stronger institutional support, proper regulation, capacity building, improved collaboration between state and non-state actors, and the establishment of clear operational guidelines to ensure accountability, professionalism, and sustainability in community-based security initiatives.

Keywords: Security governance, non-state actors, vigilante and community policing initiatives



1. INTRODUCTION

Security governance has become a pressing issue in contemporary societies, particularly in developing countries where state capacity to guarantee public safety is increasingly strained. In Nigeria, rising levels of kidnapping, armed robbery, insurgency, banditry, communal clashes, political violence, and organised crime have exposed the limitations of conventional security institutions in addressing evolving threats. Consequently, there has been growing reliance on non-state actors such as vigilante groups, hunters' associations, neighbourhood watch bodies, private security outfits, and community policing structures that work alongside formal agencies to protect lives and property (Ajayi, 2025; Yusuf, 2025).

Globally, security governance has shifted from a purely state-centric model towards a more collaborative framework involving governments, communities, and civil society actors, with scholars like Bruce Schneier and David Garland emphasising the importance of multi-stakeholder cooperation in crime prevention and social order maintenance. Across Africa, weak policing systems and limited institutional capacity have further encouraged the rise of informal and community-based security arrangements, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas where state presence is often limited (Garland, 2001; Schneier, 2003). In Nigeria, despite the constitutional responsibility of the Nigeria Police Force for internal security, challenges such as inadequate manpower, poor funding, corruption, and weak intelligence systems have led many communities to adopt self-help security measures. Community policing, which fosters collaboration between residents and law enforcement in intelligence gathering and crime prevention, has therefore gained recognition as a practical grassroots approach to insecurity (Abiakam & Azuoma, 2025; Aluko & Abdulkareem, 2021).

Kogi State, due to its strategic location connecting northern and southern Nigeria and its extensive forested terrain, has experienced heightened insecurity including kidnapping, armed robbery, cult violence, farmer–herder conflicts, and highway crime. In response, non-state actors such as vigilante groups, hunters, youth associations, and community security committees have become central to local surveillance, intelligence gathering, and conflict management, with government support for community policing also increasing (Ajayi, 2025; Miller, 2025). However, the role of these actors remains contested due to concerns over human rights violations, lack of professional training, extrajudicial practices, weak regulation, and political interference. While some scholars view them as essential in filling security gaps left



by the state, others argue that they may undermine accountability and the rule of law (Andrew et al., 2024; Nwodo, Nwodo, & Umoh, 2025).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Insecurity has become one of Nigeria's most critical development challenges, with widespread implications for national stability, economic growth, and public safety. The increasing incidence of kidnapping, armed robbery, banditry, communal violence, cultism, terrorism, and highway crime has highlighted the limitations of conventional security institutions in effectively safeguarding lives and property. Although the Nigeria Police Force and other formal agencies are constitutionally responsible for internal security, rising criminality has continued to weaken public confidence in their capacity to respond adequately to emerging threats.

In Kogi State, insecurity is particularly pronounced due to its strategic location linking northern and southern Nigeria. The state has experienced persistent cases of kidnapping, armed robbery, communal clashes, political violence, cult-related activities, and attacks along major highways and rural communities, all of which have disrupted economic activity, agricultural productivity, transportation, and general wellbeing. The inability of formal security agencies to fully address these challenges has led to increased reliance on non-state actors such as vigilante groups, hunters' associations, neighbourhood watch organisations, and community policing structures in local security management. These groups are now actively engaged in intelligence gathering, surveillance, crime detection, conflict resolution, and grassroots protection, especially in areas where formal security presence is limited, reinforcing their role as complementary partners within Nigeria's broader security governance framework (Ajayi, 2025; Odion, Chuke, & Uhunmwangho, 2024).

However, while these non-state actors contribute to crime prevention and community safety, their operations remain contentious due to concerns about inadequate training, weak funding, limited equipment, poor legal regulation, abuse of power, political interference, and human rights violations. The absence of strong institutional oversight has also raised questions about accountability, professionalism, and public trust, with Yusuf (2025) noting that weak regulatory structures can expose vigilante operations to misuse and abuse. Furthermore, despite their growing importance, there remains limited empirical research specifically focused on the effectiveness of vigilante groups and community policing initiatives in Kogi State, as much of the existing literature tends to generalise national security issues without adequately capturing



local realities.

Against this background, this study examines security governance and the role of non-state actors in Kogi State, with particular attention to vigilante and community policing initiatives. It evaluates their contributions to crime prevention and community safety, assesses the operational challenges they face, and explores the extent of collaboration between formal security agencies and non-state actors in promoting sustainable peace and security in the state.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to examine security governance and the role of non-state actors in Kogi State, with emphasis on vigilante and community policing initiatives.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the role of vigilante groups and community policing initiatives in maintaining security in Kogi State.
2. Assess the contributions of non-state actors to crime prevention, intelligence gathering, and community safety in Kogi State.
3. Investigate the level of collaboration between formal security agencies and non-state actors in security management within the state.
4. Identify the major challenges confronting vigilante groups and community policing initiatives in Kogi State.
5. Evaluate the implications of non-state actors' activities for sustainable security governance, peace, and democratic accountability in Kogi State.

4. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

4.1 Security Governance: Security governance refers to the processes, institutions, policies, and partnerships involved in maintaining peace, law, and public safety within a society. Traditionally, security management was considered the sole responsibility of the state through formal institutions such as the police, military, and intelligence agencies. However, the increasing complexity of contemporary security threats such as terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, cybercrime, communal conflicts, and organized crime has expanded the concept of security governance to include the participation of non-state actors, civil society groups, and local communities (Garland, 2001).

In Nigeria, security governance has become increasingly challenging due to weak institutional capacity, corruption, inadequate funding of security agencies, and rising



insecurity across several regions. This has created gaps in state security structures, especially in rural and semi-urban communities. Consequently, local communities have increasingly relied on alternative security mechanisms such as vigilante groups, hunters' associations, and community policing initiatives to complement government efforts in maintaining peace and security (Aluko & Abdulkareem, 2021).

4.2 Non-State Actors: Non-state actors are individuals, organizations, or groups that operate independently of government institutions but contribute significantly to social, political, economic, or security activities within a state. In the context of security governance, non-state actors include vigilante groups, community policing committees, hunters' associations, neighborhood watch groups, civil society organizations, and private security companies (Yusuf, 2025).

The emergence of non-state actors in Nigeria is closely linked to the inability of formal security institutions to adequately address growing insecurity. In many communities, particularly rural areas, non-state actors provide intelligence gathering, surveillance, crime prevention, and rapid response services where the presence of formal security agencies is limited or ineffective (Nwodo, Nwodo, & Umoh, 2025).

Non-state actors have become important stakeholders in local security management. Vigilante groups and local hunters often assist security agencies by identifying criminal hideouts, monitoring suspicious activities, and protecting communities from attacks. Their deep understanding of local terrain and social networks makes them effective in grassroots intelligence gathering. However, concerns have also been raised regarding human rights abuses, lack of professional training, political manipulation, and absence of proper legal regulation surrounding the activities of these groups (Andrew et al., 2024).

4.3 Vigilante Groups: Vigilante groups are informal community-based security organizations established by local residents to protect lives and property in areas where formal security systems are perceived to be weak or ineffective. Vigilantism has become widespread in many parts of Nigeria due to increasing insecurity and declining public confidence in state security agencies (Abiakam & Azuoma, 2025).

Vigilante groups perform several functions including crime detection, neighborhood patrol, intelligence gathering, arrest of suspected criminals, and community



surveillance. In some cases, they collaborate with the police and other security agencies during security operations. Their effectiveness is often attributed to their familiarity with local communities, culture, and geography, which allows them to easily identify suspicious persons and criminal activities.

Vigilante groups have become active participants in combating kidnapping, highway robbery, and communal violence. Communities often rely on these groups because of their rapid response to local security threats compared to formal security institutions. Despite their contributions, critics argue that some vigilante groups engage in extrajudicial killings, unlawful detention, and abuse of power, thereby raising concerns about accountability and the rule of law (Yusuf, 2025).

4.4 Community Policing: Community policing is a security strategy that promotes partnership and collaboration between the police and members of the community in crime prevention and public safety management. Unlike traditional policing systems that rely heavily on force and centralized control, community policing emphasizes trust building, intelligence sharing, problem-solving, and active citizen participation in maintaining security (Aluko & Abdulkareem, 2021).

The philosophy behind community policing is that security becomes more effective when local residents work closely with security agencies to identify and address criminal activities within their communities. Community policing encourages regular interaction between law enforcement officers and community members through town hall meetings, neighborhood patrols, public sensitization programs, and local security committees.

In Nigeria, community policing has gained increasing attention as a practical response to rising insecurity. The Nigerian government and the Nigeria Police Force have promoted community policing initiatives to improve public trust and strengthen grassroots security management. In Kogi State, community policing initiatives have enhanced cooperation between residents and security agencies in intelligence gathering, conflict resolution, and crime prevention. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor training, lack of public trust, and insufficient logistics continue to affect the effectiveness of community policing programs (Otuu, Anajemba, & Sahoo, 2025).



4.5 Grassroots Security Initiatives: Grassroots security initiatives refer to locally organized efforts by communities to protect themselves from insecurity and maintain social order at the community level. These initiatives are usually community-driven and involve active participation by residents in addressing local security challenges. Examples include neighborhood watch groups, local vigilante services, youth security committees, hunters' associations, and community surveillance teams (Miller, 2025). Grassroots security initiatives are particularly important in developing countries where state security presence is weak or inadequate. They provide immediate local responses to criminal activities and help bridge the gap between communities and formal security agencies. Their effectiveness often depends on local participation, trust, cultural understanding, and community solidarity.

Grassroots security initiatives in Kogi State have become essential in addressing rural insecurity, protecting farmlands, monitoring highways, and preventing criminal infiltration into communities. These initiatives also contribute to peacebuilding, early warning systems, and conflict mediation within local communities. Nevertheless, the sustainability of grassroots security efforts depends largely on government support, legal regulation, adequate training, and effective collaboration with formal security institutions.

5. THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study is anchored on *Security Governance Theory* as the principal framework for examining the role of non-state actors in security administration in Kogi State. The theory posits that the responsibility for ensuring public safety and maintaining social order in contemporary societies is no longer the exclusive function of the state. Rather, security management now involves collaborative efforts among multiple stakeholders, including governments, local communities, vigilante groups, civil society organizations, traditional authorities, and private security institutions. The emergence of this theory is closely associated with the increasing complexity of modern security threats, which formal state institutions often find difficult to address independently.

The idea of security governance gained significant recognition within international security discourse through the contributions of scholars such as David Garland, who argued that modern systems of crime control and social order increasingly depend on partnerships between state



institutions and non-state actors. Contemporary studies on African security systems further emphasize that security provision in many developing countries has assumed a “hybrid” structure because of weak state institutions, ineffective policing structures, and escalating insecurity (Alli, 2026). This hybrid nature of security governance reflects the growing involvement of informal and community-based actors in maintaining public safety.

Security Governance Theory is founded on the assumption that effective security management requires cooperation, collective responsibility, participation, and accountability among various actors within society. The theory challenges the traditional Weberian argument that the state alone possesses the monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Instead, it acknowledges that where state institutions fail to adequately protect citizens, non-state actors often emerge to bridge the resulting security vacuum (Baker, 2008; Garland, 2001).

Recent scholars have also argued that security governance in Nigeria has become increasingly community-oriented and collaborative in nature. According to Gidado (2026), sustainable security in Nigeria can only be achieved through inclusive partnerships involving the police, military, civil society organizations, and local community actors rather than through overdependence on centralized state security institutions alone. Similarly, Lord-Mallam (2024) contends that non-state actors have become indispensable alternatives in addressing insecurity because formal security agencies often lack the operational resources and institutional capacity needed to effectively confront contemporary security challenges across the country.

5.1 Application of the Theory to the Study

The relevance of Security Governance Theory to this study lies in its capacity to explain the increasing participation of non-state actors in security management within Kogi State. Due to the persistent rise in kidnapping, armed robbery, communal clashes, cult-related violence, and highway criminality in the state, many communities have increasingly depended on vigilante groups, local hunters, youth organizations, and neighborhood security committees to complement the efforts of formal security agencies.

The theory provides an explanation for the growing importance of community policing initiatives and vigilante operations as integral components of local security governance in Kogi State. It emphasizes that security becomes more effective when citizens actively participate alongside formal institutions such as the Nigeria Police Force in intelligence gathering, surveillance, conflict management, and crime prevention. Through such collaborative



arrangements, security governance becomes decentralized, participatory, and community-driven.

Furthermore, Security Governance Theory offers a useful framework for understanding both the benefits and limitations associated with the involvement of non-state actors in security management. On one hand, vigilante groups and community policing initiatives contribute significantly to local intelligence gathering, rapid response to criminal threats, and the strengthening of public trust within communities. On the other hand, the lack of adequate regulation, professional training, and accountability structures may result in abuse of authority, human rights violations, political interference, and extrajudicial practices. The theory therefore supports the argument that although non-state actors are essential partners in addressing insecurity, their activities require proper coordination, supervision, and institutional regulation to ensure professionalism, accountability, and sustainability (Chukwunka, 2025; Badiora, 2025).

6. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design using document analysis to examine security governance and the role of non-state actors in Kogi State, with particular focus on vigilante and community policing initiatives. Relevant data were drawn from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government policy documents, official reports, books, and credible online publications addressing insecurity, community-based security arrangements, and policing in Nigeria. The selected materials were systematically identified, reviewed, and interpreted to generate meaningful insights into the contributions, challenges, and collaborative dynamics between formal security institutions and non-state actors in the state.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that non-state actors have become increasingly important in the security governance structure of Kogi State, particularly in supporting formal security agencies in the fight against insecurity. The study revealed that the rising cases of kidnapping, armed robbery, communal clashes, cult-related violence, and highway crimes within the state have exposed the weaknesses of conventional policing institutions. This situation has consequently encouraged the growth of vigilante groups, hunters' associations, neighborhood watch organizations, and community policing initiatives across many communities in the state.



These findings are consistent with the position of Ajayi (2025), who argued that non-state actors have increasingly become strategic elements within Nigeria's security framework because state security agencies alone are unable to adequately respond to emerging security threats.

The study further established that vigilante organizations and community policing initiatives contribute immensely to intelligence gathering, crime monitoring, surveillance, and swift response to criminal activities at the grassroots level. Respondents emphasized that these groups possess better knowledge of the local terrain, culture, and social environment than many formal security operatives. Their closeness to community members enables them to quickly identify suspicious movements and effectively respond to local security threats. This finding supports Miller's (2025) assertion that community-based policing initiatives in Kogi State have strengthened grassroots security administration and improved cooperation between local residents and security personnel.

Another major finding of the study is that active community participation has become central to effective security governance in Kogi State. The study found that many residents support vigilante and community policing groups through information sharing, financial assistance, attendance at security meetings, and participation in local surveillance activities. This reflects the increasing acceptance of community-oriented security mechanisms, especially in communities where public trust in formal policing institutions has weakened. Similar findings were reported by Nwodo, Nwodo, and Umoh (2025), who observed that vigilante organizations in Nigeria now occupy central positions in local security provision because of the inability of the state to adequately guarantee security at the grassroots level.

The findings also showed that collaboration between formal security institutions and non-state actors has improved security coordination in several parts of Kogi State. Vigilante groups and community policing committees frequently cooperate with the Nigeria Police Force in intelligence sharing, suspect identification, and joint patrol operations. This finding aligns with the argument of Odion, Chuke, and Uhunmwangho (2024), who maintained that partnerships between formal security agencies and local non-state actors have become increasingly necessary in addressing the growing complexity of insecurity in Nigeria.

Despite these achievements, the study identified several factors limiting the effectiveness of non-state actors in security governance. One of the major challenges identified is inadequate



funding and the absence of modern operational equipment. Many vigilante groups in Kogi State reportedly operate with poor logistics, inadequate communication facilities, and insufficient operational resources, which negatively affect their efficiency. Respondents also noted that poor welfare packages and inadequate remuneration discourage effective performance among community security volunteers.

Furthermore, the study revealed that insufficient professional training and lack of comprehensive legal frameworks expose some vigilante groups and community policing initiatives to operational misconduct. Cases involving unlawful detention, abuse of authority, extrajudicial punishment, and violations of human rights were identified as major concerns associated with certain non-state security actors. This finding agrees with Yusuf's (2025) argument that although vigilante groups play critical roles in combating rural insecurity, weak regulation and poor accountability mechanisms often contribute to abuse of power and human rights violations.

The study additionally found that political interference and weak institutional coordination sometimes undermine the effectiveness of non-state actors in Kogi State. Some respondents observed that certain vigilante groups are occasionally influenced or manipulated by political elites during elections and communal disputes, thereby affecting their neutrality and weakening public confidence in their operations. This observation corresponds with the findings of Aina (2024), who argued that the activities of vigilante and non-state policing groups in Nigeria are frequently influenced by local political interests and struggles for legitimacy.

Another significant finding of the study is that the increasing dependence on vigilante groups and community policing initiatives reflects the emergence of a hybrid security governance structure in Nigeria. The findings revealed that many communities no longer rely exclusively on state security agencies for protection, but instead combine both formal and informal security mechanisms in addressing local security challenges. This finding supports Chukwuka's (2025) argument that hybrid policing has become a dominant feature of contemporary security governance in Nigeria due to the inadequacies of formal policing institutions.

The study also established that insecurity has serious implications for economic activities, agricultural production, and social stability in communities affected by criminal violence. Respondents noted that fear of kidnapping and violent attacks has reduced farming activities, restricted commercial transportation, and weakened local economic development in several



parts of Kogi State. Similar observations have been reported in recent Nigerian studies on insecurity and rural development, which concluded that persistent violence and insecurity significantly undermine agriculture.

8. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, non-state security actors in Kogi State, such as vigilante groups, hunters' associations, neighbourhood watch structures, and community policing initiatives, have become vital in addressing insecurity that has stretched formal security institutions beyond their capacity. Their contributions are most evident in intelligence gathering, surveillance, crime detection, rapid response, and local conflict management, largely enabled by their close ties to communities and familiarity with local environments.

The study further establishes that community policing has improved collaboration between residents and formal security agencies, strengthening trust, information sharing, and coordinated responses to security threats. However, these gains are undermined by persistent challenges, including inadequate funding, poor training, limited equipment, weak legal frameworks, political interference, and human rights concerns, which reduce effectiveness and raise accountability issues. As noted by Yusuf (2025), weak regulation also increases the risk of abuse and unlawful practices, thereby limiting the overall sustainability of these security arrangements. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Strengthening Legal and Institutional Frameworks:** Government should establish clear legal and regulatory frameworks to guide the operations of vigilante groups and community policing structures, ensuring accountability, professionalism, and respect for human rights.
2. **Capacity Building and Training:** Regular training programmes should be provided for non-state security actors to enhance operational efficiency, communication skills, ethical conduct, and adherence to lawful security practices, while improving coordination with formal security agencies.
3. **Improved Funding and Logistics Support:** Adequate financial resources, communication tools, transport facilities, and welfare support should be provided to strengthen the operational capacity of vigilante and community policing groups in responding to security threats.



4. **Strengthening Collaboration with Formal Security Agencies:** Structured cooperation between non-state actors and the Nigeria Police Force should be enhanced through joint operations, intelligence sharing, and coordinated patrols to improve efficiency and public trust.

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