

Perceptions of Community Members on the Performance of the Vigilante Security Group in Abia State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This study found out the perceptions of community members on vigilante security group in Abia State. A research question and a null hypothesis guided the study. The population of the study consisted of 3297 Town Union Executives (TUE) in the 10 Local Government Areas with registered vigilante units in Abia State. The sample of the study consisted of 648 Town Union Executives (TUE) who were selected using purposive sampling technique. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Mean statistics and t-test were used for analyzing the data. The study revealed that though some respondents expressed dissatisfaction in relation to the performance of some vigilante personnel, majority attested to the usefulness of the group in reducing crime as well as protection of lives and properties. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the government should regulate the activities of the vigilante security groups in the war against crime. This is to hinder influential people such as politicians who may intend to use them for illegal arrests and corrupt practices. Furthermore, communities in conjunction with the local government authorities should plan and organize seminars for vigilante group from time to time to get them informed on the requirements of community policing.

Keywords: Security, perceptions, performance and vigilante.

INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of vigilante services in Nigeria, different people have expressed different opinions in relation to the group. The different opinions of people on the services of the vigilante security group seem most often to be guided by their perceptions of police effectiveness or ineffectiveness in tackling crime and protecting lives and properties. Studies have shown that when people perceive the police as effective, they do not place much support on vigilantism [1], [2].

Activities of vigilante security group is being recognized in communities in Nigeria because they provide speedy and safety security services, which the Nigerian Police may not be able to offer [3]. Alemika and Chukwuma noted that as high as 50% of Nigerians living in the rural and urban communities patronize the services of the vigilante security group for protection of their lives and properties from criminal attacks. Similarly, [4] noted that the vigilante groups are closer to the people than the police, who seems to be alien and detached from the community members.

This is because vigilante members share the same affinity in relation to their community structure, topography and terrains which is alien to an outsider. This insight helps them in intelligence gathering.

According to [5], the vigilante security group in its complementary role to the efforts of the Nigerian Police Force has gained public acceptance and recognition as part of the wider strategy in the maintenance of law and order. In consonant to Baker's view, the security situations in the communities in Nigeria have improved as a result of the presence and activities of the vigilante security groups [6]. Furthermore, Adejoh noted that the vigilante security groups are deeply entrenched in communities and they form an integral part of the security architecture of communities where they exist. This is because the vigilante security groups are rooted in the traditions, customs and native practices of the people and would more readily understand and cooperate with community members, which is useful in information and intelligence gathering.

In addition, [7] noted that in several cases, communities trust the vigilante security groups more than the police, because of their effectiveness, reliability and prompt ways of tackling and handling criminal issues. This position is also shared by [8], when they noted that the vigilante security groups are more familiar with the environment and they are usually more acceptable to community members in contrary to the police who are often portrayed in bad light. The authors further asserted that, if this trend is allowed to continue, the community members will completely lose hope and confidence in the Nigerian Police. However, contrary to the stated satisfactory views on the performance of vigilante group, [9] asserted that vigilante seem to be personal assets of some very important personalities in the state who finance and influence their activities. In consonant to Akaayar's view, [5] noted that some politicians and rich businessmen use the vigilante group for intimidating political opponents during campaigns and elections and against

their enemies. Okeke noted further that some rich people use vigilante against their enemies in businesses and land disputes as well as against their debtors to enforce payment of loans and even landlords against their tenants for eviction. Based on the diversifying viewpoints of different authors on the performance of vigilante, this paper sets out to determine the perceptions of community members in Abia state of Nigeria on the performance of the vigilante security group for effective planning and decision taking.

Respondents to this study consisted of community members who were living in the urban and rural areas. Different locations were used for the study because most often, in Nigeria, the ruralites seem to be neglected and marginalized even when major decisions concerning them are taking. Urban areas which are dominated by politicians and elites are better and favourably considered because of their influence. The respondents were therefore classified across rural and urban locations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Security of community members provides trust and confidence on the existence of such people. It provides lasting peace of mind and tranquility among community members. [2] noted that the absence of peace and security in any community stifles the human capacity to develop and compromises the dignity and quality of life of both an individual and the society. In order to maintain sustainable peace and security, community policing is therefore imperative. Community policing demands that community members collaborate with police to protect and safeguard their environment against crime and disorder. It offers opportunity for the police and the community members to work together to resolve problems that exist in their communities. This is one of the major

bases for the provision of vigilante services laws in Nigeria. However, since inception, there have been varying opinions of community members in relation to the existence and the functioning of the vigilante group. Though some people express satisfactory opinions in relation to the group, others hold negative viewpoints on the vigilante. This study was therefore carried out to find out the perceptions of community members in Abia state on vigilante security group. This will serve to provide empirical evidence for checking the excesses of the group and/or encouraging their performance in different communities for maintaining lasting peace, law and order in communities in Abia state and Nigeria in general.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research question guided the study. What is the perception of community members on the

performance of the vigilante security group?

NULL HYPOTHESIS

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance: Town union executives living in the urban areas and those living in the rural

areas do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on their perceptions on the performance of the vigilante in Abia State.

METHODS

The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 3297 Town Union Executives (TUE). Purposive sampling techniques was used to select 648 TUE in the 10 local government areas with registered vigilante units in Abia State. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by two experts in Adult Education and another expert in Management and Policy. Comments from the experts were incorporated in the modification of the instrument. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was determined using cronbach alpha to establish the internal consistency of the items. The reliability

of the instrument was found to be 0.72. Thus, the instrument was highly reliable. Data related to the research question were analyzed using mean statistics. Based on the decision rule, mean values of 2.50 and above were regarded as having positive perception while mean values of below 2.50 were interpreted as having negative perception of the performance of the vigilante by the community members. t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected when the t-value calculated was greater than the t-critical value otherwise it is not rejected.

RESULTS

The data collected were presented and interpreted in Table 1.

Research Question: What is the perception of Town Union Executives on the performances of the vigilante security group?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Town Union Executives on their Perception on the Performance of the Vigilante Security Group (N=648)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Remark
1.	I like how vigilante operate in my community	166	174	155	153	2.54	Agree
2.	Members of the vigilante constitute menace in my community.	159	149	173	167	2.46	Disagree
3.	I have trust on vigilantes' effectiveness in my community.	180	139	165	164	2.52	Agree
4.	Vigilantes' personnel are mainly used as thugs in my community	159	189	158	142	2.56	Agree
5.	Members of my community do not see vigilante as doing any security work.	145	162	185	156	2.46	Disagree
6.	The vigilante maintain security to the expectation of members of my community	146	156	171	175	2.42	Disagree
7	Setting up of vigilante is a good development for reducing crimes in my community	172	157	167	152	2.54	Agree
8.	There have been lots of improvements on security services in my community since the inception of the vigilante.	166	159	158	165	2.50	Agree
9.	Members of the vigilante in my community collaborate with robbers in crime.	141	170	167	170	2.44	Disagree
10.	I see the vigilante as being reliable in fighting crimes.	172	153	164	159	2.52	Agree
	Mean					2.50	Agree

Table 1 shows that the mean scores of the respondents ranged from 2.42 - 2.56. A grand mean of 2.50 though at the border line (With reference to the decision rule) implies that the community members agreed that the

vigilante group were effective in the fight against crime, hence, their performance in the opinion of the community members was satisfactory.

The analysis of the null hypothesis was presented as follows:

Hypothesis

H₀: Town union executives living in the urban areas and those living in the rural areas do not differ significantly in their

mean ratings on their perceptions on the performance of the vigilante in Abia State?

Table 2: t-test showing mean perceptions of Town Union Executives living in Urban and Rural areas on the performance of the Vigilante in Abia State

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	LS	Decision
Urban	298	2.49	0.39	646	-0.47	1.96	0.05	Not sig
Rural	350	2.50	0.33					

Table 2 indicates that at 0.05 level of significance and 646 degree of freedom, the calculated t-value (-0.47) is less than the critical t-value (1.96). Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no

significant difference between the mean ratings of town union executives living in urban and rural areas on the performance of the vigilante in Abia State was not rejected.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The result of the analyses revealed that community members perceive the vigilante members performance as satisfactory. This implies that vigilante group is effective in curbing crime in Abia State. This further implies that the vigilante security group fights and frustrates criminal activities which seem to have a strong deterrent effect on potential offenders or hoodlums. This agrees with the findings of [9] who noted that communities trust the vigilante security group because of its effectiveness, reliability and prompt ways in which they tackle and handle criminal issues. The vigilante security group is more familiar with their environment. They form an integral part of the security architecture of communities where they exist. This makes the vigilante security groups to readily understand and cooperate with community members. Such cooperation is quite useful in information and intelligence gathering. In consonant to Yaqub and Olaniyi's findings, [8] affirmed that the vigilante security group in its complimentary role to the efforts of the police has gained public acceptance and recognition as part of the wider strategy in the maintenance of law and order, more especially in the rural communities. In line with Baker's findings, [3] also noted, that the security situations in the communities have improved as a result of the presence and

activities of the vigilante security groups. However, from the analysis, it was shown that the grand mean was at the borderline of decision rule (2.50) on the issue of performance of the vigilante. In addition, it was shown that some community members disagreed that the vigilante maintained security to their expectations. In spite of the usefulness of the vigilante security group, some community members still have reservations about certain aspect of their operations. This may be because some vigilantes are used for thuggery activities by some influential people such as politicians it may also be because some community members still perceive the police to be effective. [7] showed that when people perceive police to treat them with respect and dignity they reject vigilantism. This calls for concern because as [8] observed, politicians and rich businessmen use the vigilante security group for intimidating political opponents during campaigns and election and against their enemies and by some rich people against their enemies in businesses and land disputes as well as against their debtors to enforce payment of loans and even landlords against their tenants for eviction.

However, the test of the null hypothesis showed that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of town

union executives living in the urban and rural areas on their perceptions on the performance of the vigilante security group in Abia State. This implies that town union executives who represent the interest of the community members living in rural and urban areas agreed that the vigilante security group is effective in curbing crime in Abia State.

This is in agreement with the findings of [4] who noted that the vigilante security group is being recognized in the communities because they are closer and more preferred by community members due to her effectiveness, reliance and speedy security services which the police cannot satisfactorily guarantee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government should regulate the activities of the vigilante security groups in the rural/urban communities. This is to avoid using them by influential people such as the politicians for illegal arrests and corrupt practices.
2. The government and members of any community to ensure that vigilante security group under the auspices of community policing should not have any specific interest to protect rather than help the police in providing social security. This can be achieved through synergized monitoring effort by all parties. Thus, the vigilante security group should not represent any political group, economic and religious interest, but serve as complementary to the efforts of the police in the war against crime.
3. The government should promulgate law against using vigilante for purposes other than securing the communities.
4. Communities in conjunction with local government authorities should plan and organize constant seminars and training programmes for vigilante group to get them aware of the required novel practices and services on community policing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, community members in Abia State have positive perception of the performance of vigilante. Abia State Vigilante group should therefore be encouraged and motivated by equipping them with

necessary training and providing them with vital equipment for better performance and services to the communities for sustainable peace, safety, security and development in the State.

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