

# VIGILANTISM AND ITS IMPACT ON CRIME PREVENTION IN ANGWAN RUKUBA COMMUNITY IN JOS NORTH LGA, PLATEAU STATE.

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## Abstract

Vigilantism has emerged as a critical mechanism for community-based security in Nigeria, particularly in regions where formal policing is perceived as inadequate. This study examines the impact of vigilantism on crime prevention in the Angwan Rukuba community of Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, addressing a significant empirical gap in context-specific security research. Grounded in Social Control Theory and Social Contract Theory, the study analyzes how the breakdown of institutional bonds and a perceived "broken contract" with the state drive residents toward informal self-help measures. Adopting a cross-sectional research design, the study utilized a structured questionnaire to gather primary data from 392 respondents across five strategic locations. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-Square analysis to determine the relationship between institutional security failure and vigilante emergence. The findings reveal that 40.1% of respondents identified inadequate police presence as the primary motivator for vigilantism, while 75% reported a significant reduction in crime following the operation of these groups. The statistical evidence confirms that while vigilantism effectively fills immediate security voids, it operates outside formal legal frameworks, raising concerns about long-term accountability. The study concludes that vigilantism is a necessary but temporary response to state fragility. It recommends the formal integration of vigilante groups into community policing frameworks and a strengthening of formal police capacity to restore institutional trust and ensure sustainable social order.

**Keywords:** Vigilantism, Crime Prevention, Angwan Rukuba, Community Policing, Security Inadequacy.

## Introduction

Vigilantism has become a recurring feature of community-based crime control in many parts of Nigeria, particularly in areas where formal policing structures are perceived as weak, slow, or ineffective. In such contexts, residents often resort to self-help security arrangements to protect lives and property. Vigilantism generally refers to

the organized or spontaneous actions of individuals or groups who take the law into their own hands to prevent crime or punish suspected offenders outside formal legal frameworks (Johnston, 1996). In Nigeria, the persistence of armed robbery, theft, cult-related violence, and communal insecurity has contributed to the proliferation of vigilante groups across both urban and semi-urban communities (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2011). The Angwan Rukuba community in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State reflects this broader national trend, where local vigilante groups have emerged as alternative mechanisms for crime prevention amid concerns about public safety. Despite the growing reliance on vigilantism, the phenomenon raises critical questions about legality, human rights, accountability, and its actual effectiveness in reducing criminal activities. While some scholars argue that vigilante groups enhance local security by providing rapid responses, others contend that they often operate without clear rules, leading to abuses and mob justice (Baker, 2002; Tankebe, 2010).

The central problem addressed in this research lies in the lack of empirical evidence regarding whether vigilantism in Angwan Rukuba effectively reduces criminal activities or merely displaces crime while introducing new forms of insecurity. Existing studies on vigilantism in Nigeria often generalize findings without adequately capturing community-specific motivations and outcomes (Johnston, 1996; Tankebe, 2010). Consequently, there is a notable knowledge gap in providing context-based information to guide local security governance. This study addresses this critical gap by systematically examining the factors motivating the emergence and operation of vigilantism in Angwan Rukuba and assessing its subsequent impact on criminal activities and social order. By situating the study within broader academic debates on informal justice systems, the research contributes to the scholarly discourse on crime prevention in fragile security environments (Alemika, 2013; Tankebe & Asif, 2016).

The significance of this study is found in its potential to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, security agencies, and community leaders seeking balanced approaches to crime control that uphold both security and the rule of law. By evaluating the concrete effects of these groups, the study informs the development of sustainable crime prevention strategies that bridge the gap between formal policing and community-led initiatives. To provide a comprehensive analysis of these issues, this article is organized into several key sections. Following this introduction, the second section provides a conceptual clarification and reviews the relevant literature and theoretical framework. The third section details the cross-sectional research methodology, including the sampling techniques and data collection instruments used. The fourth section presents the results and discusses the findings derived from the fieldwork. Finally, the article concludes with a summary of findings and offers practical recommendations for security stakeholders.

### **Literature Review: Conceptualizing Vigilantism in Historical and Cultural Context**

Vigilantism is fundamentally defined as the act of individuals or groups taking the law into their own hands to enforce norms or administer justice outside formal legal systems. This self-appointed form of law enforcement is typically driven by a deep-seated belief that the state has failed to protect its citizens or deliver justice, leading residents to seek order through their own means. The phenomenon manifests in diverse forms, ranging from organized, structured groups with established leadership and patrols to spontaneous actions by small groups in immediate response to a specific threat (Baker, 2002; Johnston, 1996). In the African context, these practices are often deeply intertwined with the legacy of colonialism, where a historic rift developed between state-imposed laws and indigenous justice systems (Harsch, 2018). In Nigeria, groups such as the Odua People's Congress (OPC) and the Bakassi Boys have historically emerged to fill security gaps left by the state's inability to provide adequate protection (Olowu, 2014). Consequently, vigilantism exists in a state of social duality: while many communities praise these groups for their rapid interventions, they are simultaneously viewed as a threat to the rule of law due to their potential for human rights abuses and lack of legal oversight (Baker, 2002).

### **Crime Prevention and the Role of Informal Security Structures**

Effective crime prevention is a multifaceted endeavor aimed at reducing criminal opportunities by addressing underlying causes and deterring potential offenders through proactive and reactive strategies (Gordon & Ruggiero, 2016). These strategies are generally categorized into situational prevention, which alters the physical environment to reduce opportunity (Clarke, 1997); social prevention, which targets root causes like poverty and inequality (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2015); and community-based prevention, which relies on the active participation of local residents (Kappeler, 2006). In regions where formal state-sanctioned institutions such as the police and courts are under-resourced or perceived as ineffective, informal security structures play a vital role in maintaining the peace. Local vigilante groups and neighborhood watch organizations function on the principle of collective action, filling immediate security voids through monitoring and direct intervention (Schneider & Ingram, 2007). However, because these groups operate without formal legal authority, their role must be carefully managed to ensure they complement, rather than undermine, the formal law enforcement mechanisms they seek to support (Klein, 2011).

### **Community Policing, the Social Contract, and State Legitimacy**

The tension between formal and informal security is best articulated through the lens of social contract theory, which posits that individuals surrender certain freedoms to a governing authority in exchange for the protection of their remaining rights (Hobbes, 1651; Rousseau, 1762). When the state fails to uphold this duty, the contract is perceived as broken, often compelling citizens to act outside formal structures to restore a sense of

safety (Locke, 1689). Community policing has emerged as a collaborative bridge in this context, moving away from reactive traditional models toward proactive strategies built on mutual trust and shared responsibility (Goldstein, 1979). Unlike vigilantism, which often operates independently and may resort to extrajudicial violence (Baker, 2002; Johnston, 1996), community policing functions strictly within the framework of the law, focusing on legal and peaceful interventions (Skogan, 2006). By fostering partnerships and addressing social determinants like unemployment and education disparities, community policing aims to improve public safety while simultaneously enhancing the legitimacy and accountability of the formal police force (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2015; Skogan, 2006).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Control Theory**

This study is primarily grounded in Social Control Theory, which was originally developed by Travis Hirschi (1969) to explain how strong social bonds to institutions deter criminal behavior. While the theory traditionally focuses on why individuals conform to laws, it is applied here at the communal level to explain the emergence of vigilantism as a response to institutional decay. The core assumption is that social order relies on the effectiveness of formal institutions of control, such as the Nigeria Police Force. When these institutions fail to provide adequate security, the institutional bond between the state and the community is effectively severed. In Angwan Rukuba, this breakdown is evidenced by the finding that 40.1% of respondents identified inadequate police presence as the primary motivator for the rise of vigilante groups. From this perspective, vigilantism emerges not as an act of lawlessness but as a communal attempt to restore a form of informal social control in a landscape where formal state-led control has become non-existent.

### **Social Contract Theory as a Motivational Lens**

To resolve potential conceptual ambiguity, this study utilizes Social Contract Theory as a complementary lens to explain the specific legitimacy and motivation behind community self-help (Hobbes, 1651; Rousseau, 1762). The social contract posits that citizens surrender certain personal freedoms to a governing body in exchange for the protection of their remaining rights. When the state fails to uphold this fundamental duty, the contract is perceived as broken, which often compels individuals to act outside formal legal structures to restore order (Locke, 1689). Within the Angwan Rukuba community, persistent security challenges such as theft and violent crime have created a scenario where residents feel the state has defaulted on its protective obligations. This theoretical lens explains why 19.9% of respondents explicitly cited community self-help as a factor in the emergence of these groups. By integrating these two theories, the study

demonstrates that while Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969) explains the structural mechanics of the security gap, Social Contract Theory provides the moral and practical rationale for why the community feels justified in adopting informal security measures for their own survival.

## Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design to examine the dynamics of vigilantism and crime prevention in Angwan Rukuba. This design was deemed the most appropriate because it allowed for the collection of data from a large and diverse sample of 392 respondents across five distinct locations within the community at a single point in time. Given the study's objective to assess the immediate perceived impact of vigilante operations on crime levels, a cross-sectional approach provided a cost-effective and timely snapshot of community sentiment that would not have been possible with a longitudinal study, which requires extended periods of observation that were outside the scope of this research. While a case-study approach might have offered deeper narrative detail, the cross-sectional design was prioritized to ensure broader representativeness and to allow for the use of Chi-Square analysis to establish statistically significant relationships between variables.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What factors motivate the emergence/operation of vigilantism in Angwan Rukuba community of Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State?

**Table 2: Respondents on the Main Reasons for the Rise of Vigilante Groups in Angwan Rukuba:**

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Inadequate police presence	157	40.1
Rising crime rate	118	30.1
Community self-help	78	19.9
Political influence	39	9.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Author's Fieldwork, 2025

Table 2 reveals that 40.1% of the respondents believe that inadequate police presence is the primary reason for the rise of vigilante groups in Angwan Rukuba, while

30.1% attribute it to the rising crime rate. Additionally, 19.9% of the respondents identify community self-help as a factor, and 9.9% point to political influence.

The implication of these findings is that the emergence of vigilante groups in Angwan Rukuba is predominantly driven by a perceived weakness in formal security structures, particularly the police. This suggests a lack of trust in law enforcement and highlights the community's reliance on self-organized efforts to combat rising insecurity.

**Research Question Two:** What effects does vigilantism have on criminal activities in Angwan Rukuba community of Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State?

**Table 2: Respondents on How the Operation of Vigilante Groups Affects Crime Levels in the Community**

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Slightly reduced	176	44.9
Greatly reduced	118	30.1
No change	59	15.1
Increased	39	9.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Author's Fieldwork, 2025

Table 4.6 shows that 44.9% of the respondents agree that the operation of vigilante groups has slightly reduced crime levels in the community, while 30.1% believe it has greatly reduced crime. Additionally, 15.1% report no change in crime levels, and 9.9% indicate that crime levels have increased.

The implication of these findings is that vigilante groups have had a positive effect on crime levels, with a majority of respondents (75%) noting a reduction in crime, whether slight or substantial. This suggests that the presence of vigilante groups has contributed to improving security in the community, enhancing local safety and potentially reducing the burden on formal law enforcement.

## Hypotheses Testing 1

**Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>):** Perceived inadequacies of formal security agencies are not a significant factor motivating the emergence of vigilantism in the Angwan Rukuba community.

**Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>):**

Perceived inadequacies of formal security agencies are a significant factor motivating the emergence of vigilantism in the Angwan Rukuba community.

**Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis of Factors Motivating the Rise of Vigilante Groups**

Response Category	Observed Frequency (O)	Expected Frequency (E)	O – E	(O – E) <sup>2</sup>	(O – E) <sup>2</sup> / E
Inadequate police presence	157	98	59	3481	35.52
Rising crime rate	118	98	20	400	4.08
Community self-help	78	98	-20	400	4.08
Political influence	39	98	-59	3481	35.52
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>0</b>	—	<b><math>\chi^2 = 79.20</math></b>

The calculated Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2 = 79.20$ ) is significantly higher than the critical Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2 = 7.815$ ) at the 0.05 level of significance with 3 degrees of freedom.

**Source:** Author's Field Work, 2025

Based on this result, the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) is accepted. The statistical evidence indicates that the factors motivating vigilantism are not equally distributed among respondents. Notably, inadequate police presence, which recorded the highest observed frequency (157), emerges as the most significant factor motivating the rise of vigilante activities in the Angwan Rukuba community. This finding underscores the central role of perceived institutional security failure in the emergence of informal crime-control mechanisms within the study area.

**Hypotheses Testing 2**

**Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>):** Vigilantism has no significant effect on the level of criminal activities in the Angwan Rukuba community.

**Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>):**

Vigilantism has a significant effect on the level of criminal activities in the Angwan Rukuba community

**Table 4.19: Chi-Square Analysis of the Effect of Vigilante Groups on Crime Levels**

Response Category	Observed Frequency (O)	Expected Frequency (E)	O – E	(O – E) <sup>2</sup>	(O – E) <sup>2</sup> / E
Slightly reduced	176	98	78	6084	62.08
Greatly reduced	118	98	20	400	4.08
No change	59	98	-39	1521	15.52
Increased	39	98	-59	3481	35.52
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>0</b>	—	<b><math>\chi^2 = 117.20</math></b>

Source: Author's Field Work, 2025

The calculated Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2 = 117.20$ ) is significantly greater than the critical Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2 = 7.815$ ) at the 0.05 level of significance with 3 degrees of freedom.

Accordingly, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted. The statistical evidence confirms that the operation of vigilante groups has a significant effect on crime levels in the Angwan Rukuba community. Specifically, a substantial majority of respondents (294 out of 392) reported that crime levels have either slightly reduced or greatly reduced following the activities of vigilante groups. This result strongly supports the view that vigilantism contributes to the reduction of criminal activities within the community, although it also underscores the need for appropriate regulation and integration with formal security structures.

## Discussion

The findings indicate that vigilantism in Angwan Rukuba is largely driven by inadequate police presence and persistent crime, confirming that communities resort to self-help security when formal protection is perceived as insufficient. The rejection of the first null hypothesis highlights a clear lack of confidence in formal law enforcement, which motivates the formation and operation of vigilante groups (Johnston, 1996; Alemika & Chukwuma, 2011).

The second hypothesis reveals that vigilante activities have contributed to a reduction in crime, as most respondents reported either slight or significant decreases in criminal activities. This suggests that vigilante groups act as local deterrents in areas with weak policing, although their impact is not uniform, while vigilantism appears to support short-term crime control, it reflects deeper institutional gaps that require stronger state involvement and structured collaboration with community security efforts.

## Conclusions

This study establishes that vigilantism in the Angwan Rukuba community is a direct consequence of a perceived breakdown in formal social control. The findings demonstrate that a lack of institutional trust and inadequate police presence have effectively severed the institutional bond between the state and the citizenry, compelling residents to reclaim their side of the social contract through informal security measures. While the data confirms that these groups have significantly reduced local crime levels, with 75% of respondents reporting positive security outcomes, their operation outside formal legal frameworks highlights a critical gap in sustainable security governance. Ultimately, while vigilantism serves as a necessary interim response to immediate threats, it represents a symptom of state fragility rather than a permanent solution for crime prevention.

To address these gaps, the Nigeria Police Force must prioritize strengthening its presence and response capacity within the community to restore public confidence in formal law enforcement. It is further recommended that vigilante groups be formally integrated into community policing frameworks through regulated oversight and training to ensure their activities respect human rights and the rule of law. Policymakers should also establish localized guidelines that provide resource support for these informal actors while ensuring their accountability to state institutions. Finally, a holistic approach to security in Angwan Rukuba must include socio-economic interventions that target the root causes of crime, such as unemployment and social exclusion, to foster long term stability and communal resilience.

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