

Vigilante Groups and the Dialectics of Internal Security Management in Takum Local Government Area, Taraba State

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Abstract- This study examines the complex role of vigilante groups in managing internal security within Takum Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria. Against a backdrop of persistent violent crime and perceived failures in formal law enforcement, communities have increasingly turned to vigilante groups as alternative security providers. The research examines the relationship between formal law enforcement limitations and the emergence of vigilante groups, and assess the roles these groups play in responding to criminal activities. Employing descriptive research design, the study utilized interview, and field observations with 25 purposively selected participants, including vigilante members, community elders, police officials, and residents. The analysis was framed through State Fragility Theory, which illuminates how institutional weakness and legitimacy deficits create security vacuums filled by non-state actors. Findings reveal that vigilante groups emerge directly as a pragmatic response to the profound operational and trust deficits of formal agencies, characterized by inadequate resources, corruption, and slow response times. These groups have become integral to local security, performing preventive patrols, rapid response, intelligence gathering, and customary dispute mediation. Their effectiveness and legitimacy stem from deep community embeddedness and cultural familiarity. However, their operations remain largely unregulated, raising concerns about extra-judicial actions, human rights abuses, and the reinforcement of a hybrid and often unstable security order that both compensates for and exacerbates state fragility. Based on these findings, the study recommends a dual-pathway approach: first, the formal recognition and regulated integration of vigilante groups into a community policing framework, accompanied by training in ethics and human rights; and second, a fundamental reform and resourcing of formal security institutions to address the root causes of state fragility and restore public trust. This balanced strategy aims to harness the local efficacy of vigilante groups while strengthening the rule of law and accountable governance in Takum LGA.

Keywords: Vigilantism, Internal Security, State Fragility, Community Policing

I. INTRODUCTION

Security remains a fundamental prerequisite for socio-economic development, political stability, and the well-being of any society. In Nigeria, the challenge of internal insecurity has been exacerbated by the inefficiencies of formal law enforcement agencies in addressing rising violent crimes, communal clashes, and banditry (United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2023). This has necessitated the emergence of informal security structures like vigilante groups, particularly in regions such as Takum Local Government Area (LGA) in Taraba State. Takum LGA, like many parts of Nigeria's Middle Belt, has experienced recurrent security threats, including armed robbery and kidnapping. The Nigerian Police Force, constitutionally empowered to maintain internal security, is consistently undermined by systemic issues such as inadequate manpower, lack of operational resources, and allegations of corruption (USIP, 2023). These institutional weaknesses have diminished public trust, encouraging communities to form vigilante groups as alternative security measures (Crisis Group, 2022).

Vigilante groups, composed largely of local volunteers, have increasingly filled this security vacuum by taking up roles such as patrolling neighbourhoods, apprehending suspects, and mediating local disputes. Their familiarity with the local terrain and social networks enables operational efficiency and immediacy that formal agencies often lack (Crisis Group, 2022). In areas like Takum LGA, their presence has supplemented the formal security sector and enhanced communal resilience.

Nevertheless, the operations of vigilante groups are fraught with challenges. Many operate without legal recognition or formal training, exposing them to accusations of human rights abuses, extrajudicial actions, and political manipulation (Anyo, Tagher, & Ugbem-Onah, 2024). The absence of regulatory frameworks leads to inconsistencies in accountability and transparency, while a lack of funding, logistical support, and collaboration with official agencies hampers their effectiveness. In Takum LGA, reliance on these groups has grown significantly, especially in rural and underserved areas, as communities depend on them for protection amidst persistent criminal activities and limited formal security responses.

This scenario presents a compelling case for assessing how vigilante groups have become central to internal security management. Consequently, this study is designed to critically assess their role with the following specific objectives: (1) to examine the relationship between formal law enforcement limitations and the emergence and rise of vigilante groups in security management within Takum Local Government Area and (2) to assess the roles played by vigilante groups in managing and responding to criminal activities in Takum Local Government Area of Taraba State.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Vigilantism

Vigilantism, derived from the Latin *vigil* meaning "awake" or "observe," refers to actions by self-appointed individuals or groups who enforce law and order outside formal state authority (Johnston, 2019; Alemika, 2021). It is a category of non-state or self-policing characterized by reactive, ad hoc, and often violent methods of crime control (Baker, 2003). Core elements include voluntary private action, minimal state sanction, and a response to perceived failures in institutionalized norms, aiming to assure the community that order will prevail (Johnston, 2019).

Scholarly definitions diverge from popular cultural depictions, such as those in film and comics, which often glorify vigilantes as heroes or vilify them as ruthless criminals (Turner, 2014; Scott, 2017). Conceptually, vigilantism is defined by its operation outside institutional structures. Vigilantes act on the

belief that the existing social and legal systems are ineffective in resolving specific problems, prompting direct community intervention (Miller, 2018). This reflects a form of agency exercised in response to structural constraints, where individuals choose to address perceived social shortcomings directly rather than seeking reform through established channels (Harre, 2016; Boege et al., 2017).

The legitimacy and perception of vigilante actions are contingent on cultural norms, local justice preferences, and the observer's views on morality and politics (Scott, 2017). Without formal oversight, such groups risk evolving into dangerous entities, as illustrated by cases where initially welcomed vigilantes later engaged in harmful acts, demonstrating the perils of unregulated, extra-legal enforcement (Miller, 2018).

History of Vigilantism

Historically, vigilantism emerges in contexts where state institutions are weak or absent, compelling communities to organize for self-defense (Alemika, 2021). While precursors can be traced to ancient times, modern vigilantism is often linked to frontier societies. In 18th and 19th-century America, for example, vigilance committees arose to combat crime where formal justice systems were underdeveloped, employing extralegal measures like lynching (Culberson, 2013; Apollo, 2017).

Philosophically, vigilante violence is distinct from revolutionary violence; it seeks to uphold a perceived existing social order against transgression, rather than to overthrow it (Francis et al., 2015). Proponents have historically justified their actions as necessary for protecting tradition and community safety, framing themselves as honourable citizens imposing "retaliatory justice" (Francis et al., 2015).

While classic frontier vigilantism has faded, modern manifestations persist globally. Contemporary vigilante actions range from community groups combating drug traffickers and gangs in countries like Mexico and South Africa, to impulsive "street justice" meted out by crowds before police arrival (Hofstadter et al., 2012; Marx, 2015). Such tendencies are checked by countervailing ideologies emphasizing due process, civil rights, and constitutional protections, which highlight the risks of mob justice and wrongful

punishment (McClory, 2015). Thus, vigilantism remains a complex phenomenon, simultaneously viewed as a necessary community response and a threat to legal order (Shotland, 2017).

Concept of Security

Security is a multifaceted concept central to national and human well-being. Fundamentally, it denotes freedom from danger, risk, and fear, encompassing the ability of a nation to protect itself and promote its values and interests (Amujiri & Agu, 2012). Traditionally, a state-centric (neo-realist) perspective dominated, focusing on military defence of territorial integrity. However, a postmodernist, human-centric view has gained prominence, arguing that true security extends beyond military concerns to include economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013). This aligns with the concept of human security, which prioritizes freedom from "want" and "fear," covering economic, food, health, personal, community, and political security (UNDP, 1994).

In practical terms, security provision involves both state and non-state actors. Joseph (2019) classifies vigilante groups in Nigeria into three types: voluntary village patrols, community-funded groups, and government-sponsored outfits. This reflects the broadening of security governance beyond the state, especially where formal institutions are perceived as inadequate.

Concept of Internal Security

Internal security refers to the state's mechanisms to protect its citizens, territory, and institutions from internal threats like crime, insurgency, and civil unrest, as opposed to external aggression (Okolie & Nnamani, 2021). Its management involves law enforcement, intelligence, community policing, and conflict resolution, utilizing both formal agencies and informal structures (Adeleke, 2022).

In Nigeria, the fragility of internal security is evident, with rising incidents of kidnapping, banditry, and communal clashes. Effective internal security increasingly depends on synergy between formal forces and informal, community-based actors like vigilante groups, particularly in areas with weak state

presence (Usman & Ibrahim, 2023; Chukwuemeka & Ibrahim, 2021). This study adopts a broad conceptualization, viewing internal security as the protection against threats to territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the people's rights, property, peace, and prosperity.

The traditional state-centric model has been challenged, acknowledging the significant role of non-state security actors, including vigilantes and private firms, in contemporary security governance (Gichira, 2019). For many citizens, vigilantism represents the most viable alternative to formal policing, especially given the cost barriers of private security. Consequently, internal security is now understood as a shared responsibility within a network of state and non-state actors, reflecting a hybrid and multidimensional approach to maintaining a stable and just society.

The Impact of Vigilante Patrolling and Community Engagement in Crime Prevention and Control in Nigerian Society

It is expedient that the expected impacts of vigilante organisations in any particular security situation be spelt out. For instance, Aina and Odiji (2019) postulated that there are numerous importance assigned to the vigilante groups in Nigeria and it includes the following: Due to the insufficient police force in Nigerian society to carried out their functions, the Nigerian vigilante group was introduced to assist in meeting this demand, and one of such demands has been the protection of lives and properties. This function on the part of the Nigerian vigilante group is very necessary, given the important attached to human lives, and much more important too, their properties must be protected, the Nigerian vigilante group has been functioning in protecting the lives of Nigerian and their properties. This aspect of function has been attached to the vigilante group. It is expected of it to maintain peace and order within society. For instance, anytime there are social functions or public functions, the services of the vigilante group can best be employed to assist in ensuring that, peace and order are maintained in order to guarantee the success of such event particularly, those recruited by the government. This is another function of the vigilante group, they assist in fighting

crimes in the Nigerian society, particularly, in the night. During the night hours, the vigilante group will organize itself and go for patrolling for the purpose of ensuring that any robbery attempt is averted. By so doing villagers, whose family members of the vigilante group are among are being protected from robbery attack. The vigilante groups do not only prevent crimes, they can go as well as arresting any individual caught committing crime, because crime commission is invariably the same thing as encroaching or infringing the rights of the members of the public, and when you are caught, you are going to be arrested by the members of the Nigerian vigilante group, and once you got arrested by the Nigerian vigilante group, they will immediately hand you over to police for prosecution.

do not number it, state the assumptions in a discursive paragraph

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on State Fragility Theory, which provides the foundational lens for analyzing the complex relationship between vigilante groups and formal security management in Takum Local Government Area. The theory, significantly developed by Rotberg (2003) and expanded by scholars like Carment (2007) and institutions such as the OECD, posits that state fragility arises from a critical deficit in both the capacity and the political will to perform fundamental sovereign functions. Central to this framework is the understanding that fragility is not a monolithic condition but a multidimensional syndrome manifesting in pervasive insecurity, economic exclusion, and the collapse of effective governance. A core assumption is that this institutional deterioration creates a vacuum of authority and service delivery, a void which non-state actors ranging from insurgent groups to community-based organizations invariably move to fill. This dynamic establishes a self-reinforcing cycle: as these parallel systems gain local legitimacy and operational space, they further undermine the state's legitimacy and erode its capacity, thereby deepening the very fragility that enabled their emergence.

However, the application of this theory is not without its critical contours. It has been challenged for its potential to overgeneralize and for embedding a

Western-centric conception of statehood that may overlook resilient indigenous governance structures and local contextual realities. Furthermore, a significant critique is the theory's frequent neglect of external determinants of fragility. Scholars argue that for states like Nigeria, and by extension Taraba State, fragility cannot be understood in isolation from historical legacies such as colonialism, ongoing international financial pressures, and the exploitative practices of multinational entities, all of which are pivotal in shaping contemporary governance challenges.

Application of the Theory to the study

The context of Taraba State, and specifically Takum LGA, embodies the central propositions of State Fragility Theory. The area illustrates the paradox where resource potential coexists with acute service delivery failure and institutional weakness, a condition Gelbard et al. (2015) identify as endemic to fragile states. Here, the formal security apparatus exemplifies the state's diminished capacity. The Nigeria Police Force and associated agencies are crippled by systemic issues inadequate manpower, logistical poverty, corruption, and debilitatingly slow response times. This represents a fundamental failure in the state's most basic mandate: the monopoly on the legitimate use of force and the provision of public security. According to the theory's logic, such a security vacuum becomes a site of contestation and innovation.

It is within this vacuum that the dialectics of internal security management in Takum unfold. Vigilante groups emerge not as a spontaneous cultural phenomenon but as a direct, structural consequence of state retreat. They perform the core security functions the state has abdicated, from neighborhood patrols to intelligence gathering and suspect apprehension. In doing so, they accrue a form of grassroots legitimacy rooted in immediacy, cultural familiarity, and perceived effectiveness, starkly contrasting with the distant and discredited formal institutions. This creates the central dialectical tension of the study: vigilante groups simultaneously compensate for and exacerbate state fragility. They provide a semblance of order where the state cannot, yet their existence and methods

which often include extra-judicial actions and the establishment of parallel justice systems directly challenge the state's legal authority and undermine the rule of law. This interaction fosters an unstable hybrid security order, characterized by uneasy and shifting relations of collaboration, co-optation, and conflict between state and non-state actors.

The fragility is further compounded by the political economy of the region, where elite competition for resources and power often leads to the instrumentalization of state institutions and the neglect of peripheral communities. This erodes the state's legitimacy and fuels public reliance on alternative systems of protection. Therefore, State Fragility Theory enables this study to transcend a mere descriptive account of vigilante activities. It facilitates a critical examination of the underlying conditions of institutional failure, legitimacy crisis, and territorial insecurity that produce and sustain these groups. Through this lens, the study interrogates the dynamic and often contradictory relationship between a fragile state and the non-state security actors operating in its shadow, offering profound insights into the complex governance of internal security in Nigeria's marginalized states.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive research design to investigate the role of vigilante groups in internal security management in Takum Local Government Area, Taraba State. Utilizing a purposive sampling strategy, the research engaged 25 key participants including vigilante leaders, active members, community elders, local police officials, and affected residents selected to reach thematic saturation and ensure the inclusion of diverse, experience-rich perspectives. Data collection was anchored in semi-structured interviews which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the emergence, operations, and challenges of vigilante groups, supplemented by field observations and a review of secondary sources such as local government records and relevant literature. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data to identify and interpret core patterns related to the perceived ineffectiveness of formal law enforcement, the community-embedded roles of vigilantes, and the structural and ethical constraints limiting their

effectiveness, while content analysis helped situate these findings within the broader context of Nigerian security policy and local governance. Through methodological triangulation, the study integrated insights from interviews, group discussions, observations, and documents to construct a coherent, empirically grounded narrative on how vigilante groups function as both a response to state security deficits and a consequential feature of Takum's local security landscape.

Data Presentation and Discussion

The relationship between formal law enforcement limitations and the emergence and rise of vigilante groups in security management within Takum Local Government Area.

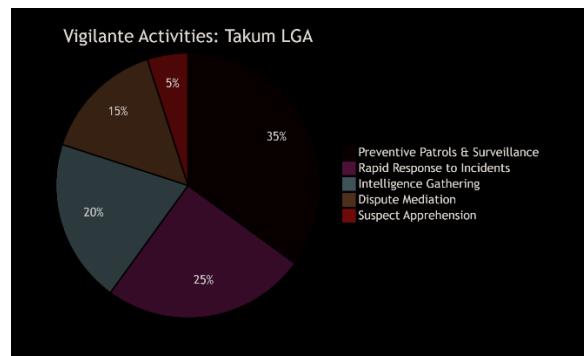


Figure 1: Distribution of Vigilante Group Activities in Takum LGA

This chart illustrates the proportional allocation of vigilante functions based on qualitative field data. Preventive security measures constitute the primary activity (35%), followed by rapid response (25%), intelligence gathering (20%), dispute mediation (15%), and formal suspect apprehension (5%).

The security landscape in Takum Local Government Area is fundamentally defined by a crisis of confidence in the state, where the failure of formal law enforcement has directly seeded the growth of vigilante groups as a parallel system of order. Thematic analysis reveals that residents widely view agencies like the Nigeria Police Force as critically under-resourced, operationally slow, and compromised by corruption. This perception has not merely created dissatisfaction but has actively dismantled public trust, forging a pervasive sense of abandonment that left a vacuum in community

security. As documented in studies on hybrid security orders, when the state is seen as absent or predatory, communities will invariably innovate their own mechanisms for protection, often rooted in local social structures (Bøås & Stig, 2018). A resident from a rural settlement captured this sentiment of institutional failure starkly:

Calling the police is often a waste of time. If they even come, it will be hours later when the thieves are long gone. Sometimes they will first ask for 'fuel money' before moving their vehicle. We reported when our neighbour's son was kidnapped; they came two days later to ask questions that we had already answered on the phone. How can we rely on such a system? We are on our own here. Respondents.

This experience of delayed response and perceived extortion underscores a critical breakdown in the state's basic social contract to provide security, a phenomenon noted in analyses of policing in rural Nigeria where logistical constraints and corruption severely limit effectiveness (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020).

The crisis is further compounded by a perceived failure in the judicial process, which erodes the deterrent value of law enforcement. Respondents frequently cited a cycle where suspects apprehended at great risk were later released without meaningful prosecution, fostering a sense of futility and impunity. This broader system failure transforms the security gap from a mere operational shortfall into a comprehensive governance deficit. A local trader who was interviewed explained how this cycle discourages engagement with formal institutions:

What is the use? Last year, vigilantes caught the men stealing my goats and took them to the station. We spent our own money to follow up the case. Months later, we heard the case was struck out. Those same men were back in the market, laughing at us. The police collect our reports, the court sets them free, and we are left with nothing but fear. The system is not for the poor. (Respondent).

It is precisely into this vacuum of effective authority and justice that vigilante groups have emerged, not as a preference but as a pragmatic necessity. Their rise represents a grassroots, self-help initiative to impose order where the state has receded. Unlike the distant and often alien formal institutions, vigilantes are embedded within the community's social fabric, operating with a responsiveness and cultural familiarity that the police lack. As scholars observe, such groups derive their legitimacy from being "of" the community rather than "over" it, offering security that is immediate and intelligible within local norms (Baker, 2010). A community elder described this organic emergence:

When the government's light refused to shine on our darkness, we had to light our own candle. The vigilantes are our sons. They sleep here, their families are here. When there is trouble at night, they don't wait for permission or petrol; they run out because it is their home too. They arose from our need, not from any government paper." (Community Elder, Takum LGA, 5th November, 2025)

Consequently, the emergence of vigilante groups in Takum is a dual-signifier. Primarily, it is a direct functional reaction to institutional failure a community-based solution to immediate threats of kidnapping, robbery, and communal violence. Simultaneously, it serves as a stark indicator of the fragility of state authority at the local level, revealing a context where formal governance structures are perceived as unable or unwilling to deliver equitable safety and justice. These dynamic positions vigilante groups not merely as alternative security providers, but as symptomatic of a deeper political condition where the monopoly of legitimate force is contested, giving way to a complex and often unstable hybrid security order.

The Role of Vigilante Group in its Management of Crime in Takum L.G.A of Taraba State

Thematic coding of interviews and community narratives identified several key roles vigilante groups perform in Takum Local Government Area. Their functions go beyond mere reaction to crime and reflect an embedded system of community-based security

management that fills the gap left by formal law enforcement agencies.

One of the most visible roles vigilante groups plays is preventive security. They organize regular night patrols, establish informal checkpoints, and monitor the movement of strangers within their communities. These preventive measures are especially important in areas vulnerable to armed robbery, cattle rustling, and kidnapping crimes that have been recurrent threats in Takum. Residents interviewed expressed that the presence of vigilantes acts as a psychological deterrent to potential offenders, as criminals are aware that community-based actors are constantly watching and ready to intervene. This observation aligns with studies on non-state security actors, which note that their embeddedness within communities enhances deterrence through constant surveillance and local intelligence (Baker, 2010). A community elder in Takum town explained this role succinctly:

The criminals know that the vigilante eyes are everywhere. We organize ourselves, patrol our own streets at night, and question strangers. Since these boys started their patrols, the cases of people breaking into homes have reduced in this area. It's not that the police are not there, but we are the ones who live here and know every corner. (Community Elder, Takum Town, 22nd November, 2025)

The statement underscores how vigilante groups leverage hyper-local knowledge and constant visibility to prevent crime, a function often constrained for formal police forces operating with broader mandates and limited local integration (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020).

Unlike formal law enforcement agencies, which are often constrained by bureaucratic procedures and logistical limitations, vigilante groups respond swiftly when security threats arise. Community members reported that vigilantes often arrive at crime scenes faster than the police, sometimes even within minutes of being alerted. This quick response time has built a reputation of reliability and strengthened community confidence in their effectiveness. For many residents, calling vigilante members is perceived as more practical than reaching out to the police, especially at night or in remote areas. This dynamic illustrates a pragmatic shift in security-seeking behaviour where

efficiency trumps formality. A shopkeeper in central Takum recounted:

There was an attempt to steal my generator at night. My son raised the alarm, and within minutes, vigilante members from two streets away were here. They chased the thieves. When we eventually called the police, they came much later to only write a statement. For us, the first call is always to our vigilante. They are faster because they are already here with us. (Shopkeeper, Central Takum, 18th November, 2025)

This account highlights the operational pragmatism that drives community reliance on vigilantes, a trend documented in other regions where state presence is perceived as distant and ineffective (Higazi, 2016).

Beyond physical security, vigilante groups play a socio-judicial role by mediating minor disputes. Many respondents indicated that conflicts involving land, family disagreements, or minor theft are often referred to vigilante leaders for resolution. These community-driven interventions are valued because they prevent disputes from escalating into violent confrontations. Furthermore, their conflict resolution strategies are usually rooted in local customs, norms, and cultural practices, which makes them more acceptable to the people compared to formal legal processes perceived as expensive, slow, and alien to local realities. This role positions them as crucial nodes in local governance. A local farmer described this function:

Many matters are too small for the police but can cause big trouble if left. If two neighbours quarrel over a small piece of land or a stolen goat, we take it to the vigilante chairman. He listens to both sides, consults with other elders, and gives a judgment everyone usually accepts. It follows our custom and settles the matter quickly without expensive lawyer fees or endless waiting. (Local Farmer, Takum LGA, 5th October, 2025)

This practice of customary arbitration by vigilantes reflects a broader adaptation of traditional justice mechanisms to contemporary security gaps, though it

operates outside the formal legal framework (Owen, 2022).

Despite tensions between vigilantes and state security institutions, evidence from interviews suggests that some level of collaboration exists. Vigilante groups sometimes apprehend suspects and hand them over to the police, while also providing intelligence on criminal hideouts or suspicious movements. This support role, though informal, has been acknowledged as crucial in complementing the overstretched capacity of formal agencies. However, respondents also noted that this relationship is inconsistent and often undermined by mistrust or rivalry between the two security actors. This fragile collaboration is a common feature in hybrid security systems, where the lines between cooperation and competition are frequently blurred (Boås & Stig, 2018). A vigilante member himself noted the complexity:

We do work with the police sometimes. When we catch a known thief or someone with a weapon, we tie them and take them to the station. We also give them information about hideouts. But the cooperation is not smooth. Sometimes they look at us with suspicion, and sometimes we fear they may even release the person we caught because of a bribe." (Vigilante Member, Takum LGA, 30th September, 2025)

Overall, respondents emphasized that vigilantes enjoy higher levels of trust than formal security forces. Their legitimacy stems from their embeddedness within the communities, their familiarity with local terrain, and their reliance on shared cultural values in enforcing order. Vigilantes are seen not only as protectors but also as insiders who share the same vulnerabilities and responsibilities as other community members. As one woman from a rural settlement stated, "They are our sons and brothers. They understand our suffering because they share it. We trust them more than the police who come from elsewhere and may not even understand our language."

Nonetheless, their methods remain controversial. While they are celebrated for effectiveness, they are also criticized for extra-legal practices, including the use of excessive force, arbitrary punishments, and occasional human rights violations. This duality

highlights the paradox of vigilante operations: they are both a source of security and a potential risk to due process and the rule of law. As a youth leader cautiously added, "Yes, they keep us safe, but we also hear stories of them beating suspects too much or punishing people without a proper hearing. We want security, but we also want fairness." This critical awareness underscores the ongoing tension between community efficacy and accountability in Takum's security landscape.

Figure 1: Process flow illustrating the cyclical and multi-functional role of vigilante groups in Takum LGA. The model begins with formal law enforcement failure, leading to community mobilization and vigilante formation. Their core functions prevention, response, intelligence, and mediation feed into dual outcome pathways: formal collaboration with police or informal community adjudication. These outcomes reinforce either the erosion of state legitimacy or the strengthening of vigilante authority, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of hybrid security governance.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the role and dynamics of vigilante groups in the internal security management of Takum Local Government Area, Taraba State, against the backdrop of a retreating and institutionally fragile state. The findings revealed a complex dialectic wherein vigilante groups emerge not as aberrations but as systemic responses to profound gaps in formal law enforcement. The failure of state security agencies manifested in chronic under-resourcing, operational inefficiency, pervasive corruption, and a collapsed judicial follow-through has not merely created a security vacuum but has actively eroded the social contract, compelling communities to devise localized, self-help mechanisms for survival. Vigilante groups have filled this void, evolving from informal watches into entrenched nodes of grassroots security governance. Their effectiveness is rooted in their embeddedness within the social fabric of Takum, leveraging hyper-local knowledge, cultural familiarity, and rapid response capabilities that the distant and often alien formal police force lacks.

The research reveals that these groups perform multifaceted roles that extend beyond simple crime reaction. They engage in preventive patrols and

surveillance, act as first responders to incidents, provide crucial local intelligence, and even serve as socio-judicial arbiters in resolving minor disputes according to customary norms. This functionality has granted them a significant degree of community legitimacy and trust, positioning them as indispensable actors in the daily security calculus of residents. However, this very indispensability underscores a deeper crisis of statehood. The rise and normalization of vigilante groups are potent indicators of state fragility, revealing a context where the monopoly of legitimate force is contested and governance is hybridized.

Furthermore, the study uncovers the inherent tensions and contradictions within this hybrid order. While vigilantes compensate for state failure, their operations are fraught with challenges that threaten both their sustainability and the broader rule of law. They operate in a legal gray zone, lacking formal recognition, adequate training, and consistent resources. This leads to significant risks, including human rights abuses, extra-judicial punishments, vulnerability to political manipulation, and fraught, often adversarial relationships with the formal police. Thus, vigilante groups embody a central paradox: they are simultaneously a solution to and a symptom of systemic security and governance failure. They provide immediate, community-anchored protection while potentially undermining the long-term establishment of a uniform, accountable, and rights-based security framework. The situation in Takum, therefore, represents a microcosm of the broader dialectics of security in fragile states, where non-state actors both stabilize and complicate the pursuit of public order.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the above findings of the study. The following recommendations were made.

1. Formalize, Regulate, and Integrate Vigilante Groups into a Legitimized Community Policing Framework. The state government, in collaboration with the Nigeria Police Force and local government authorities, should move beyond ad-hoc toleration toward formal recognition and structured integration. This requires enacting a clear legal statute that defines

the status, mandate, and limits of “Community Security Volunteers.” Integration must be coupled with mandatory training programs in basic policing ethics, human rights, evidence handling, conflict de-escalation, and proper procedures for suspect handover. Establishing formal liaison desks within local police divisions and creating joint patrol and intelligence-sharing protocols can institutionalize collaboration, reduce mistrust, and align vigilante activities with constitutional standards. This approach seeks to harness their local efficacy while embedding them within a regulated, accountable system that reinforces rather than undermines the rule of law.

2. Address the Root Causes of State Fragility by Radically Reforming and Resourcing Formal Security Institutions. The proliferation of vigilante groups is a symptom of the failure of formal institutions. Therefore, a sustainable solution requires a decisive, two-pronged effort to rebuild state capacity and legitimacy in the security sector. First, immediate and tangible investment is needed to address the operational deficits of the police in Takum LGA. This includes deploying adequate manpower, providing reliable vehicles, communication equipment, and establishing functional posts in remote communities to ensure visible and rapid response. Second, and equally critical, is implementing robust accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms. This involves creating independent, community-involved oversight committees to monitor police conduct, investigate complaints transparently, and ensure that reported crimes are diligently prosecuted.

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