

Crime Prevention and the Emergence of Self-Help Security Outfits in South Western Nigeria

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Abstract

Beyond doubt the role of the Nigeria Police is that of providing effective internal security that is strategically crucial to the survival of democracy and the economy. The task of providing a safer and more secured environment conducive for socio-economic development through crime prevention and control is therefore crucial to any society, there has to be domestic peace, law and order for economic development, and stability of a nation. Armed robbery and other violent crimes had assumed a disturbing dimension in most parts of Nigerian society. The Nigeria Police has also declared War against Crime several times to no avail and inalienable peace is strategically critical to the survival of democracy and the state of the economy. The enlisting of the cooperation and collaboration of stakeholders in crime prevention and control campaign is very crucial for the maintenance of law and order but it is somewhat disturbing that the police have not adequately performed the task of keeping the society safe in Nigeria. Instead they have been a terror to the general public whereas they are overwhelmed by the activities of criminals. This has led to incessant crime wave particularly in the south western Nigeria resulting into agitations and the intervention of private self - help elemental organizations in crime prevention and control.

Keywords: Nigeria Police, Security, Crime Prevention, Crime Control, Domestic Peace

Introduction

The legitimacy and right of any state over the people can best be upheld only to the extent to which it can guarantee the protection of life and property of its citizens. In a crimogenic society only those with strength survive, the feeble are left at the mercy of the physically powerful. Shane [1980] was of the view that revolutionaries portray police as representatives of the ruling class and oppressors of the ruled, even often as the enemy of the latter itself. On this note Nigeria police have not lived to the expectations of the general public; they have been pro-government right from the colonial time. The presence of the police in any place in Nigerian society, portend sorrow, agony, ill-wind and no one ever sees them as friends to the public.

People are afraid to volunteer information because times without number, there have been instances where the complainant ended up being the accused because of corruption and miscarriage of justice by the police. In occasions where volunteers of information are spared, they have been forced to report on daily basis at the police station for weeks thereby giving such persons the impression that they had better kept such information to themselves next time because so much time wasting is involved. Even sometimes at the end of such exercise informants identities are given up such that they become targets of violent and virulent attacks by hoodlums and criminals. For example at Olodo village near Ibadan a man gave a motor bike to a youngster for commercial purpose locally called *Okada business*. For several months no remittance of the proceeds of the business was made. To the chagrin of the owner, the *Okada rider* boasts that the matter be reported to the police in the area, if the owner is aggrieved, because he has nothing to give. The inference that could be drawn from this is that, the police are collaborators of some sort to criminals in the neighborhood. This is not to denigrate the police but the case of late Iyamu a Superintendent of police in the defunct Bendel State and late Lawrence Anini's robbery gang is still fresh in Nigerian's memory. There is no doubt that the police need the assistance of the public for effective crime prevention but such has not been given veritable ground to thrive in Nigeria because of the fear of and the unpredictable behavior of the police.

This is one of the major reasons why the members of the public become mere onlookers even at the very scene of crime or where crime is committed. The unchecked upsurge in crime in Nigeria particularly in the south west and the inability of the police to find a long lasting solution to the menace resulted into general disdain of the police.

Hence private self-help groups such as OPC and other vigilante groups too numerous to mention rose up to defend themselves and their neighborhoods from criminal attacks.

Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine the nature of crime prevention and the emergence of Self-help security outfits particularly in Western Nigeria. This objective is further broken in to specific ones thus:

- To examine the role of self-help outfits particularly in crime prevention in the south west Nigeria and.
- To investigate the effectiveness or otherwise of the self help security groups.

Literature

The growing crime wave in Nigeria

The growing crime wave in Nigeria is partly a product of widespread unemployment and a rising cost of living. For many desperate and unemployed youths, robbery appears the only avenue left open to them to make a living. The situation is worsened by the ready availability of small arms like rifles and pistols in the open market. In some neighborhoods young men form self-help groups teaming up with the police sometimes to help fight crime. Muri Adesanya, whose Bariga neighbourhood in Lagos has been subjected to repeated attacks, says: "The robbers are a common enemy." But in a worrying trend, others are taking the law into their own hands.

Attacks by vigilantes in the south west on suspects with stones and sticks are common and some end with the "necklace treatment". A tire doused with petrol is put around the neck of the suspect who is subsequently set on fire. In one instance, five alleged bank robbers were burnt to death that way. There will be many more battles on Nigeria's streets as bank robbery has become a fashion for criminals. Sometimes in September 2008 in broad day light two mobile policemen were allegedly shot dead by bank robbers around the Oyo state secretariat in Ibadan before they fled with their loots. The battle between police and armed robbers for control of Nigerian streets is proving a costly one for both sides.

Flipping through Nigerian newspapers one frequently comes across headlines like: "Police, Robbers in Bloody Gun Duel", "Robbers on Rampage Kill Police Chief" and "Police, Robbers in Midday War - Five robbers Killed." Lagos, the country's commercial capital, is the worst hit. Police statistics show that between August 2003 and May 2004, criminals killed 273 civilians. Within the same period, they also killed 84 policemen and injured 133 others. In the past couple of months, criminals have been operating with impunity, snatching cars on the highways, raiding banks particularly in Ibadan and breaking into homes. Even though police authorities boast they will win the war against crime, they agree it is an uphill task and a hard nut to crack.

The Nigeria Police

The constitution vests the overall operational control of the force in the hands of the President. Each of the thirty-six states and the federal capital territory is served by a unit called a command, under a state commissioner of police. Three or four state commands are grouped together to form one of twelve zones, each under an Assistant Inspector General. State commands are divided into smaller area commands, below which are divisional police stations, headed by a Divisional Police Officer [DPO] and finally local police posts. The force size currently stands at approximately 375,000 officers. As a federal institution, the Nigerian Police Force recruits officers from across the country. New recruits are posted to any one of the thirty-six state commands. Under a strict system of rotation officers are transferred to a new post every few years and therefore communities are policed by officers who may be from different ethnic or religious backgrounds to their own.

Serving alongside the regular police force are the Mobile Police, an especially trained anti-riot unit, numbering 30,000 officers. Known locally as MOPOL, they were originally created to contain civil disturbance or large-scale conflict but today are also deployed to carry out various other policing duties. The Mobile Police operate under a parallel authority structure with forty-six squadrons, organized into state and zonal commands and headed by a commissioner of police at the force headquarters. While crime trends are notoriously difficult to analyze or interpret in Nigeria, it is apparent that the public perception is that crime rates are extremely high, particularly armed robbery which is traceable to rising poverty, high unemployment and the breakdown of traditional social structures which the Nigerian police have been ill-equipped to address.

The police have often been unable to meet the safety and security needs of local communities and are often overpowered by well-armed and often violent criminals. According to Nigerian police reform experts, the police force has insufficient well-trained manpower to adequately address policing needs. The loss of public confidence in the effectiveness of the police has resulted in the emergence of private security outfits and local vigilante groups, the most virulent of which include the Bakassi Boys in the south-eastern states, but also extends to hundreds of smaller groups across the country.

Other law enforcement agencies

Several other national agencies carry out law enforcement functions and have the power to arrest and detain suspects at their own detention facilities. These include the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Customs and Immigration Service and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), a body established in 2002 to investigate a range of financial crimes such as money transfer fraud and money laundering. In addition, there are two principal intelligence agencies: the State Security Service (SSS) and the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), dealing with criminal matters affecting the security of the state.

The Oodua Peoples Congress [OPC] and other Self-help outfits

Much has been said in literature concerning the etiology of OPC that in this paper, attention is essentially focused on the structure - admission/recruitment and training of members, mode of operation - deployment, investigation and punishment and reward system. The Oodua People's Congress [OPC], named after the mythological ancestor of the Yoruba is one of the largest ethnic militias in Nigeria today [Guichaoua, 2006]. It is very influential in the states demographically dominated by the Yoruba in the southwest. The OPC's official objectives are set out in its constitution thus:

To gather all the descendants of Oodua all over the earth especially in Africa, the Caribbean, South America and North America for a most profound, all embracing and absolutely unflinching UNITY; to identify with a view of re-living the glory of our past for the purpose of posterity; to educate and mobilize the descendants of Oduduwa for the purpose of the above; to integrate the aspirations and values of all the descendants of Oduduwa into a collective platform of an Oduduwa entity; to monitor the various interests of descendants of Oduduwa by whatever name called, anywhere on the face of the earth and struggle for the protection of these interests; to ensure maximum self-determination of the people of Oodua; to further the progress of Oodua civilization by protecting and promoting our values, mores and the inter-generational transmission of same; to locate a bearing for an Oodua world view and establish its place in the world and to mobilize the people of Oodua for the National cause [OPC constitution and Bill of Rights]

There are still conflicting accounts of the date and the formation of the OPC by the two factions into which the group was broken. The organization according to Fasheun, was formed by a group of seven, including himself; the other six were popular market leaders at Mushin area of Lagos. They were Mrs. Adebowale [Iya-Ijebu], Alhaji Ibrahim [Baba Oja], and Mrs. Taiwo, each of them brought one other person along for the inaugural meeting on August 29, 1994. Apart from Fasheun and Taiwo a semi-literate retired military officer, the recruited members were all illiterate [Sesay *et al.*, 2003]. Gani Adams explained: there were nine founding members of OPC comprising Tony Ugurugbe [an Ijaw man], Gani Adams, Dr. Fredrick Fasheun, Olumide Adeniji, Kunle Adesokan, Idowu Adebowale, Ibrahim Abobolanwo, Ibrahim Atanda and Silus Atanda. Explaining further, he said Ugurugbe a non-Yoruba was spurred by the annulment of the June 12 election and felt that there was a need to establish a militant group that would fight to redeem and enhance the status of Yoruba race in the face of unending brazen oppression and subjugation.

OPC claims to have several millions members worldwide: men and in a smaller proportion, women; Christian, Muslim and traditionalist.

The main bulk of these supporters are obviously concentrated in the heart of Yorubaland, mainly consisting of the six states of the former southwestern region [Lagos, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, and Ondo]. In addition to the states of Edo, Kwara and Kogi other supporters live in the Yoruba part of the Republic of Bénin or belong to the Diaspora in North America, the Caribbean and Europe. It is, however, difficult to verify whether these are card-carrying members who regularly attend meetings, or simply sympathizers occasionally contributing to the activities of the group.

Also unverifiable are the relative size of each faction and the proportion of 'eso's' [or 'guardians', the alleged paramilitary wing of the OPC]¹ in the group. What is certain, however, that is the OPC can be labeled a mass movement that is known by everyone in Nigeria [Guichaoua, 2006; Adams, 2002]. As a self-determination movement, OPC canvass for the organization of a Sovereign National Conference designed to redraw the structure of the Nigerian Federation.

Human Rights Watch [2003] asserts that OPC has a strict hierarchical structure, chain of command, and efficient systems of communication. The organization has structures and executive committees at both the national and state levels with the Annual National Conference as its Supreme decision-making body and the National Executive Council [NEC] as its governing body. At the local level, every member is required to belong to a branch and the branches are grouped into zones, which are further grouped into sub-regions. There are different wings, including *eso's* wing, women's wing, and also sections responsible for different activities. In each zone in particular there is a matron called *Iya Oodua* who stands as a spiritual leader to be consulted on any issue for divination and direction/instruction. The 'eso's,' as a unit [who go to fight], also called 'ushers' in Gani Adams faction, is involved in vigilante activities and discipline, during meetings or any public events. There is another subset known as the monitoring group that usually clear the way ahead for members while going for rallies [HRW, 2003]. There is strict adherence to disciplinary procedure outlined in OPC's constitution: members who carry out any one of a range of specified offences may face reprimand, payment of compensation and/or performance of useful task, suspension and expulsion. The offence listed range from acts that undermine the effectiveness and reputation of the organization, to corruption, sexual abuse, fighting and a display of religious or any other forms of discrimination.

OPC Organizational structure

The hierarchical structure of OPC is shown in figure 1. The OPC has a hierarchy and an organisational structure, according to the HRW report on the OPC, which states:

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Information gleaned from literature asserts also that being a Yoruba is all any one need to qualify for membership and a process of initiation is prepared for a new member. Under Fasheun's faction the initiation according to Sesay *et al* [2003] is devoid of rituals. It involves making an oath in Yoruba as spelt out in the OPC Constitution and Bill of Rights. The would be member pays the membership fees and obtains an identity card by filling a membership form sold for NI50.00. The situation is not the same in the more militant faction led by Gani Adams; new members go through a ritual of initiation which Adams depicted as 'protocol'. This initiation takes place with the participation of a congregation of initiated members. It involves swearing to an oath of secrecy and allegiance through any of the major Yoruba deities. During the initiation a bowl of water is placed on the ground. The one in charge of the rite of initiation puts a piece of iron, stone, and palm frond in the bowl. Initiates are made to swear depending on individual preference by *Sango* [the Yoruba god of thunder], *Ogun* [the god of iron], or *Yemoja* [the water goddess]. The initiate then places his or her hand on the symbol of the god and swears that he/she will never betray the organization, and or abuse whatever it stands for.

The new member then confirms allegiance to the organization by chanting *O'odua ni mi t'okan to'kan, O'odua ni mi t'okan t'ara* meaning, 'I am O'odua wholeheartedly, I am O'odua soul and body.' Initiation is usually into the *eso* rank; the *esos* constitute what the group calls the 'Resistant Wing'. The idea of the *eso* is an appropriation of one of the key features of the age of warlords in the nineteenth-century Yorubaland. An *eso* in this era was the epitome of courage, perseverance and victory [Adebanwi, 2005].

¹ Historically the Yoruba term "eso" refers to a kind of vigilante group or "people's army" which used to protect local communities and traditional rulers from external attacks and acted as police during peace time. Within the OPC the *eso's* are expected to have spiritual capabilities and knowledge of defensive weaponry.

During initiation, members are made to swear to an oath that enjoins them to work for the progress of Yoruba land at all times and to keep the secrets of the congress. Though members are issued identity cards, they can also identify one another through sign language and the representations of certain wild animals or insects inscribed on their upper arm.

The OPC adopted the effigy of Oduduwa, the mythological progenitor of the Yoruba race, as its symbol [Adebanwi, 2005; Akinyele, 2001]. The effigy to Akinyele is printed on the tee-shirt commonly worn by OPC members. New members are subsequently armed with charms believed to prevent bullet, cutlass or knife wounds, handkerchief soaked in concoction deemed to prevent gun wounds, a small gourd with black powdery substance, native rings which have also been soaked [*Oruka ere*], and incisions [*gbere*] are made on the bodies of new members to prevent harm befalling them. Members also consult oracles regularly to divine the immediate future and seek for protection by offering the prescribed sacrifices to the gods [Adebanwi, 2005]. The motto of the Congress is '*Tiwa ni*', which means it is ours, while the slogan is *Oodua Ni mi tokan tokan, Odua ni mi tokan tara*, meaning I am Oodua deep down my soul, I am Oodua soul and body [Akinyele, 2001; Sesay *et al* ed. 2003; Adebanwi, 2005].

OPC claims to have between three and five million members. The bulk of the membership of the organization are drawn mainly from the community of artisans, unskilled workers, street gangs, the educationally – disadvantaged, and some practicing and ex-area boys who live in high density and largely notorious areas of Lagos like Mushin, Ajegunle, Bariga, and Agege [Adebanwi, 2005]. While Fasheun seemingly considered that volatile OPC youths should remain under the control of educated leaders, Gani Adams' perspective on what makes a good OPC member is much closer to the 'loose molecules'²:

We don't like to bother ourselves with people from a capitalist background or rich people because they can only behave like sympathizer to the struggle and they can be difficult to be devoted member. The rest people are the frustrated people on the street who are deprived one way or the other. They have the will and the courage to fight. For instance, take the student union movement, children of rich people do not bother to join such movement to fight for their rights, it is only student from deprived homes who are often at the forefront of the battle [Interview with Gani Adams, 23/05/2005 cited in Guichaoua, 2006].

This new attitude in OPC's enlistment of members [although certainly not fully executed practically, as zonal coordinators have great autonomy in the enlistment procedure at the plebs level] is more likely to have prompted the progressive but partial criminalization of OPC. One of the informants from Gani Adams faction explained thus:

When we started, we called ourselves youth activists but when the then military started dealing with us, that they killed about 300 at Mushin [a popular neighborhood of Lagos], then we went back to recruit all sorts of people, area boys [street boys] and any kind of person that was interested, this to me led to the loss of focus of the organization leading to the derailing for the initial plans of it.

The oath taken by new OPC members during initiation in their belief makes them bullet proof and compels them not to commit any criminal offence. They believe also that through progressive learning of the use of juju, neither cutlasses nor acid can hurt them. It is their belief also that higher-profile OPC members have the ability temporarily to petrify their enemies simply by looking at them and that a thrown egg can transform itself into a bomb. Aside from increasing self-confidence among members, these procedures ensure cohesiveness within the group, as violating the oath may have very grave consequences for the wrongdoer. In addition, these claims exacerbate fear in OPC's potential enemies and give the OPC credibility within the population they serve.

The magical clout is often complemented by more conventional armaments: OPC members [though not all] carry guns, locally made, smuggled or snatched from the police. [Akinyele, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2003]. The founder of OPC said members of the organization were only given identity cards after training, and that they were trained in self-defense.

² Those who have fewer opportunities to get a legal job that may constitute easy recruits for political entrepreneurs [Krueger and Malekova, 2003]

Some members according to Human Rights Watch stated that they were trained or educated about the history and culture of the Yoruba. Still others said they were taught how to relate to the police, in order to avoid confrontation. Gani Adams, according to HRW [2003] averred: “our members are trained in conscience and determination, not the use of weapons” However, it would appear that most of the members had not received any specific training because of the way they were recruited into the group, being Yoruba was virtually all one needed to be a member. In all, there was no specific or concrete blueprint of training for members of OPC but it is usually not out of place to see them flaunt dangerous weapons including guns menacingly while on patrol. The question then is who trained them to use guns and where did they receive the training and who gave them the guns?

The OPC essentially like any other vigilante group before and now, cashed in on the public disillusion with the police and concerns about persistent insecurity and the rising crime rate. They believe they have magical powers and charms to overpower criminals and protect members against conventional weapons; OPC established its reputation a fearless and bold force, more daring and, in the eyes of some, more effective than the police. The *esos* took charge of security and vigilante activities, when they caught suspects; they often handed out instant justice, killing them summarily on the spot [Guichaoua, 2006; HRW, 2003]. To Adams, only about two or three percent of the members are engaged in vigilante activities; claiming that the service is voluntary but that some give token money in appreciation of the selfless and prompt performance. HRW [2003] reports that, the involvement of OPC in vigilante activities has been particularly financially rewarding to the organization. A community leader in Ajegunle in Lagos once told HRW that: OPC *eso's* collect twenty or fifty naira from bus drivers at every bus stop before they were allowed to go. Ten or twenty percent of this goes to the Lagos State Local Government, then the rest is appropriated by OPC. All local governments employ members of OPC in Lagos State. The OPC leaders are very close to the local governments. Each house has to pay about five hundred naira a month, some more, some less. This money is supposed to be for security and their salaries. The tax is paid to the OPC directly³

The OPC has provided security arrangement at local and official gatherings including high profile events. It has been hired by people for different functions, called in to settle scores between private individuals and has intervened in disputes between landlords and tenants. The threat “I will call OPC to deal with you” has become a common catchphrase in situations of argument between people. It is no doubt that OPC members have been responsible for killings in this context, and their intervention in disputes has sometimes evoked wider clashes between communities.

Theoretical frame

This paper employed the general theory of social movement of Smelser (1963). In line with the theory, the structural imbalances and inadequacies in Nigeria during the military rule particularly the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, political marginalization, and economic deprivation of the south west created an enabling condition for people’s agitations and restiveness. The police are expected to prevent crime, bring sanity to the disorderliness of Nigerian polity and maintain social order. Their failure to effectively manage the security apparatus of the society brought about the operations of primordial groups such as OPC [Ajayi, 2008]. Other parameters such as structural strain, growth and spread of generalized beliefs, precipitating factor, mobilization for action and social control contribute in different proportions to the formation of the social movement aimed at fighting for rights and privileges of the society. According to Ajayi [2008] what is being established here is that there is crime problem in the south west of Nigeria and the police seem incapable of arresting the phenomenon. This was one of the major reasons why OPC and other self help groups got involved in crime prevention in the south west of Nigeria.

Methodology

Because the State capitals are more prone to crime and the presence of OPC in crime prevention in these State capitals, the study was therefore, carried out in Ado-Ekiti, Akure, Oshogbo, Ibadan, Abeokuta and Lagos. The survey targeted adults who are 18 years and above as a means of generating data from male and female respondents who are deemed matured enough to be well aware of the security processes in their neighborhood. Sequel to the mix of the study population, a variety of sampling methods was utilized. A multi-stage sampling method was used to select members of the public.

³ Human Rights interview, Lagos, September 1, 2002

Two communities in the state capitals were selected purposively [two communities with the highest incidence of crime and that utilize self-help or OPC as security agents]. In each of the two communities, a stratified and simple random sampling method was used to select the final respondents. First, stratified sampling method was used to disaggregate sex into male and female, from which twenty five respondents were selected from each sex category in each of the two communities selected, using simple random sampling method [see Table 1].

Table 1: Number of Research Instruments in each of the South West State Capital

Southwest State Capitals	Instruments used					Total
	IDIwith members of OPC	IDIwith Opinion leaders	Community level interviews using semi structured questionnaires	Focus Group Discussion held	Consultative and interactive meetings with members of OPC	
Ikeja	10	5	50	6	2	73
Ibadan	10	5	50	6	2	73
Abeokuta	10	5	50	6	2	73
Oshogbo	10	5	50	6	2	73
Akure	10	5	50	6	2	73
Ado - Ekiti	10	5	50	6	2	73
Total	60	30	300	36	12	438

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Data Collection

The study was divided into two sections. The first section which is the main object of this report was the baseline data section of the study, and it focused mainly on building mutual trust and confidence between the self-help security groups and the researchers and the collection of appropriate data on issues such as their formation, membership, operation and specific objective of each group. In the first section of the study, emphasis was on the collection of primary data which then provided information on the group's mode of operation, size, composition, socio-economic data, and type of activities undertaken, etc. There are other activities in this section these are: i] interactive meetings with specific leaders of OPC and rank and file members, ii] in-depth interviews [IDIs] with members of OPC and with key informants, members of the public and leaders of thought in each of the state capitals, iii] Focus Group Discussions [FGDs] with members of the community in which the OPC group is based, iv] Community level surveys using a pre-designed semi structured questionnaire to probe, among others the role of OPC in crime prevention, methods of crime prevention, Instruments of operation and their effectiveness in providing security to the neighborhood. Secondary data obtained from books, journals, newspapers, magazines and archival materials were used to complement the primary ones.

As a result of both quantitative and qualitative data generated from the study two different types of computer software packages were used for analysis of the data. EPI INFO was used for quantitative data, while TEXT BASE BETA was used for qualitative data. The data were presented in simple percentage tables and categorization of social events and content analysis of the recorded responses and diary of events.

Findings

Regardless of the risk to life and sensitivity of the study to field workers, very useful information was obtained with respect to the study's overall objectives. The study findings are organized under the following them:

- i] OPC and crime prevention in the south west
- ii] Strengths and weaknesses of OPC in crime prevention

Highlights

The Assistant Inspector General of Police [AIG] in charge of Zone Nine, in The Nigerian Tribune 26, June 2008 report once said that the Nigeria Police lack the necessary manpower to effectively check crime in the country. The officer who made this remark in Onitsha, Anambra State, while on a familiarization tour of the Onitsha Area Command, said the police, no matter how motivated, could not adequately provide security for millions of Nigerians with manpower of a little above 350,000. This is one of the major reasons why we have all sorts of self-help groups in crime prevention in our society today. Even apart from inadequate manpower in the police in Nigeria, the police can not do the job alone without the assistance of the people. The rising tides of violent crime in Nigeria starting from the mid-1990s and the widespread citizens' frustration with the inefficiency and

corruption of both the police and the judiciary, led to the emergence and upsurge in the numbers of vigilante or self-help outfits. In response to the relentless increase in the incidence of crime in virtually parts of the country, both local communities and state governments opted for the formation of vigilante groups either as a complement or substitute to the operations of the regular police [Sesay et al, 2003].

Socio-Economic and Cultural Characteristics of Respondents

Using a semi structured questionnaire, a total of 300 respondents were interviewed in the community survey. Table 2 presents the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in the field survey: age, sex, marital status, religious affiliation, ethnic origin, education and occupation. The age structure indicates that the modal age group was 25-29 years with a frequency of 26%. From the table it could be seen that 64% of the respondents fall within the age 25-49 bracket which is considered to be the prime or active age. Males [64%] dominated the respondents. The married respondents were 44% and about 42% were single. Most of the respondents [53.3%] were Christians while Muslims trailed behind with 40%. The table also shows that majority [83.3%] of the respondents were Yoruba this is strange because South West Nigeria is predominated by Yoruba ethnic group. The literacy level of the respondents was 99.4% with about 32.7% having more than secondary education. Most of the respondents [52%] were professionals of one kind or the other.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Characteristics of respondents in the six state capitals of the South West Nigeria		
Age	N	%
>25	66	22.0
25-29	78	26.0
30-34	30	10.0
35-39	30	10.0
40-44	6	2.0
45-49	48	16.0
50 and above	42	14.0
Total	300	100.0
Sex		
Male	192	64.0
Female	108	36.0
Total	300	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	126	42.0
Married	132	44.0
Divorced	12	4.0
Widowed	30	10.0
Total	300	100.0
Religious Affiliation		
Christianity	160	53.3
Islam	120	40.0
Others	20	6.7
Total	300	100.0
Ethnic Origin		
Yoruba	250	83.3
Igbo	30	10.0
Hausa /Fulani	12	4.0
Others	8	2.7
Total	300	100.0
Education		
No education	2	0.6
Primary education	80	26.7
Secondary education	120	40.0
Tertiary education	98	32.7
Total	300	100.0
Occupation		
Student	24	8.0
Applicant/unemployed	30	10.0
Professional	66	22.0
Trading/Business	36	12.0
Artisans	36	12.0
Teaching/civil service	36	12.0
Others	72	24.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2008

A significant number of the respondents were also either in trading/business or were in the teaching/civil service [8%] in each of these categories respectively.

OPC and other self-help security Outfits in crime Prevention

Crime and criminality have been a critical and major discourse in Nigeria socio-political and economic life since independence and particularly after the civil war. It seems none of the successive governments has been able to checkmate the menace to an appreciable degree [Third United Nations Crime Survey, 1993]. The failure of the State and State actors in crime control has led groups and individuals to take laws into their own hands; this assertion is corroborated by Roberts and Oladeji [2001], who observed that the perceived failure of the State in the area of public security as reflected in non-performance of the police led to the participation of the community in security management in Lagos and other parts of the south west. The most viable manifestation of this response in south west according to them is that of the Oodua Peoples Congress [OPC].

Table 3: OPC and Crime Prevention in South West Nigeria

Pre – OPC crime trend	N	%
Very high	170	56.6
High	120	40.0
Very low	2	0.7
Low	8	2.7
Total	300	100.0
OPC Intervention reduced crime		
Yes	297	99.0
No	2	0.7
Don't Know	1	0.3
Total	300	100.0
OPC's response to distress calls		
Very prompt	234	78.0
Prompt	30	10.0
Very careless	5	1.7
Careless	25	8.3
Don't know	6	2.0
Total	300	100.0
Victim of crime since OPC Intervention		
Yes	13	4.3
No	287	95.7
Total	300	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2008

The responses of the respondents to OPC roles in crime control in south west are shown in Table 7. About fifty three percent [57%] of the respondents said pre-OPC crime trend was very high, 40.0% saw the trend as high; while 2.7% and 0.7% believed it was low and very low respectively. In other words majority of the respondents, that is, 96.6% believed that crime rate was on the upward trend; while 3.4% said it was on the downward trend. The survey findings are corroborated by the qualitative data generated on the field. An interviewee explained the scenario thus:

Mushin contains both the lazy and the thieves, and they are in large numbers threatening the lives of the people day and night. The situation was so frustrating and hopeless that one wonders what the police are actually doing. They are only very efficient in extra-judicial killing, aiding and abetting, extortion of ₦20 from commercial motorists. In addition, so many of our youths and able-bodied men and women are jobless, life has been so hard and extremely difficult for the majority of our people. This situation has led to unprecedented high incidence of crime before OPC came on board.

**Male IDI/ Mushin /Opinion Leader
[May 27, 2008]**

To further establish this fact an FGD session in Agbeni generally submitted that:

The level of crime was very high before OPC involvement in crime prevention in this community. Armed robbers were two many. Even there was a time that when these armed robbers came around and their victim does not have a color television they can steal, they subject the person to vicious beating until one becomes breathless. I want to say the level of crime was high, the armed robbers often come in groups of ten or twenty to attack their victims, life was not safe until the emergence of OPC.

Female FGD/ Agbeni, Ibadan/ Adult 40 years and above

[April 27, 2008]

Thus, from the data generated, crime level was high before OPC emergence in crime control. This upward trend in crime was attested by Alemika and Chukwuma [2005] observation, that Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in crime during the past two decades most especially Lagos the major hob of the nation's economic and commercial activities even the most densely populated city. The increased level of crime might also be as a result of the pervasive and persistent increased level of deterioration in socio-economic conditions of the citizens, this condition gives room to poverty, inequity, inequality, disenchantment, frustration and hopelessness that on the long run find expression in criminality.

Having known the position of crime in The South West before OPC intervention, it is pertinent to look at the position after the intervention of OPC and its crime prevention related activities. This in other words, will give a clearer view of the impact of OPC in crime prevention. Respondents were asked to state in clear terms whether crime has reduced or it has been on the increase with OPC presence. In response to this, 99.0% affirmed that crime has drastically reduced, while 1.0% was negative. Majority distinctly supported the view that OPC has helped immensely to put crime in check as revealed in Table 7. The qualitative data obtained on the field also gave credence to this opinion and view.

An Opinion leader provided insight into OPC impact on crime rate in Ado-Ekiti thus:

The level of crime since OPC got involved in crime prevention reduced. Actually we faced some problems with the government and the people when we employed the services of OPC men but we thank God that the people later embraced OPC, because the police were unable to help the people.

Male IDI/ Ado-Ekiti/ Opinion Leader

[May 3, 2008]

Data from IDI and FGD further show that crime reduced at the instance of OPC involvement in crime prevention in the communities elected for this study. For example, members of a FGD session in Mushin generally agreed that:

Crime reduced because of the OPC intervention, the police cannot do anything in Ajegunle as they worsen crime situation, and they take bribe. But with the OPC, crime has reduced, but now that OPC has been banned, the armed robbers have gradually started again. Now thieves tie bournvita tin to a long stick and use it to collect handsets through the window opened for fresh air. Just about last week, a thief came and wanted to steal my phone through the window. He used the bournvita tin with a long stick and unfortunately for him, the stick was not long enough, it touched me instead and I suddenly woke up. I shouted at him then he took to his heels.

Female FGD/ Ajegunle/ Adult 40 years and above

[April 27, 2008]

From all of the above, it could be deduced that, there is general discontent against the failure of the state to provide some basic needs of the citizens such as security to lives, and property and this has resulted in helping themselves. Meanwhile like Anifowose [2004] observed, there was an army of unemployed youngsters, street urchins and loafers, and area boys prowling the densely populated slums and commercial centers of Lagos harassing, intimidating and extorting money from helpless citizens and frequently engaging in violent criminal activities.

It is the prevalence and upsurge in violent criminality that informed the embracing of private security arrangement to protect people from the hands of hoodlums. Perspective observers can not but be exasperated by the paradox of a State that was pervasive and strangulating to the civil society, yet weak and fragile, unable to exert its hegemony or claim the monopoly over the means of coercion much less provide basic needs citizens had long taken for granted.

The reaction from the citizens against the state inadequacy to provide security to lives and property according to the respondents in this study can be seen in the increasing yearning for an intervention for protection and redress against armed gangs and their collaborators in the police. If the police cannot guarantee the protection of the citizenry, then any alternative no matter how unorthodox would be welcome relief to the people. This was why OPC and all other self-help groups won many converts and admirers across the urban centers in Yoruba land. The organizations seek to protect the safety of lives and properties.

Effectiveness of Self-Help Security Outfits in the South West

A cursory look at Table 3, gives the impression that 88.0% of the respondents affirmed that OPC was very prompt/prompt and responsive to distress calls as against 1.7% and 8.3% that said they were very careless/careless. Only 2.0% said they did not know. It could therefore be inferred from the data that OPC being part of the community, know and appreciate the need of the people for security and are ready to render that service at little or no cost to keep the community safe and secure. In fact for OPC to gain some level of acceptance as against the police they need to satisfy some of the demands of the people which were left unattended to by the police.

To further buttress the effect of OPC in crime control, respondents were asked if they were victims of crime since the intervention of OPC, 4.3% of the respondents were in the affirmative while 95.7% said they did not fall victim. In other words, security to lives and property were more guaranteed with the coming in of OPC than the pre-emergence of OPC in those communities. In essence, the OPC became the major agency for physical security in Lagos in the context of individual and group insecurity, as they organized neighborhood watch and vigilante groups resisting vehemently the incursion of hoodlums [Adejumobi, 2003]. The majority of the interviewees and discussants agree that the rate of crime was high before OPC came into help, but since the involvement of OPC crime rate reduced. An interviewee says:

The level of crime in Oshogbo reduced drastically, because the OPC knew those that commit crime in the community so they go for them, they deal ruthlessly with the criminal, most of them ran away to other areas to hide. The contribution and effort of the OPC helped a great deal to minimize crime in this community. Tell me who would not be afraid of OPC treatment.

**Male IDI/ Oshogbo/ chairperson of Landlords Association
[May 3, 2008]**

Yet a youth male in FGD session submit thus:

The level of crime in Abeokuta Township was very high before OPC came in, high to the extent that lives and properties were very unsafe. Crime reduced after OPC involvement in crime prevention. This is because OPC punish the thieves mercilessly. They kill most of them while the rest left the community.

**Male FGD/ Abeokuta/ 18 - 39 years of age
[April 27, 2008]**

From the above, it could be deduced that the insecurity to lives and property in the South West studied was pervasive and call for immediate action which the police had no capability to handle, this apparent failure of the State security apparatus led to various strategies for self help, the manifestation of this is exemplified in the activities of the OPC in fighting crime generally in the South West. Response from the public affirmed that crime rate started decreasing following the intervention of OPC in crime prevention in the southwest.

Table 4: A cross tabulation of respondents' reasons for the support and Patronage of Self Help Security Organization [OPC]

Reasons for OPC support	In case of crime, which agent do you report to?			Total
	The police	OPC	Others	
Police is the authorized crime control agency	108 98.2%		2 1.8%	110 100.0%
OPC is nearer to the people/community	16 13.2%	34 28.1%	71 58.7%	121 100.0%
OPC is fast effective and make peace immediately	4 7.3%	44 80.0%	7 12.7%	55 100.0%
Police delay in investigating cases	4 100.0%			4 100.0%
OPC is crude in handling Offenders	8 80.0%	2 20.0%		10 100.0%
Total	140 46.6%	80 26.7	80 26.7%	300 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Despite the public acclamation of police ineffectiveness people still prefer to report cases to them. From Table 4, 46.6% showed preference for the police mainly for its legality and the crudity in OPC's methods of handling offenders. And those who showed preference for OPC [26.7%] did so for various reasons ranging from its closeness to the community, its effectiveness, and the general delay of police in prosecution and adjudication of cases. Further more the table reveals that patronage of OPC is influenced by its closeness to the community [28.1%] as against police [13.2%]. The table also reveals that majority [80.0%] who patronize OPC does so because they are effective and prompt in response to distress calls against police [7.3%]. It can be deduced further that the public prefer to report cases to the police on the basis of their legality and not because of closeness to the people and effectiveness in responses to public needs for security. Majority of the interviewee and discussants agree that the withdrawal of the OPC will lead to increase in crime in their neighborhood.

Conclusion

Crime incidence declined in the crimogenic [crime generating] and criminogenic [criminal producing] metropolis in the south west because of the intervention of self help security groups. The emergence of most militant groups in crime control, points to the failure of the government and the conventional police to provide and maintain security in the urban centers of Nigeria. Up till now the Federal Government is yet to grapple with the security to lives and properties of Nigerian citizens in the urban centers. The more the police remained weak, ill motivated and ill equipped the more the violent crimes and the more alternative groups are welcomed and appreciated by the urban residents' in spite of the unorthodox methods of operation such groups exhibit.

Despite the brutal and violent methods of dealing with offenders, the self help security groups gained public acclamation and support, particularly among the Yoruba that constitute the major ethnic group in the south west. The grassroots support they enjoyed, the ineffectiveness of the security apparatuses and the tacit aid of the State government sustained and gave the self help security groups preference over the police. Thus, the basic causes of crime and that, which cause self help militant group's involvement in crime prevention, need to be addressed. Based on the perceived effectiveness and the support the groups enjoyed from the public there is need for reorganization of the groups by the government to make them more relevant and useful for security purposes particularly in the south west state capitals instead of outright proscription that merely drove the group underground with occasional violent and virulent outbursts. This can only make it more difficult if not very impossible for the groups to be held accountable for their actions any time.

The self help security groups performance in crime prevention was impressive but methodically crude, brutal and extra judicial. There is therefore the need for a formalized training to make the groups more useful and be responsible to the police since the police cannot succeed in controlling crime without the support of the public. Though this is a very controversial stance but does not negate the fact that there is need for some sort of self help security groups/police collaboration to rid the urban areas of criminality.

A deliberate social and economic policy should be put in place by the government to alleviate the suffering of the youths in Nigerian society. Given the fact that most of the members of the ethnic militias recruited are members from the 'urban footloose' and lumpen proletariat – the unemployed and the semi-employed - provision of gainful employment for millions of presently idle youths may help reduce the number of restive young men on the street who have nothing to lose by being a member of an ethnic militia participating in the various activities and violent operations. The economy, especially the productive industrial sector and agriculture, need to be developed in order to minimize the problems of unemployment, poverty and food insecurity that produce a large army of unemployed, poor and hungry youths that are recruited for violent conflicts, militia and vigilante activities in different parts of the society. Without doubt it has become so imperative no matter the economic handicap of the state to enhance police efficiency for the purpose of crime management.

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