

**COMMUNITY-BASED SECURITY OUTFITS AND THE GOVERNANCE OF RURAL VIOLENCE IN
SOUTHWEST NIGERIA:
LEGAL FRAMEWORK, INTEGRATION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE ERA OF IRU EKUN**

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Abstract

The resurgence of kidnapping, armed robbery, and farmer-herder violence in Southwest Nigeria has exposed the limits of centralized policing in securing vast and porous rural spaces. The proposed Iru Ekun security outfit by Chief Sunday Adeyemo represents a renewed push for community-based response to insecurity. This paper analyzes the legal, operational, and governance challenges of integrating informal and quasi-formal security actors into Nigeria's security architecture.

Drawing on constitutional provisions, the Police Act 2020, state security laws, and comparative models from Commonwealth Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, the paper argues that community-based outfits can enhance response time and local intelligence only when subjected to legal oversight, standardized training, and interagency coordination. The analysis integrates theoretical frameworks of subsidiarity, community policing, and plural policing, and draws on the author's published works on security management in educational institutions, threat prevention in school environments, and strategic security operations.

The paper concludes that without structured integration, accountability mechanisms, and depoliticization, community outfits risk becoming part of the problem. It proposes a model for state-level fusion cells, joint operations protocols, and civilian oversight to prevent the "second rising of affliction" in Yorubaland and beyond.

Keywords: Community Policing, Plural Policing, Subsidiarity, Iru Ekun, Amotekun, Vigilantism, Rural Violence, Security Governance, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Security is the first duty of the state, but the state cannot secure what it cannot reach. In Southwest Nigeria, the period 2019-2026 witnessed repeated abductions, attacks on farmers, and assaults on traditional rulers across Ibarapa, Oke-Ogun, Ekiti North, and parts of Ondo and Ogun States. The Nigeria Police Force, Army, and NSCDC remain overstretched, with average police-to-citizen ratios well below the UN recommended 1:450.

In this context, the announcement of Iru Ekun as a community security outfit intended to support federal efforts against kidnapping has reignited debate on the role of non-state actors in public security. The core question is not whether local actors can provide speed and terrain knowledge, but under what legal and governance conditions their operations can enhance rather than undermine public order.

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of community-based security outfits in Nigeria, with a focus on Southwest Nigeria. It examines the historical evolution of informal security, the legal framework governing their operation, comparative experiences from other jurisdictions, and the practical requirements for integration, oversight, and accountability.

2. Background and Historical Context

2.1 Pre-Colonial and Colonial Security Arrangements

Traditional Yoruba society relied on agbekoya, oro, and palace guards for local security. The British colonial administration introduced the Nigeria Police Force in 1930, centralizing policing and marginalizing indigenous security structures.

2.2 Post-Independence Vigilantism and Militia Groups

From the 1980s, economic decline and police incapacity led to the rise of groups like the Oodua Peoples Congress, Bakassi Boys, and local hunters' associations. These groups filled gaps but often operated without legal backing, leading to human rights violations and political misuse.

2.3 The Amotekun Model 2020

The Southwest Security Network, codenamed Amotekun, marked the first attempt to legalize regional community security within constitutional limits. State assemblies passed laws creating Amotekun Corps as auxiliaries to the NPF, with mandates limited to intelligence gathering, arrest, and handover.

2.4 The Emergence of Iru Ekun 2026

Iru Ekun emerges in a context where Amotekun remains under-resourced and where kidnapping syndicates exploit gaps in rural coverage. Its proponents argue for speed, cultural legitimacy, and local knowledge. Critics warn of duplication, politicization, and lack of accountability.

3. Problem Statement and Overview

The core problem is a mismatch between threat geography and state security deployment. Kidnappers operate in forests and rural roads with rapid mobility, while formal security response is delayed by distance, bureaucracy, and intelligence gaps.

The overview of this paper is to assess whether community-based outfits like Iru Ekun can be integrated into Nigeria's security architecture in a way that respects constitutional limits, improves operational effectiveness, and maintains public trust.

4. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

4.1 Theoretical Foundations

- **Subsidiarity:** Decisions should be made at the lowest effective level. Community actors are best placed for immediate response in rural areas.
- **Plural Policing:** Loader and Walker argue that policing is delivered by a mix of public, private, and voluntary actors. The challenge is coordination and regulation.
- **Community Policing:** Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux emphasize partnership, problem-solving, and trust between police and communities.

4.2 Conceptual Background

- **Legal Pluralism:** The coexistence of formal state law and informal normative orders.
- **Security Governance:** The process of coordinating multiple actors to produce security outcomes.
- **Accountability Deficit:** The gap between authority exercised by non-state actors and mechanisms to hold them accountable.

4.3 Views of Prominent Authors and Analysts

David Bayley argues that community policing succeeds only when local actors are formally linked to the state police. Etannibi Alemika warns that unregulated vigilantism in Nigeria often degenerates into political thuggery. Social media analysts on platforms like X and Facebook have highlighted both the operational successes and abuses of regional outfits, noting that public perception shifts rapidly based on visible accountability.

Real-life scenarios such as the 2021 Oke-Ogun kidnappings, the 2023 Ibarapa attacks, and the 2024 Ekiti school abduction attempts illustrate the operational gap that local actors can fill if coordinated.

5. Principles, Processes, and Procedures in Community Security

5.1 Principles

1. **Legality:** All operations must be within statutory authority.
2. **Accountability:** Clear reporting lines to state security councils.
3. **Proportionality:** Use of force limited to what is necessary and lawful.
4. **Non-Discrimination:** Operations must not target ethnic or political groups.

5.2 Processes and Procedures

- **Recruitment and Vetting:** Background checks, psychometric evaluation, and community endorsement.
- **Training:** Human rights, use of force, first aid, and intelligence handling. Akinade provides a curriculum model for local security actors in Security Threats and Hazards Prevention in School Environments.[2017]
- **Command and Control:** Integration into State Security Council structure with a designated liaison officer from the NPF.
- **Intelligence Management:** Community intelligence fed into State Criminal Intelligence Fusion Cells.
- **Operational Protocol:** Arrest and handover within 24 hours, prohibition on detention beyond lawful limits.
- **Complaints Mechanism:** Independent civilian oversight board to receive and investigate complaints.

5.3 Role of Private Security Organizations and Non-State Actors

Private security firms can provide training, logistics, and technology support under license from the NSCDC. Informal militia groups must be disarmed and either integrated into formal structures or disbanded.

6. Legal and Statutory Framework

6.1 Constitutional Provisions

- Section 214 vests policing in the Nigeria Police Force.
- Section 215 allows the President to give directions to the IGP.
- Section 217 permits the National Assembly to make laws for the regulation of the Armed Forces.
- Sections 4 and 5 define the legislative competence of states, which includes internal security within constitutional limits.

6.2 Legislation and Regulations

- Police Act 2020: Establishes community policing and allows collaboration with community groups.
- NSCDC Act 2007: Regulates private guard companies and auxiliary security services.

- State Security Network Laws 2020: Enacted by Ondo, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, and Lagos to create Amotekun Corps.
- Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015: Governs arrest, detention, and prosecution.
- Cybercrimes Act 2015: Governs digital intelligence and interception.

6.3 Policy Instruments

- National Security Strategy 2022
- National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools 2021
- Community Policing Policy Framework 2020

7. Books by Barrister Adebayo Akinade on the Subject Matter

The analysis and recommendations in this paper draw directly from the author's published works:

1. Akinade, A.. Security Operations, Crime Prevention and Good Governance: Patterns and Trends. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria Publications Series.[2007]
2. Akinade, A.. National Security, Social Coercion and Sustainable Development: Panacea to Conflict, Violence and Xenophobia. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria Publications Series.[2008]
3. Akinade, A.. Security Culture, Diplomacy and Communication Skills in International Relations. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria Publications Series.[2008]
4. Akinade, A.. Communal Conflict and Violence: Response, Resolution and Prevention. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria Publications Series.[2009]
5. Akinade, A.. Security Management in Educational Institutions. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria Publications Series.[2014]
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8. Akinade, A.. Managing Strategic Security in Statecraft, Public Affairs and Foreign Relations. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria Publications Series.[2019]
9. Akinade, A.. Policing Terrorism, Insurgency and Weapons of Mass Destruction for International Peace and Security. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria Publications Series.[2019]

8. Comparative Insights and Exposition

8.1 Commonwealth Africa: Kenya and South Africa

Kenya's Nyumba Kumi initiative integrates community representatives into policing at the village level, with formal reporting to police stations. South Africa's Community Policing Forums face challenges of politicization and underfunding, similar to Nigeria's experience.

8.2 United States

Neighborhood Watch and Community Emergency Response Teams operate under local police supervision. Joint Terrorism Task Forces and HIDTA programs demonstrate the value of fusion cells in linking local intelligence to federal action.

8.3 United Kingdom and Canada

The UK's Prevent Duty requires schools and local authorities to report radicalization risks to police. Canada's School Safety Teams and Integrated Gang Task Forces show how multi-agency units can address youth violence without eroding civil liberties.

8.4 Asian Countries: India and Indonesia

India's Village Defence Committees in Jammu and Kashmir provide armed local defense under Army oversight. Indonesia's Siskamling neighborhood watch system operates under police coordination. Both models emphasize legal status and command integration.

9. Analysis of Issues Raised in the Iru Ekun Discourse

9.1 Terrain Knowledge and Response Speed

Local actors possess knowledge of bush paths and flashpoints that external forces lack. This aligns with Akinade's argument in Security Management in Educational Institutions that localized risk mapping is essential for effective prevention.[2014]

9.2 Risk of Politicization

Without non-partisan governance, outfits become tools for electoral mobilization. The paper proposes a multi-stakeholder oversight board to insulate operations from partisan interference.

9.3 Accountability and Human Rights

Speed without accountability leads to extrajudicial action. The paper recommends mandatory body-worn cameras for all operations and quarterly audits by the National Human Rights Commission.

9.4 Integration with Amotekun and NPF

Iru Ekun should function as an auxiliary unit under the Oyo State Amotekun Command, with joint training, shared communications, and a unified incident command system. Akinade in Policing Terrorism, Insurgency and Weapons of Mass Destruction emphasizes that joint operations protocols and deconfliction mechanisms are critical in multi-agency responses.[2019]

10. Recommendations for Improvement, Innovation, and Reform

1. **Legal Clarification:** Enact a Federal-State framework law defining the status, mandate, and limits of community security outfits.
2. **Fusion Cells:** Establish State School and Community Security Fusion Cells within State CID to process intelligence and coordinate response.
3. **Training and Certification:** Mandate minimum training standards for all community security personnel, certified by the NSCDC and NPF.
4. **Technology Integration:** Deploy low-cost panic alarms and digital reporting apps linked to Divisional Police Control Rooms.
5. **Oversight Mechanism:** Create a State Civilian Oversight Board with representatives from traditional rulers, civil society, legal profession, and security agencies.
6. **Depoliticization:** Prohibit partisan funding and require transparent budget disclosure.
7. **Victim Support:** Integrate psychosocial support and safe reintegration protocols for victims of kidnapping.
8. **Public Education:** Launch campaigns on responsible information sharing to counter disinformation during incidents.

11. Prospects and Future Generations

The future of rural security in Nigeria lies in a hybrid model that combines state capacity with community legitimacy. If properly regulated, outfits like Iru Ekun can serve as early warning nodes and first responders, reducing response time from days to hours.

For future generations, the priority must be institutionalization. Ad hoc arrangements collapse when political will fades. Embedding community security into state budgets, legal frameworks, and career pathways for local security personnel will ensure sustainability.

12. Conclusion

The Southwest cannot afford a second rising of affliction. Iru Ekun and similar initiatives represent an opportunity to close the operational gap in rural security, but only if they operate within law, under oversight, and in coordination with state institutions.

The choice before Yoruba leaders and elders is not between state policing and community action, but between coordinated partnership and fragmented vigilantism. History will judge whether this generation chose structure over sentiment, and accountability over impunity.

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