

**UNCOVERING AND DISMANTLING HIDDEN FOREST CELLS IN SOUTH WEST
NIGERIA:
LEGAL, ETHICAL, AND PREVENTIVE SECURITY FRAMEWORK FOR
COUNTERING RURAL BANDITRY, LAND-BASED INSURGENCY AND FOREST-
BASED TERRORISM**

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ABSTRACT

The Ikokore Reporters' May 2026 investigation of Omugbawojo forest, Atan-Odosimadegun axis, Ijebu North East LGA, Ogun State, alleges a settlement of 2000+ undocumented persons, 100+ huts, 2000+ cattle, parallel governance under a "Sarki Fulani", illegal arms, intimidation of farmers, Baales and hunters, and destruction of N30m cassava investment. Footpaths allegedly link the cell to Ibadan-Ijebu Ode Expressway kidnappings and transnational routes to Niger Republic. This paper subjects the report to legal, ethical, constitutional, and security analysis. It identifies statutory breaches: Constitution 1999 S.14(2)(b), S.17(2)(b); Land Use Act 1978 S.1, 28; Ogun State Forestry Law S.7; Firearms Act S.3, 28; Criminal Code S.86, 451; Immigration Act 2015 S.38; Terrorism Prevention and Prohibition Act 2022 S.1, 2; and Amotekun Corps Law Ogun 2020. Ethical issues include ethnic profiling, victim protection, proportionality of force, and media responsibility. Using Akinade 2015 Intelligence System: Principles and Practice, Akinade 2017 Public Policing and Private Protection for Maximum Security, Akinade 2017 Contemporary Security Issues in Governance and Statecraft, Akinade 2017 Managing Strategic Security and Crime Prevention Models, Akinade 2018 Community Policing: Strategic Approaches in Crime Prevention, Akinade 2018 Legal and Forensic Issues in Elections and Peace Education, Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity, Bioterrorism and Environmental Protection, Akinade 2019 Managing Strategic Security in Statecraft, Public Affairs and Foreign Relations, Akinade 2020 Law Enforcement Strategies, Techniques and Tools, Akinade 2021 Enhancing Information Security and Facilities Management, and Akinade 2021 Security and Criminal Intelligence for Law Enforcement, plus Nigerian scholars Nwabueze 1992, Odinkalu 2019, Jinadu 2021, Ojo 2012, and foreign authorities Lowenthal 2020, Byman 2014, Ratcliffe 2016, Clarke 1995, Gill & Phythian 2018, and Bayley 2006, the paper designs a 4-phase Detect-Disrupt-Dismantle-Deter model. It evaluates prospects: reclaiming forests, securing N4.3trn South West agric GDP, restoring state monopoly of force; and challenges: Amotekun firepower limits, human rights compliance, political interference. It details strategies and techniques of investigation, surveillance, monitoring, and undercover assignments, including drone IMINT, hunter HUMINT, NFIU financial tracking, and forensic evidence chains. The paper concludes that forest cells are incipient insurgencies. Amotekun cannot confront them alone, but integrated JTFs can. NUC must reward scholars who deploy forest-security systems.

Keywords: Ungoverned Spaces, Forest Banditry, Amotekun, Intelligence Fusion, Preventive Security, Constitution 1999, Land Use Act, Firearms Act, Terrorism Act 2022, Ethics, Undercover Operations, Agrosecurity, Community Policing.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Ikokore Reporters' Account: Narrative Summary

A farmer lost N30m cassava to cattle overnight in Omugbawojo, Ijebu North East. Tracing 3km into the forest reserve via narrow footpath, he found “a big town”: 100+ huts, 2000 cattle, 2000+ persons under a “Sarki Fulani”. Occupants were “fully armed”. Hunters were warned not to hunt near the camp. Baales were “afraid” and allegedly “stooges”. Footpaths connect to Ibadan-Ijebu Ode Expressway kidnap points and to Niger Republic. The victim abandoned his 20-hectare farm.

1.2 Legal and Ethical Problem Statement

The report triggers 8 intersecting issues:

1. Legality of Occupation: Forest reserve settlement without C of O.
2. Criminality: Threat to life, mischief, illegal firearms.
3. National Security: Potential terror cell per Terrorism Act 2022.
4. Constitutionality: State's duty S.14(2)(b) to secure welfare.
5. Ethics: Risk of ethnic profiling vs. victim protection.
6. Interagency: Amotekun's legal firepower vs. 2000 armed men.
7. Intelligence: How 2000 persons moved undetected.
8. Academic: Universities publish on conflict but deploy no forest monitoring.

1.3 Aim and Research Questions

Aim: To establish a legally compliant, ethically sound, and operationally effective framework for detecting and dismantling hidden forest cells.

Questions:

1. What specific statutory provisions and constitutional requirements are breached?
2. What ethical duties bind security agencies, media, and consultants?
3. What prospects and opportunities exist if the cell is dismantled?
4. What problems and challenges impede state response?
5. What investigation, surveillance, monitoring, and undercover techniques apply?

1.4 Methodology

Doctrinal analysis of 1999 Constitution, Land Use Act, Forestry Laws, Firearms Act, Criminal Code, Immigration Act, Terrorism Act 2022, Amotekun Law. Case comparison with Rugu, Kamuku, Ibarapa. Application of Akinade 2015-2021 frameworks.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Ungoverned Spaces Theory

Rabasa et al. 2007: spaces where state cannot exercise authority. Byman 2014: forests become “insurgent incubators” when 3 factors exist: terrain, population, grievance. Omugbawojo has all 3.

2.2 Preventive Security Doctrine

Akinade 2017 Managing Strategic Security and Crime Prevention Models Chapter 2: security is achieved by denying opportunity. Forest clearance, surveillance, and prosecution deny opportunity.

2.3 Community Policing and Public-Private Protection

Akinade 2018 Community Policing: Strategic Approaches in Crime Prevention Chapter 5: hunters, Baales, and farmers are the first line of intelligence. Their intimidation breaks the chain. Akinade 2017 Public Policing and Private Protection for Maximum Security Chapter 4: Amotekun must integrate with Police CTU, not operate parallel. Bayley 2006 supports integrated models.

2.4 Agrosecurity and Environmental Protection

Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity, Bioterrorism and Environmental Protection Chapter 3: destruction of 20 hectares of cassava is agro-terrorism when used to displace populations. Forest reserves are environmental assets; illegal settlement degrades biodiversity and creates safe havens.

3.0 LEGAL ASPECTS: STATUTORY AND CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

3.1 Constitutional Provisions and Requirements

Provision	Requirement	Breach in Omugbawojo
S.14(2)(b) 1999	Security and welfare of people is primary purpose of government.	Farmers abandoned land. State absent in forest.
S.17(2)(b)	Sanctity of human person shall be recognized.	Threats to kill victim violate.
S.43	Right to acquire immovable property.	Victim's 20 hectares rendered useless.
S.214	Only NPF for internal security.	Amotekun cannot wage war alone.
S.217	Armed Forces for insurrection.	If cell = insurrection, Army required.

3.2 Statutory Provisions and Legislation

Statute	Section	Requirement	Application
Land Use Act 1978	S.1, 28	All land vests in Governor.	Occupation without C of O = trespass. Revocation for public interest. Settlement illegal. Governor can revoke and issue quit notice.
Ogun State Forestry Law	S.7, 12	No settlement in reserve without permit.	Penalty: eviction + 2 years. 100 huts = mass offence. Forestry + Police to enforce.
Firearms Act	S.3, 28	No person shall possess firearm without licence.	AK-47 = prohibited. "Fully armed" triggers arrest.
Criminal Code	S.86	Threatening violence = 1 year.	Sarki's threat actionable.
Criminal Code	S.451	Mischief by destroying farm = 2 years.	N30m cassava loss = aggravated.
Immigration Act 2015	S.38	Undocumented entry = deportation.	2000 undocumented = NIS sweep.
Terrorism Act 2022	S.1, 2	Encampment for terror, arms = terrorism.	If linked to Sahel, proscribe cell.
Amotekun Law Ogun 2020	S.4, 15	Collaborate with Police.	Bear pump-action only. Cannot assault camp alone.
Police Act 2020	S.4, 66	Police lead internal security.	CP must command JTF.
Environmental Impact Assessment Act	S.2	Forest reserve requires EIA for change of use.	No EIA done. Breach.

3.3 Regulations and Rules

1. National Forest Policy 2006: Reserves for conservation, not settlement.
2. Ogun State Forest Regulations 2018: Entry permit, 6am-6pm only.
3. IGP Standard Operating Procedure on Joint Operations 2021: Amotekun as guides, not lead.
4. DSS Source Handling Rules: Hunter HUMINT must be vetted, paid, protected.

4.0 ETHICAL ISSUES RAISED

4.1 Ethnic Profiling vs. Criminal Conduct

Akinade 2018 Legal and Forensic Issues Chapter 8: The law targets conduct, not ethnicity. Media must report “illegal armed settlement” not “Fulani cell” unless identity confirmed. ICCPR Article 20 prohibits incitement. Ethical duty: Ikokore Reporters should hand coordinates to DSS, not publish routes that aid escape.

4.2 Victim Protection and Food Security Ethics

Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity, Bioterrorism and Environmental Protection Chapter 1: Destruction of food systems is a human security violation. State has ethical duty to compensate and protect food producers under FAO Right to Food.

4.3 Proportionality of Force

Constitution S.33 + Army v. Obeya: Force must be proportionate. 2000 persons include women, children, cattle. Akinade 2017 Contemporary Security Issues Chapter 6: “cordon, negotiate, then assault”.

4.4 Media Ethics

NUJ Code: accuracy, balance. Publishing “Sultan of Reserve” without verification inflames. Ethical path: verify with satellite, then report.

4.5 Consultant Ethics

Akinade 2020 Chapter 12: Duty of confidentiality, but S.40 EFCC Act requires reporting crime. Consultant cannot take bribe from Sarki. Must disclose conflict.

5.0 PROSPECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. Agricultural: Reclaim 20 hectares + forest. Ogun IGR from cassava = N200bn yearly. Secure it per Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity Chapter 4.
2. Security: Cut Ibadan-Ijebu Ode kidnap corridor. IGP 2025 data: 60% kidnaps use forest.
3. Environmental: Enforce Forestry Law, stop deforestation. Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity Chapter 7: forests are critical national infrastructure.
4. Community Policing: Empower hunters and Baales per Akinade 2018 Community Policing Chapter 7. Restore trust.
5. Legal Precedent: Prosecution under Terrorism Act 2022 deters future cells.

6.0 PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

1. Firepower Asymmetry: Amotekun dane guns vs. AK-47s. Akinade 2017 Public Policing and Private Protection Chapter 8: private security cannot match insurgency.
2. Political Interference: If Sarki has patrons, JTF stalls. Odinkalu 2019 documents this.
3. Human Rights: Risk of extrajudicial killings, burning huts. ICC scrutiny.
4. Intelligence Failure: 2000 persons moved undetected. NIS, DSS gap.
5. Community Policing Breakdown: Akinade 2018 Community Policing Chapter 3: when hunters and Baales are intimidated, early warning fails.
6. Judicial Delay: Terrorism trials take 5 years. Suspects return.

7.0 STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES OF INVESTIGATIONS, SURVEILLANCE, MONITORING, UNDERCOVER ASSIGNMENTS

7.1 Investigation Strategy

Akinade 2019 Legal Records, Data Forensics Chapter 3 + Akinade 2020 Law Enforcement Strategies Chapter 5:

1. Crime Scene: Forest camp. Preserve footprints, cartridges.
2. Agro-Forensics: Soil samples, crop damage assessment for prosecution. Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity Chapter 6.
3. Suspect Profiling: Sarki, armourers, financiers. NFIU track cattle sales.

7.2 Surveillance Techniques

1. IMINT: NIGCOMSAT-1R + Planet Labs. Count huts. Akinade 2015 Chapter 5.
2. Community Surveillance: Train hunters as watchers per Akinade 2018 Community Policing Chapter 9.
3. Environmental Monitoring: Sensors for forest entry. Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity Chapter 8.
4. Acoustic Sensors: ShotSpotter in forest. Detect test-firing.

7.3 Monitoring Techniques

1. Geofence: Virtual fence around reserve. Alert if 50+ phones enter.
2. Agric Market Monitoring: Kara market cattle surge = cell selling. Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity Chapter 5.
3. Road CCTV: ANPR on Ijebu Ode-Ibadan. Match vehicles to cell.

7.4 Undercover Assignments

Akinade 2021 Security and Criminal Intelligence Chapter 11 + Akinade 2018 Community Policing Chapter 10:

1. Hunters as Sources: Trained, paid, exfil plan.
2. Pseudo-Herder: DSS operative with cattle, joins camp. Collect arms data.
3. Community Policing Infiltration: Use trusted locals, not strangers.
4. Supply Chain Infiltration: Sell to camp, tag bags with GPS.
5. Ethics: Undercover must not entrap. Evidence Act 84 compliant.

7.5 Forensic Chain

Akinade 2018 Chapter 4:

1. Drone video: Hash + certificate.
2. Seized Phones: Cellebrite extraction.
3. Ballistics: Match shells to kidnaps.
4. Financial: NFIU + BVN link.

8.0 PREVENTIVE SECURITY FRAMEWORK: 4D MODEL WITH LEGAL ANCHOR

8.1 Detect

Legal: S.5 Constitution, S.3 DSS Instrument.

Action: Satellite, hunters, NFIU, agro-surveillance. 30 days. Akinade 2017 Managing Strategic Security Chapter 4.

8.2 Disrupt

Legal: Forestry Law quit notice, Firearms Act arrest.

Action: Freeze accounts, arrest scouts, protect farmers per Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity. 60 days.

8.3 Dismantle

Legal: Terrorism Act 2022, Police Act S.4.

Action: JTF operation with community policing guides per Akinade 2018 Community Policing. Prosecution, deportation. 90 days.

8.4 Deter

Legal: Land Use Act, NSCCDC post.

Action: Occupy, develop, monitor, integrate public and private protection per Akinade 2017 Public Policing and Private Protection. Ongoing.

9.0 ROLE OF AMOTEKUN: INTEGRATING PUBLIC POLICING AND PRIVATE PROTECTION

9.1 What Amotekun Can Do

1. Intelligence: Guide JTF, map footpaths. Lawful S.4. Akinade 2018 Community Policing Chapter 6.
2. Arrest: Citizens arrest S.12 ACJA.
3. Cordon: With Police.

9.2 What Amotekun Cannot Do

1. Wage War: S.217 Constitution.
2. Carry AK-47: Firearms Act.

Solution: IGP secondment under S.33 Police Act. Vetted Amotekun become Police CTU. Akinade 2017 Public Policing and Private Protection Chapter 9: "Maximum security is achieved when public and private assets fuse under one command."

10.0 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Immediate: 30 Days

1. Ogun SSC: Verify within 7 days using Akinade 2015 intelligence model.
2. AG: Issue quit notice per Forestry Law.
3. Compensate farmer per Akinade 2019 Agrosecurity Chapter 10.
4. DSS: Activate hunter HUMINT per Akinade 2018 Community Policing.

10.2 Legislative: 90 Days

1. Amend Amotekun Law: Secondment clause per Akinade 2017 Public Policing.
2. Amend Forestry Law: Drone evidence admissible per Akinade 2018 Legal and Forensic Issues.
3. Pass Ogun Agrosecurity Bill: Criminalize farm destruction as terrorism.

10.3 Institutional: 2 Years

1. Forest Fusion Center: DSS + Amotekun + Forestry + Ministry of Agriculture.
2. NUC: 60% promotion for deployed systems from Akinade 2017 Managing Strategic Security, 2018 Community Policing, 2019 Agrosecurity.

3. Constitutional: State Police with forest rangers.

11.0 CONCLUSION

The Omugbawojo report breaches 13 statutes and the Constitution. It violates agrosecurity principles in Akinade 2019 and community policing doctrines in Akinade 2018. Ethically, we must protect victims without profiling ethnicity. Operationally, Amotekun needs JTF and public-private integration. Technically, drones, HUMINT, and NFIU can expose the cell.

As Akinade 2017 Contemporary Security Issues and Akinade 2017 Managing Strategic Security and Crime Prevention Models warn: “The state dies in the forest before it dies in the capital.” Find the cell. Name the crime. Apply the law. Reclaim the forest. Protect the farm.

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