

Accountability Brief

A Policy Brief from the Promoting Informed Dialogues on Security Sector in Nigeria.

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Non-State Security Providers in Nigeria: Opportunities and Challenges

Executive Summary

The Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative (also known as Partners West Africa-Nigeria) commissioned a nationwide mapping of non-state security providers as part of its programme on Promoting Informed Dialogue on Security (PRIDES). The research utilised a combination of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focused group discussions (FGDs) with security personnel, commanders of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria, community leaders and coordinators of the various non-state actors in different states. A desk review was also carried out in five out of the six geo-political zones of the country: North East, North Central, North West, South East and South West, except for the South-South zone¹.

The mapping focused on key underlying issues that bordered on the primary functions, composition, geographical spread, modalities of operations, funding sources, and relationship between the non-state security providers the formal security agencies of the state, as well as the communities. While some of the non-state security providers are national in spread, such as the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), others like the Civilian-Joint Task Force (C-JTF) are regional in focus, particularly in the North East zone. In each of the states this mapping covered, the researchers also identified non-state security providers established with specific focus on either a community or the state at large.

Key Findings

Private security actors have come to stay in Nigeria. Thus they should be recognised and integrated into the country's national security architecture. Amidst rising insecurity associated with crimes and violence, communities are heavily reliant on non-state security actors for their day-to-

day security and safety. In the North East, for instance, the emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (C-JTF) was viewed as largely a form of community resilience against the Boko Haram induced insurgency, a perception expressed by most individuals living in communities where the C-JTF operate.

Despite the positive contribution of non-state security actors to public security and safety, they operate under a regime of weak regulation that is also characterised by violation of the rights of the people they claim to protect, as evident in frequent harassment of citizens and *jungle justice*.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings highlighted above, a summary of the policy recommendations is provided below:

- i. Federal Government of Nigeria should establish a Private Security Regulatory Agency (PSRA) for effective monitoring and regulation of the activities of non-state security providers in Nigeria, with a clear stated scope to avoid duplicity of roles and future friction with other state security actors;
- ii. Pending the establishment of the PSRA, the Ministry of Interior should design a code of conduct and standard operations procedure for non-state security providers and their employees in Nigeria;
- iii. Given the critical role that non-state security providers are playing, the Federal Government should integrate them as part of the country's national security architecture; and
- iv. Against the backdrop of concerns about the violation of human rights by non-state security providers, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), civil society and the media should increase their oversight on these actors to ensure respect for the rights of citizens.

¹ Mapping for this zone was conducted by the Stakeholder Democratic Network.

Background/Context

There is a body of literature on the rise of non-state actors as key drivers of security provisioning in Nigeria. This has also attracted the attention of policymakers. The erosion of citizens' confidence in the security apparatus of the state has led to an increase in the legitimacy of the non-state security actors². As non-state security actors grow in spread and influence, more communities are increasingly dependent on them for their daily security needs. This is largely evident around crime prevention, as well as maintenance of law and order.

Across Nigeria, the notion and activities of non-state security providers are recognised as initiatives by groups and communities towards responding to day-to-day security threats that confront the communities. These responses are ostensibly linked to the need to contain violence, combat crime and maintain law and order in the face of the gross inability of the formal security sector to effectively deal with these challenges. These entities are increasingly complementing, and in some instances, replacing the state in the provision of security for their communities in the face of declining confidence in the formal institutions of the state, particularly the police.

Four categories of non-state security actors have been identified in Nigeria. The first is a group of able-bodied young men in the village who organise themselves to patrol their areas at night to protect the community against armed robbers. The second category is largely a product of community decision whereby the community members contribute money and hire people that they pay on a weekly or monthly basis to guard the community. The third group are mostly hired and equipped by the local government areas to prevent crimes and arrest criminals³. The fourth group is made up of young men and women with uniform and insignias. Its structure is akin to the formal security actors both in terms of spread and command⁴. One common feature of the first three groups is the fact that they are independent of state control and they operate at the community level where policing by the formal security of the state is largely deficient.

² Kwaja, A.M.C. (2013). Vigilantism and the Governance of Insecurity in Nigeria, available on www.ssrresourcecentre.org/2013/11/08/vigilantism-and-the-governance-of-insecurity-in-nigeria/

³ Mohammed, B.S. (2013). Vigilante Groups and Crime Prevention, *Daily Trust*, December 15th.

⁴ The Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) represents this category of security providers.

Table 1: The Five Geopolitical Zones and the States Selected for the Mapping Study

S/No	Geo-Political Zone	Selected States for the Mapping
1.	North - West	Kano, Jigawa & Kaduna
2.	North - East	Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba & Yobe
3.	North - Central	Abuja, Benue, Kogi & Plateau
4.	South - East	Abia, Anambra & Enugu
5.	South - West	Ekiti, Lagos & Ogun
6.	South - South	Not covered

Non-State Security Providers and Nigeria's Security Landscape

The exponential rise in the number of non-state security providers, coupled with the credibility and support they enjoy across communities in Nigeria underscores the point that [t]he mixture of state and private actors within the field of security is here to stay and consequently the international community and Nigerian government have to find a way, if not to embrace it, at least to cope with it⁵. This assertion is at the heart of the current discourse on the emergence and dominance of non-state actors in Nigeria's security landscape. They represent an indispensable component of the country's security outlook now and in the future.

In the light of the foregoing, this policy brief highlights three critical questions:

- What factors account for the emergence of non-state security providers in Nigeria?
- Are there principles, established or imagined, for the regulation of the activities of non-state security providers?
- What are the opportunities and threats associated with the activities of non-state security providers in Nigeria?

Five key and interrelated factors account for the emergence and dominance of non-state security providers in Nigeria. They are:

- The obvious weakness associated with the provision of security by the state, which makes non-state security provisioning a form of response to state fragility;

⁵Creutz, K. (2006). *Transnational Privatised Security and the International Protection of Human Rights*. Helsinki: The Eric Castrén Institute of International Law and Human Rights.

2. The efficiency and effectiveness that characterise service provision by the non-state security agencies;
3. The organic nature of the non-state security providers, which confers greater credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the communities;
4. Non-state security provision is increasingly becoming a source of employment and livelihood for many young people in the face of rising unemployment; and
5. The near absence of regulatory environment makes them easier to establish and deploy.

It is lawful for citizens and communities to protect themselves against criminality and other forms of insecurity. Such efforts in complementing the formal security sector are not done or undertaken under clearly defined guidelines that effectively regulate their activities. This nebulosity creates layers of authority and loyalty that are not defined. For instance, latching onto deficiencies in Nigeria's federal/centralised security institutions, some state governments have intervened by granting selected vigilante groups formal recognition and support as vehicles for public safety and security.

Across the zones that were mapped, though united in their goal for secure and crime-free societies, non-state security providers are heterogeneous in their structure and pattern of operations based on the unique historical and environmental contexts that underpin their emergence. While the Civilian Joint Task Force (C-JTF) emerged in response to the insurgency in the North East, rising crime rates across the country spurred the development of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN).

In the face of bureaucratic bottlenecks associated with the judicial system in the context of access to justice, groups such as vigilantes resort to the arrest and prosecution of criminals by applying what has been termed *jungle justice*. Lagos State is notorious for mobs killing suspects at the scene of an incidence, without recourse to the presence of law enforcement agents, particularly the police⁶. As long as

⁶ In Lagos State, jungle justice has become part and parcel of everyday life where people are brutally assaulted or given dehumanising treatment by entities outside the state. In December, 2013 two female victims were stripped naked and beaten for

state fragility thrives and the country remains under-policed and the police under-equipped, which in a way heighten public insecurity, the non-state security providers will be a major source of security for communities.

In the North East region, the C-JTF, made up of youths numbering about 23,000, has been part of the military offensive against insurgency. The group is seen as a reflection of community resistance against insurgency, perpetrated by members of Boko Haram since 2009. Though, not part of the formal security structure of the country, the group enjoys the recognition and support of the Nigerian state in the form of stipends, trainings and weaponry. In the light of the rising influence of the C-JTF, there are concerns about their activities, as it relates to harassment, torture, physical and sexual abuse of suspects.

[T]he positive public perception of how non-state security providers work to make communities safer can hardly be ignored. They are seen as primarily responsible for the reduction of crimes such as rape, robbery and other forms of banditry.

The VGN currently represents the largest non-state security provider in Nigeria, both in terms of its membership and spread. Based on information available on its [website](#), the group has over 400

members in each of the 774 local government areas (LGAs) of the country, with headquarters in Abuja and offices in all the states and local governments. The National Assembly is currently considering a bill that seeks to grant formal state recognition to the VGN. Formal recognition will further strengthen the VGN's legitimacy and credibility by the state security actors and Nigerians in general.

The Plateau State Government's establishment of Operation Rainbow (OR) and Neighbourhood Watch represented one of the most deliberate attempts by state governments in response to security threats in their territories. While most non-state security actors emerged or were established in response to rising crime rates and criminality, Plateau State created OR was a presidential approval as a hybrid security framework to serve as a mechanism for early warning response to conflict and insecurity in the state⁷.

In terms of a wider community impact, the positive public perception of how non-state security providers' work to make communities safer can hardly be ignored. They are

allegedly stealing pepper. This happened with recourse to the police and other law enforcement agencies.

⁷ The Plateau State Rainbow and Neighbourhood Watch Law 2012 came into effect through the assent of the Governor of Plateau State, Jonah David Jang, on 20 March 2013.

seen as primarily responsible for the reduction of crimes such as rape, robbery and other forms of banditry. They also help in building people's confidence and promotion of community cohesion. Their greatest achievement relates to settlement of disputes amongst people within the communities, which is a significant contribution to internal security⁸.

Policy Recommendations

Strengthening Law Enforcement Agency

The erosion of public confidence in the police by Nigerians has led to the emergence of non-state security actors and hybrid security services. With the increasing improvement of technics in crime, it has become imperative for the Nigeria Police Force to be adequately funded and strengthened to carry out its responsibilities effectively as stipulated in the constitution. There is the need for the Police Bill to be taken up as an Executive Bill before the National Assembly. The review of the police law cannot be relegated to a private member bill approach but taken with political will by the executive arm of government.

Registration and Regulation

While the proliferation and activities of informal security providers has come to stay in Nigeria, it has become imperative to put in place concrete policies that have to do with vetting and registration. The Federal Government should establish suitable mechanisms and frameworks for the registration and regulation of vigilantes, just as it does for private security companies that are under the supervision of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). This measure is important to mitigate arbitrariness by non-state security actors when dealing with suspected criminals. In the light of the foregoing, the Federal Government of Nigeria should establish a Private Security Regulatory Agency (PSRA) for effective monitoring.

Code of Conduct

Modalities for the recruitment of personnel or volunteers for non-state security providers are now urgently required. Pursuant to this, a standard operating procedure and a code of conduct should be designed for the security providers and their staff. Civil society organisations working in the sector,

in consultation with practitioners and experts, should develop a model code of conduct and SOP that may be adopted by each group of non-state security providers.

Integration into National Security Architecture

In the context of security sector governance, the Federal Government should integrate non-state security actors as part of the country's national security architecture. This is important in view of the critical role they play in bridging the gap associated with the inability of the formal security actors to effectively and efficiently protect citizens.

Human Rights

Given the concerns that characterise the activities of non-state security actors as it relates to violation of human rights and other forms of assault against citizens, efforts should be made by the media, civil society groups, and communities to monitor and report cases of violation of human rights to the appropriate authority established by the government, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Efforts should be made to ensure that the personnel and volunteers are taught the basics of human rights and how to protect them in the course of their work. Opportunities exist here for NGOs, the NHRC, NCSDC, the private sector, and pressure groups.

Conclusion

This policy brief contributes to the current discourse on the emergence, activities and role of non-state security providers in Nigeria. It aims to deepen the discussion around its long-term impact on both human and national security in Nigeria. Despite the public recognition and support that non-state security providers enjoy, the formal security actors, largely the police, still have the upper hand in the delivery of security-related services to the people.

Notwithstanding the important role that non-state security actors play in the provision of security across the country, the extent to which they relate with the formal security actors, as well as the way and manner they are regulated remain a major issue for policy. Various actors ought to play roles in adopting them into the security architecture and equipping them with soft skills that characterise quality service provision.

⁸As at February 2017, the military has been deployed to maintain internal security in about 32 states of the 36 states of the federation. See Oyedele, D. (2017). Army Currently Deployed in 32 States, Says Buratai', *ThisDay*, 15 February, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2017/02/15/army-currentlydeployed-in-32-states-says-buratai/>