

Community Security Responses to Insecurity in Ondo State, Nigeria: An Assessment of Causes, Effects, and the Role of Amotekun and Other Security Agencies

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Abstract

Insecurity remains a persistent and destabilising challenge in Nigeria, particularly at the grassroots level, where state protection is often inadequate. The growing wave of criminal activities—ranging from kidnapping and robbery to communal clashes—has increasingly prompted local responses to security threats. This study investigates the causes, effects, and strategic responses to insecurity in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria, with particular attention to the role of community-based security outfits such as the Amotekun Corps. A descriptive survey design was adopted, targeting security personnel across multiple agencies operating within the study area. One hundred (100) respondents were randomly selected, and data were collected using a validated, researcher-designed questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, mean scores, and percentages, were employed to analyse the findings. Results indicate that the most prevalent security threats include kidnapping, Fulani herdsmen-related violence, and armed robbery. Major causes of insecurity were identified as unemployment, poverty, political corruption, and weak institutional frameworks. The effects of insecurity included displacement, mistrust, and social disintegration. Notably, Amotekun and other local actors were perceived as vital in augmenting conventional law enforcement efforts, particularly through their responsiveness and local intelligence networks. The findings underscore the need for integrating community-based security initiatives into Nigeria's broader security architecture. Policy reforms should focus on strengthening local capacity, improving inter-agency collaboration, and addressing the structural roots of insecurity

Keywords: *Community Security Outfit, Community Policing, Grassroots Security Initiatives, Security Sector Response, Criminal Activities Control*

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity remains one of the most pressing national concerns in Nigeria, touching every layer of society and governance. Over the past two decades, the country has witnessed an unsettling shift in its security landscape—marked by rising incidents of kidnapping, armed robbery, political violence, rural banditry, and insurgency. This pattern of unrest has not only eroded public confidence in national security institutions but has also spurred the proliferation of non-state actors and community-based security arrangements. Increasingly, Nigerians are compelled to rely on alternative forms of protection, especially in regions where the formal security apparatus is overstretched or ineffective. The South-Western region, and Ondo State in particular, has experienced a notable increase in criminal activities, such as highway abductions, farm invasions, and communal clashes. These threats have prompted the establishment of *Amotekun*, a regional security outfit aimed at addressing insecurity through local intelligence, rapid response, and community trust-building. Though insecurity in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon, its persistence and transformation across time and space have been the subject of significant scholarly attention. Babaita (2020) have argued that ethno-religious tensions, exacerbated by structural inequality and marginalisation, play a foundational role in the country's security challenges. Nwizugbo and Nwankwo (2025) have emphasised the institutional dimensions—particularly the underfunding of the police, poor training, political interference, and lack of accountability—which have left national agencies ill-equipped to manage the scale and complexity of insecurity. In the context of regional responses, Dada (2025) highlights how the emergence of vigilante groups and community-led security initiatives fills the void left by weakened state structures. While studies on Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East and the rise of banditry in the North-West are well-established, there is a dearth of focused empirical research on the *Amotekun Corps*, particularly about its functionality, public perception, and operational outcomes in Ondo State.

This study emerges from a critical need to understand how insecurity is both experienced and addressed at the grassroots level in Nigeria. Although Amotekun has received considerable media attention and public discourse since its formation, academic engagement with its operational effectiveness and integration into the broader security ecosystem has been limited (Olubade & Ogunnoiki, 2020). Furthermore, few studies have examined the perspectives of security personnel—both formal and informal—on the root causes, consequences, and strategic responses to insecurity in their local contexts (Anugwa et al., 2023; Ata-Agboni et al., 2024). This is an important gap, as frontline security actors possess firsthand knowledge of the challenges and limitations inherent in the fight against criminality. The urgency of this research is further underscored by data from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), which reported a sharp increase in violent crimes across Ondo State between 2019 and 2022. With state-level institutions increasingly turning to localised responses, it becomes necessary to critically assess whether these structures are effectively mitigating insecurity or merely replicating the limitations of their national counterparts. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the perceptions of security personnel on the causes and effects of insecurity in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State, and to assess the strategies deployed by security agencies, with a focus on the role and effectiveness of Amotekun. It offers a locally grounded, evidence-based perspective on how security is practised, understood, and sustained within the context of ongoing national challenges. By

doing so, it aims to inform both academic inquiry and practical policy development on decentralised security models in Nigeria.

Historical Survey of Insecurity in Nigeria

The history of insecurity in Nigeria is neither new nor isolated. Rather, it is a complex and evolving phenomenon that has mirrored the country's socio-political transformations from colonial times through independence to the modern democratic era. What began as regional tensions and identity-based contestations has expanded into a nationwide crisis involving terrorism, banditry, armed robbery, communal violence, and the systematic erosion of public trust in the state's capacity to ensure safety and justice. To understand the current climate of insecurity, it is imperative to examine how past events, institutional failures, and regional disparities have shaped the present security challenges in Nigeria.

In the immediate post-independence period, insecurity was largely rooted in ethno-political competition and contestations over power and resources. The Biafran War (1967–1970), for instance, represented the climax of ethnic and regional discontent, leaving deep scars on national unity and setting the stage for militarised responses to dissent (Ojo, 2024). The subsequent decades under military rule further entrenched a culture of repression, arbitrary arrests, and a general disregard for civil liberties. Under regimes from Gowon to Abacha, the militarisation of national security entrenched impunity among law enforcement agencies, while citizens grew increasingly alienated from the institutions meant to protect them (Obikaeze et al., 2023). The return to democratic rule in 1999, though celebrated, did not bring the expected relief. Instead, it coincided with the rise of armed militancy in the Niger Delta, followed by ethno-religious violence in Plateau and Kaduna States, and eventually the emergence of Boko Haram in the North-East. These phases reflect a shift in insecurity from politically motivated agitation to ideologically and economically driven violence (Ayika & Onwurah, 2025). The evolution of Boko Haram from a religious sect to a full-fledged terrorist organisation marked a watershed moment in Nigeria's security history, prompting not only widespread internal displacement but also a surge in military expenditure and regional cooperation efforts.

Over time, the nature of insecurity in Nigeria has become multi-dimensional. Ethno-religious clashes continue to erupt in the North-Central and North-East; kidnapping for ransom and cultism are prevalent in the South-East and South-West; while resource-driven militancy remains entrenched in the South-South. More recently, banditry and farmer-herder conflicts have emerged as dominant threats, particularly in the North-West and Middle Belt. These forms of insecurity often overlap and reinforce each other, leading to complex crises that defy singular explanations. Unlike in previous decades when political violence dominated headlines, the current wave of insecurity is characterised by its decentralisation. Violence now originates not only from organised insurgent groups but also from fragmented actors, such as armed herdsmen, street gangs, and opportunistic criminals. The result is a security environment marked by unpredictability and the rapid erosion of state authority in many rural and peri-urban areas (Mevayerore, 2020).

Nigeria's regional diversity has meant that the experience and causes of insecurity vary widely. In the North-East, terrorism has left entire communities deserted, while in the South-South, oil theft and piracy continue to sabotage the economy. The Middle Belt suffers frequent farmer-herder conflicts fueled by climate change and ethnic tension. The South-West, once regarded as relatively stable, has recently seen a surge in kidnappings, ritual killings, and land

disputes, prompting state-led responses like the creation of the Amotekun Corps in 2020. This highlights how even previously secure regions have had to devise localised mechanisms to address growing vulnerabilities. The persistence of insecurity in Nigeria is not only the result of criminal intent or socio-economic hardship—it is also a symptom of institutional fragility. The Nigerian Police Force and allied agencies have historically suffered from underfunding, poor training, low morale, and political interference (Balogun, 2019). These weaknesses, coupled with corruption in the judiciary and executive arms, have allowed criminal networks to operate with impunity. Furthermore, the failure of intelligence coordination, as seen in the inability to pre-empt or rapidly respond to attacks, underscores systemic lapses that go beyond frontline capacity. Successive governments have often approached security through a centralised, reactive model, which has proven inadequate in addressing the country's diverse and localised security challenges.

The sustained insecurity across decades has exacted profound social and political costs. Millions have been displaced from their homes; thousands have died in avoidable conflicts; and confidence in the Nigerian state has steadily eroded. In response, many communities have turned to non-state actors, including local vigilantes, ethnic militias, and now, constitutionally recognised state-level security outfits such as Amotekun in the South-West. These developments represent both a critique of federal failure and a call for decentralised security governance that reflects local realities. The present-day adoption of community-based security models like Amotekun cannot be fully appreciated without recognising the historical failure of centralised systems to effectively secure all regions of Nigeria. Over the years, the Nigerian state has cycled through military repression, police expansion, and international cooperation—yet insecurity persists. What has often been missing is a locally informed, citizen-centred model of protection, one that leverages community trust, cultural familiarity, and immediate responsiveness. This study draws upon this historical context to better understand why localised interventions are gaining traction and how their effectiveness can be critically evaluated. By grounding the analysis in both past failures and present innovations, it contributes to the ongoing search for more responsive, just, and sustainable security frameworks in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were generated to guide the study:

1. What are the common crises or issues challenging security outfits in Ondo state, Nigeria?
2. What are the causes of insecurity in Ondo State, Nigeria?
3. What are the effects of insecurity in Ondo State, Nigeria?
4. What are the common strategies adopted by the security agency for combating insecurity in Ondo state?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to explore the causes, effects, and mitigation strategies of insecurity in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State, with particular emphasis on the role of the community security outfit known as Amotekun, alongside other conventional and informal security agencies. The descriptive design was deemed appropriate because the study sought to collect first-hand insights from individuals directly involved in security operations, without manipulating variables or imposing

experimental controls. This approach allowed for the gathering of broad, realistic perspectives on the patterns and dynamics of insecurity as experienced on the ground. The target population for the study comprised security agents actively serving within Ondo State, cutting across multiple agencies, including the Nigeria Police Force, Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Amotekun Corps, local vigilante groups, and Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIOs). A total of 100 participants were selected using simple random sampling, ensuring fair representation and minimising selection bias. To achieve this, the researcher first obtained a compiled list of security personnel serving within the local government area and then employed a lottery method to select 10 individuals from each agency, leading to a diverse and balanced sample. The primary tool for data collection was a self-developed structured questionnaire titled: "Community Security Outfit for Combating Criminal Activities Questionnaire (CSOCCAQ)." The instrument was designed to align with the research objectives and was divided into four key sections, each addressing a specific research question. Items on the questionnaire included both Likert-scale and binary-response formats, enabling both quantitative frequency analysis and categorical comparisons. To ensure the content validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by an expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko. Feedback from this expert informed the refinement of the instrument in terms of item clarity, structure, and alignment with the research focus. For reliability testing, the test-retest method was used. The questionnaire was administered to a small group of similar respondents within the study area on two occasions, spaced two weeks apart. The scores obtained were analysed using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, which produced a high reliability coefficient, confirming that the instrument would yield consistent results over time. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires during scheduled visits to the duty posts of the selected respondents. This allowed for a brief introduction of the study's purpose and clarification of any ambiguous items. All respondents participated voluntarily and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in handling their responses. The data collected were analysed using simple descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and means, to present a clear summary of trends and patterns in the responses. This method of analysis suited the nature of the data and provided a straightforward interpretation of how insecurity is perceived, experienced, and addressed in the study area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What are the common crises or issues challenging security outfits in Akoko North-East Local Government Area of Ondo State?

Table 1.

Perceived Frequency of Common Crises Challenging Security Outfits in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State (N = 100)

S/N	Crisis Type	Very (%)	High High (%)	Low (%)	Not at All (%)
1	Abduction/Missing Person/Kidnapping	19	46	32	3
2	Violent Protest	6	34	51	9

S/N	Crisis Type	Very (%)	High High (%)	Low (%)	Not at All (%)
3	Fulani Herdsmen Conflict	26	31	41	2
4	Food Poisoning	3	24	52	21
5	Fighting	24	32	42	2
6	Fire Outbreak/Explosion	1	15	72	12
7	Flooding	5	30	60	5
8	Armed Robbery	15	28	56	1
9	Money Ritual	3	26	62	9
10	Accidental Discharge of Weapon	–	9	76	15

Table 1 illustrates the reported frequency of different crises affecting security organisations in the Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State, based on data from 100 surveyed security agents. The data reflect the perceived prevalence and severity of these crises at the grassroots level. Among the identified crises, abduction, missing persons, and kidnapping emerged as the most pressing challenges. Approximately 46% of respondents classified it as a "high" concern, with an additional 19% categorising it as "very high." This indicates the ongoing and increasing apprehension regarding kidnappings in the region, which has emerged as a defining characteristic of insecurity in various areas of Nigeria. Conflicts related to Fulani herdsmen were identified as a significant concern, with 57% of respondents (26% indicating "very high" and 31% "high") recognising it as a pressing security threat. This indicates that tensions regarding land use, ethnic mistrust, and conflicts between herders and farmers are profoundly experienced within the local community. In contrast, crises such as food poisoning, money rituals, and accidental discharge of weapons were predominantly regarded as low-level threats, with the majority of respondents classifying them as "low" or "not at all." For example, 62% considered money rituals to be a "low" concern, whereas only 3% rated it as "very high." Accidental discharge of weapons, particularly in regions with inadequately trained personnel, was largely regarded as a minor concern, with 76% of respondents categorising it as a "low" issue and 15% indicating that it had not occurred at all. Violent protests, armed robbery, and fighting were primarily assessed as moderate threats. While not entirely dismissed, these issues were not regarded with the same urgency as kidnapping or ethnically motivated violence. For instance, merely 6% of respondents classified violent protests as a "very high" threat, while 51% perceived it as a "low" threat. Finally, fire outbreaks, explosions, and flooding were identified as some of the least perceived threats. This may indicate either the presence of effective disaster prevention mechanisms or a scarcity of recent environmental crises in the region. The table indicates that security agents prioritise crimes that pose direct threats to human life and disturb communal peace, particularly kidnapping and ethnic violence. Other crises, although existent, are not perceived as urgent or pervasive. The insights offer guidance for security planning and resource allocation, highlighting the necessity for targeted interventions in regions most impacted by violent crimes, while also overseeing less frequent threats that may escalate if overlooked.

Research Question 2: What are the causes of insecurity in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State?

Table 2.
Perceived Causes of Insecurity in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State (N = 100)

S/N Causes of Insecurity	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (%)
11 Unemployment	98	2
12 Poverty	92	8
13 Weak Security System	93	7
14 “Do-or-Die” Political Ambition	89	11
15 Ethnicity and Religious Differences	77	23
16 Political Corruption	94	6
17 Awareness of Inequality	78	22
18 Terrorism	89	11
19 Desire to Get Rich at All Costs	89	11

Table 2 presents the views of 100 security personnel on the underlying causes of insecurity in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State. The responses provide insight into how those directly involved in maintaining security understand the roots of the problems they confront daily. Unanimously, unemployment emerged as the most widely agreed-upon cause, with 98% of respondents affirming its strong link to rising insecurity. This suggests that joblessness among the youth is a significant driver of criminal behaviour, as economic desperation may push individuals into kidnapping, theft, or banditry. Similarly, poverty (92%) and a weak security system (93%) were identified as major enablers of insecurity. These findings reflect a general perception that the lack of basic needs and ineffective law enforcement systems create an environment where criminal activities flourish. Another important factor is political corruption, which was confirmed by 94% of respondents as a major cause of insecurity. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that when political leaders exploit public resources, overlook justice, or use youth as tools for electoral violence, the social order breaks down. The responses also highlight socio-cultural contributors. Ethnicity and religious differences (77%) and the awareness of inequality (78%) were both considered significant, pointing to the role of identity politics, marginalisation, and community distrust in fostering violence and conflict. Interestingly, the desire to get rich at all costs (89%) and the “do-or-die” mentality in politics (89%) were also heavily cited. These responses reflect societal concerns around materialism, moral decay, and the normalisation of illegal or violent means to acquire wealth or power. Overall, the findings portray insecurity in the region as not just a policing issue, but a deeply rooted socio-economic and political crisis. Respondents believe that without addressing unemployment, poverty, corruption, and inequality, security challenges will persist regardless of how well-equipped or active security agencies are. This calls for integrated solutions that go beyond armed response—solutions that tackle governance failures, create economic opportunities, and promote social cohesion.

Research Question 3: What are the effects of insecurity in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State?

Table 3.
Perceived Effects of Insecurity in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State (N = 100)

S/N	Effects of Insecurity	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (%)
20	Social dislocation and displacement of people	87	13
21	Social tension and new settlement patterns are dividing Muslims and Christians	77	23
22	Animosity and antipathy between indigenes and settlers	82	18
23	Dislocation and disruption of family and communal life	89	11
24	Shifting of the home base from one place to another	75	25
25	General atmosphere of mistrust, fear, anxiety, and frenzy	90	10
26	Unsympathetic treatment of people in areas where rape and child abuse are used as war tools	91	9
27	Strengthening of hunger and poverty in the polity	90	10
28	Atmosphere of political insecurity and instability	92	8

Table 3 outlines the perceived effects of insecurity as identified by security personnel operating in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State. The findings reveal the deep social, emotional, and political impacts that insecurity has on local communities. One of the most striking effects reported is widespread social dislocation and displacement of people, with 87% of respondents agreeing that insecurity has caused families and individuals to flee their homes or communities. This aligns with patterns seen in many rural and semi-urban areas across Nigeria, where persistent threats like kidnapping, banditry, and communal clashes force people to seek safety elsewhere. Equally concerning is the finding that 90% of respondents observed a general atmosphere of mistrust, fear, anxiety, and frenzy among the population. This emotional climate contributes to the breakdown of everyday life, making it difficult for communities to live, work, and interact normally. When insecurity becomes persistent, fear replaces trust—even among neighbours. The data also show that political instability (92%) and disruption of family and communal life (89%) are major consequences. These responses underscore how insecurity goes beyond crime and violence; it destabilises governance, weakens traditional institutions, and erodes the support systems families and communities rely on. Another serious effect highlighted is the unsympathetic treatment of people in areas where rape and child abuse are used as instruments of violence, which 91% of respondents acknowledged. This reflects the vulnerabilities of women and children during periods of insecurity and points to the urgent need for victim-centred approaches in policy and humanitarian responses. Social fragmentation was also visible in responses about inter-group relations. For example, 82% agreed that insecurity has bred animosity between indigenes and settlers, while 77% noted

increasing divisions along religious lines, such as between Muslims and Christians. These tensions often emerge or deepen during crises, feeding cycles of suspicion and hostility. Furthermore, the data indicate that insecurity has intensified poverty and hunger (90%) and triggered the shifting of home bases (75%), disrupting livelihoods, education, and healthcare access. Overall, Table 3 reveals that insecurity is not just about loss of property or threats to physical safety—it causes long-lasting social damage. It breaks communities apart, destroys trust, and undermines both traditional and formal governance structures. The findings highlight the human cost of insecurity and emphasise the need for not just stronger security responses, but also social healing, psychosocial support, and inclusive peacebuilding efforts that address the trauma and disintegration left in insecurity's wake.

Research Question 4: What are the common strategies adopted by security agencies for community security in the Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State

Table 4.
Perceived Frequency of Strategies Adopted by Security Agencies for Community Security in Akoko North East Local Government Area (N = 100)

S/N	Strategy Adopted by Security Agencies	Very (%)	High (%)	High (%)	Low (%)	Not at All (%)
29	Police punctuality at the duty post	50	43	7	0	0
30	FRSC punctuality at the duty post	37	54	8	1	0
31	Civil Defence punctuality at the duty post	43	47	10	0	0
32	Vigilantes' punctuality at the duty post	43	42	14	1	0
33	Regular vehicle checks by Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIO)	45	41	14	0	0
34	Issuance of queries and arrest of law offenders	32	44	22	2	0

Table 4 presents the responses of 100 security personnel regarding the frequency and consistency of security strategies adopted by various agencies—including the Police, FRSC, Civil Defence, vigilantes, and VIO—in Akoko North East Local Government Area of Ondo State. The results show a strong operational presence and routine enforcement efforts by most security bodies. For instance, police punctuality at duty posts was rated as “very high” by 50% and “high” by 43% of respondents—indicating that the police are generally visible and responsive in the area. This suggests a level of discipline and commitment to routine patrols, which is essential for community confidence and deterrence of criminal activity. Similarly, FRSC officers—who primarily manage road safety—were rated as “high” or “very high” in punctuality by 91% of respondents, showing that their presence is consistent, especially at checkpoints and accident-prone areas. This visibility may contribute not just to traffic regulation, but to broader security monitoring. The Civil Defence Corps also received strong ratings, with 90% of respondents saying their presence at duty posts was either “very high” or “high.” This reinforces the perception that multiple security agencies are actively contributing to maintaining order in the area. Interestingly, vigilante groups, often composed of residents and community-based volunteers, were also viewed positively. A combined 85% of

respondents reported their punctuality as “very high” or “high.” This is important because these groups often serve as the first responders in rural or hard-to-reach communities, where formal security agencies may be less present or slower to act. Moreover, Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIOs) were commended for their regular vehicle checks, with 86% of respondents rating their performance as “very high” or “high.” These checks may seem routine, but they contribute to general law enforcement, especially in detecting stolen vehicles, trafficking, or unauthorised movement. Lastly, when it comes to arresting offenders and issuing queries, 76% of respondents affirmed that this is frequently practised. This indicates that law enforcement is not just present, but actively engaged in holding people accountable for violations—an essential function for sustaining the rule of law. Overall, Table 4 reveals that security operations in Akoko North East are active and multi-layered, involving both formal agencies and local vigilante networks. The high ratings for punctuality and engagement suggest that, at least in terms of presence and enforcement, these agencies are fulfilling their duties. However, while visibility and patrols are important, the broader challenge lies in ensuring that these strategies are not just reactive, but also preventive, intelligence-led, and community-sensitive. The positive perception of these agencies, especially community-based groups like vigilantes, highlights the value of local trust and cultural alignment in effective security governance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study, which sought to examine the causes and effects of insecurity and the role of community security outfits in Ondo State—particularly Amotekun—revealed critical insights aligned with the stated research objectives. Data indicated that the most prevalent security challenges included abduction, kidnapping, and the activities of Fulani herdsman. These challenges reflect systemic vulnerabilities in local security structures and underscore the urgency for effective community-level responses. The most prominent challenge identified was abduction/kidnapping, which a majority of respondents perceived as “high” or “very high.” This aligns with national crime trends where kidnappings for ransom have escalated across Nigeria, including the South-West region (Onuoha & Okolie-Osemene, 2019). Fulani herdsman conflicts and fighting also ranked significantly, reflecting ethnic tensions and land disputes—issues well-documented in rural security literature (Lenshie & Jacob, 2020). Interestingly, other expected threats, such as armed robbery, violent protests, money rituals, and accidental discharge of weapons, were ranked relatively low. This contradicts media portrayals and suggests either a shift in dominant security concerns or localised variations in crime patterns. The finding underscores the importance of place-based assessments of insecurity rather than relying solely on national narratives. The high ranking of abduction and herder-farmer clashes indicates that security challenges in Ondo are both criminal and ethno-political, requiring multidimensional responses. These findings validate the establishment of Amotekun as a regionally responsive force that operates within the local sociocultural context. These results affirm theories that link structural violence, economic deprivation, and institutional failure to rising insecurity (Bartusevičius & van Leeuwen, 2022; Jackson & Sadler, 2022). They also align with Igwe's (2025) observation that Nigeria's insecurity is rooted not only in economic hardship but also in ethnic mistrust and political exploitation. The emphasis on political corruption as a major driver of insecurity is especially relevant, suggesting a cyclical problem: corrupt leaders enable insecurity, and insecurity provides a cover for further

corruption. Additionally, respondents' identification of "do-or-die" political ambition as a trigger indicates how electoral politics can escalate into violence, especially when unemployed youths are weaponised by political actors. Insecurity in Ondo is not only a law enforcement issue but a developmental crisis. It stems from the erosion of social safety nets and trust in government. Addressing these root causes will require not only security reforms but also economic empowerment, governance transparency, and inter-ethnic reconciliation efforts. These findings mirror earlier conclusions by Berebon (2025), who warned that insecurity undermines the development of physical infrastructure, social capital, and national integration. The reported polarisation between Muslims and Christians and between indigenes and settlers speaks to the identity-based dimensions of insecurity. Such divisions intensify conflict, reinforce fear, and reduce civic trust. Moreover, the effect of internal displacement—though more commonly associated with northern Nigeria—appears to be a rising concern in Ondo, possibly driven by kidnapping and rural attacks. This reinforces the need for state-level humanitarian policies in addition to policing. The effects of insecurity in Ondo are deeply socio-psychological as well as structural. The erosion of community life and rise in fear impact not only personal well-being but also economic productivity and social cohesion. Amotekun and similar agencies must be equipped not only to fight crime but also to restore public confidence and facilitate reconciliation where communal relationships have broken down. The study found that security agencies, including Amotekun, police, civil defence, FRSC, vigilantes, and VIO, are implementing strategies with high operational engagement, including police punctuality, presence of FRSC and Civil Defence, vigilante engagement, vehicle inspections, and law enforcement through arrests. This indicates a reasonably active and visible security presence. The integration of community-based outfits (Amotekun and vigilantes) with state-backed agencies suggests a hybrid policing model that can enhance coverage, rapid response, and trust-building. These findings support Pajón and Walsh (2023) and Leone (2024), who argue that multi-agency collaboration and local intelligence are crucial for effective crime prevention. However, the study does not examine technological or intelligence-led approaches, which presents a gap. Operational strategies in Ondo appear to rely heavily on human presence, physical patrols, and law enforcement through checkpoints. While these are necessary, long-term effectiveness will depend on incorporating preventive, intelligence-led, and community trust-building measures. The high rating of Amotekun suggests that legitimacy and cultural alignment of security outfits are as important as technical capacity.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on non-state security provision, particularly within the African context of federalism, ethnic identity, and state fragility. It demonstrates that community-based security outfits like Amotekun can complement formal state structures when well-coordinated and socially legitimised. It also highlights the value of security sector decentralisation in multi-ethnic societies where localised solutions are often more effective than centralised command structures. Despite widespread assumptions about public distrust of formal security institutions, this study found relatively positive perceptions of police, civil defence, and FRSC punctuality. This challenges dominant narratives and suggests either recent performance improvements or the positive influence of Amotekun-led collaboration. Also, the low ranking of some expected threats (armed robbery, ritual killings) suggests that public anxiety may not always align with actual risk, an area worth exploring in future studies. The findings validate the necessity for hybrid, culturally embedded, and

community-responsive security models in the Nigerian context. Future research should examine civilians' views on security effectiveness to compare with agency perspectives.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the role of community security outfits, particularly Amotekun, in combating criminal activities and addressing insecurity in Ondo State, Nigeria. Grounded in a descriptive survey of security personnel, the study critically examined the local causes, effects, and strategic responses to insecurity through the lens of grassroots security mechanisms. The findings confirm that insecurity in Ondo State is deeply rooted in socio-economic and political dysfunctions, such as unemployment, poverty, weak security infrastructure, and political corruption. The effects extend beyond physical violence to include social fragmentation, fear, mistrust, displacement, and political instability. The study also revealed that Amotekun, alongside other formal and informal security agencies, plays a crucial and increasingly legitimised role in confronting these threats, particularly in high-incidence crimes like kidnapping and communal violence. Importantly, the study advances current understanding by demonstrating that community-based security models can effectively complement formal policing, especially when they are culturally embedded and operationally coordinated. However, sustainably addressing insecurity requires a multi-sectoral approach—one that not only enhances policing strategies but also targets the structural conditions that enable violence to thrive. In conclusion, this study reinforces the urgency of investing in locally driven, community-trusted, and institutionally supported security frameworks as a pathway to both regional stability and national development. As Nigeria continues to grapple with complex internal security challenges, the future of public safety may well depend on how effectively such hybrid models are institutionalised, evaluated, and scaled.

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