



Constructing Security Communities in Nigeria? Interrogating the Politics of Regionalization of Vigilante Protection and the Dynamics of Ethnic Security Dilemma

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Abstract

The recent adoption of the *Amotekun* and *Ebubeagu* regional vigilante institutions in the governance of security in Nigeria marks a fundamental shift towards the development of regional security complexes or security communities in the country. This article seeks to address two questions: How does the regionalization of vigilantism and protection interact with national security interests of the Nigerian state and, in turn, impact the process of securitization amongst the various ethnic regions in the country? What are the implications of regional identity politics for ethnic security dilemma and effectiveness of regional vigilantism in Nigeria? It draws on the theory of cooperative security and secondary data with the aim of providing new insights into the nature of regional security politics and the ethnic security dilemma that the evolving dynamics of the regionalization of protection generates in Nigeria. The key argument is that while the regional vigilante structural arrangement is driven by an integrationist bias to secure members of the imagined community, it has also contributed to the politicization of protection in ways that tended to deepen ethnic consciousness in Nigeria. Yet, the realities of national security politics and internal political dynamics in each region of the country counteract the effectiveness of the regional vigilante initiatives. The article concludes that these challenges raise a number of questions, regarding whether the current attempts at regional vigilantism has rather produced an illusion of security transformation in the struggle for structural reforms of Nigeria's security architecture.

Keywords: *Amotekun*, *Ebubeagu*, Security community, Ethnic and cultural identities, security politics, Ethnic security dilemma.

Introduction

The recent adoption of state government-established vigilante groups in the governance of security in Nigeria along regional lines marks a fundamental shift towards the evolution and development of regional security complexes or security communities. Applied primarily in international relations, a security community is defined as “a collective in which members securitize together to protect a common referent from threat” (Buzan and

Waever, 2009). Shared values, norms, interests, cultural ties and history are critical variables that provide a common social identity underlining cooperation and peaceful relationships in a security community (Adler and Barnett, 1996). The boundary of a security complex is conceptualized as “where the specific security relationship separates a group of countries from the rest” (Esmaili, Hossein and Firoozabadi, 2021, p. 139). At the domestic sub-national level in Nigeria, the formation of the *Amotekun* and *Ebubeagu* security frameworks in 2020 and 2021 by the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups arguably exemplified the institutional expression of the collective aspirations of state governments of the Southwest and South-east regions to protect and defend their territories in ways that approximate a security complex. The Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria speak the same language and are united by a contiguous territory and myth of common Igbo identity bound by an origin story linking them to the biblical, “lost tribe” of Israel”. The Yoruba people are an ethnic group who trace their historical origins to *Oduduwa* and occupy contiguous territory in Southwestern Nigeria. Beyond the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups, the idea and sentiments of a security community have been embraced by other regions of the country. The oil-rich South-south region of Nigeria, comprising ethnic minorities with shared historical memories and sentiments of political marginalization formally announced in Port Harcourt, in April 2021, their intention to create their own regional security outfit.

Historically, the concept and practice of regional vigilantism are not new in Nigeria. The activities of the *Bakassi Boys* in Igboland in the 1990s and *Hisbah* in the North in 2003 are exemplars. However, the current wave of the regionalization of vigilante protection in the country where some federating states have more or less coalesced into ‘pluralistic security communities’ is linked to the evolution of new security challenges that confront the Nigerian state which the Federal Government appears impotent to tackle. Armed banditry and its associated kidnappings have threatened the social fabric of the Northwest and are compounded by the festering violence of the Boko Haram terrorist group in the Northeast. Additionally, the violent activities of rampaging Fulani herdsmen throughout the country are a huge threat to national security. Paradoxically, the perverse activities of these violent non-state armed actors like bandits and the Fulani herdsmen have also provoked ethnic distrust that is characterized by the politicization of federal, state and regional responses to them. Recent studies identify government complicity as a critical factor in the prevalence and escalation of the herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria (Ugwueze, Omenma and Okwueze, 2022; Nyiayaana, 2022). Government complicity is defined as the political climate, policies and decisions that sanction certain forms of behaviour or shape institutional responses to security threats in ways that advance the political and economic interest of a particular group over the other, for example, the Fulani herder over the farmer and vice versa (Ugwueze, Omenma and Okwueze 2022). According to this view, the nature of state responses to the herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria reflects predispositions to ethnic considerations of state leaders rather than the inherent weaknesses of the police and the military institutions to confront security predicaments of herder-farmer violence (Ugwueze, Omenma and Okwueze 2022). The contradictions of these policy actions result in the creation of ethnic vigilante structures in support of their own means of protection and survival.

As Nwoko (2021) and David and Oyedele (2020) have noted, the formation of *Amotekun* was in part legitimated by the existential threats posed by the activities of Fulani herdsmen to life and property in the Southwest as well as perceptions of Hausa-Fulani domination. Motivation for regional security arrangement, thus, appears to be entangled with the protection of ethnic groups rather than providing security for Nigerian citizens. To state differently, the paradox of adopting regional solution to national security challenges that emphasizes regional distinctiveness and the protection of regional ethnic identities tends to deepen ethnic consciousness and ethnic animosity in Nigeria. Conceivably, the regionalization of vigilantism and protection in Nigeria raises not only the issue of regional security linkages in tackling emergent complex national security challenges, but also the dialectics of protecting shared cultural values and shared political identities. These contradictions may be considered inherently constitutive of the process of developing a regional security complex and the decentralization of the structure of security governance in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the contradictions also have implications for

effective national security and stable peace in Nigeria in terms of both the centripetal and centrifugal forces they generate.

This article raises two key questions: How does the regionalization of vigilantism and protection interact with national security interests of the Nigerian state and impact the process of securitization amongst the various ethnic regions in the country? What are the implications of regional identity politics for ethnic security dilemma and effectiveness of regional vigilantism in Nigeria? Drawing on the theory of cooperative security in international relations, this article aims to address the foregoing questions with a view to providing new insights into the nature of regional security politics and the evolving dynamics of ethnic security dilemma that the regionalization of protection generates in Nigeria. In doing so, the article contributes to our understanding of the complex interactions of identity management, conflicts, security politics and ethnic security dilemma (see Vinson, 2018; Xu, 2012; Tang, 2011; Baqai, 2004; Posen, 1993; Enloe, 1980).

The article is divided into five sections. The introduction provides brief conceptual and historical background to the notion of security communities and the emergence of regional vigilantism in Nigeria. Building on the broader discourse on regional security communities in international relations, the second section reviews the existing literature on the evolution of regional security frameworks in Nigeria. The third section explains the methodological framework for data collection and analysis while the fourth section deals with the theoretical perspective from which the article analyses its subject-matter. The rest of the sections deal with Nigeria's previous and recent experiments in the regionalization of vigilantism in the governance of security, highlighting relationships of interests and identities and their ramifications for securitization and the ethnicisation of protection and overall effectiveness of regional vigilantism. The final section is the conclusion.

Literature Review: The Evolution of Security Complexes

The literature on the institutionalization and implementation of regional security complexes seeks to explain the nature of interdependence and cooperation that takes place amongst states in their responses to unique and shared security threats in global politics. The centrality of explanations is that a security complex is a liberal approach to peacebuilding that emphasizes regional integration and security cooperation. The scholarly root of regional security complex is traceable to Karl Deutsch's development of the concept of security community (see Deutsch, 1964; 1957). The character of post-Cold War politics, the challenges of 9/11 and the changing dynamics of insecurities such as environmental degradation and climate change have been identified as key factors underlying the significance and the evolving shift towards regional solution to international security crises (Jones and Smith, 2007; Kelly, 2007; Kim, 2004; Bah, 2005; Buzan, 1991). Indeed, by the end of the Cold War, Barry Buzan's study that produced the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) became widely regarded as a significant advancement on Karl Deutsch's security community analysis. For Barry Buzan a regional security complex is "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another" (Buzan, 1991, p.190).

Following Buzan, several other studies have looked at the regionalization of responses to emerging security threats in different regions of the world with different findings and criticisms (see Esmaeili, Hossein and Firoozabadi, 2021; Walsh, 2021; Martel, 2020; Kilroy, Abelardo and Todd, 2017; Bah, 2005; Kim, 2004). Some, such as Kilroy, Abelardo and Todd (2017), note that power inequalities amongst states in a security complex, especially in North America may sometimes lead to securitization and desecuritization of threats in the regional complexes. Furthermore, in the same region, it is argued that the operation of regional security complexes is defined less by "the role of institutions and interests, and more by identity politics" (Kilroy, Abelardo and Todd, 2017, p.1). Others such as Walsh (2021) argues that the RSCT as developed by Barry Buzan loses explanatory power outside of Europe, particularly in Africa. In all, the literature on regional security arrangement embraces explanations at the level of international relations. Interestingly, such practices

in regional security cooperation are evolving at the subnational level in Nigeria in relation to the activities of *Ebubeagu* and *Amotekun*.

However, the emerging and growing literature on *Ebubeagu* or the *Amotekun* regional vigilante groups studies them as individual regional security arrangement designed to promote physical security rather than viewing them through the conceptual frame of security complexes or security communities. These studies, for example, Mou (2023), Otu and Apeh (2022), Nwoko (2021), Adebolu and Adebisi (2021), David and Oyedele, (2020) and Olubade and Ogunnoiki (2020) examined the causal determinants and technical effectiveness of regional vigilantism. By adopting the theory of cooperative security to study the recent development in regional vigilantism in Nigeria, the present article departs from the existing focus of the literature and articulates how fighting criminal activities and insecurities is connected to how the regions securitize ethnic and cultural differences in ways that reinforce ethnic polarizations. In doing so, the article provides an innovative addition to the existing understanding of the regionalization of vigilantism and the politics of regional security integration in the country and their ethnic implications.

The Theoretical Framework of Analysis

This article is guided by the theory of Cooperative Security, an offshoot of security community which is historically and strongly associated with Karl Deutsch (see Deutsch 1957, 1954). The underlying assumption of the theory of cooperative security is that working together in the provision and governance of security is better than proceeding alone. Buzan (1991) and Evans (1994) have popularized the theory and practice of cooperative security, including drawing attention to the role of norms and socialization of values in collective identity formation as a crucial factor conducing to cooperation and the need to protect the community. In fact, by the end of the Cold War, Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett's (1998) edited volume on security community devoted significant attention to explaining how inter-subjective understanding of the structure of international life, the role of norms and shared identity can facilitate the formation of cooperative security. Yet, their contribution did not ignore the significance of power and threats in triggering the formation and practice of security communities as originally formulated by Karl Deutsch. Indeed, the evolution towards more constructivist explanations of cooperative security is not a surprise. Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (1998) have argued that the development of security community is not an end-point in itself, drawing attention to flexibility in its ongoing evolutionary process. Therefore, while not losing the centrality of the role of power and threats as conditions for the evolution of a community as already noted, constructivist notions of shared identity and trust have led to the formation and crystallization of different security community arrangements. For example, Australia as a single state has always had to deal with the insecurity inherent in the "tyranny of distance" and the history of security threats posed by its neighbours through the application of the theory of security community. Yet, Australia does not want to lose sight of its roots in the collective identity of Asia. Its signatory to, and involvement in the Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty, or ANZUS Treaty is quite illustrative. Higgott and Nossa's (1998) study, for example, traces the source of the tension in Australian security policy to its post-war beginnings: the "we-feeling" that held the ANZUS alliance together also confirmed the "otherness" of Australia's Asian neighbours.

This raises questions about the critical issue of integration and interdependence. Integration means the attainment of "a sense of community," which refers to the belief on the part of the individuals in the group that "they have come to agreement to address their security problems interdependently" (Vesa, 1999, p.18). Interdependence of states, is, therefore, key as security cooperation is based on the ideals of collective security and the principle of indivisibility of peace. A threat to one is conceived as a threat to the other in which there is also an increasing emphasis on human rather than hard security. Accordingly, there is a sense of security community in which the interests of all the member states are well served by acting and working together as a collectivity.

Regional vigilantism in Nigeria can be described as a form of institutionalized security cooperation. Although there is no formal operation of regional system of government with

some level of autonomy and power as characterized the 1940s and up to 1950s, Nigeria was politically structured into six geopolitical zones in 1993 by the Sani Abacha regime in a federation made of 36 states. In this context, federating states in the country that share similar cultural identities and values have come together to form regional vigilante groups to achieve their collective security aspirations. The values of regional distinctiveness defined by cultural ties and ethnic boundaries are preconditions, which have significantly influenced the institutionalization and implementation of security cooperation within the framework of *Amotekun* and *Ebubeagu*. As Galtung (1972, p. 2) has argued, for this interdependence in security to develop and be effective, “it has to be based on some minimum structural similarity (homology),” which is already largely satisfied in the various regions in Nigeria from the East, West to the North. Yet, these integrating values, which separate the insiders of the security community from the outsiders and conduce to cooperation, also form the basis for securitization and politicization of external threats in the implementation of security cooperation. In this regard, the externalities and contradictions inherent in the implementation of a cooperative security arrangement create challenges for its effectiveness as well.

Applying the theory of cooperative security to the domestic level of analysis in Nigeria in relation to the formation and implementation of regional security systems, the *Amotekun* and *Ebubeagu*, for example, are apprehensive of the threats posed by bandits and herdsmen, which have been conceptualized as new forms of terrorism in Nigeria. It is also argued that the armed Fulani herdsmen are determined to capture the territories of non-Fulani ethnic groups with a view to Islamizing Nigeria, which is more or less an extension of the jihadist expedition of 1804. Given this context, the need to protect the ethnic and socio-cultural identities of the Yoruba and Igbo people conduces cooperation amongst the states in their regions to respond to a common threat. So it was with the *Hisbah* in Northern region where at conception and implementation in 2003, was aimed at safeguarding Islamic identities of the predominantly Hausa-Fulani people of northern Nigeria.

The point, therefore, is that while regional vigilante groups can be conceived as complementarities to the inadequacies of federal policing in Nigeria, their activities are at the same time mutually constitutive in the securitization of ethnic and cultural claims. To put it differently, mutual suspicion of ethnic threats and the dialectics of protecting one ethnic neighbour against the other are inherently problematic for peacebuilding and national security because of perceptions of ethnic domination. For example, the refusal of the federal government under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari to grant licence to state governors of the South to secure sophisticated weapons for their state vigilante groups is considered as an ethnically and politically motivated strategy by his regime to frustrate the effectiveness of these state vigilantes in the fight against crime and insecurities orchestrated by the Fulani herdsmen. This ethnopolitical claim is based on the fact President Buhari hails from Northern Nigeria and identifies as Fulani. Indeed, a more substantive argument for the ethnopolitical claim is that the Buhari regime has since 2015 been characterized by the perceived systematic ethnicisation of the governance of national security in Nigeria in favour his ethnic Fulani kinsmen. For example, almost all the security institutions in Nigeria were headed and led by the Fulani people during the Buhari administration of 2015 -2023.

Notes on Data Sources and Methods

Secondary data form the core sources of information for this article. These data sources comprise mainly newspaper articles and scholarly literature including recent official reports of non-governmental institutions such as the International Crisis Group. It is important to note that when the *Amotekun* first emerged in 2020, public discourse and analyses of the constitutionality and desirability of the new security framework dominated newspapers articles in Nigeria. The limitations of these newspaper reports must be problematized, especially the tendency toward sensationalism in news sources seeking mass appeal. This inadequacy was remedied through informal discussions with different people including villagers, academics and top-ranking security personnel from the states and regions where the *Amotekun* and *Ebubeagu* operate. Due to these triangulated data sources, the article adopted the discourse and thematic methods of data analysis to

analyse and interpret the divergent debate in the newspaper articles and grey literature as well as the views generated from informal conversations in order to develop coherent themes. Some of the major themes that emerged from the analysis and review of the scholarly literature such as books and journal articles speak to historical dynamics of the structural flaws inherent in Nigeria's security and policing architecture and implications for the replication of the *Amotekun* concept amongst the ethnic nationalities represented in the various regions of the country.

In this regard, the *Amotekun* tended to have set a precedent for a regionalized race in paramilitary security outfits for the purpose of filling the local security gap created by poor national policing system in Nigeria (Nwoko, 2021). As explained in the subsequent section, the formation of Eastern Security Network by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and later *Ebubeagu* in Igboland became an inevitable outcome of this regional race and ethnic competition. Accordingly, the interpretive findings of the data suggest that perceptions of ethnic domination strengthened the resolve of the various regions in their determination to protect their ethnic communities against the federal government's contestations of the constitutionality of their actions.

Dynamics of the Regionalization of Vigilantism and Evolution of Ethnic Security Dilemma

Regional vigilantism is not entirely a new phenomenon in Nigerian history. Instead, it is evolving and consolidating. The Bakassi Boys was the first in the historical evolution of state-directed regional vigilante institution. The background to the Bakassi Boys is traceable to the activities of traders in the commercial city of Aba, Abia State. Formed in 1998, it was created against the backdrop of crime fighting in Aba, an idea that was gradually regionalized to embrace the entire Igboland as Imo and Anambra states passed laws to legalize its operations in their states. As studies (McCall, 2004; Baker 2002) have shown, at the time, Aba had become so notorious for crime and insecurities posed by armed robbers to the extent that the people in Aba could hardly sleep with both eyes closed. Responding to these contexts where the Nigeria police had failed to provide security and peaceful conditions required for sustainable commercial activities, it became expedient for the Aba traders to initiate an alternative law enforcement institution in the name of the Bakassi Boys. The vigilante group operated in Eastern Nigeria until 2002 when the Federal Government, under the leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo, disbanded it.

Similarly, established in 2003 in Kano and extended to 11 of the 19 states of the north, the second regional vigilante structure in Nigeria was the *Hisbah*. The creation of *Hisbah* was influenced by the determination to promote both spiritual and physical security in Northern Nigeria. The introduction, enforcement and protection of Sharia code by *Hisbah* in the twelve Northern states was widely seen as an attempt to secure the Muslims against Christians who were considered as outsiders to Islamic culture and practice. For example, the *Hisbah* seized and destroyed 6000 cartons of beer, belonging to non-Muslims, mostly Christians (Last, 2008, p.53). "In a broader political vision, the enforcement of *Sharia* law was perceived as a return to Islamic values (divinely ordained laws) to foster societal re-orientation and redress moral decadence in the society" (Olaniyi, 2005, p.1). In short, *Hisbah* responded to the need to protect and expand Islam as a critical force in the advancement of the interests of Muslims in the predominantly Hausa-Fulani territory of Northern Nigeria.

For the *Amotekun*, the six state governors of the Yoruba ethnic group in Southwestern Nigeria endorsed the formation of the collective security initiative on January 9, 2020, at Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State. At present, the Yoruba nation in Nigeria comprises six states: Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, and Lagos; and they are ruled by different political parties. Importantly, despite political, ideological and religious affiliations of the governors, all of them supported the formation of the *Amotekun*. At the time of the formation of the *Amotekun*, the Southwest was confronted with the security challenges of Fulani herdsmen and kidnapping. However, the abduction of Chief Olu Falae on Monday, September 21, 2015, in his farm and the killing of the 58-year-old, Mrs Funke Olakunrin on July 12, 2019, were two critical events that drew the attention of the Yoruba people. Chief

Olu Falae was a former Minister of Finance and presidential aspirant in Nigeria while Funke Olakunrin was the daughter of Pa Reuben Fazoranti, the national leader of *Afenifere*, the Yoruba apex socio-cultural umbrella organization. While these two prominent Yoruba son and daughter provided the immediate sparks in the evolution of the *Amotekun*, the Yoruba people generally viewed the incessant kidnappings and killings by suspected Fulani herdsmen as evolving threats to the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria that needed to be confronted head-on. More broadly, therefore, the emergence of *Amotekun* represented an ideological struggle in the defence of the identity, security and territorial integrity of the Yoruba people in the Southwest.

Dialectically, the birth of *Amotekun* in Yoruba had consequential impact on the evolution of *Ebubeagu* in Igboland in terms of hardening of the ethno-cultural dimensions of regional security complexes. *Ebubeagu* was created by the five Southeast States of Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo on April 11, 2021. In contemporary history of Nigeria, therefore, it can be argued that beginning from 2020, regional vigilante groups that assert ethno-cultural and political identities began to consolidate in their efforts to promote cooperative security amongst the state governments in the emergent security complexes. Yet, the intersections of crime fighting, security provisioning and the protection of ethno-religious and political identities in regional vigilantism drew attention to the nature of state-building and the practice of federalism in Nigeria that had historically ignored the resolution of the nationality question (Nyiayaana, 2021). In fact, the expression of ethnic grievances by southern politicians took on a stronger regional and political dimension in the Asaba Declaration of August 2021. On August 25, 2021 the governors of southern Nigeria met in Asaba, Delta State, and one of the major decisions adopted in that meeting was the ban on open grazing of cattle in the South. By October 2021, the South-South governors had resolved to establish a regional security framework as part of the measures to implement the ban on open grazing of cattle on farmlands in the south-south region even though some individual state governments have already implemented such bans. Indeed, the Southern governors' Declaration was an organized mobilization of the peoples of the southern states against what they perceived as Northern domination expressed in the increasing onslaught of herders' violent confrontations with sedentary farmers and their resultant killings. In these contexts, the political elite, that is the southern governors, represented the link between the people and their social-cultural identities by connecting them to shared broader collective security goals of their region. Against this background, enduring nationalistic and primordial sentiments, thus, strengthened each region against the other and underlined the significance of the evolving dynamics of the evolution of ethnic security dilemma and in some sense of security competition amongst the regions and by extension the politics of national security governance.

Ethnic and Political Constraints of Regional Vigilantism in Nigeria

Drawing on the above, it is argued in this section that national politics and the uniqueness and nature of intraregional politics provide important contextual backgrounds for understanding the effectiveness or otherwise of the evolving security complexes in Nigeria. In Igboland, internal politics of the pan-Igbo Biafran self-determination agitations and the repressive strategies of the Nigerian state on the one hand, and the struggle between the Eastern Security Network (ESN) and the *Ebubeagu*, on the other, affect the effectiveness of the latter. The ESN conceives the *Ebubeagu* as a tool of the governors to fight against the IPOB struggle. The ESN was formed by Nnamdi Kanu to serve as the military wing of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in ways comparable to the relationship between the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* and the African National Congress of South Africa in their struggle for liberation from apartheid politics of discrimination. Nnamdi Kanu is the leader of the IPOB, which champions neo-Biafra separatist movement in the Southeast. The selfish, political ambitions and activities of the Igbo governors are not compatible with the IPOB's visions and demand for armed agitation for a sovereign state of Biafra. At the same time, the political interests of the governors interfere with the operations of *Ebubeagu*. For example, Obasi Igwe, a prominent Igbo leader and Professor of Political Science, contends that the governors of Imo and Ebonyi States employ *Ebubeagu* to pursue their selfish political interests in ways that compromise the security of the

region (Ujumadu, et. al 2022, p. 38). Indeed, there have been several demonstrations by the Igbo youth for the disbandment of the *Ebubeagu* because of its increasing politicization by the political elite.

While these intraregional challenges, bordering on conflicting interests of the Igbo elite are important considerations in assessing the ineffectiveness of *Ebubeagu*, transregional power politics of the Federal Government, which revolves around the intersections of ethnic and political domination creates conditions that undermine the performance of the regional vigilante initiatives in two major ways. First, at the broader national level, the politics of licensing and giving legal approval for the operation of the regional groups is a serious and hotly debated issue in Nigeria. In the exercise of its constitutional monopoly of power over the control of the means of violence, the Federal Government has refused to grant licence to state governments to acquire sophisticated weapons, such as military-grade weapons, to arm their regional vigilante groups. Most governors, especially Rotimi Akeredolu, the governor of Ondo State, have justified the need to acquire superior weapon systems. Akeredolu has consistently argued that criminals, like bandits, are better armed with sophisticated weapons such as AK-47 while the *Amotekun* carry lower calibre weapons, making it practically difficult to confront criminals. Akeredolu and other governors' argument has not convinced the Federal Government to grant approval for the purchase and acquisition of sophisticated weapons by regional vigilante groups. In fact, it is worth recalling that in January 2020 when the *Amotekun* was formed, the Federal Government represented by Abubakar Malami, the Attorney-General of the Federation sued the governments of the Southwestern states, challenging their constitutional powers to create the regional security outfit despite the precedent that has been set by the establishment and operations of the *Hisbah* in the North in 2003.

Against the background of the *Hisbah*, some have argued that Abubakar Malami, a Fulani, may have acted to defend and protect the rights of the Federal Government and the constitution, yet ethnic considerations cannot be ruled out as an ulterior motive for his actions. Not the least of the reasons for this cynicism is the fact that the Northern region continued to view the resurgence of regional vigilante institutions in the south with suspicion. The other side of the ethnic predicaments in the management of regional security and regional vigilantism was demonstrated in the effective mobilization of primordial sentiments by the governors of the Southwestern states in support for the creation of the *Amotekun*. As noted earlier, despite the differences in religious, ideological and party affiliations of the six state governors of the Southwest, they all mobilized their resources and challenged the Federal Government in its suit over the constitutionality of the *Amotekun* and eventually won (David and Oyedele, 2020). In fact, for the Yoruba governors, the evolution of the *Amotekun* was much more than an indictment of the failure of the federal Police institution and national security architecture. *Amotekun* was conceived as a response to threats posed by Fulani herdsmen to the collective identity of the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. What do all these mean for ethnic security dilemma in Nigeria? More research is needed to probe this question as the activities of the regional vigilante institutions mature alongside with the deepening of liberal democracy and the increasing ethnicisation and privatization of protection in the country.

The Security Impact of Regional Vigilantism

One of the major arguments that have been advanced in support of the decentralization of security governance in Nigeria is that the existing national security structure with its centralized command in Abuja, is too detached from the local people. A corollary to this argument is the view that local security outfits have better knowledge of their local terrains and, therefore, are better placed to gather and deploy local intelligence to protect the people effectively. Given that regional vigilantism embed these aspirations and is characterized by a sense of security community, it will be necessary to analyze how all these issues, taken together, have translated into practical realization of protection for ordinary people in the various security complexes. It would be argued that the empirical finding, regarding the impact of regional vigilantism on physical safety is mixed in terms of success and failure.

In the case of the Southwest, it is noted that the creation and presence of the *Amotekun* have sent strong signals to criminal groups in the region, both from the standpoint of deterring the aggression of Fulani herdsmen as well as its dynamic responses to internal security challenges of the region. The observation is that the *Amotekun* has contributed significantly to the reduction of incessant clashes between herdsmen and farmers to the extent that farming activities in the region are frequently disrupted for fear of being attacked by bandits or herdsmen. For example, a recent report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) suggests that “the two-year-old *Amotekun* has reduced crime, especially kidnapping for ransom by gangs based in the vast forests” (ICG, 2022, p. 12). Some have also argued that “the outfit’s role in combating criminality such as kidnapping, armed robbery, ritual killing, and herdsmen-farmer clashes has made them progress from providing intelligence for the police and other security operatives to being in charge” (Awojobi, n.d.). Indeed, “if there’s any iota of criminal suspicion anywhere, the people in that area would prefer to call on the *Amotekun* Corps instead of the Police who have been perceived to handle issues with levity” (Awojobi, n.d.). There have also been cases of arrest of suspected criminals and cultists in Ondo State by the *Amotekun*, especially members of the ‘Agbado’ cult group who have been involved in cattle rustling.

But, despite these success cases, the Owo killing of June 5, 2022 appears to have called into question the effectiveness of the regional security infrastructure. On Sunday morning of June 5, 2022, no fewer than 43 people who were worshipping in St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, Owo community, Ondo State, were brutally murdered in cold blood by a terrorist group suspected to be the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP). During the invasion of ISWAP in the Owo community, the *Amotekun* was neither able to prevent the attackers from carrying out the killings nor respond effectively to save the lives of the innocent victims. So from the point of view of supplying local intelligence to the police or responding swiftly to the terrorist attackers, *Amotekun* failed to live up to its responsibility to protect the people of Owo. In fact, as Eghagha (2022) rhetorically asks: “where was the *Amotekun* when the ISWAP invaded the church and successfully killed its victims?” Furthermore, specific case study of the operational activities of the *Amotekun* in Oke and Ibarapa communities, Ogun State has suggested that people of the state perceived the vigilante group as largely ineffective based on the assessment of the impact of criminality on socio-economic developments, the decline in investments and periodic disruption of social order and restriction of movement. The conclusion of the study is that kidnapping, armed robbery and weapons proliferation remain key threats to peace and security in Oke and Ibarapa communities despite the operational presence of the *Amotekun* (Otu and Apeh, 2022, p.82). Moreover, like the federal police, the territorial reach of both the *Amotekun* and *Ebubeagu* in local communities remain limited including limitations in the exercise of command and control over the activities of other local community vigilante groups. Consequently, this has had significant implications for regulating the activities of community vigilantes. For example, in spite of the operational presence of *Amotekun* in the Southwest, both urban and local vigilante groups in Lagos continue to engage in jungle justice, criminal and other violent activities (Tiwa, 2022, p. 276).

The activities of the *Ebubeagu* in the provision and management of security in Igboland are even more problematic and controversial than those of the *Amotekun*. At present, in Igboland, particularly since 2021, there is hardly any week that people have not been killed in armed attacks, targeted at destroying local communities or state infrastructures. Police stations, and offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have been repeatedly attacked and burnt down in Anambra, Enugu and Imo States. Specifically, on May 13, 16, and 23, 2021 respectively, the INEC offices of the above mentioned states were attacked. And on December 4, 2022, the INEC office in Oru West Local Government Area of Imo State was attacked with improvised explosive devices of which the Federal Government accused the IPOB and the ESN (*The Nation*, 2022, p.1). Also, in the month of October 2022, the Enugu-Nsukka road was described as a nightmare for motorists because of the regularity of threats of kidnapping on the road. More importantly, the phenomenon of the “unknown gunmen” who kill people indiscriminately in the Igbo region since 2021 and the role of the Federal Government-sanctioned Operation Python Dance have become a defining feature of the chronic insecurity situation in the area. When

these attacks and variegated forms of insecurities that pose constant threat to the peace and security of Igbo people are cumulated at a regional level of analysis, they raise important questions about the effectiveness of *Ebubeagu* as a security provider.

But, even at that and as noted earlier, the seeming paralysis of the *Ebubeagu* must be situated within the wider context of national security politics as well the internal and external contradictions of the political dynamics generated by neo-Biafran struggle for independent statehood in Eastern Nigeria. As exemplified in the activities of the Operation Python Dance, the Federal Government's securitization and militarized repression of the IPOB is engendered by the politics of national security governance and political domination. For a detailed and critical analysis of how the deployment of kinetic strategies involving harassment, proscription, arrest, extraordinary rendition, torture and mass killing of pro-Biafra agitators underlies insecurity in the South-East (see Nwangwu, 2022). Furthermore, dating back to 2021, the IPOB has embarked on a sit-at-home protest every Monday to demonstrate solidarity and support for its detained leader, Nnamdi Kanu. Practically, the sit-at-home protestation, which has been widely embraced by the Igbo youth, disrupts socio-economic activities and further complicates the role of *Ebubeagu* and the already tense security situations in the South-East. The activities and impact of the ESN must also be factored in. Indeed, the contradictions of the activities of the Operation Python Dance, the IPOB agitation and the internal division it generates between the ESN and the *Ebubeagu* undermine the effectiveness of the latter and its security community broadly defined as Igboland.

The divergent responses of the states in the Southeast is an added complexity that further complicates the security predicament of the people in the region. In Anambra state, for example, the state government does not allow *Ebubeagu* to operate in the state except the Anambra Vigilantes Services alongside formal law enforcement agencies (Paul, et.al., 2023). The *Ebubeagu* has been accused of human rights abuses, extortion, illegal detention, and misuse of firearms. In March 2023, a Federal High Court in Abakaliki, Ebonyi state presided over by Justice Riman Fatun ordered the disbandment of the state's component of the *Ebubeagu* regional security agency due to what the court considered as serial human rights violations (Punch, 2023).

Ebubeagu has also been used by local politicians to pursue and achieve their narrow political goals. In the governorship election of November 11, 2023 held in Kogi, Balyelsa and Imo states respectively, it was reported that Senator Hope Uzodinma, the incumbent governor of Imo state and candidate of the APC employed the services of the *Ebubeagu* vigilante institution to rig the election, which he eventually won (Intersociety Report, 2023). Generally the different responses of the states in the southeast to the *Ebubeagu*, which revolve around lack of determined commitment to the pursuit of the ideals of security community raise issue of the politics of securitization. In fact, Like David Umahi, the governor of Ebonyi State who has not hidden his opposition to *Ebubeagau*, other governors in the southeast geopolitical zone only reluctantly established the *Ebubeagu* in ways that more or less reflected the domino effect of the creation of the Amotekun hence they have faced constant accusations of deploying it to harass their political opponents (Punch, [ibidhttps://punchng.com/ebonyi-giving-ebubeagu-a-bad-name/](https://punchng.com/ebonyi-giving-ebubeagu-a-bad-name/)). In the southwest, a common denominator in the differentiated responses of the state governments to the *Amotekun* lies in poor funding and general inability to equip the *Amotekun* Corps with modern sophisticated weapons systems (Otu and Apeh, 2022).

Conclusion

The evolution of security communities in international relations has drawn attention to how inter-subjective understanding of the structure of international life, the role of norms and shared identity can facilitate the formation of regional security cooperation and promote international security and peacebuilding. Indeed, these constructivist explanations and application of regionalism and cooperative security are important, and have become an integral framework in the management of international security since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, it is worthy to note that power differentials amongst the states, and the need to protect their different regional and ethnic identities also create

entanglements that impede the practice and effectiveness of security communities in international politics.

Drawing on the theoretical insights of the notions and operation of security communities, this article investigated the adoption of the *Amotekun* and *Ebubeagu* regional vigilante security outfits in the governance of security in Nigeria as a response to the structural inadequacy of the national security architecture of the Nigerian state. The argument is that the regionalization of the *Amotekun* and *Ebubeagu* vigilantism marked a fundamental shift towards the development and implementation of security communities in the country. A key finding of this article is that while the regional vigilante structural arrangement is driven by an integrationist bias to secure members of the imagined community, it has also contributed to the politicization and ethnicisation of protection in ways that deepen ethnic consciousness and ethnic mistrust in Nigeria. This is because in the implementation of regional vigilantism, physical safety intersects with the protection of ethnic and cultural identities. The *Amotekun* is not only confronted with the challenge of protecting life and property but also the preservation of the cultural identity of the Yoruba people in Southwestern Nigeria. Likewise the activities of *Ebubeagu* in Igboland of the South-East. One major implication of this is the evolving tendency towards engendering the complications of ethnic security dilemma.

Another practical reality that has characterized the implementation of regional vigilantism is that national security politics, and in some cases, as in the South-East, internal dynamics of IPOB politics and the differentiated responses by state governments in the region have combined to challenge the sense of a security community. Taken together, both *Amotekun* and *Ebubeagu* have raised further questions about whether the current attempt at regional vigilantism has rather produced an illusion of security transformation in the struggle for structural reforms of Nigeria's security architecture. This question deserves more research and careful scholarly probing.

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