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Rural communities in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State are increasingly confronted with escalating security challenges. Hence, the formation of “*AnyamNyor*”; a non-conventional security organization which is one of the strategies to control crime in the state. This study assesses rural crimes, the role of *Anyam Nyor* in crime control within rural communities in Benue State, community perception, operational strategies, challenges and possible collaboration with formal security agencies in enhancing rural security in Nigeria. The study was anchored on the social control theory and theory of hybrid security governance. The study adopted cross-sectional survey design, using structured questionnaire as its primary data collection instrument for the study of 308 respondents sampled. Findings of the study revealed that *Anyam Nyor* plays a meaningful, but not a dominant role in rural crime control in the state. However, *AnyamNyor* enjoys significant trust and perceived effectiveness among rural communities in Benue. The study recommended among others that Government and other stakeholders should develop a coordinated framework for collaboration between *Anyam Nyor* and police or other formal security forces to ensure comprehensive and sustainable crime control in the rural area of Benue State.

Key Words: “*AnyamNyor*”, **Informal Security Organizations, Crime Control, Benue State**

**Introduction**

Many sociologists, including Frazer (1922), in Alemika, and Chukwuma (2013), conceptualized crime as "an act which is believed to be socially harmful by a group of people which has the power to enforce its beliefs" rather than an act that violates a basic, universal human sentiment and is harmful to society. From a legal perspective, any action taken by an individual that violates the law is considered a crime. This violation could involve doing something that is illegal or failing to do something that is required by law

(Gillian, 1954 cited in Alemika, and Chukwuma, 2020). In fact, one is a misdemeanor, and the other is a felony. However, the law forbids both, hence acts that were not crimes in the past are now considered such in developing societies when new laws are passed.

The capacity to provide safety from crime, violence, and conflict is essential not only for personal well-being, but also for encouraging investments, economic growth, and the sustenance of democratic institutions. Hence, security of lives and property is seen as a foundational pillar for socio-economic development, political stability, and human rights protection (Nourbakhsh & Baghbanno, 2023). In many regions of the world, especially in rural or marginalized areas, State-led security frameworks are often times inadequate, leading communities to adopt informal and community-based systems of protection (Ruteere, 2017). Informal security organisations (ISOs) encompass all forms of security efforts outside of the conventional government-established channels; from the community as a self-help means of filling a perceived "security vacuum" created by weak police presence and governance.

Informal institutions play a crucial role in maintaining law and order, particularly in rural and underserved communities where the reach of formal security agencies is often limited. These institutions typically include traditional rulers, community elders, vigilante groups, and religious bodies that operate outside the formal state apparatus yet command legitimacy within their local contexts (Meagher, 2012). Their embeddedness in the community gives them the advantage of local knowledge, trust, and cultural authority, enabling them to address security concerns swiftly and effectively.

Globally, informal and community-based security actors have gained prominence in the face of state fragility, governance deficits, and the inability of formal institutions to ensure adequate law enforcement. In countries across Latin America, such as Colombia and Mexico, local vigilante groups have emerged to combat organized crime especially in areas where state police presence is minimal or seems compromised (Moncada, 2017). Similarly, in parts of India and the Philippines, village defence committees and barangay-level peacekeeping units' function as first combat responders to crime and social unrest (Berg & Carranza, 2015).

The trend in Africa and other developing nations is even more pronounced with the legacies of colonial policing and post-independence governance challenges, where formal security forces are frequently overstretched, underfunded, and mistrusted by the rural populace. It was reported in 2021 that the Nigerian police force has an estimated population of 371,000 officers, out of which 200,000 of them are serving the political elites while leaving 171,000 to police 236.7 million Nigerians, bringing the ratio of police officers to common folk to about 1:1000, highlighting the inadequacy of manpower (Alemika, & Chukwuma (2020). Furthermore, reports have it that nearly half of these officers are attached to politicians and senior government officials as part of their security detail, further depleting manpower from the already short-staffed force Alemika, & Chukwuma (2020). This has often led to the rise of traditional and non-state security actors, such as the Bakassi Boys and Amotekun in Nigeria, Sungu-Sungu in Kenya, among others who are perceived by local communities as more effective and responsive to security challenges (Kirby, 2021). While these groups often succeed in crime prevention and community policing, their operations raise important questions about human rights, accountability, and the rule of law (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011).

Scholars have increasingly conceptualised informal security organizations as examples of "hybrid security governance," where state and non-state actors coexist and sometimes collaborate in the provision of security (Baker, 2010). This hybridisation is not merely a symptom of state failure to a large extent but also a reflection of an adaptive strategies by local communities seeking pragmatic solutions to everyday insecurity. In Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, the limitations of formal law enforcement caused a persistent state of insecurity. Rural communities face numerous security challenges ranging from armed robbery and communal clashes to kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts to ancestral displace and occupation. These forms of insecurity threaten not only the safety of lives and property but also hamper agricultural productivity, discourage investment, and destabilize the rural economy (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2019).

Benue State, known as the “Food Basket of the Nation,” has experienced recurrent incidents of violent crime, owing to inter and intra ethnic conflicts, competition over land and resources, and insufficient policing infrastructure. The Nigerian Police Force, though constitutionally charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order, has often been overwhelmed with limited manpower, poor logistics, and a weak presence in rural areas (Iyekekpolo, 2020). Consequently, rural dwellers have resorted to alternative means of safeguarding their communities. Informal security organizations have emerged as grassroots responses to the inability of the state to effectively provide security. These groups, often organized along ethnic, cultural, or local lines, draw from traditional systems of justice and community self-regulation.

One of such organizations is *Anyam Nyor*, an indigenous security group among the Tiv people of Benue State. This group, whose name translates to “Eye of the People,” operates based on community vigilance, collective responsibility, and indigenous justice mechanisms, whose membership consists of volunteers from the community; knowledgeable of local customs and familiar with the terrain and residents. *Anyam Nyor* is conceptualized as a state-led philosophy of policing; a paradigm which rests on the Weberian ideal that the state is the exclusive source of legitimate force (Schärf, 2000). The *Anyam Nyor* security organization has been instrumental in crime detection and prevention, dispute resolution, recovery of stolen property, and maintaining order during festivals and community events. Moreover, their methods, ranging from intelligence gathering through community informants to traditional methods of sanctioning offenders, are considered effective in deterring criminal behaviour in rural settings (Iyekekpolo, 2020).

However, the activities of informal security outfits such as *Anyam Nyor* raise critical concerns regarding accountability, legality, and human rights. While they help to address issues left by the formal state apparatus, their operations are often outside the formal legal framework, which can lead to abuses of power or conflicts with the police and judiciary (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011). There is also the concern that such groups could be hijacked by politicians or become agents of oppression rather than protection if not properly regulated.

Despite these concerns, the role of informal security groups in maintaining rural security cannot be overlooked. Hence, the objective of the study is to assess the categories of rural crime and nature of informal crime control offered by *Anyam Nyor* in Benue State, critically examine the role of *Anyam Nyor* in crime control within rural communities in Benue State, assess community perception, operational strategies, challenges and possible collaboration with formal security agencies in enhancing rural security in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the social control theory (Travis Hirschi, 1969) and theory of hybrid security governance. According to Social control theory, people follow social standards because of the strength of their social ties. In other words, these standards, originate from years of experience and interactions of their forebearers, and tend to wax strong because of the immense belief in them which ultimately acts like a glue, holding the society/community together. Hirschi claims that these ties are made up of an intersection of four components: belief, engagement, commitment, and attachment. Hence, people place high premium on their relationships and places within their community, and are less likely to act in a deviant manner (Hirschi, 1969; Cullen & Agnew, 2011). On the other hand, the Theory of Hybrid Security Governance propounded by Niagale Bagoyoko, Eboe Hutchful, and Robin Luckham, (2016) in their article “Taylor & Francis”, commissioned by African Security Sector Network (ASSN) addresses the overlap, coexistence, and occasionally cooperative ties between formal (state-sanctioned) and ISOs in security provision. In many post-colonial contexts, especially in cases where the state has been further weakened, usually due to civil unrest or domestic terrorism, informal security groups like *Anyam Nyor* arise to cover the gaps left by the official police force. It follows that in order to maintain local order and justice, these unofficial groups work alongside formal institutions rather than in opposition to or undermining state authority (Baker, 2010; Kyed, 2009). Particularly in developing nations where the capacity of state-run agencies is constrained and/or disputed, calling into question the notion that state security provision is universal, consistent, or hegemonic (Meagher, 2012; Bagayoko, Hutchful & Luckham, 2016). The perfect model of this has been seen as

community policing, where there is a clearly laid out relationship between the official channels and local operators.

### Methodology

The study adopted cross-sectional survey design, using structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. While Benue State with 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and a population of over five million people was the setting for the study (NPC 2023 projection).

Cluster sampling, stratified random sampling and simple random techniques were employed to ensure that all rural communities where the *Anyam Nyor* group is active are adequately represented in the study. The sample size of 308 respondents arrived at across six LGAs selected for the study in proportion to their population sizes, providing sufficient power for meaningful descriptive and inferential analysis.

### Findings on Rural Crime and Nature of Informal Crime Control Offered by *Anyam Nyor*

The study sought to understand the nature of informal crime control in rural areas of Benue state with regards to the role of informal security organizations (*Anyam Nyor*) thus:

**Table 1. Categories of Rural Crime and Nature of Informal Crime Control Offered by *Anyam Nyor***

VARIABLE	RESPONSES	FREQUENCY (N= 308)	PERCENTAGE (100%)
What type of crimes does <i>Anyam Nyor</i> commonly address in your area?	Theft	146	47.4
	Assault	42	13.6
	Communal clashes	69	22.4
	Drug-related crimes	12	3.9
	Others	39	12.7
How often do you see <i>Anyam Nyor</i> patrolling or responding to crimes in your community?	Very often	78	25.3
	Occasionally	108	35.1
	Rarely	73	23.7
	Never	49	15.9
In your opinion, does <i>Anyam Nyor</i> use traditional methods	Yes	135	43.8
	No	17	5.5
	Not sure	156	50.6
Does <i>Anyam Nyor</i> collaborate with community elders or traditional rulers in their operations?	Yes	164	53.2
	No	57	18.5
	Occasionally	87	28.3

### Source: Field Survey, 2025

Findings on the nature of informal crime control offered by *Anyam Nyor* in rural areas of Benue State, Nigeriareveal that, theft was the most frequent type of crime commonly addressed by *Anyam Nyor* with 47.4% (146) of the respondents. This was followed by communal clashes 22.4% (69) assault 13.6%

(42), drug-related crimes 3.9% (12), and other forms of crime by 12.7% (39). The frequency of *Anyam Nyor's* activities showed that, 35.1% (108) respondents indicated that the group was seen occasionally responding to crimes, 25.3% (78) of the respondents reported seen very often, 23.7% (73) reported rarely seeing, while 15.9% (49) respondents stated that they never observed activities of *Anyam Nyor*. On the use of traditional methods in their operations, 43.8% (135) affirmed that *Anyam Nyor* employed traditional approaches, 5.5% (17) disagreed, and 50.6% (156) were not sure. Furthermore, 53.2% (164) of the respondents indicated that the group collaborates with community elders or traditional rulers, 28.2% (87) said such collaborations occurred occasionally, while 18.5% (57) reported that no collaboration existed.

These findings suggest that the *Anyam Nyor* group plays a notable role in community-based crime control, particularly in addressing theft and communal conflicts. Their use of traditional methods and collaboration with local leaders reflect a form of indigenous policing that draws on communal trust and cultural authority. Similar observations have been made in previous studies, which emphasize that informal security groups in Nigeria often complement formal policing structures, particularly in rural areas where government security presence is weak (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020; Olaniyan & Okeke-Uzodike, 2021). Such community-led initiatives help fill gaps in crime prevention and control although their effectiveness often depends on sustained collaboration with formal law enforcement agencies and community institutions.

### Findings on the Roles Played by *Anyam Nyor* in Crime Control

The study further examines the roles played by *Anyam Nyor* in crime control in rural communities of Benue State thus:

**Table 2. Roles Played by *Anyam Nyor* in Crime Control**

VARIABLE	RESPONSES	FREQUENCY (N=308)	PERCENTAGE (100%)
Does <i>Anyam Nyor</i> respond promptly to crime-related emergencies?	Always	76	24.7
	Sometimes	154	50.0
	Rarely	53	17.2
	Never	25	8.1
Do they conduct community sensitisation or awareness campaigns on security issues?	Yes	121	39.3
	No	73	23.7
	Don't know	114	37.0
How involved is <i>Anyam Nyor</i> in resolving local disputes or conflicts?	Very involved	106	34.4
	Moderately involved	166	53.9
	Not involved	36	11.6
Has the presence of <i>Anyam Nyor</i> reduced community reliance on external (formal) security forces?	Yes	94	30.5
	No	214	69.4

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Table 2 presents the findings on the roles played by *Anyam Nyor* in crime control across rural communities in Benue State. The results indicate that, regarding responsiveness to emergencies, 50.0% (154) of the

respondents noted that *Anyam Nyor* sometimes responded promptly to crime-related situations, 24.7% (76) indicated they always did, 17.2% (53) said they rarely did, while 8.1% (25) reported that the group never responded promptly. In terms of security awareness, 39.3% (121) of the respondents revealed that *Anyam Nyor* conducted community sensitization or awareness campaigns on security issues, while 23.7% (73) said they did not, and 37.0% (114) were unaware of such efforts. The level of involvement in conflict resolution was also examined, with 53.9% (166) of the respondents describing *Anyam Nyor* as moderately involved, 34.4% (106) as very involved, while 11.6% (36) as not involved. Furthermore, when asked whether the presence of *Anyam Nyor* had reduced community reliance on formal security agencies such as the police, only 30.5% (94) agreed, whereas a majority of 69.4% (214) disagreed.

These findings suggest that *Anyam Nyor* plays a meaningful but not dominant role in local crime control. While the group actively contributes to dispute resolution and occasionally engages in public sensitization, its ability to replace or reduce dependence on formal law enforcement agencies remains limited. This aligns with earlier studies which found that community vigilante groups often complement, but rarely substitute state security institutions (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020; Okenwa & Igbo, 2021). The moderate involvement of *Anyam Nyor* in conflict resolution also reflects the traditional role of informal security systems in fostering communal harmony, security and responding to social disruptions where formal institutions may be less accessible (Bamidele, 2022). However, limited resources, irregular coordination, and lack of official recognition may often constrain their effectiveness in sustaining long-term security outcomes.

### Findings on Perceptions and Effectiveness of *Anyam Nyor* by Community Members

The study assessed the perceptions and effectiveness of *Anyam Nyor* as an informal security organization domicile in rural community members of Benue state thus:

**Table 3. Perceptions and Effectiveness of *Anyam Nyor* by Community Members**

Variable	Responses	Frequency (N=308)	Percentage (100%)
In your opinion, which group responds faster to crime reports?	<i>Anyam Nyor</i>	109	35.4
	Police	77	25.0
	Both equal	82	26.6
	Not sure	40	13.0
Who do you trust more to handle community-level crimes effectively?	Missing	2	.6
	<i>Anyam Nyor</i>	139	45.1
	Formal security agencies	131	42.5
	Neither	36	11.5
Compared to police or other agencies, how would you rate the effectiveness of <i>Anyam Nyor</i> ?	Very effective	87	28.2
	Somewhat effective	163	52.9
	Ineffective	36	11.7
	Not sure	22	7.1
	Very effective	87	28.2

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Table 3 shows the perceptions of community members regarding their perceptions and effectiveness of *Anyam Nyor* in crime control. The data indicate that a considerable proportion of respondents 35.4% (109) believe that *Anyam Nyor* responds faster to crime reports than formal security agencies such as the police 25.0% (77). Additionally, 26.6% (82) respondents felt that both groups respond equally, while 13.0% (40) were unsure. When asked who they trust more to handle community-level crimes effectively, 45.1% (139) of the participants expressed greater trust in *Anyam Nyor*, compared to 42.5% (131) of the respondents who preferred formal security agencies, while 11.5% (36) of respondents trusted neither group. Similarly, the perceived effectiveness of *Anyam Nyor* compared to formal agencies was rated highly, with 28.2% (87) respondents describing the group as “very effective” and 52.9% (163) as “somewhat effective.” In contrast, 11.7% (36) respondents viewed the group as “ineffective,” while 7.1% (22) were “not sure.”

The findings suggest that *Anyam Nyor* enjoys significant trust and perceived effectiveness among rural communities in Benue State. The majority of respondents believe that the group responds more swiftly and efficiently to crime reports than formal security agencies, aligning with existing literature that highlights the responsiveness of community-based security networks in rural areas (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2021). The higher trust in *Anyam Nyor* compared to formal forces may stem from its close ties with local residents and better understanding of community dynamics, which enables faster communication and conflict resolution (Eke, 2020).

The communities’ perceived reduction in crime since *Anyam Nyor* became active underscores the role of informal security organizations in supplementing formal policing. This finding supports the argument that community-led security initiatives can fill critical gaps in state policing, especially in under-resourced rural areas (Onyeozili, 2022). However, the substantial proportion of respondents who were uncertain about *Anyam Nyor’s* effectiveness and collaboration with formal agencies points to the need for improved coordination and transparency between both entities.

**Conclusion**

The “*Anyam Nyor*” an informal security organization established by the state government serves as an important informal security mechanism in rural areas of Benue State, contributing to crime prevention, community dispute resolution, and local safety. While the group is generally valued by community members, its operations face challenges. Strengthening the capacity, accountability, and integration of *Anyam Nyor* with formal security agencies could enhance its effectiveness and sustainability for a more safe and secure rural Benue State.

**Recommendations**

Government at all levels should give formal recognition, and legal backing for *Anyam Nyor* to legitimize its operations and foster collaboration with official security agencies. More so, community engagement should be carried out frequently by all stakeholders to strengthen community awareness campaigns and encourage residents to report crimes, enhancing trust and cooperation. Finally, Government and other stakeholders should develop a coordinated framework for collaboration between *Anyam Nyor* and police or other formal security forces to ensure comprehensive and sustainable crime control. This will promote integration with formal security structures.

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