

Vigilantism in Africa - UFR

Definition of Vigilantism

Vigilante is a Spanish word which means watchman and or guard but in the modern day in age vigilante means someone who is part of an organized committee, without legal jurisdiction and fights crimes. Vigilantism is a form of law enforcement taken by individuals without the consideration of the government, and is becoming more prevalent in Africa, where nearly 800 people die because of it every year.

The Nature of Vigilantism

The nature of vigilantism consists of groups which fight to protect themselves and their community or seek revenge against groups that they have animosity with. Vigilantes may also spring up due to ethnic rivalry, community defense and these can morph into predatory organization. In close knit community's vigilantism is practiced more as they are protecting themselves. It usually results in violence as unregulated individuals act without consequences however many benefits can be brought through this. This ambivalence is reflected in the words South Africans use to talk about vigilantism. These include oxymoronic terms such as "popular justice", "kangaroo court", "vengeance attacks" and "mob justice".

The Broken Window Theory of Vigilantism

Wilson and Kelling's Broken Windows Theory states that the maintenance and order of urban environments can stop the escalation of petty crimes like vandalism into more serious ones. Certain crimes are also committed due to antisocial behavior. Based on assumption that unmaintained communities are unable to control crimes such as rape and robbery. People should feel a sense of responsibility and stop small crimes such as graffiti and theft so they can prevent larger crimes like burglary and rape, preventing the snowball effect for misdemeanors. People do get hurt as a sense of responsibility is encouraged, without having the proper checks and balances.

The Just World Theory

Adelstein's Just World Theory states that vigilantism is rooted in attempts to preserve a just world. Thus, they believe that in this world people get what they deserve, vice versa. Strategies used for protecting beliefs in a just world include denial of the injustice or else restoration of justice by means of punishing the offender (vigilantly groups carry this out). This can result in the protection and safety of many people however the belief of people getting what they deserve can cause many issues such as people taking justice into their own hands and killing without proper judiciary requirements.

The Social Group Control Vigilantism Theory

Rosenbaum and Sederberg's Social Group Control Vigilantism Theory states that vigilantism emerges as a result of collective efforts of people in the same religion or culture. They work against people/aspects of society which threaten their belief. This is an extremely dangerous form of motivation as it can lead to a gang's mob mentality which further starts conflicts between two groups and endangers lives.

General Causes for Vigilantism

There is government failure to apprehend criminals and uphold the state, so people take their safety into their own hands. This, paired with an increasing distrust towards police and others has also led to a major rise in vigilantism, as people have to protect themselves. Weak African states are also facing insurgencies and are outsourcing their resources on fighting with non-state actors, leading to further problems.

Political Factors Leading to Vigilantism

Politics and government are a factor in the causes of vigilantism as many people believe that the political hand in the criminal justice system has been compromised, so residents have no choice but to turn towards vigilantism. This belief also leads to executions without trial. Politicians create vigilant groups consisting of the unemployed in order to coerce people to vote for them. Lack of government is another example of how there can be harmful funding in police and army supplies often to people taking the law in their hands as there is a lack of coordination between the government and task forces, resulting in a weak center, less supervision and thus leads to more crimes.

Role of the Police in the Spread of Vigilantism

Vigilantism also rises due to the corruption of the police, often consisting of misuse of authority, protection of illegal activities, coerced arrests and intimidations, unwarranted searches and surveillance which leads to the seizure of belongings and/or property. Thus, when a crime takes place many people rely on vigilantes rather than the police

Several neighborhoods also do not have access to the police due to lack of presence. These reasons contributed to the formation of the Arrow of Boys of Teso. However African countries should be forthcoming about these problems and instead of resort to vigilantes we should try to strengthen the existing police

Role of the judicial system in the spread of vigilantism

Long trials and light sentencing from the Judicial System also opens the possibility of vigilantism. High crime rates, lack of accessibility of the justice system, poor witness protection, lack of transparency in granting parole and misunderstanding of trial proceedings by civilians contribute to the aforementioned reasons of vigilantism as a result of the Judicial System. But vigilantes often violate laws and execute people themselves and this undermines decisions by the court and it promotes defying the judicial system and this could lead to problems that plague many people

Factors Affecting the Spread of Vigilantism

Economic: High costs of living and a high unemployment rate lead to further vigilantism. Economic recession such as reduction in wages and lay-offs leads to crimes like theft to put food on the table and basic survival. Vigilante groups form to express their frustration due to day to day challenges. This leads to people acting out in frustration and disguising it as justice.

Postcolonial: The transition of African governments from authoritarian regimes to democracy has not been easy. In her journal, Heald states that vigilantism is the result of a polarity of political and legal authority within states. Many groups are also on their way to integrate their ideals into the structure of a colonial or postcolonial state. This has led to problems which make it harder for states to integrate and exit colonial rule.

Case Study of the Kamajors in Sierra Leone

Before the civil war, the Kamajors of the south-eastern Mende were chiefdoms (two per village) and were responsible for hunting and protecting the community from human and animal threats. West African differentiation between hunters and warriors became blurred as they were both. These hunters were then in the 1990s employed by the government to take on rising threats within the country RUF and they were a pro government militia. The Kamajors then acted as defenders in the area having to take on many different threats. They brought a period of peace however in 1997 they received more preference by the government, so the military started campaigns of mass violence which again caused a period of war with the RUF and APCR collaborating. The government with the help of Kamajors also brought that down. The group was also however guilty of violence against civilians and looting them, and brutality. They brought many benefits to the state however they managed to also violate many laws and take advantage of their position as independent, yet state backed fighters. Soon the government was not able to keep them under control and in 2002 they banned all vigilante groups. Many fighters stopped fighting with the promise of reintegration back into society. Many of them went to their rural homes and got jobs and worked. Though they were not given enough help and ultimately became bitter and many of them were tried on a special court.

Case Study of the Arrow Boys of Teso

They were a militia group formed in 2003 to combat an uprising by radical Christians known as the LRA. The members of the arrow boys consisted of people who were previously rebels and fought under the UPA which inherently made them a threat. This made the government hesitant to help the arrow boys however they were forced to in desperation. The LRA started a violent campaign and the arrow boys combated it under the direct supervision of the president. By 2007 the arrow boys had a significant victory. Then the arrow boys were disbanded as they still did act as a threat and many of them were given compensation.

Case Study of Nigerian Civilian Joint Task Force

Boko Haram was a prevalent threat to the state of Nigeria and proved to be extremely dangerous and carried out atrocities which plagued the lives of civilians. So, in 2009 the Boko haram acted as a catalyst for young men to defend themselves and their region, so they began to fight. They systematically tracked down boko haram members and killed them. These men then started working with the army and the government and fought off boko haram and these men proved to be very beneficial. However, they took revenge on many members of the Boko haram and even

locals with their new power and they even got into tiffs with the military and these vigilantes caused great discrepancies within the army.

Case Study of Operation Wanya Tutsi

They are civilians in Kimberly who stop crimes amongst teens and others such as brawls and drug abuse. They have had an avid impact on that region as crimes went down by 40% and this was a great achievement. Their methods are however extremely controversial as they are beating children and hurting them as well as posting their names and faces on social media to set a precedent. This has led to people not liking this group of vigilantes who use their own vehicles and gas money and they scout at night however it is evident they cannot sustain themselves without public funding.

The Predicaments of Vigilantism:

Vigilantism in Aba

In Aba there was a group known as the Bakassii boys and they became vigilantes in 2000 and from there on they fought crime and were legitimized under the government and the state house of assembly passed a law for them that validated them. They were then run under an official committee.

Vigilantism in Oodua

They operate in south west Nigeria and were banned for showing resistance to the government in 1999 however they continued to operate. They had an unpredictable relationship with the government however they continued to get support in times of desperation.

Vigilantism in Northern Nigeria

The Hisbah group operated here and they were very violent and because of this a committee was set up to monitor them and in 2003 they passed a law to make them reduce violence but not ban them and in 2006 they had to ban them due to their atrocities, however they continue to operate.

Vigilantism in The Niger Delta

There are many vigilante groups which have had clashes with one another such as the ijaw groups, Niger delta peoples volunteer force and Niger delta vigilante. Federal attempts to stop certain groups have been largely successful.

Do the Positives of Vigilante's Outweigh the Negatives

The Cons: They kill, murder, harass, rape, are not trained, do not have accountability and they have done many horrid things with the power they gain. They often have exploited the community and fought against the government and the military. They are also used as tools of the government to carry out their biddings unofficially

The Pros: They fight off many insurgencies and have worked to exterminate many threats in the region and protect the citizens, which has great importance when the government fails to protect its country's people.

Should These Groups be Aided by the Government

In the past the government has used vigilante groups to fight off threats but in most cases, they used committees and or special measures to ensure that the methods of the vigilante groups are just. This means money and resources are put into these groups with them retaining vigilante status and not having the same set rules as the military or police. This begs the question, should the government be funding these groups or should they be using that money to strengthen their institutions and police. This comes down to the country's own belief and its views on the matter.

Do Vigilantes Undermine the Legitimacy of the State

Vigilantes do inherently undermine the state through their acts continuously. They take justice into their own hands without regarding what the law is or what the law states and this acts as an extremely large problem for many civilians and for the state. This directly violates the

principles of a country, hence making it unacceptable for vigilantes to be given enough power for them to undermine the state, as that would just be counter-productive.

