

When Local Security Loses Its Roots

How the Absorbing of the 'Yan Banga into the Kaduna State Vigilante Service Weakened Community Protections

By Jubal Dabo, head researcher, CHAIN

May 29, 2026

What began as a community-driven security effort in 1970s Northern Nigeria rooted in watchfulness, sacrifice, and collective responsibility gradually lost its spirit after the government got involved over the past decade. The story of the 'Yan Banga and their incorporation into the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS), captured through my interviews with community leaders from 12 local government areas of Kaduna State, reflects a wider challenge in community security across Nigeria: the risk of weakening voluntary local security structures once they become absorbed into formal government security structures.

'Yan Banga—a Hausa term that translates to “local guards” (literal meaning: “sons of the sentry”)—refers to a collective of local vigilante groups made up mostly of youths and other community members. They understood the terrain, knew community residents, identified suspicious activities quickly, and responded to intervene because they genuinely saw community protection as a personal responsibility. The leaders I interviewed shared that before their integration into KADVS, the 'Yan Banga operated with a strong sense of ownership and duty. Their commitment to vigilance was not primarily driven by salary or political recognition, but by loyalty to their communities and the desire to defend their people against insecurity.

The effectiveness of the 'Yan Banga came from multiple factors, including:

1. They had the trust of local residents, because they were part of the same communities they protected.
2. They were motivated by honor, identity, and social responsibility, rather than by paychecks and other bureaucratic incentives.
3. Their operations were flexible, localized, and immediate in many rural and semi-urban communities.
4. They served as the first line of intelligence gathering and early warning against criminal activities.
5. Their most important focus was on conducting night patrols to maintain constant vigilance, and their predictable presence at night gave rural community members a sense of protection and reassurance.

However, their effectiveness changed after their incorporation into KADVS, established in June 2016 and launched in April 2018. Once their structure became formalized under government control, many members gradually lost the volunteer spirit that originally defined the group. The transition introduced bureaucracy, political influence, and expectations of salaries and official recognition. Instead of seeing themselves primarily as community defenders, more and more members began to view their role merely as government employment and primarily as an avenue for personal gain.

One of the clearest signs of this change in mindset was the distinct decline in community night patrols. The 'Yan Banga no longer maintained the same level of local watch and vigilance they were known for before the incorporation. Rather than

focusing on protecting their villages and neighborhoods through routine patrols, many members shifted toward joining the Nigerian Police, the Nigerian Army, and other federal security agencies in mounting checkpoints along highways.

Unfortunately, these checkpoints increasingly became associated with the exploitation of road users. Travelers frequently reported being compelled to give money at checkpoints before being allowed passage. This development damaged the image of the 'Yan Banga and weakened public trust in the group, as more Nigerians began to see its members less as community protectors and more as participants in the extortion practices all too common on Nigerian highways.

In addition, many 'Yan Banga members reduced their activities to guarding politicians, wealthy individuals, and VIPs. Instead of safeguarding vulnerable communities, they increasingly became involved in escort duties, protecting convoys and providing security at social or political events where they were contracted to watch over VIP vehicles. This represented a major departure from the original purpose of the community vigilance groups, which was built around communal protection rather than private security services.

The incorporation of the 'Yan Banga into KADVS also created social tensions among community youths. A major source of frustration was the lack of a clear and transparent enrollment process. Many stakeholders expected that all existing members of the 'Yan Banga would automatically be absorbed into KADVS. Instead, the government established a limited number of positions, and enrollment slots were reportedly allocated to individuals, politicians, and others who were allowed to submit names for recruitment. As a result, the leaders I spoke with said that many long-serving members of the 'Yan Banga were excluded, while some individuals who had never participated in the group—even people from outside the state—were enrolled. While some youths gained access to uniforms, influence, and financial opportunities through KADVS, others who had equally contributed to community security felt sidelined.

Another major issue was formalization unintentionally removed the moral and communal accountability that existed. Before incorporation, a 'Yan Banga member who neglected his duties faced direct criticism from neighbors, elders, and community members because he lived among the same people he protected. Membership was restricted to volunteer youths of good character who lived in the community. But under a government-controlled structure, accountability became more administrative and less communal, weakening the social responsibility that once sustained the system.

This does not necessarily mean that formalization itself was entirely wrong. Government support can provide training, coordination, equipment, and legitimacy. Many KADVS members now have access to resources including security agency networks, communication tools, office facilities, and tents at their guard posts. However, the challenge lies in preserving the original spirit of volunteerism, local ownership, and community trust when introducing more official structure. Once community security groups become overly politicized or transformed into conventional state-controlled outfits, they risk losing the very qualities that made them effective.

The experience of the 'Yan Banga offers an important lesson for security policy in Northern Nigeria: community-based protection initiatives succeed most when they remain rooted in the people, guided by local trust and driven by genuine communal responsibility rather than by bureaucracy, political patronage, or personal financial

interest.

Sources:

ICG (2022). “Managing Vigilantism in Nigeria: A Near-term Necessity,” Africa Report 308, International Crisis Group, April 2022.
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/africa/nigeria/308-managing-vigilantism-nigeria-near-term-necessity>

Yakubu, Khadija Nda (2024). “Governance And Security In Africa: Beyond The State: Non-State Actors and Security in Nigeria: a Case Of Yen Kato Da Gora in Kaduna Urban Area,” PhD thesis, SOAS University of London. <https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00041828>

Lar, Jimam (2018). “Policing Actors, Plural Processes and Hybridisation: Histories of Everyday Policing Practice in Central Nigeria,” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, May 2018. <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.605>

Ogbozor, Ernest (2016). “Understanding the Informal Security Sector in Nigeria,” Special Report 391, United States Institute of Peace, September 2016.
<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR391-Understanding-the-Informal-Security-Sector-in-Nigeria.pdf>