



An Analysis of Vigilantism and Its Effects on Police Force Legitimacy in Tanzania

Jastine Katabaro

Assistant Lecturer, Arusha Institute of Accountancy (IAA), Department of Accounting and Finance, P. O. Box 2594, Njiro Hill, Arusha, Tanzania

ABSTRACT: Vigilantism has increasingly emerged across sub-Saharan Africa as a response to perceived inadequacies in state-provided security and justice. This study examines its rise and implications for police legitimacy in Tanzania, focusing on Dar es Salaam and Mwanza. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with a sample of 50 respondents selected through simple random sampling. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, applying ANOVA and Exploratory Factor Analysis. The findings indicate that delays in police response and socio-economic conditions are primary drivers of vigilantism, with socio-economic status ranked highest (RII = 0.704), while cultural factors were least significant (RII = 0.436). Statistical analysis revealed a significant relationship between perceptions of police legitimacy and support for vigilantism ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, community safety strategies, including community policing and improved accountability, were found to significantly mitigate vigilantism. The study concludes that strengthening police efficiency, institutional legitimacy, and the collaboration between the community and the police force is essential for reducing reliance on extralegal justice mechanisms.

KEYWORDS: Crimel; criminal justice; fairness; legal justice; police legitimacy; public safety; security; trust; vigilantism.

INTRODUCTION

Vigilantism has resurged across many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, reflecting citizens' attempts to fill perceived gaps in state protection and justice (Aina, 2024; Wilke, 2024). Tanzania particularly presents a revealing case of the long, variegated history of *sungusungu* village-based vigilante formations that emerged in the early 1980s among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi and later spread to other regions (Abrahams, 1987; Fleisher, 2000; Paciotti & Mulder, 2004). While *sungusungu* and other local security initiatives had at times been credited with deterring cattle rustling and petty crime. Their normalization as problem-solving mechanisms beyond state policing raises fundamental questions about police force legitimacy, believing that the police force is entitled to be obeyed and trusted to act fairly, lawfully, and effectively (Pósch et al., 2021; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). This study examines the rise of vigilantism and its implications for the legitimacy of the police force in Tanzania, situating the Tanzanian experience within contemporary criminological debates on procedural justice, police cooperation, and hybrid security governance in Africa (Boateng et al., 2023; Cross, 2014; Tankebe, 2013).

The emergence and institutionalization of *sungusungu* followed episodes of insecurity and limited reach of formal policing in rural settings (Abrahams, 1987; Bukurura, 1994). Research documents how community elders and local committees mobilized collective surveillance, patrols, and sanctioning procedures, sometimes with tacit or explicit state support and sometimes in tension with statutory law (Fleisher, 2000; Paciotti & Mulder, 2004). More recent work in northern Tanzania indicates that these formations operate as de facto "community policing" arrangements with complex welfare effects for households and communities (Kudo, 2020). However, across cases, concerns persist regarding due process, accountability, and the potential for violent excesses, especially where vigilante groups adjudicate disputes, meet out punishments, or target marginalized individuals (Cross, 2014; Fleisher, 2000). These controversies matter for the legitimacy of the police force because citizens' experiences with alternative security providers may recalibrate expectations of what "real" security looks like and who is entitled to provide it (Boateng et al., 2023; Tankebe, 2013).

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Theoretical work on legitimacy emphasizes that citizens accord to be policed not only because the police are powerful, but also they are seen as morally appropriate, procedurally fair, and effective (Pósch et al., 2021; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Procedural justice, involving respectful treatment, neutrality, trustworthy motives, and voice, predicts cooperation and compliance more robustly than deterrence alone (Boateng et al., 2023; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). When the police force is perceived as distant, corrupt, politicized, or ineffective, citizens may rationally or normatively turn to non-state actors, thereby eroding the state's symbolic and practical authority (Mutahi et al., 2024; Tankebe, 2013). In Africa more broadly, public judgments about the fairness and effectiveness of the police force vary widely by locality, with urban-rural differences, security threats, and administrative capacity shaping citizens' willingness to report crime and to work with law enforcement (Boateng et al., 2023; Elfversson et al., 2024). Tanzania's history of locally organized security makes it a critical setting to test whether and how the spread or normalization of vigilantism correlates with diminished legitimacy of the police force, or instead coexists with it in hybrid forms of governance (Cross, 2014; Kudo, 2020).

Empirically, the Tanzanian case underscores three tensions at the heart of legitimacy debates. First, effectiveness versus legality: where crime control is visible and swift, citizens may prioritize outcomes over procedures, enabling vigilantism to gain social acceptance even as it sidesteps legal safeguards (Fleisher, 2000; Kudo, 2020). Second, community embeddedness versus impartiality: localized knowledge can enhance crime prevention, but it can also amplify bias, collective punishments, and exclusionary practices that undermine rights and equal protection (Cross, 2014; Paciotti & Mulder, 2004). Third, short-term order versus long-term legitimacy: while vigilantism may reduce immediate risks of victimization, it can hollow out the perceived necessity of professional policing and legal adjudication, leaving the police force dependent on, or overshadowed by, non-state actors (Boateng et al., 2023; Tankebe, 2013). These trade-offs invite systematic inquiry into whether rising vigilantism in Tanzania, manifested through *sungusungu* and other various ad hoc formations, signals deficits in the procedural and performance dimensions of police force legitimacy, or whether it reflects negotiated, hybrid security arrangements that can complement formal policing if appropriately governed (Cross, 2014; Kudo, 2020).

Recent African scholars also point to an "institutional distrust trap," in which citizens who doubt that the police force will protect or treat them fairly choose self-help or non-state providers, a decision that reduces opportunities for positive police-public relationships and, in turn, perpetuates low cooperation (Tiwa, 2024). In this light, vigilantism is not merely a response to crime but a diagnostic of legitimacy, its rise may be both a symptom and a cause of weakened authority for the police force. Conversely, in context where the police force credibly demonstrates fairness, restraint, and problem-solving competence, reliance on vigilante mechanisms appear to diminish (Boateng et al., 2023; Wilke, 2024). Tanzania's policy debates around community policing and local safety committees, sometimes overlapping with or drawing from *sungusungu*, illustrate the stakes of designing inclusive, rights-respecting forms of co-production without sliding into privatized or majoritarian enforcement (Cross, 2014).

Despite a rich historical and anthropological record, critical knowledge gaps remain. First, most classic studies of *sungusungu* are historical or ethnographic, leaving limited recent, nationally comparative evidence on how exposure to vigilantism shapes citizens' legitimacy judgments toward the police force (Abrahams, 1987; Fleisher, 2000; Paciotti & Mulder, 2004). Second, there is insufficient integration between the procedural justice literature and Tanzania-specific analyses of hybrid security governance; as a result, we know comparatively little about how fairness perceptions mediate the relationship between vigilantism and willingness to cooperate with the police force (Boateng et al., 2023; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Third, cross-border learning drawing on new experimental and observational work from South Africa and Kenya has not been leveraged to reinterpret Tanzanian trajectories or to identify context-sensitive policy levers (Mutahi et al., 2024; Wilke, 2024). Addressing these gaps can suggest strategies to strengthen the police force's legitimacy while reducing reliance on extralegal enforcement.

Tanzania has witnessed the persistence and, in some areas, the revitalization of vigilante practices (notably *sungusungu*), even as the state has invested in formal policing and community-policing reforms. This coexistence raises a central question: to what extent does the rise and normalization of vigilantism undermine, reshape, or potentially complement the legitimacy of the police force in Tanzania? Specifically, if citizens perceive vigilante groups as more responsive or effective, does this diminish their belief in the right of police force to exercise authority and their willingness to cooperate? Conversely, can regulated forms of community partnership deliver public safety without eroding due process and the moral basis of police authority? Current scholars offer valuable pieces of the puzzle but lack an integrated, contemporary assessment that links the spread of vigilantism to the multidimensional construct of police force legitimacy in the Tanzanian context (Boateng et al., 2023; Cross, 2014; Kudo, 2020).

Research Objectives

1. To document the contemporary forms and drivers of vigilantism in Tanzania, with attention to historical continuities and regional variations.
2. To assess the relationship between exposure to or support for vigilantism and citizens' perceptions of police force legitimacy (procedural fairness, effectiveness, obligation to obey).

3. To distil policy implications for designing community safety strategies that reduce reliance on extralegal enforcement while enhancing police legitimacy.

Research Questions

1. Why are vigilante practices (including *sungusungu*) currently organized and justified in different Tanzanian localities?
2. What is the association between citizens' exposure to or support for vigilantism and their perceptions of police legitimacy (fairness, effectiveness, and obligation to obey)?
3. Which policy and organizational reforms could rebalance security provision toward rights-respecting, procedurally just policing while reducing demand for vigilantism?

Significance and Contribution

By bridging Tanzania-specific research on *sungusungu* with contemporary legitimacy theory and new evidence from Africa on trust, cooperation, and hybrid security, this study advances scholarly and policy debates in three ways. First, it brings updated empirical focus to a classic African case, testing whether perceived advantages of vigilantism reflect performance gaps, fairness deficits, or both (Boateng et al., 2023; Kudo, 2020). Second, it integrates insights from procedural justice to specify the mechanisms through which vigilantism may erode the normative foundations of police authority (Pósch et al., 2021; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Third, it speaks to practical reforms, identifying how police force in Tanzania can cultivate legitimacy through fair treatment, accountability, and problem-solving—thereby shifting citizens' incentives from self-help to lawful cooperation (Mutahi et al., 2024; Tiwa, 2024; Wilke, 2024). The result is theoretically grounded, contextually nuanced account of the rise of vigilantism and its implications for police force legitimacy in Tanzania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing vigilantism and its African/Tanzanian roots

Scholars generally define vigilantism as extra-state or para-state collective violence or coercion justified by actors as the enforcement of community norms and order in the face of perceived state failure (Abrahams, 1987). In East Africa, one of the most studied forms is *sungusungu*, village defence associations that emerged among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi in the early 1980s and spread widely through rural and peri-urban Tanzania (Abrahams, 1987; Bukurura, 1994). Early ethnographies emphasize that *sungusungu* fused customary sanctioning with state encouragement, blurring lines between autonomous "popular justice" and state-sponsored security (Abrahams, 1987; Heald, 2006). Subsequent work among the Kurya of northern Tanzania details *sungusungu*'s institutionalization, formal registers, mandatory patrols, and fee schedules, while documenting both its problem-solving capacity and the risks of abuse (Fleisher, 2000).

Two broad evolutionary arcs are salient. First, *sungusungu* diversified from cattle-raiding control and property protection toward a generalized neighborhood-watch modality, including crime detection and dispute resolution (Paciotti & Mulder, 2004). Second, beginning in the mid-2000s, Tanzania formalized "community policing" (*polisi jamii/ulinzi shirikishi*), an official program that sought to harness community patrols under police oversight (Cross, 2016). This policy shifts reframed vigilantism from a putative stopgap for state absence into a hybrid assemblage of state and non-state actors in routine security governance (Cross, 2016). While *ulinzi shirikishi* aimed to replace autonomous vigilantism with participatory policing aligned to state law, research shows implementation remained uneven, with local leaders using security committees to pursue both public and private ends (Cross, 2016).

Determinants and consequences of vigilantism

Why does vigilantism rise and persist? Classic accounts stress perceived deficits in state capacity and reach, especially when police force is under-resourced, distant, or mistrusted (Abrahams, 1987; Heald, 2006). In rural Tanzania, endogenous social organizations and collective-action capacity, such as age sets, kinship networks, and neighbourhood committees, lowered coordination costs and enabled large-scale cooperation for patrols and sanctions (Paciotti & Mulder, 2004). More recently, Kudo (2020) exploits household-level data in northern Tanzania to show that village vigilante groups are associated with improved subjective safety and some welfare gains, partly through deterrence and reduced livestock theft. However, these benefits coexist with opportunity costs (time levies), unequal burdens on poorer households, and the risk that delegated coercion may spill over into extortion or collective punishments (Cross, 2016; Fleisher, 2000).

Comparative African literatures underscore the "hybrid governance" logic: non-state security provision interacts with state authority in negotiated ways rather than simply substituting for it (Anderson, 2002; Cross, 2016). Where state officials tacitly endorse or embed with vigilantes, communities may perceive increased order but also experience blurred accountability and incentives for overreach (Heald, 2006). Contemporary experimental and observational studies beyond Tanzania show that when states publicly *discourage* vigilantism and credibly commit to lawful policing, citizens' willingness to support or join vigilante actions can decline (Wilke, 2024). Contrary, where citizens view the police force as ineffective or predatory, demand for "do-it-yourself" order persists (Boateng et al., 2023).

Police legitimacy: theory and African evidence

Police legitimacy to the public is the police's right to power and a corresponding obligation to obey, and this has matured theoretically and empirically over the past two decades (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2003). A key finding is that procedural justice, when treated with dignity, neutrality, voice, and trustworthy motives, more strongly predicts legitimacy than instrumental performance alone (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2003). Tankebe (2013) pushes the field further by modeling legitimacy as multidimensional (lawfulness, procedural fairness, distributive fairness, and effectiveness) and dialogically shaped not only by public judgments but also by how power-holders see themselves.

In the African context, evidence suggests the core propositions travel, albeit with contextual nuance. Boateng et al. (2023) reviewed work across the continent. They found that procedural justice, lawfulness, and fairness are robust correlates of trust, obligation to obey, cooperation, and compliance, even in contexts with high crime risk and resource constraints. Afrobarometer data from Tanzania (Round 9, 2022) show relatively high trust in the police force alongside substantial concerns about professionalism and excessive force, and an attitudinal configuration consistent with mixed legitimacy signals (Amakoh & Msafiri, 2023). Specifically, nearly four-fifths of Tanzanians report trusting the police force, yet fewer than half believe that the police force consistently acts professionally and respects rights; significant minorities report frequent unjustified stops and excessive force (Amakoh & Msafiri, 2023). This contradiction is critical: legitimacy can be high on some dimensions (e.g., effectiveness or patriotic identification) while lagging on others (procedural fairness), with implications for cooperation and for citizens' resort to parallel security (Boateng et al., 2023; Tankebe, 2013).

Linking vigilantism and police force legitimacy in Tanzania

The Tanzanian case offers a distinctive lens on the vigilantism-legitimacy nexus because *sungusungu* grew not only from state absence but also through state incorporation and later reform into *ulinzi shirikishi* (Abrahams, 1987; Cross, 2016). Three mechanisms stand out:

The first one is Complementarity vs. Substitution. Where *ulinzi shirikishi* is well integrated, with clear rules, police oversight, and lawful dispute handling, community patrols that complement the police force can potentially strengthen perceived effectiveness and shared ownership of security (Cross, 2016). Kudo (2020) studied the associations between village groups and welfare improvements, implying a complementarity channel. However, when oversight is weak, vigilantism substitutes for the police, normalizing extralegal sanctions that can undermine perceptions of lawfulness and fairness thereby eroding legitimacy (Fleisher, 2000; Heald, 2006).

The second one is procedural justice spillovers. Citizens' experience with community patrols and their leaders can bleed into global judgments about "the security system." Where patrols are inclusive, respectful, and procedurally fair, may buoy generalized legitimacy; where they engage in collective punishment, compelled levies, or biased enforcement, they can contaminate views of the wider policing ecosystem, including the formal police that tolerate or sponsor them (Cross, 2016; Tankebe, 2013).

The third one is Accountability signalling. Official stances on vigilantism signal the rule of law. Consistent condemnation of mob justice and unlawful punishments, paired with credible police force responsiveness, can lower the social acceptability of vigilantism (Wilke, 2024). On the contrary, permissive or instrumental use of vigilantes by officials suggests that outcomes, not procedures, govern, which conflicts with procedural justice norms foundational to legitimacy (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2003).

Gaps and directions in the Tanzanian literature

Despite rich historical and ethnographic work, several gaps remain. First, micro-level causal evidence in Tanzania linking exposure to *sungusungu/ulinzi shirikishi* to specific legitimacy dimensions (obligation to obey, trust, lawfulness, distributive fairness) is limited. Kudo (2020) addresses welfare outcomes but not granular legitimacy constructs. Second, urban-rural variation and the dynamics in rapidly urbanizing municipalities are underexplored; Cross (2016) focuses on Mwanza, but comparative evidence across cities and rural districts is sparse. Third, equity concerns gendered and socioeconomic patterns in who bears patrol burdens, who is targeted by sanctions, and who benefits from dispute resolution need systematic measurement to assess distributive fairness and its legitimacy consequences (Cross, 2016; Paciotti & Mulder, 2004). Fourth, state signalling has not been rigorously evaluated: do police communications and enforcement against mob justice shape willingness to support vigilantism, as experimental findings elsewhere suggest (Wilke, 2024)? Finally, the interface between police officers' self-legitimacy and professional identity shaped by working alongside community patrols remains largely unstudied in Tanzania. However, the related theory posits a reciprocal "dialogue" between communities and power-holders (Tankebe, 2013).

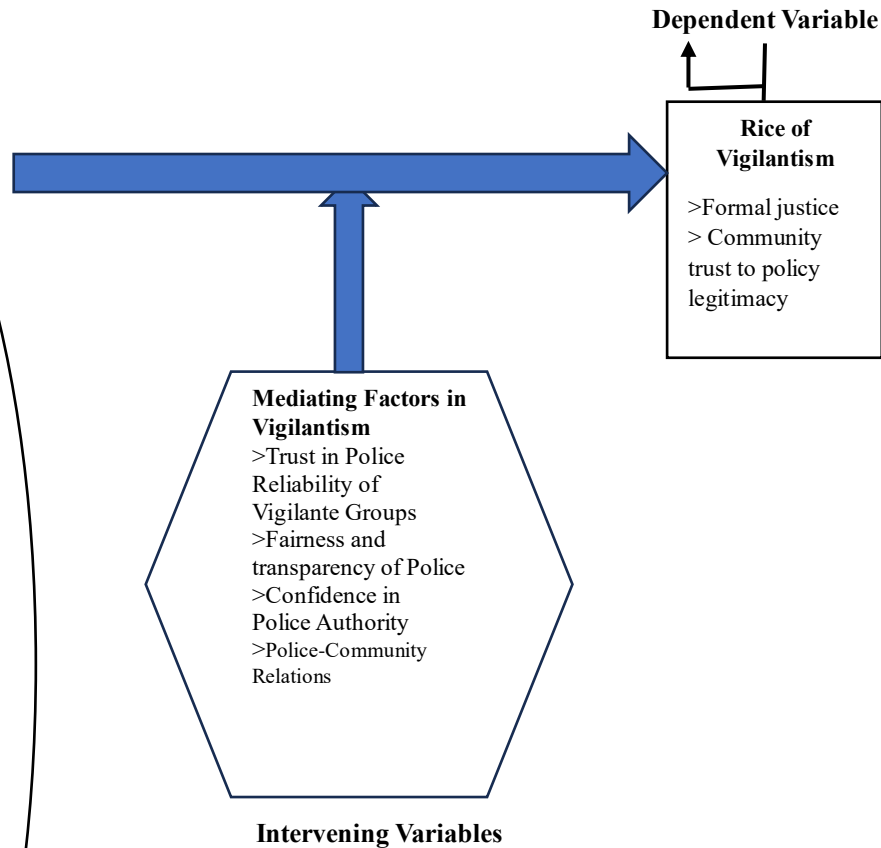
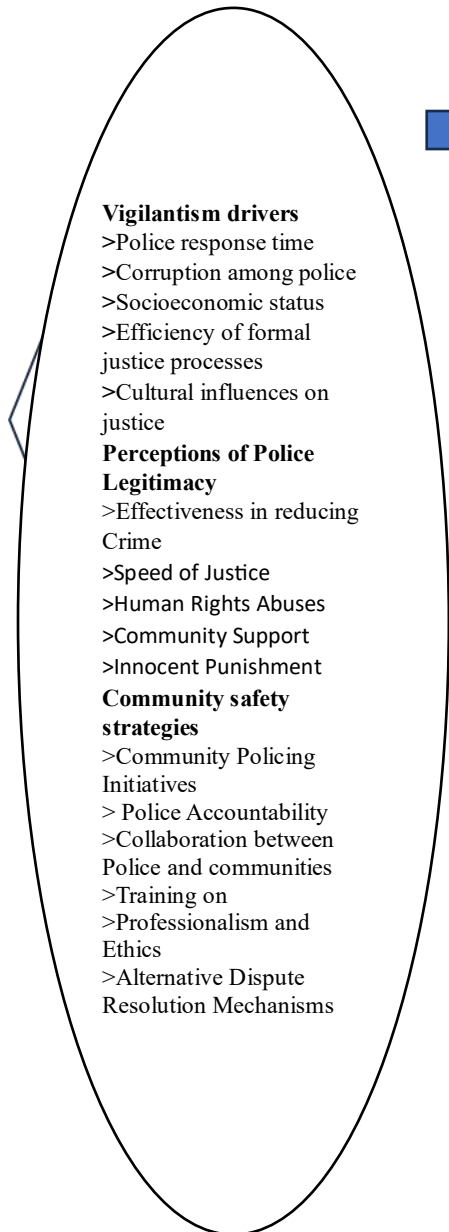
Synthesis

The Tanzanian experience complicates a simple "vigilantism undermines legitimacy" narrative. Historically, *sungusungu* addressed concrete security deficits, and when integrated into legal frameworks and procedural safeguards, community security can enhance perceptions of effectiveness and local empowerment (Abrahams, 1987; Cross, 2016; Kudo, 2020). However, the

same arrangements can normalize coercion beyond due process, eroding judgments of fairness and lawfulness that are central to legitimacy (Fleisher, 2000; Heald, 2006; Tankebe, 2013; Tyler, 2003). Contemporary public opinion in Tanzania is highly generalized trust. However, persistent concerns about professional conduct underscore a legitimacy "imbalance" that hybrid security governance can either correct or exacerbate, depending on accountability design (Amakoh & Msafiri, 2023; Boateng et al., 2023). A next research step is to identify the institutional features of *ulinzi shirikishi* units and police-community interfaces that maximize complementarity (co-production with due process) and minimize substitution into extralegal sanctions, and to test their effects on distinct legitimacy dimensions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Independent variables



METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study adopted descriptive design to investigate factors for the rise of vigilantism and its implications for the police force legitimacy in Tanzania. Under this design, a quantitative method was employed as it is suitable for collecting in-depth data on perceptions, experiences, and the meanings related to vigilantism (Creswell, 2013). Since the research aimed to examine drivers, police force accountability, and strengthening police force legitimacy on vigilante actions.

Research Approach

The study employed a case study approach, focusing on selected urban communities in Tanzania where incidents of vigilantism had been documented. The case study approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are blurred (Yin, 2018). This approach was well-suited to exploring the dynamic interactions among citizens, vigilante groups, and the police force in the Tanzanian context.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's largest urban center, and in Mwanza, a major city in the Lake Zone. These two regions were selected for this study because they had reported more incidents of mob justice and vigilante activities (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Including both urban and peri-urban contexts, it provided a broader understanding of the socio-cultural and institutional factors influencing vigilantism and police force legitimacy.

Population and Sampling Procedures

The target population consists of three main groups:

1. Community members residing in areas where vigilante justice had happened.
2. Local leaders and civil society representatives, who mediate between communities and law enforcement agencies.
3. Police force officers at the ward and district levels.

Both random and non-random sampling techniques were employed to identify participants with relevant knowledge and experiences on the study topic Table 3x. Purposive sampling was appropriate for qualitative studies, as it ensured that participants were selected based on their ability to provide rich, relevant, and diverse information (Palinkas et al., 2015). Approximately 40–50 participants were recruited as follows: 25 community members, 10 local leaders and civil society actors, and 10–15 police officers.

Data Collection Methods

Survey Method

A cross-sectional survey design using structured questionnaire was used to collect data from community members, local leaders, and police officers in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza at a single point in time. This type of data collection tool was chosen considering its ability to provide standardized and comparable data on respondents' perceptions towards vigilantism, ensuring consistency in measurement across participants. (Kothari, 2004). The survey method was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection of data from a relatively large number of respondents within a short period of time. It is particularly suitable for studies that aim to measure perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural tendencies, such as public views on police legitimacy and support for vigilantism.

The structured questionnaire facilitated the collection of quantitative data on key variables, including perceptions of police legitimacy, socio-economic influences on vigilantism, trust in law enforcement institutions, and attitudes toward community safety strategies. The standardized nature of the questionnaire ensured consistency in responses, making the data suitable for statistical analysis using techniques such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).

Data Collection Procedure

A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from community members, police officers, and local leaders. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree") to measure attitudes, perceptions, and experiences regarding prevalence and drivers of vigilantism, level of support for vigilantism relative to exposure, mediators of police-community cooperation and preference for formal versus extralegal community safety strategies as per study objectives.

Data Analysis

In this study, quantitative data were analysed descriptively using the Relative Importance Index (RII) for the first objective, whereby Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) coupled with F test and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) as inferential statistical methods under Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0, was used (Pallant, 2011). The stated model equation was adopted in F test under ANOVA.

$$F = \frac{(SS_B) / (N - 1)}{(SS_w) / (N - k)}$$

Where F implies the critical value representing the ratio for the Sum of the squares between and within variables, (SS_B) sum of the squares between groups, (SS_w) sum of the squares within groups of the same variables, with corresponding degrees of freedom ($N-1$) and ($N-k$). (N) is the total number of observations, and (k) is the number of group categories.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from a recognized institutional review board in Tanzania. Key ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants were provided with information sheets outlining the study's purpose, risks, and benefits. Consent was obtained before participation to maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms, and all data were securely stored in password-protected files. Additionally, special care was taken when interviewing community members about sensitive experiences, such as mob justice, and psychological well-being was ensured through referral pathways if distress arose (Orb et al., 2001).

Limitations of the Methodology

The study acknowledges several methodological limitations. First, reliance on self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias, especially among police officers. Second, findings may not be generalizable to all regions of Tanzania due to the design contextual focus. However, the aim was not generalizability but depth of understanding, and the use of multiple data sources to strengthen the robustness of insights.

Validity and reliability of collected data

Validity in research refers to the extent to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept it is intended to measure. Ensuring validity is crucial for the credibility of research findings and has several facets, including internal, external, construct, and statistical validity (Mohajan, 2022). In this study, external validity was used by using representative samples, clear inclusion criteria, and studying participants and settings that resemble real-world conditions.

On the other hand, reliability on the context of research findings is the basis of scientific research, reflecting the consistency and dependability of a study's results. It is essential for establishing trust in research findings and ensuring that findings replicated under similar conditions (Cypress, 2017). In this study, Cronbach's alpha test was used as a statistical measure of a questionnaire to test internal consistency which shows how closely the items are related by estimating the reliability. The higher value of alpha (often around 0.7 or more) suggests items to be highly consistent (Hajjar, 2018).

The study reveals average Cronbach's Alpha of 0.9102 with moderate variable correlation of 0.5249 for the sample of 50 respondents using a quantitative questionnaire as a data collection tool. This indicates extremely high consistence for the study variables in investigating community vigilante actions (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Overall reliability statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average value(s)
Variables Correlation	0.788	0.617	0.231	0.809	0.296	0.604	0.611	0.417	0.654	0.222	0.5249
Cronbach's Alpha	0.903	0.908	0.916	0.904	0.915	0.909	0.908	0.913	0.909	0.917	0.9102

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic profile of respondents involved in the study. The characteristics examined include gender, age, level of education, and occupation. These variables are presented to provide contextual background for interpreting the study findings.

Gender of Respondents

The gender distribution of respondents was examined to ensure gender representation in the study. Out of a total of 50 respondents, 32 (64%) were male, while 18 (36%) were female. This indicates a higher representation of male respondents compared to female respondents.

Age Distribution of Respondents

The age composition of respondents shows variation across three categories. The findings indicate that 15 respondents (30%) were aged between 18 and 30 years, 25 respondents (50%) were aged between 31 and 40 years, and 10 respondents (20%) were aged above 40 years. The majority of respondents therefore fall within the 31–40 years age group.

Level of Education

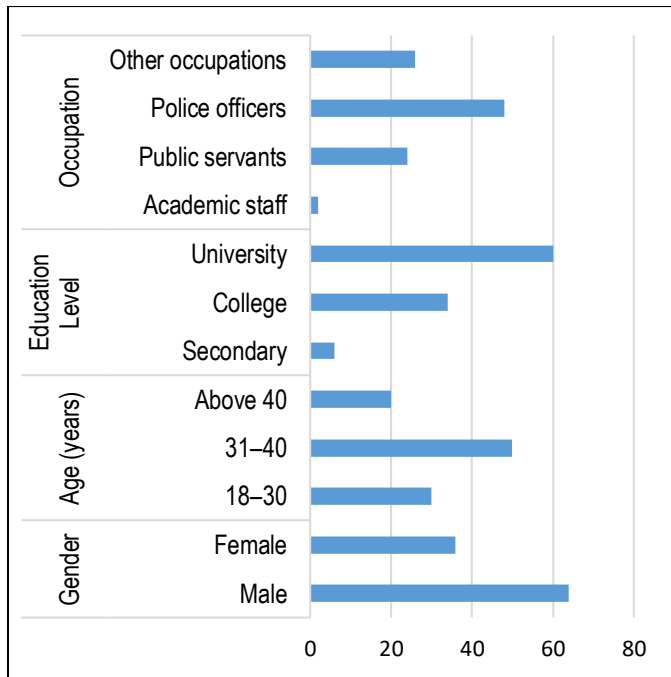
The educational background of respondents was assessed to understand their level of formal education. The findings show that 30 respondents (60%) had attained university-level education, 17 respondents (34%) had college-level education, and 3 respondents

(6%) had secondary education as their highest level of attainment. This suggests that most respondents had post-secondary education qualifications.

Occupation of Respondents

The occupational distribution of respondents indicates diversity in professional backgrounds. Out of the 50 respondents, 1 (2%) was academic staff, 12 (24%) were public servants, 24 (48%) were police officers, and 13 (26%) were engaged in other occupations. This distribution reflects the inclusion of respondents from both law enforcement and non-law enforcement sectors relevant to the study context (Table 2)

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 50) with graphical illustrations



Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	64
	Female	36
Age (years)	18-30	30
	31-40	50
	Above 40	20
Education Level	Secondary	6
	College	34
	University	60
Occupation	Academic staff	2
	Public servants	24
	Police officers	48
	Other occupations	26

Drivers of Vigilantism

To achieve this objective, the primary data from questionnaires were collected as indicators of drivers of vigilantism in Tanzania and later transformed into quantitative data and analysed using the Relative Importance Index (RII) to determine the extent and order of significance for these drivers. The Relative Importance Index is a valuable research tool for evaluating and ranking factors based on respondent input, leading to more robust conclusions and actionable insights. The RII allows researchers to rank factors by perceived importance. This ranking helps to identify which factors are most critical to the study objectives (Al-Assaf, 2020).

The equation guides the mathematical presentation for the Relative Importance Index:-

$$RII = \frac{\sum w}{(A \times N)}$$

Where;

W = Weight given by respondents as a function of the assigned degree of response.

A = Total response value depends on the number of response degrees

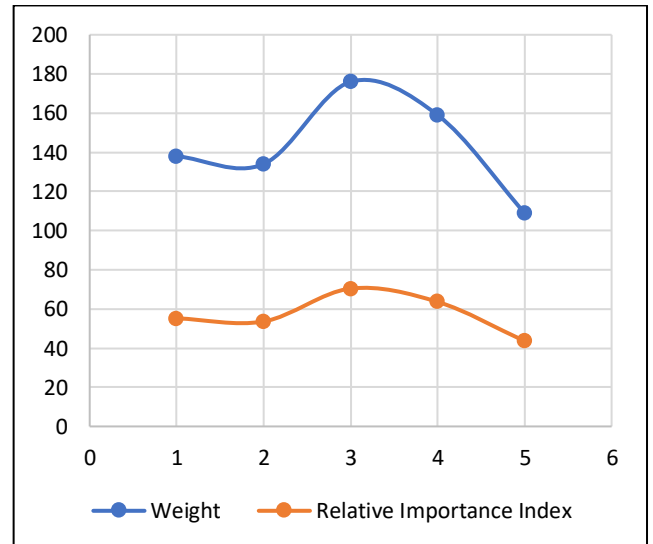
N = Total number of response degree.

The findings indicate that a majority of respondents associated the rise of vigilantism with delays in police response. This suggests that perceived inefficiencies in formal law enforcement may contribute to reliance on informal mechanisms of justice. The Relative Importance Index (RII) results show variation in perceived drivers of vigilantism. Socio-economic status recorded the highest RII value of 0.704 (70.4%), indicating relatively stronger perceived influence. Cultural influence recorded the lowest RII value of 0.436 (43.6%), indicating comparatively weaker perceived influence among respondents. These findings are consistent with crime and safety studies in Tanzania, which indicate that economic hardship, unemployment, and limited access to justice services contribute to informal security practices in both urban and peri-urban areas (Fjeldstad & Isaksen, 2008; Nivaro, 2019).

Table 3: Drivers of vigilantism in Tanzania with graphical illustrations

Assessment variables	Response degree						W	RII	%
	SD	D	N	A	SA	T			
Police response time	25	0	2	8	15	50	138	0.552	55.2
Corruption among police	17	7	8	11	7	50	134	0.536	53.6
Socioeconomic status	3	3	14	25	5	50	176	0.704	70.4
Efficiency of formal justice processes	3	17	6	16	8	50	159	0.636	63.6
Cultural influences on justice	15	18	10	7	0	50	109	0.436	43.6

	Assessment variables	Weight	Relative Importance Index
1	Police response time	138	55.2
2	Corruption among police	134	53.6
3	Socioeconomic status	176	70.4
4	Efficiency of formal justice processes	159	63.6
5	Cultural influences on justice	109	43.6



In line with these findings, an interview conducted for the selected sample of respondents had these to comment;

"People may join vigilante groups because they are frustrated with how the police force handles issues and hence would need quick justice, or feel a duty to help their community. Emotions like fear, anger, and a desire to feel in control often push people to get involved."

Other respondents added;

"I see vigilantes as competitors to state security in some cases. Their presence indicate a failure of the police force to maintain order, and can further lead to unlawful actions. Police forces usually face numerous challenges, including limited resources, community distrust, and the complexities of dealing with diverse social issues that often fall under criminal behaviours."

Relationship Between Police Legitimacy and Vigilantism

Similarly, under this objective, the researcher investigated the extent of community support for vigilantism. In this scenario, the relationship between these two variables was to be tested. To perform this analysis, two hypotheses were generated and tested for their significance by using the F-test under Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) from SPSS software. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare means across multiple groups and determine whether at least one group mean differs from others (Stoker, 2020). Disputes under this objective were significantly identified using this model, guided by the equation:-

$$F = \frac{(SS_B) / (N - 1)}{(SS_w) / (N - k)}$$

In this model equation, F represents the critical value for the ratio of the Sum of Squares between variables (SSB) and the Sum within the same variables (SSw), with corresponding degrees of freedom (N-1) and (N-K). (N) is the number of disputes to be tested, and (k) is group categories. The study was guided by two hypotheses, the null and alternative hypotheses, as listed.

- i) Support for vigilantism is not due to citizens' perceptions of police legitimacy.
- ii) Support for vigilantism is due to citizens' perceptions of police legitimacy.

In this study, the set of four assessment variables treated as independent group variables, included effectiveness in reducing crime, speed of justice, human rights abuse, and community support, which were mapped against innocent punishment as the dependent variable.

The results revealed that all assessment variables were significant with probability value (p value < 0.05) and F critical which is greater than F-value of 2.10 at 49 degree of freedom and 95% confidence interval which were: Effectiveness in Reducing Crime (p value 0.00, F = 8.026), Speed of Justice (p value 0.00, F = 7.943), Human Rights Abuses (p value = 0.00, F= 8.354) and Community Support (p= 0.005, F = 4.789). These provide enough evidence to reject hypothesis (i) and accept hypothesis (ii) which states that support for vigilantism is due to citizen's perception of police force legitimacy (**Table 4**).

Table 4: Vigilantism and community perceptions of police force legitimacy

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Effectiveness in Reducing Crime	Between Groups	41.402	3	13.801	8.026	.000
	Within Groups	79.098	46	1.720		
	Total	120.500	49			
Speed of Justice	Between Groups	34.806	3	11.602	7.943	.000
	Within Groups	67.194	46	1.461		
	Total	102.000	49			
Human Rights Abuses	Between Groups	28.384	3	9.461	8.354	.000
	Within Groups	52.096	46	1.133		
	Total	80.480	49			
Community Support	Between Groups	10.762	3	3.587	4.789	.005
	Within Groups	34.458	46	.749		
	Total	45.220	49			

On top of these findings, the interviewed respondent had this to comment;

"I view vigilante activities with caution. While I understand the desire for safety, these actions can lead to chaos and undermine the rule of law. Proper channels should always be preferred. To reduce reliance on vigilante groups, communities can focus on improving police-community relations, increasing law enforcement resources, and fostering education and economic opportunities."

Another respondent added this comment;

"Communities usually deal with crime by staying alert and informing each other. Working with local authorities and creating community groups are important ways to help."

Effectiveness of Community Safety Strategies

In this study, the objective is to set up four assessment variables that constitute independent group variables including effectiveness in reducing crime, speed of justice, human rights abuse, and community support which are mapped with innocent punishment as the variable that falls under the dependent category. Two hypotheses guided the study were i) null, and ii) alternative, as listed

- i) *Community safety strategies have no effect on the rise of vigilantism*
- ii) *Community safety strategies have an effect on the rise of vigilantism*

With this study objective, the set of assessment variables representing the independent group includes police accountability, collaboration between police and communities, training on professionalism and ethics, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, which were mapped to community policing initiatives as part of the dependent variable category. Results revealed that all assessment variables were significant with probability value (p value < 0.05) and F critical which is greater than F value of 2.10 at 49 degree of freedom and 95% confidence interval as indicated: police accountability (p value=0.013, F=4.017), training on professionalism and ethics (p value 0.010, F = 4.277), human rights abuses (p value = 0.00, F=8.354) and alternative

dispute resolution mechanisms ($p=0.006$, $F = 4.765$). These provide enough evidence to reject the hypothesis (i) and accept the hypothesis (ii) that Community safety strategies have an effect on the rise of vigilantism (**Table 5**).

Table 5: Assessment variables

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Police Accountability	Between Groups	27.285	3	9.095	18.681	.000
	Within Groups	22.395	46	.487		
	Total	49.680	49			
Collaboration Between Police and Communities	Between Groups	19.780	3	6.593	4.017	.013
	Within Groups	75.500	46	1.641		
	Total	95.280	49			
Training on Professionalism and Ethics	Between Groups	24.496	3	8.165	4.277	.010
	Within Groups	87.824	46	1.909		
	Total	112.320	49			
Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms	Between Groups	26.439	3	8.813	4.765	.006
	Within Groups	85.081	46	1.850		
	Total	111.520	49			

To support these findings, an interview conducted with respondents provided the following views;

"Interactions with police officers can vary from respectful to confrontational, depending on the circumstances. Effective communication is crucial. While vigilante groups stop crime in the short term, I believe they are not effective long-term solutions. They often lack proper oversight and can escalate violence rather than resolving issues constructively. The community should think of a legal option to settle problems."

Another respondent added that;

"From my perspective, the main challenges include under-resourced policing and socioeconomic factors that contribute to crime, such as unemployment and lack of education opportunities; these altogether should not be ignored."

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings are consistent with institutional legitimacy theory, which emphasizes that public trust in law enforcement influences compliance with formal justice systems (Tyler, 2006). In the Tanzanian context, studies have shown that perceptions of delayed response, corruption, and limited accountability within policing institutions affect public confidence in formal security structures (Fjeldstad & Isaksen, 2008; REPOA, 2017).

The prominence of socio-economic status as a perceived driver of vigilantism aligns with empirical studies in Tanzania that link poverty, unemployment, and inequality to informal security arrangements and community-based enforcement mechanisms (Nivaro, 2019; Kessy, 2013). These conditions may contribute to alternative forms of dispute resolution when formal systems are perceived as inaccessible or ineffective.

The observed relationship between police legitimacy and support for vigilantism supports findings from governance and policing studies in Tanzania, which indicate that trust in law enforcement institutions is closely linked to perceptions of fairness, transparency, and responsiveness (Chaligha, 2008; Maliyamkono, 2014).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of community safety strategies is consistent with evaluations of community policing initiatives in Tanzania, which suggest that structured collaboration between police and citizens enhances information sharing, crime reporting, and mutual trust (Moshi & Mpangala, 2016). However, the effectiveness of such strategies may vary depending on resource availability and institutional commitment.

The findings of this study align with Institutional Legitimacy Theory, which emphasizes that public trust in law enforcement institutions significantly shapes compliance with formal justice systems. In the Tanzanian context, evidence indicates that perceived delays in response, corruption, and weak accountability within policing institutions undermine public confidence in formal security structures (Fjeldstad & Isaksen, 2008; Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), 2017).

In relation to the first objective, the study identifies socio-economic conditions as key drivers of vigilantism. This finding is consistent with empirical studies in Tanzania linking poverty, unemployment, and inequality to the emergence of informal

security arrangements and community-based enforcement mechanisms (Nivaro, 2019; Kessy, 2013). Such conditions often push communities toward alternative dispute resolution mechanisms when formal systems are perceived as inaccessible or ineffective. Regarding the second objective, the study establishes a relationship between police legitimacy and support for vigilantism. This supports earlier findings that trust in law enforcement institutions is closely associated with perceptions of fairness, transparency, and responsiveness (Chaligha, 2008; Maliyamkono, 2014). Lower perceived legitimacy tends to increase tolerance for extra-legal enforcement practices.

Finally, in line with the third objective, the study underscores the importance of community safety strategies. The findings are consistent with evaluations of community policing initiatives in Tanzania, which demonstrate that structured collaboration between police and citizens enhances information sharing, crime reporting, and mutual trust (Moshi & Mpangala, 2016). However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on adequate resource allocation and sustained institutional commitment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study generally addresses vigilante actions in Tanzania reflecting respective forms of drivers, police force legitimacy and implications basing on investigations conducted. Relative importance Index (RII) identified significant drivers on the rise of vigilantism being police response time with the highest driver (RII = 0.552 (55.2%) and cultural influences on justice as the lowest driver (RII = 0.436 (43.6%). On the other hand, ANOVA results indicated a significant community support for vigilantism across various dimensions. Specifically, the statistical analysis revealed that the perception of community support had a meaningful impact, with an F-value of 4.789 and a significance level of less than 0.005. This suggests that community attitude towards vigilantism is not uniform; rather, they differ significantly based on factors such as effectiveness in reducing crime, the speed of justice, and human rights considerations. The low p-value indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis, supporting the notion that community support plays a crucial role in shaping views on the legitimacy and efficacy of vigilantism.

Furthermore, the results revealed the significant differences across various policing and community engagement strategies and highlighting the potential applicability in vigilantism. The high F-values (18.681) for police force accountability and (4.017) for collaboration, coupled with p-values below 0.05, suggest that community perceptions are strongly influenced by factors such as police accountability and ethical training. These insights imply that vigilantism may be seen as a response to perceived inadequacies in formal law enforcement, particularly where community trust is lacking.

The study advocates a multi-dimensional policy approach to addressing vigilantism in Tanzania. It highlights the importance of reducing socio-economic inequalities through expanded employment, strengthened social protection, and improved access to formal justice systems to limit reliance on informal security mechanisms. It further emphasizes the need to enhance police legitimacy through reforms that promote transparency, accountability, and procedural fairness, alongside effective complaint-handling and timely, impartial law enforcement. Additionally, the study underscores strengthening community safety through adequately resourced community policing frameworks and formalized collaboration between citizens and law enforcement to enhance information sharing and deter extra-legal practices.

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