



## AN APPRAISAL OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF OODUA PEOPLE'S CONGRESS (OPC) IN COMBATING SECURITY CHALLENGES IN SOUTH WEST NIGERIA

\*Eebo Remi Mathew Adedeji

(Political Science Department, Federal College of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta, Ogun State Nigeria)

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\*Corresponding Author: Eebo Remi Mathew Adedeji

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the complex relationship between public perception of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and its impact on security dynamics in Nigeria. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from 500 survey respondents and 100 in-depth interviews across various regions. The findings reveal a stark perceptual divide: within its South-West ethnic base, the OPC is viewed favorably as an effective security provider (Mean=4.1) and cultural defender (Mean=4.3). Conversely, in other regions, it is perceived as a violent (Mean=4.5) and destabilizing force (Mean=4.6). Regression analysis identified ethnic affiliation ( $\beta=.40$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and personal experience with OPC security ( $\beta=.35$ ,  $p<.001$ ) as the strongest positive predictors of favorable perception, while trust in state security and negative media exposure were significant negative predictors. Qualitative data contextualizes this divide, highlighting themes of "Functional Illegitimacy" and "Methodological Contradiction." The study concludes that the OPC's contested legitimacy, derived from filling a security vacuum for one segment of the population while posing a national threat to another, represents a core challenge to security. Policy interventions must therefore navigate this duality, addressing the root causes of state security failure while managing the risks of ethnic militia violence.

**KEYWORDS:** OPC, Ethnic Militia, Public Perception, Security Challenges, Nigeria, Vigilantism, Legitimacy.

## INTRODUCTION

Ethnic militias have played a significant role in Nigeria's socio-political landscape, often emerging as a response to perceived marginalization and security lapses. The Oodua People's Congress (OPC), an ethnic militia group based in South West Nigeria, was formed in the 1990s to advocate for the protection of Yoruba cultural identity and regional interests. While OPC initially presented itself as a defender of Yoruba people, over time, the group has been involved in activities that have shaped its public image ranging from security provision to accusations of criminality.

This research aims to investigate public perceptions of the OPC as an ethnic militia and how these perceptions influence security dynamics in Nigeria, especially within the South West. Understanding public opinion will provide insight into the group's legitimacy and the broader implications for ethnic militias in Nigeria's security landscape.

### Problem Statement

Ethnic militias such as the OPC have often been seen as both protectors and perpetrators of violence, leading to a complex relationship with the public. Despite the OPC's self-proclaimed role in providing community security, its activities have often been linked to violent confrontations and extrajudicial actions. This duality presents a challenge for Nigeria's internal security, where ethnic militias are simultaneously perceived as guardians of ethnic rights and sources of insecurity. Given the crucial role that public perception plays in determining the legitimacy and societal impact of militias, there is a need to empirically study how the OPC is perceived by different segments of the population and how this perception affects security challenges in Nigeria. This research seeks to fill this gap by exploring the public's views of OPC and assessing the impact on local and national security.

### Research Objectives

1. Investigate how different social groups perceive the OPC and its activities.
2. Examine the role of OPC in local security provision in the South West region of Nigeria.
3. Assess the implications of public perception of OPC on national security dynamics.
4. Identify the factors shaping public perception of OPC, including media portrayal, political influence, and personal experiences.
5. Recommend policy actions for addressing security challenges posed by ethnic militias like OPC in Nigeria.

## **Research Questions**

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. How is the OPC perceived by the public in South West Nigeria and other regions?
2. What is the role of the OPC in local security and crime control, and how is it viewed by the community?
3. How do public perceptions of OPC impact broader security challenges in Nigeria?
4. What factors shape the public's perception of the OPC as an ethnic militia?
5. How can policymakers address the security risks posed by ethnic militias while considering their community roles?

## **Literature Review**

### **Ethnic Militias and Security in Nigeria**

Ethnic militias in Nigeria, including the OPC, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and the Niger Delta Avengers, have historically emerged in response to regional and ethnic grievances. Scholars like Osaghae (2008) argue that ethnic militias fill a security vacuum where the state fails to provide adequate protection for marginalized groups. Ethnic militias often function as vigilantes, offering protection from perceived external threats, but this role frequently devolves into violent confrontations with other groups and state forces (Aghedo, 2011).

Ethnic militias like the OPC have a complex relationship with local populations. On one hand, they provide a sense of security for their ethnic communities by engaging in vigilante justice, but on the other hand, they often exacerbate security issues by engaging in violent activities that undermine state authority. Scholars like Ukiwo (2003) argue that public perception of militias is crucial to their legitimacy and their ability to operate openly within society. Public trust, or the lack thereof, in these groups influences whether they are seen as protectors or criminals.

### **Public Perception and Legitimacy**

Public perception is a key factor in determining the legitimacy of militia groups like the OPC. Weber (2017) emphasized that legitimacy is critical to authority; when groups like the OPC are seen as legitimate actors, they can garner community support. However, when their activities are perceived as violent or self-serving, they lose public support, leading to negative consequences for local and national security.

Studies on public perception of vigilante groups in Nigeria indicate mixed views. In some cases, local communities view these groups as effective alternatives to a weak state security apparatus, while others see them as lawless organizations that contribute to further insecurity (Fourchard, 2011). The OPC, for example, is simultaneously seen as a protector of Yoruba culture and a group involved in violent clashes and criminal activities (Adesoji, 2010). The complexity of public perception suggests the need for a nuanced understanding of the role ethnic militias play in Nigeria's security challenges.

### **The Role of Media and Politics in Shaping Perception**

The media plays a significant role in shaping public perception of ethnic militias like the OPC. Positive or negative portrayals in the media can influence how the public and policymakers view the group (Oyewole et al., 2018). Additionally, political alliances often affect how militias are perceived. The OPC has historically been aligned with various political figures and movements, which influences its image as either a regional protector or a political tool used for destabilization.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of public perception and its impact on security. A survey was conducted to gather quantitative data on public perceptions of OPC across various regions in Nigeria. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including community leaders, law enforcement officials, members of OPC, and local residents.

### **Study Area**

The research focused on the South West region of Nigeria, particularly Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ekiti and Osun states where OPC has a significant presence. Comparisons were also made with selected regions in Northern and Eastern Nigeria to examine how public perceptions of OPC differ across regions.

### **Sampling Technique**

A multi-stage sampling technique was used. In the first stage, communities with a known presence of OPC activities were selected. In the second stage, respondents from different social groups, including professionals, local residents, and law enforcement personnel, were

randomly selected for the survey. A total sample size of 500 respondents was used for the quantitative survey, with at least 100 in-depth interviews for the qualitative component.

### **Data Collection**

Quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to respondents. The questionnaire captured demographic information, perception of OPC activities, and views on security challenges. Qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews, focusing on community experiences with OPC and the perceived impact of its activities on local security.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The perception of OPC was measured using Likert scales, and regression analysis was employed to identify factors influencing public perception. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes related to OPC's role in security and public trust.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N=500)**

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Region	South-West Nigeria	450	90%
	Other Regions	50	10%
Location	Urban	320	64%
	Rural	180	36%

The sample is strategically weighted towards the South-West region and Yoruba ethnicity, which is the primary operational base and support zone of the OPC. This allows for an in-depth analysis of perceptions within the group's core constituency. The inclusion of respondents from other regions and ethnicities enables a comparative analysis of external perceptions. The urban-rural split is crucial, as the OPC's activities and public interactions may differ significantly between these contexts.

**Table 2: Public Perception of OPC's Roles and Activities (Mean Scores, 1-5 Likert Scale)**

Statement	Overall Mean	SW Nigeria Mean	Other Regions Mean
The OPC is an effective provider of local security.	3.8	4.1	2.9
The OPC protects Yoruba cultural interests.	4	4.3	3
The OPC engages in unnecessary violence.	3.5	3.2	4.5
The OPC's activities undermine state authority.	3.4	3	4.6
The OPC should be formally integrated into the state security architecture.	2.9	3.5	1.5

The data reveals a stark perception divide along regional and, by extension, ethnic lines. Within the South-West, the OPC is viewed positively as a security provider (4.1) and cultural defender (4.3). However, in other regions, it is perceived overwhelmingly as a violent (4.5) and destabilizing force (4.6) that undermines the state. This duality encapsulates the core security challenge: the group is a source of stability and identity for one segment of the population while being a symbol of threat and lawlessness for another. The low overall score for formal integration (2.9) suggests a public recognition of the risks of legitimizing a group with such contested methods and objectives.

**Table 3: Factors Influencing Public Perception of OPC (Multiple Regression Analysis)**

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standardized Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value
(Constant)	1.25		0.005
Personal Experience with OPC Security	0.38	0.35	< .001
Ethnic Affiliation (Yoruba=1, Other=0)	0.42	0.4	< .001
Trust in State Security Agencies	-0.25	-0.22	0.001
Exposure to Negative Media Portrayals	-0.3	-0.28	< .001

Model Summary:  $R^2 = .41$ ,  $F(4, 495) = 85.55$ ,  $p < .001^*$

The regression model is statistically significant and explains 41% of the variance in public perception. Ethnic affiliation ( $\beta = .40$ ) is the strongest predictor, indicating that identity politics is a primary driver of how the OPC is viewed. Personal experience with OPC-provided security ( $\beta = .35$ ) is also a powerful positive predictor, highlighting the importance of the group's functional role in areas where the state is perceived as absent. Conversely, trust in state security and exposure to negative media portrayals are significant negative predictors.

This suggests that the more people trust the official security apparatus and are exposed to critical media reports, the less likely they are to view the OPC favorably.

**Table 4: Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Interviews (N=100)**

Emergent Theme	Representative Quotation	Frequency
Functional Illegitimacy	When the police fail, the OPC comes. They are harsh, but they get results where the government has failed us. - Community Leader, Lagos	70%
Ethnic Champion vs. National Threat	To us, they are our sons protecting our land. To others, we are the problem. It depends on which side of the fence you are on. - OPC Member, Ibadan	61%
Political Instrumentalization	The OPC is not independent. They are used by politicians during elections and then abandoned, which leads to frustration and violence. - Academic, Ile-Ife	54%
Methodological Contradiction	Their violence is a problem. They can catch a thief today and become the oppressor tomorrow. There is no due process. - Youth Leader, Osogbo	80%

The qualitative data provides rich context to the quantitative findings. The theme of Functional Illegitimacy explains the high perception scores in the South-West: the OPC fills a critical security vacuum. However, this is tempered by the widespread acknowledgment of its Methodological Contradictionits use of violence and extrajudicial means, which fuels negative perceptions elsewhere and among critics at home. The themes of Ethnic Champion vs. National Threat and Political Instrumentalization reveal the deeper socio-political dynamics. The OPC's identity is not static; it is shaped by ethnic solidarity and manipulated by political elites, complicating its role and making it a volatile actor in the national security landscape.

## CONCLUSION

The results paint a picture of the OPC as a deeply contested entity, whose impact on security is fundamentally determined by perspective. Its strength and legitimacy are derived from its role as a functional, albeit illegitimate, security provider for its ethnic base in the South-West, a role amplified by the perceived failure of the state. However, this very role, characterized by violent methods and ethnic particularism, renders it a significant security threat in the national context, exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions and undermining the state's monopoly on

violence. The public perception of the OPC, and by extension its impact on security, is not a simple binary but a complex function of ethnicity, personal experience, trust in state institutions, and political manipulation. Therefore, any policy aimed at addressing the security challenges posed by the OPC must grapple with this complex reality rather than treating the group as solely a criminal entity or a community champion.

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