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THE IMPACT OF *AMOTEKUN* ARMED OPERATIVES ON INSECURITY REDUCTION IN ONDO STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study investigates the extent to which Amotekun Armed Operatives (AAOs) have reduced insecurity in Ondo State in Southwestern region of Nigeria. Readings from extant researches revealed that the impact of security operatives has been discussed but scholars did not systematically measure the extent to which AAOs have reduced insecurity and the menace continue to escalate in Ondo State, underlining the need to assess the impact and challenges of AAOs to proffer solution to escalated insecurities. The quantitative method was adopted. The cluster sampling was employed to draw 400 participants who responded to data collection instrument. The simple percentage statistics method data analysis was then employed. Study findings show that the extent to which AAOs have reduced kidnapping, arm robbery, raping, drugs trafficking, arms trafficking, ritual killings in Ondo State is statistically low but farmer-herders' crisis have considerably reduced. It was found that improper recruitment process, interference of godfatherism, poor funding, inadequate training, inadequate equipment and poor welfare are challenges that have affected AAOs effectiveness in the war against crimes in this State. This study advocates that for AAOs to effectively combat crimes to reduce insecurities in Ondo State and across the southwestern region of Nigeria, there is the need to put appropriate recruitment process in place to recruit people with integrity, unhealthy interference should stop; should be adequately funded, equipped and trained as this may inspire the central government legalization of AAOs operations in the country.

Keywords: Armed Operatives, Crimes, Insecurities, Reduction rate.

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Introduction
Security operatives are ultimate for the safety and protection in any state across the globe. The security pattern in Nigeria is largely centralized, as the national government exercises controls over the national security agencies. The daily occurrences of criminal acts such as kidnapping, raping, robbery, banditry, destruction of lives and properties have kept citizens perpetual fear of insecurity, and in doubt about the integrity of the national controlled security agencies charged with the responsibility to prevent criminal acts and provide safety and protection across the states in Nigeria as the European Asylum Support Office (2021) claimed that the activities of illegal armed men has obviously become a very serious security issues that have directly affected the quality of life across states in different region of Nigeria.

As insecurities continue to escalate and the people continue in lamentation and it appears that the national security agencies could not tame the situation. On 9th of January, 2020, the six States' Governors in southwest comprising Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo and Lagos states launched a security operatives known as '*Amotekun*' as southwestern region collective security effort to protect and defend their people against the rising insecurities marked by killings, kidnappings, banditry and destruction of farmlands in the region, even though the centrally control security agencies were against the initiative at that time, Kabir (2020) explained that since then *Amotekun* has been armed to continue their operations across the southwestern states including Ondo State. However, despite the presence of the *Amotekun* Armed Operative (AAO) in Ondo State, Oluwole (2023) claimed that people of Ijagba Ifon, Imoru, Ijagba, Ute and Okeluse communities in Ondo State raised alarm over kidnappings, killings, burning of our houses and farm lands by suspected gun men or terrorists for some years. Accordingly, Sahara Reporter (2023) averred that some criminals attacked the Ago-Oyinbo at Ala Forest Reserve in Akure North Local communities in Ondo State, killed some farmers and wounded eight other persons at in the middle of the night. Similarly, Egobiambu (2022), Mayaki (2022) lamented that the forty-eight people dead and over seventy people injured among the worshippers in an attacks on a church in Owo local government of Ondo State by armed men in June 2022.

In the light of above incidents, the capabilities of the AAO to effectively curb crimes and reduced the upsurge of insecurities in Ondo State was beclouded with uncertainty. Besides, Readings from extant researches of Adegbami (2013), Olubode & Ogunnoiki (2020), Chi & Dayil (2020), Agbefe, Atare & Ikenga (2023), Okaiyeto (2021), Out & Apeh (2022), Adetunmbi & Adedigba (2021), Ogunsanya (2021) revealed that the impact of security operatives has been discussed but did not systematically show the extent AAO have reduce insecurities in Ondo State and insecurities continue to threaten peoples' well-being in Ondo State, underlining the need to assess the impact and challenges of AAO to proffer solution to escalated insecurities. To fill this gap and the burdened by the uncertainty and worsened insecurities in Ondo state communities, this research seeks to investigate the extent to which AAO has reduce insecurities in Ondo State Nigeria. In doing this two essential questions raised are: to what extent has AAO reduced insecurities in Ondo State in southwestern region of Nigeria? And what are the challenges affecting AAO effectiveness in combating crimes to scale down insecurities in Ondo State Nigeria? Methodically, the quantitative technique was adopted. In terms of significance, the overall finding contributes immensely to the understanding of the nature and dynamics of insecurities in Ondo State. The paper serves as policy guide not only for the Ondo State policy makers but for the Governors in the southwestern region of Nigeria to address the challenges affecting AAO effectiveness in the war against criminals.

The Concept of Insecurity

The concept of insecurity can be defined as a situation in which the lives of citizens and their properties are not secured. It also implies a serious condition of lack of confidence and protection from criminals in a particular place of worship home, community, state, country or a particular society (Innocent, 2024).

According to Zubairu (2020), insecurity is just the opposite of what we have as security. Insecurity is the lack of safety or the existence of danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of trust; doubtful; inadequately guarded or protected; lack of stability; disturbed; lack of protection and unsafe. Insecurity make people to be frightened, to be unsettled, feel oppressed, lose focus, feel devastated and lose their humanity. It is the state of terror, threat, risk, molestation and harassment.

Insecurity is a threat that inspires arm and nuclear weapons race to protect the state. In the same vein, Williams (2015) conceived insecurity as "a state of being not secure, not being safe or protected. In securities emanates from criminal acts such as arm robbery, conflicts, ethno-religious violence, banditry, terrorism, militancy, kidnapping, porous borders proliferation of arms and ammunitions, illegal armed groups, oil bunkering, labour activists, fear, distrust on government, unemployment, religious and fanaticism/extremism.

In the context of this study however, insecurity is any act constituting threats to lives and properties; the safety and protection people. Insecurity include macheting, killing of people, kidnapping of people, duping and robbing people of their head earn money, raping, hunt for human parts to do money rituals, illegal trafficking of drugs, proliferation of arms and ammunition, domestic violence, election violence, child abuse, thefts, attacks on worship and non-worship centers in Ondo State.

Empirical Claims

Empirical studies on insecurities reducing impact of security operatives in Ondo State Nigeria are scarce in literature. Scholarly literature contributions focus more on impact of insecurities. From the investigation of Adegbami (2013), it was revealed that insecurities have serious impact on peoples' general well-being as it injected illnesses, lower life expectancy, lower quality of life, death, it destroyed businesses, properties, it led to displacement and closed down of businesses. And suggested that since Nigeria cannot be sold to private managers as usually can be done to public enterprises, the government should create room for national dialogue to find solutions to insecurities.

Interestingly, Olubode & Ogunnoiki (2020) argued that with the establishment of *Amotekun* Armed Operatives (AAO) to address the myriad security challenges bedeviling the southwestern region of Nigeria, the spate of armed robbery, kidnappings, ritual killings and the likes will be reduced in if not become a thing of the past in coming years. In support of this argument, Chi & Dayil (2020) stressed that AAO will drive fear into the hearts of criminals like killer herdsmen, bandits, kidnappers, insurgents and armed robbers have made life intolerable for the in the recent history of the southwestern region of Nigeria and in various parts of the country. In this sense, Agbefe, Atare & Ikenga (2023) inspired that the need for federal government to provide constitutional backing to regional security operatives to complement the efforts of the national security agencies in the fight against insecurities in Nigeria and advocated a New Crusade on National Integration (NCNI) which will immensely guarantee unity, peaceful co-existence and security in Nigeria. However, Olubode & Ogunnoiki (2020), Chi & Dayil (2020), Agbefe, Atare & Ikenga (2023) did not establish the extent to which AAO have waged war against criminalities to reduce in the escalated insecurities in Ondo State.

In examining the impact of insecurity in Nigeria, Adetunmbi & Adedigba (2021) revealed that even thought, N4.62trillion have been spent on national security there was still oil pipeline vandalization, murder and political upheavals, cattle rustling, untold catastrophes, destructions of lives and properties, many people have been displaced as a result of these insecurities, thousands of people have been killed, many have been rendered homeless, people's economy had been crippled, many foreigners have moved out of the country with their investment. Also that the widespread of insecurity remains and the dynamics include Boko Haram to farmer-herder conflicts, ethnic- religious tensions, urban crime, Fulani kidnappers to Niger-Delta militant groups; Nigeria is overwhelmingly crushed under the

burden of insecurities. The study advocated that AAO security network would be a lasting solution to curtail the trending problem of insecurities in southwestern region of Nigeria.

Nonetheless, otu & Apeh (2022) examined the impact of regional policing on crime prevention with emphasis on AAO in Oke Ogun and Ibarapa communities of Oyo State, Nigeria and argued that criminal activities have impacted significantly on socio-economic development of Oyo State in ways such as investments declined, people movements were limited, there were social disorder, chaos, confusion that hindered community collaboration and trust. More importantly, Otu & Apeh (2022) linked these challenges to community mistrust, frosty relationship between AAO and community members, godfatherism interference, inadequate infrastructure, poor funding and dearth of modern weapons and advocated the need to intensify efforts by proving more funds for AAO to purchase modern security gadgets in order to reduce armed robbery, kidnapping and banditry within Oyo State. That achievements of AAO should also be publicized to put more fear in the hearts of criminals or intending criminals in Oyo State.

While investigating the position of media on security issues in Nigeria, Okaiyeto (2021) revealed that media provide a robust platform for cross-fertilization of ideas on solutions to looming insecurity challenges facing Nigerians. That media is expected to serve as unbiased umpire in the debates for community and state policing as a form of decentralization of the security architecture which the various regions of the country want to achieve through the creation of regional security operatives such as *Amotekun* in Southwest; *ShegeKaFasa* in the North; *EbubeAgu* in the Southeast; Braced in the South-south and similar moves in the North central. However, cautioning that if these issues are not managed properly, regionalism will create more security challenges as done in the past than solving it. Even though, the study revealed the position of media regarding insecurity amidst the debate for community policing, state police and regional security for the effective security of Nigeria and advocated that media should promote ideas that will ensure full security of the country. It did not consider how AAO has effectively combated optimize security in Ondo state.

A similar study was that of Ogunsanya (2021) which focused on the experiences of Lagos State residents on the impact of the Neighbourhood Safety Agency on security and how to improve the measures currently adopted. The result of the study indicated that the Lagos State Neighbourhood Safety Agency has not been adequately equipped to combat insecurity in the state due to lack of proper recruitment process, inadequate training of security personnel, misplaced priority of personnel of the agency, and dearth of modern security equipment. The study drives positive social change as it recommended effective recruitment process of personnel into the agency, training and re-orientation on operational processes, and adequate funding for modern security appliances to promote a more secured community from the grassroots in Lagos state.

It is glaring from the foregoing that Adegbami (2013), Olubode and Ogunnoiki (2020), Chi & Dayil (2020), Agbefe, Atare & Ikenga (2023), Okaiyeto (2021), Otu & Apeh (2022), Adetunmbi & Adedigba (2021), Ogunsanya (2021) identified the impact of insecurities on the people well-being and the relevance of *Amotekun* in providing lasting solution to the insecurities in the six southwestern states. However, they did not consider the extent to which AAO have effectively combated crimes to reduced insecurities in Ondo State in southwestern region of Nigeria. Therefore, this study investigates the extent to which AAO have reduced insecurities in Ondo State Nigeria. It also examines the challenges affecting the effectiveness of AAO in the war against crimes.

Theoretical Relevance

The theory of community policing is relevant to this research. The theory has its roots in the works of multiple scholars. However, one of the early and influential proponents of the idea was Professor Herman Goldstein. His work laid the foundation for community policing as it is understood today. Herman Goldstein, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, introduced the concept in his seminal work titled "Policing a Free Society." In this work, published in 1977, Goldstein advocated for a shift in the traditional model of policing towards a more collaborative and community-oriented approach. He emphasized the importance of involving the community in problem-solving and crime prevention (Goldstein, 1979).

Community policing is a philosophy and organizational strategy that expands the traditional police mandate of fighting crime to include forming partnerships with citizenry that endorse mutual support and participation. It is the first major reform in policing in a half-century and changes the way police think and act. This revolutionary movement broadens the police mandate beyond a narrow focus on fighting crime to include efforts that also address fear of crime, social and physical disorder, and neighborhood decay (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990).

More importantly, the theory of community policing emphasizes collaboration between the police and the community to identify and solve security issues. It focuses on building positive relationships, enhancing communication, and involving the community in the decision-making process regarding security matters problem-solving and proactive measures (Cordner, 2016; Kelling & Coles, 1996).

It follows therefore that the community policing theory id relevance to the optimization of AAO and minimizing insecurities in the following ways:

- *Amotekun*, as a regional security outfit, can work collaboratively with local communities in Ondo State to understand their specific security needs and concerns. That building partnerships with community leaders, residents, and local organizations could allow *Amotekun* to gain trust and gather valuable information about potential security threats.
- Community policing encourages proactive problem-solving rather than reactive responses. *Amotekun* can engage with communities to identify root causes of insecurity and develop strategies to address them. Through community engagement, *Amotekun* can implement preventive measures, such as community patrols, awareness programs, and addressing social issues contributing to insecurity. Empowering communities to take an active role in their own safety is a core principle of community policing. *Amotekun* can provide training and resources to communities, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for security. Involving community members in decision-making processes related to security policies and practices enhances transparency and accountability.

No wonder, Olubode & Ogunnoiki (2020) argued that *Amotekun* as a security initiative is necessary to reduce to a barest minimum the insecurities bedeviling the southwestern region including Ondo State. And Chi & Dayil (2020) claimed that the launching of *Amotekun* security outfit may drive fear into the hearts of those criminals.

Methodology and Demographic Datasets

The descriptive research design was adopted to reveal the extent to which *Amotekun* Armed Operatives (AAO) have reduce in securities in Ondo State Nigeria. The targeted population for this study is the people in various communities of Ondo State. The Department of

Research and Statistics (DRS, 2010) projected the population of Ondo state to be 3,895,367. Adopting this population, the sample size for this study was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula to calculate sample size for this study is approximately 400). The purposive sampling technique was then adopted to draw the 400 sample participants who responded to the self-structured questionnaire adopted to determine the response rating. The data gathered was statistical analyzed using frequency and simple percentages.

The respondents' demographic datasets are presented in Table I below and discussed. This is important to show some basic qualities of the participants and the implication on the data analysed subsequently in this paper.

Table I: Respondents' gender, age, occupation and education

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	171	45
Female	229	55
Total	400	100
Age		
18-25 years	48	12
26–30 years	86	21.5
31–40 years	182	45.5
41-50 years	38	9.5
Above 50 years	46	11.5
Total	400	100
Occupation		
Civil Servant	157	39.25
Trading	82	20.5
Student	58	14.5
Farming	68	17
Self-employed	35	8.75
Total	400	
Level of education		
Primary education	21	5.25
Secondary education	119	29.75
Tertiary education	178	44.5
Non-formal education	82	20.5
Total	400	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In terms gender, Table I shows that 45% of **respondents were male while 55% were female. This implies that the majority of the respondents are in the female category.** In terms of the age, 12% of the respondents were 18-25years of age, 21.5% (26-30years), 45.5% (31–40 years), 9.5% (41-50 years), while 11.5% were above 50 years of age. Which implies that majority of the respondents falls in the age range of 31-40 years. In terms of occupation, 39.25% of the respondents were civil servants, 20.5% traders, 14.5% students, 17% farmers while 8.75% were in self-employed. Which implies that majority of the respondents are civil servants in government jobs. In terms of level of education, 5.25% have undergone primary education, 29.75% secondary education, 44.5% tertiary education, while 20.5% have non-formal education. This implies that most of the respondents were educated adding credibility to the information provided during the study. The data gathered was statistical analyzed using

frequency and simple percentages. The results were then thematically presented with aid of tables, charts to describe the reduction impact of AAO on insecurities.

The impact of *Amotekun* armed operatives on insecurity reduction in Ondo State of Nigeria

The result of the analysis of the data gathered on the extent to which AAO have reduced insecurities in Ondo State Nigeria are thematically presented in table II, visualized and described with the aid chart.

Table II. Extent of insecurities reduction rate

Insecurities indicators	**Frequency and percentage rating**		**Totals**
	High	**Low**	
Kidnapping	89	312	400
	22.25	77.75	100.0
Arm robbery	86	314	400
	21.5	78.5	100.0
Raping	60	340	400
	15.0	85.0	100.0
Drugs trafficking	94	306	400
	23.5	76.5	100.0
Arms trafficking	100	300	400
	25	75	100.0
Ritual killings	74	326	400
	18.5	81.5	100.0
Farmer-Herders crisis	305	95	400
	76.25	23.75	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

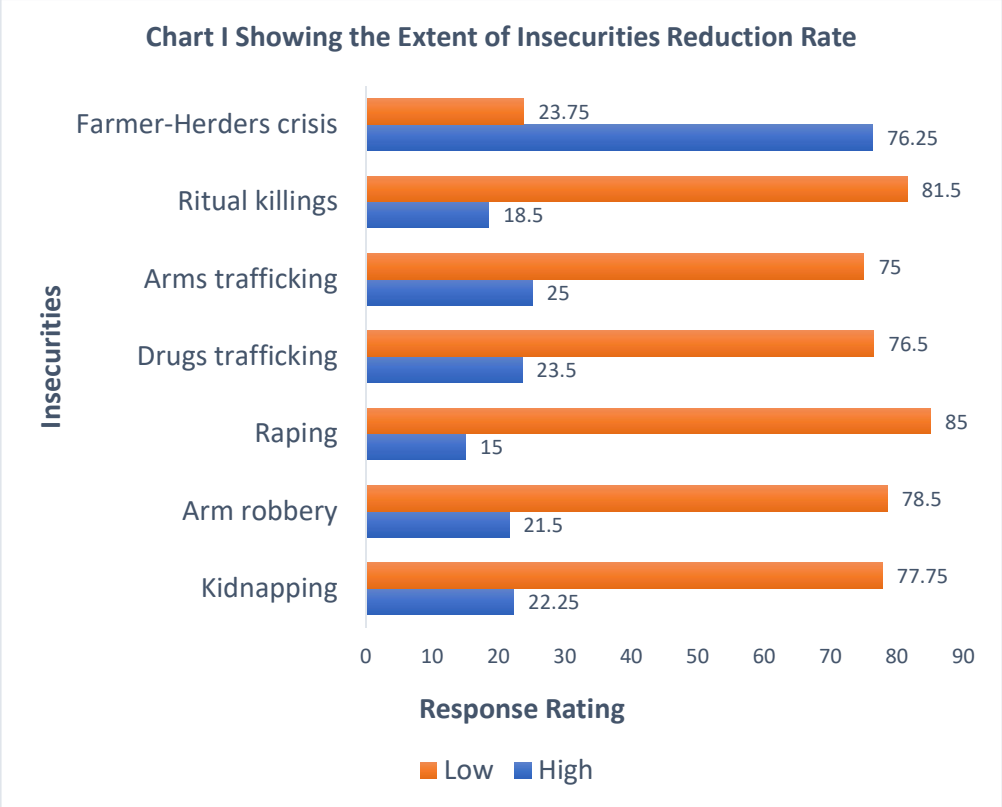


Table II and the corresponding chart I show that 77.75% of the respondents rated the extent to which *Amotekun* operatives have reduced kidnapping in Ondo State in Nigeria as low, 22.25% rated it high. **7**8.5% were of the opinion that the extent to which *Amotekun* operatives have reduced **arm robbery** is low, 21.5% rated it high. **8**5% were of the opinion that the extent to which *Amotekun* operatives have reduced **raping** is low, 15.0% rated it high. 76.5% were of the opinion that the extent to which *Amotekun* operatives have reduced **drugs trafficking** is low, while 23.5% rated it high. **7**5% were of the opinion that the extent to which *Amotekun* operatives have reduced **arms trafficking** is low, 25% rated it high. **81.**5% were of the opinion that the extent to which *Amotekun* operatives have reduced **ritual killings** is low, while 18.5% rated it high. 23.75% were of the opinion that the extent to which *Amotekun* operatives have reduced **farmer-herders' crisis** in Ondo State in Nigeria is low, 76.25% said high. It can therefore be deduced that **despite the presence of *Amotekun* operatives, kidnappings, arm robbery, raping, drugs trafficking arms trafficking, ritual killings are yet to be** reduced. However, only the **farmer-herders' crisis** in Ondo State has not reduce with the presence of this operative across the southwestern states of Nigeria. It can **implicitly** be argued that **as far as *Amotekun* operatives are concern they have not done much to reduce crimes in Ondo State. This finding is in disagreement with** Olubode & Ogunnoiki (2020), Chi & Dayil (2020), Agbefe, Atare & Ikenga (2023) arguments that crimes rate will reduce with the establishment of regional security operatives and that with the presence of *Amotekun* in the southwestern states insecurity such as kidnapping, **arm robbery, raping to mention only few would become a thing of the past**.

The challenges affecting the effectiveness of AAO in Ondo State, Nigeria

The data gathered on the challenges affecting the effectiveness of *Amotekun* operatives in combating insecurity in Ondo State in Nigeria are presented and discussed below.

Table III: The challenges affecting effectiveness of *Amotekun* operatives

Challenges	**Frequency and percentage rating**		**Total**
	Agreed	**Disagreed**	
Lack of proper recruitment process	265	135	**400**
	66.25	33.75	100.0
Interference of godfatherism	363	37	400
	90.75	9.25	100.0
Poor funding	308	92	400
	77.0	23.0	100.0
Inadequate training of security personnel	334	66	400
	83.5	16.5	100,0
Inadequate equipment	298	102	400
	74.5	25.5	100.0
Poor welfare package	333	67	400
	83.25	16.75	100.0
Lack of legal backing	107	293	400
	26.75%	73.25%	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

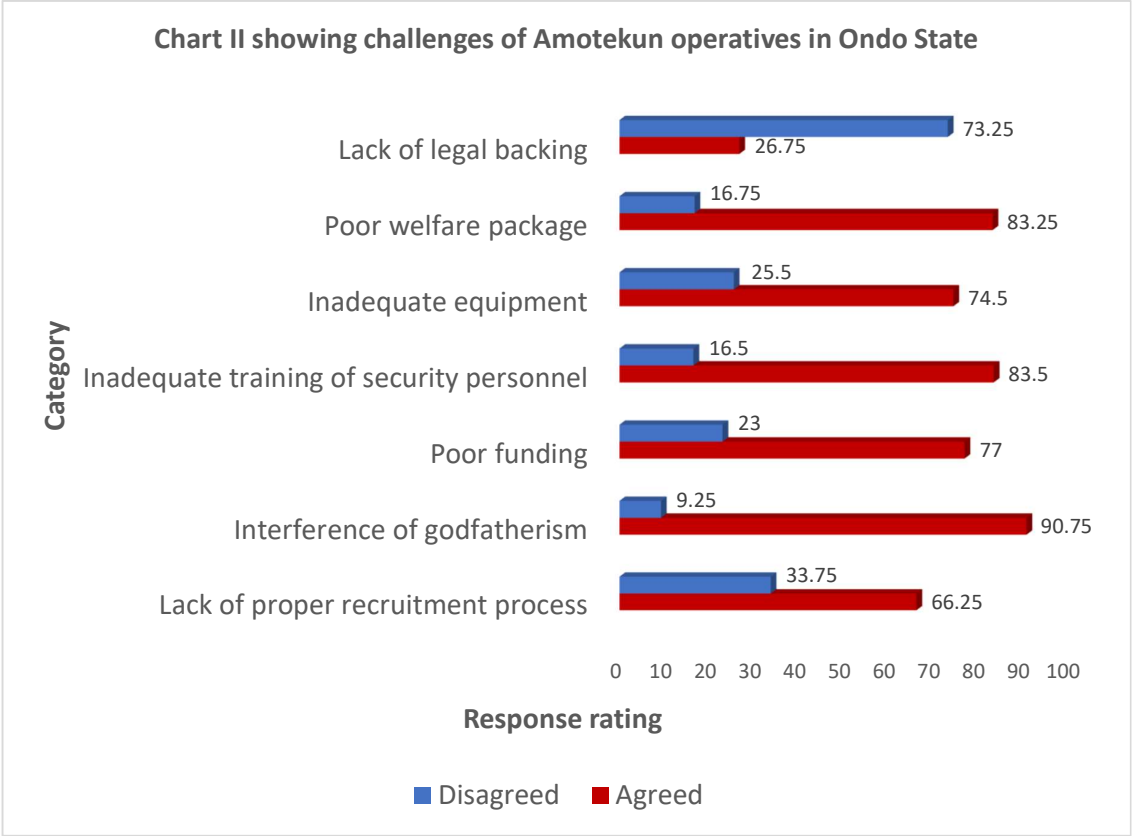


Table III and the corresponding chart II show that 66.25% of the respondents agreed that the **lack of proper recruitment process** is a challenge affecting the effectiveness of *Amotekun* operatives in combating insecurity in Ondo State Nigeria, while 33.75% disagreed with this position. Also, 90.75% agreed that **interference of godfatherism** is a challenge affecting the effectiveness of *Amotekun* operatives in combating insecurity in Ondo State Nigeria, but 9.25% disagreed with this position. Equally, 77% agreed that **poor funding** is one of the challenges affecting the effectiveness of *Amotekun* operatives in combating insecurity in Ondo State Nigeria, only 23% disagreed with this position. 83.5% agreed that **inadequate training of security personnel** is a challenge affecting the effectiveness of *Amotekun* operatives in combating insecurity in Ondo State Nigeria, while 16.5% disagreed with this position. 74.5% agreed that **inadequate equipment** is equally a challenge affecting the effectiveness of *Amotekun* operatives in combating insecurity in Ondo State Nigeria, on the contrary 25.5% disagreed with the position. 83.25% agreed that **poor welfare package** is another challenge affecting the effectiveness of *Amotekun* operatives in combating insecurity in Ondo State Nigeria, however, 16.75% disagreed with the position. 26.75% agreed that **lack of legal backing** is a challenge affecting the effectiveness of *Amotekun* operatives in combating insecurity in Ondo State Nigeria, but 73.25% disagreed with the position. It therefore implies that as for as *Amotekun* Operatives are concern the challenges affecting their effectiveness in combating crimes to reduce insecurities in Ondo State Nigeria includes are: **lack of proper recruitment process, interference godfatherism, poor funding, inadequate training of security personnel, inadequate equipment, poor welfare.** However, the **lack of legal backing is** not one of the challenges affecting their effectiveness. This finding is in agreement with Ogunsanya (2021) research outcome that security operatives are challenged with inadequate equipped to combat insecurities in the state due to lack of proper recruitment process, inadequate training of security personnel and dearth of modern security equipment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded from the foregoing discussions that even though the people of Ondo State have been facing escalated insecurity such as kidnapping, **arm robbery, raping, drug trafficking, arms trafficking,** and **ritual is killing** at different times, the extent to which the *Amotekun* Armed Operatives have reduced these insecurities in Ondo State is low, due to the **lack of proper recruitment process, interference godfatherism, poor funding, inadequate training of security personnel, inadequate equipment and poor welfare.** This paper therefore, recommends that in order for *Amotekun* Armed Operatives to effectively combat crimes, reduce the insecurities and the dynamics of insecurities in Ondo State in Southwestern region of Nigeria, the following are necessary actions are required:

i. There is need to put in place **proper recruitment process/procedures. This will ensure proper screening and bring those with integrity into the organization. All forms of unhealthy interference from godfathers in the affairs of *Amotekun*, operations should stop.** *Amotekun* operatives should be properly **funded to avoid compromise. Regular and adequate training of the *Amotekun* operatives is required to perform their duty with professionalism.** *Amotekun* operatives should **adequately** be **equipped due to the sensitivity of their responsibilities. The welfare of the *Amotekun* operatives should be taken seriously to motivate them to perform their duty without compromise.**

ii. *Amotekun* **operatives** can engage with communities to identify root causes of insecurity and develop strategies to address them. Through community engagement, *Amotekun* can implement preventive measures, such as community patrols, awareness programs, and addressing social issues contributing to insecurity. There is also the need for *Amotekun* operatives as a regional security organization to create synergy with other security agencies in Ondo State and in Southwestern Nigeria to effectively wage the war against crimes to reduce insecurities in various communities.

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