

The Role of Community Policing in Addressing Pastoral Terrorism in Nigeria

Osaretin Akinola Osho,

Abstract

This paper explores the role of community policing in addressing the growing threat of pastoral terrorism in Nigeria. It highlights how conflicts over land between Fulani herders and farmers intensified during the administration of former President Muhammadu Buhari. Drawing on primary and secondary data, the study analyzes various narratives surrounding pastoral terrorism and its impact on the safety of lives and property across Nigeria. The findings reveal that pastoral terrorists, primarily Fulani herders, use unconventional tactics to destroy local communities. In seeking solutions to the farmer-herder conflicts and their severe consequences, the study evaluates the effectiveness of community policing. It establishes that community policing, involving residents, enhances protection against killings, injuries, and abductions. This model fosters community engagement in security efforts, enabling better intelligence gathering for reporting to local police units and specialized anti-robbery squads established by the Nigerian Police Force. Despite challenges such as legitimacy and training deficits, the study concludes that community policing is a practical and effective approach to combating the nomadic terrorism affecting various regions of Nigeria.

Keywords: *Community, Policing, Fulani herders, Farmers, Community Policing, Pastoral Terrorism.*

Dr. Osaretin Akinola Osho, Department of Finance & Admin, State Headquarters, Nigeria Police Force, Calabar.

oshoosaretin@gmail.com

Introduction

The challenge of Pastoral terrorism is not only peculiar to Nigeria. It is a problem that affects many parts of Africa, from Eastern Africa to Western Africa and down to the Southern parts of Africa. West Africa is the most affected by this crisis. At the centre of the problem are the Fulani pastoralists.¹ The Fulani are the primary pastoralist group in Africa and have roots in West Africa as far back as 900 A.D. The largest Fulani population resides in Nigeria, where they make up a considerable portion of the population, with over 18 million people and 270 clans.² For centuries, farmers and herders coexisted in relative harmony, sustaining a symbiotic relationship that kept croplands fertile and livestock well-nourished.³ Herders seasonally migrated their cattle in search of lush grass, available water sources, and profitable markets for their cattle, often near villages and farms. In turn, the cattle provided critical dung fertiliser that nourished the soil for crop production, leading to high yields. Farmers and herders both benefited in the exchange of grain for dairy and crop residue for manure.⁴ Despite this interdependence, land disputes were common, but when they happened, conflict mitigation/resolution mechanisms were developed to compensate losses and share resources. However, over time, economic, political, and environmental changes eroded this mutually beneficial understanding between the two groups.

The Fula or Fulani herders want better pasture for their cattle. However, because they are sedentary, they usually have to move from one community to another, finding greener pastures. This puts them in the forests that farmers also depend on for sustenance. What puts herders and farmers at loggerheads is when allegations began to come up concerning the destruction of farmlands and farmers retaliating by harming the cattle of the Fulani herders.⁵ This narrative is at a surface level. A deeper narrative considers the issue of pastoral terrorism as a political tool meant to frustrate the southern part of Nigeria by a Northern front. What has further exacerbated the situation is the emerging alliance between herders and established insurgent groups in Northern Nigeria. This has made the Fulani herders attain a status of the fourth deadliest terrorist organisation in the world according to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI).⁶ Records indicate that in 2014 alone, about 7,512 terrorism-related deaths were witnessed in Nigeria, and this was mainly attributed to the Fulani onslaught.⁷

Similarly, it was reported that between 2017 and 2nd May, 2020, Fulani herders conducted 654 attacks, killed 2,539 and kidnapped 253 people in Nigeria.⁸ The herdsmen's assaults against farmers in Nigeria were "regular, systematic, targeted attacks. In the study of the effects of the clashes between farmers and herders in Plateau, Kaduna, Nassarawa, and Benue states, the Guardian Newspapers noted that in 2016, only 2,500 people were killed; 62,000 people were displaced; \$13.7 billion was lost to the attacks from Fulani herders, and 47 per cent of the internally-generated revenue in the affected states was lost.⁹

While many studies have emerged on farmer-herder conflicts, adequate attention has not been paid to how community policing can offer a prognosis.¹⁰ This paper examines the role of community policing in mitigating the escalating threats of pastoral terrorism in Nigeria. It adopts a qualitative methodology, utilising data collected from secondary sources, including books, academic journals, newspaper articles, and reports from international organisations and policy think tanks.

Ramifications of Fulani Herdsmen Attack

The attacks perpetrated by Fulani herders in Nigeria have far-reaching consequences that touch on social, economic, political, and security dimensions. These conflicts, primarily between nomadic Fulani pastoralists and sedentary farming communities, have escalated over the years, particularly in Nigeria's Middle Belt, but also in northern and southern regions. The widely accepted definition of terrorism involves the deliberate and unlawful use of violence, or the threat of violence, to instill fear across a broad segment of society. These actions aim to advance political, religious, ideological, or social objectives. According to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004), terrorist acts are described as criminal actions, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death, serious injury, or hostage-taking, primarily to provoke terror or coerce a government or international organization to act or refrain from acting in a certain way.¹¹ Bayo Akinloye has pointed out that the attacks carried out by armed Fulani groups, organized as militias, align with this definition of terrorism.¹²

In fact, attacks and killings from Fulani herders are usually unprovoked, and the attackers are deliberate and conscious about where and when to strike. They attack when their intended victims are most vulnerable. In several cases in Plateau State, for instance, the attackers came at night when the villagers were asleep, killed and sacked whole villages and disappeared before daybreak.¹³

Several factors have been identified as contributing to the conflict between herders and farmers, which has led to nomadic terrorism. The factors of extremism, greed, intertribal and cultural rivalry, mutual suspicion, illiteracy, population explosion, and global warming all contribute in no small measure to the escalating situation of pastoral terrorism in Nigeria. Omotosho noted that pastoral terrorism has evolved into a strategic political movement aimed at securing land and accumulating wealth.¹⁴ As evident in their activities since 2014, pastoral terrorists commit crimes against humanity and evade arrests because they are not easily recognised due to the clandestine nature of their activities, which require community intelligence to decipher. The Fulani militia (also known as Fulani herders) comes from a nomadic, predominantly Muslim tribe. In 2014, the militia was named the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world by the Global Terrorism Index.¹⁵ Thus, represents one of the deadliest agents of social disorder and crime. The disorganisation of social norms becomes acute when certain members of a state no longer abide by the peaceful norms that comprise it. Their activities begin to

threaten public safety. The rise of threats from non-traditional opposition groups to societal peace often necessitates vigilance and unconventional policing methods.¹⁶

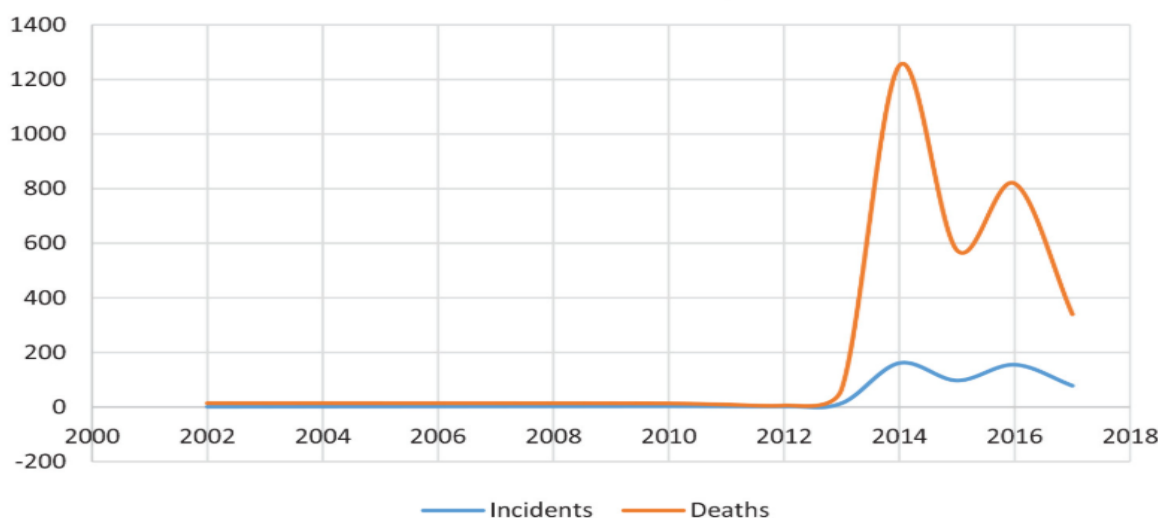


Figure 1: Fulani Herdsmen Terrorism, 2002-2017

Source: Ejioogu, (2019:5)

Figure 1 above shows the prevalence of attacks and distribution of terrorist incidents and deaths by Fulani herdsmen between 2002 and 2017. The primary reason why Fulani herders have become associated with pastoral terrorism is that an extreme section of the Fulani herders has chosen the path of aggression, destruction, and killing and maiming to sustain the quest for grazing, which is a cultural and social representation of Fulani survival. These herders are now unorthodox armies who consider access to land in different parts of Nigeria as an ancient right that cannot be upturned, even by laws against open-grazing. The enactment of anti-grazing laws, particularly in the South-Western part of Nigeria, has not deterred Fulani incursions; instead, it has exacerbated the crisis between farmers and increased political activism, notably with the rise of advocacy for the Yoruba Nation led by Sunday Adeniyi Adeyemo (AKA Igboho Osha).¹⁷

While laws against grazing are being developed, this essay argues that community-based security systems are necessary to address the growing threats of insecurity across Nigeria, which is experiencing a concomitant rise in population. A gradual loss of US\$14 billion was witnessed between 1990 and 2015 as a result of the clash between farmers and herders. In recent times, over two thousand deaths are estimated to occur annually, not estimating the thousands of people who have become internally displaced as a result of the conflict.¹⁸ The Fulani cite issues such as growing population, loss of grazing land due to agricultural expansion, and the intensification of desertification in the North, which they attribute to climate change, as significant factors motivating their southward movement. However, the South considers such movement as a tactical infiltration of their homelands in a sort of pastoral Jihad.¹⁹ This could have been considered lightly, but for the violence that has accompanied such movements.

Recently, the Nigerian government has intensified plans to set up settlements for the nomadic Fulani herders across the nation's 36 states against the wishes of the indigenous communities. The settlements known as the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlements are believed to be politically motivated to resettle the nomadic Fulani herders in Nigeria without the consent of the land owners, as described in the Nigeria Land Use Decree enacted by Federal law in 1978 to standardise the administration of land.²⁰ This law gave authority to state governments over all urban lands within the states, and vested authority over nonurban land in the local government administrations. However, rather than resolve the issue, RUGA has only worsened the conflict.

The clash between migratory pastoralists and farmers has taken increasingly dangerous dimensions. Studies have documented instances where nomadic pastoralists attempt to assert themselves as agro-pastoralists by illegitimately seizing land from farming communities—often through the use of violence and terror.²¹ They also terrorise through kidnappings, murders, armed robberies, arsons, rapes, and targeted, carefully planned annihilations of entire communities. These activities fit into the framework of terrorism because it has become communicative as a use of force to inspire fear and insecurity in society. The fact that the issues have become a means for the continuation of politics makes it a serious war that needs to be curtailed before it escalates. There are narratives that the Fulani herders from the North are using migration as a strategy to entrench imperial interest in the southern part of Nigeria, so that after a while, they can bring it under the caliphate, as was done after the 1804 Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio. As a writer observed:

More than a resource conflict between pastoral and sedentary groups, the pastoral nomadic Fulani onslaught since the 1990s has taken a war-like and criminal dimension, which includes but is not limited to rampaging, killing and destroying communities in the northern and southern Nigeria. The use of this form of terrorism appears to be a tactical move to intimidate their host communities, thereby paving the way for subsequent land acquisition and capital accumulation.²²

Bagu and Smith have argued that farmer/herder violence is neither an ethnic nor religious conflict, but rather a competition for resources playing out on ethno-religious lines in a fragile country characterised by impunity and corruption.²³

Be that as it may, this paper views the herdsmen-farmer conflict from the viewpoint of the security of both farmers and herders. It is not focused on debating who is right or wrong between the two parties. However, it focuses on community initiative to ensure that neither of the parties foments violence, which will lead to the destruction of property or the violation of human life and dignity. Hence, in the subsequent sections, the paper will examine the idea of community policing and go further to

analyse the role that community policing can play in curtailing the dangerous manifestations of nomadic attacks on several communities.

The Idea of Community Policing

Policing is usually informed by retrospective or prospective ideology.²⁴ Retrospective policing refers to the range of police activities carried out before a crime occurs, to deter terrorist actions. In contrast, prospective policing focuses on responses after a crime has taken place. Accordingly, retrospective counterterrorism involves proactive measures designed to deter, prevent, and disrupt terrorist plans and operations. In contrast, prospective counterterrorism entails proactive measures aimed at preventing and mitigating situations in the aftermath of a crime.²⁵ This can also apply to terrorist incidents. Community policing can serve both retrospective and prospective functions, and, in this way, it would, over time, be a worthy instrument in tackling the full ramifications of terrorism across the various communities.

Awogbade *et al.* have also distinguished between the approach of community policing and that of traditional policing.²⁶ Traditional policing approaches view the community as a partner in identifying and solving crime-related issues. However, the institutional orientation of traditional police is hierarchical and functional, making it less adaptable to the flexible social engagement strategies needed for community order reprioritisation.²⁷ The flexibility of community policing is what is needed to tackle such unorthodox terror from pastoralists. One area of flexibility that is worthy of consideration is the utilization of community policing to increase self-regulatory behaviours and internalization of formal regulations among the citizenry. Without mincing words, it is difficult for the institutionalized and traditional police structure to get communities to comply with rules and regulations, even when those are for the ultimate security of the citizenry.

The idea of community policing stems from the general belief in tackling insecurity using a social control system. As noted earlier, the degeneration of the relationship between the Fulani and the farmers led to pastoral terrorism. The effects of nomadic attacks have put so many communities in disorder. The communities have developed indigenous defences against incursions into their territories, but because the systems are not formalised, the situation has worsened over time and attempts to respond to social disturbance have resulted in more violence. However, the formalisation of community police plays a crucial role in restoring social order and engaging major stakeholders in community security, particularly in warding off bandits and intruders.²⁸

By and large, communities are locations where some relationships exist among individuals. In each community, collaborations, conflicts, power sharing, and representation are understood and managed. These relationships enable the development of social efficacy and social networks required for deep, mutually beneficial collaboration among its members. The community is, therefore, a place where policing initiatives

drawn from members of the community who already share the needed affinity can thrive.

The Role of Community Policing in Countering Pastoral Terrorism

The central question this paper seeks to answer is: How can community policing be harnessed to address the herdsmen-farmer conflict in Nigeria? In view of the question, the role of community police in addressing nomadic terrorism, also known as pastoral terrorism, in Nigeria comes into sharp focus. A central justification for community policing is that it is a solution-focused measure, emanating from the community itself that is directly affected by the terrorist attacks. One of the problems with efforts to combat terrorism in Nigeria is inadequate statistics about the locations of terrorist masterminds and even victims. The government's inability to negotiate with terrorists underscores the need for a robust strategy that makes it exceedingly difficult for terrorist masterminds to operate with impunity.²⁹

Community policing will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying agencies involved in pastoral terrorism. Research revealed that the bulk of information gathering about herders' activities has relied mainly on informal informants, and more often, this is unreliable.³⁰ This is why gathering intelligence through recognised and legally constituted community police is better. There are available technologies that community police can leverage to overcome the challenge of data gathering and other limitations that have led to numerous issues over time. The information gathered independently by community police and verifiable across different channels would facilitate liaison with other police force units, enabling them to deploy necessary security measures as needed. There would also be less pre-empting of security details about communities and a more focused counterattack against opposing forces.

It is often difficult for security actors who are not resident in an area to be on the ground to either douse tension or quell crises. However, in a situation where community policing is in force, adequate and credible information is obtained about the rationale behind violence and the actors in a specific location. Consequently, the rates of escalation of conflict will reduce drastically. There have been instances of little success recorded in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria and the Middle Belt region with community policing efforts.³¹ The limited success provides insight into the viability of expanding community policing across other parts of the country where insecurity is prevalent.

Having special constables from each community, especially in areas where there have been serious clashes between farmers and herders, would help prevent the ravage of pastoral terrorism. The inefficiency of the central police force cannot be undermined. The inefficiency extends beyond the usual argument of insufficient resources for police officers and compensation. The primary issue found is that the lack of key intelligence information about the major actors fuelling inter-communal

clashes has limited the efforts of the central police force in tackling the menace of pastoral terrorism. However, community police forces or special constables, as they are called, would perform better, especially when they engage in a tactical synergy with local vigilante groups. Since many members of vigilante groups will be conscripted into the community police, it will be very easy to work together with other groups, such as local hunters and security guards, to safeguard the lives and property of citizens.

Omosho observed that community devolved policing will redefine the culture of policing, transforming it from a top-down approach to one that emerges and is indeed determined by the will of the people.³² There have been long-standing views about the police as a force that only comes when they are beckoned on; however, the idea of community policing ensures that even before events happen, the community devolved police would have developed strategies ahead of time to tackle them. The individuals who play a significant role in escalating the Herdsmen-Farmer crisis are not invisible to their community members. Therefore, for efficacy, either to identify threats or to calm what might erupt into a full-blown attack, the community police have an important role to play in social efficacy. Bagu and Smith noted that one primary strategy of terrorism is to thrive on uncertainties.³³ Therefore, community policing initiatives would remain a significant force to curb public uncertainties and fears.

As part of being security conscious, the openness with which the community police operate in designated locations and the occasional surveillance will reduce rates of pastoral terrorist attacks and even safeguard controversial territories that may become battlegrounds for herdsmen-farmer confrontations. In communities lacking security controls, research has consistently shown an increase in attacks. However, in areas with at least some vigilantes, the rate of clashes between herders and farmers has been significantly reduced.³⁴

Narratives are pointing to the fact that, instead of socialising with existing communities in order to utilise the lands for grazing pragmatically, their agenda is to annihilate existing communities and occupy them alongside their cattle.³⁵ However, the consciousness that they can get punished by the police has been found in many instances to limit both the damage to be done and the timing of the damage. Having community policing in place would serve a more potent deterrence, especially in the South-Eastern, South-Western and Middle-Belt areas of Nigeria, where the effects of pastoral terrorism are most felt.

The community police would be able to identify both herdsmen and criminals who take advantage of the situation to commit other heinous offences against innocent citizens. Bagu and Smith observed that although the current violence emanates from brutal responses to land disputes and attacks on livelihoods (crops and cattle), gangs of criminals, often youth from farming and herding communities and/or local bandits, take advantage of growing insecurity, fear, and cyclical attacks to loot villages,

engage in highway robbery, and rustle cattle for personal gain. The community policing initiative is crucial for tracking down criminals who masquerade as herdsmen.³⁶

Challenges to Community Policing in Nigeria

The engagement of citizens as community police does not come without its own risks. For instance, community policing may eventually occasion some unconstitutional behaviour, especially during times of provocations. The political nature of the farmer-herdsmen crisis may also tell on the integrity of people chosen to police in the community. Another risk found with community police is that, over time, due to political infiltration or biased interest, it can become a platform for the idealisation of retaliatory community clashes. This is usually worsened by the lack of professionalism of the volunteers or recruits.³⁷

Aside from the weakness of unprofessionalism and unconstitutionality, community police can be constrained by the question of acceptability. Usually, the laws of the state are supposed to back the activities of community police and to enhance their acceptability in the face of the public to whom they have been recruited to protect. However, in cases where the law does not provide clear guidance and allowances for community policing nationwide, operational constraints may arise. Thus, to ensure community police effectively counter pastoral terrorism, it is crucial to establish laws governing their activities and implement a security master plan that directs their efforts to the appropriate line of duty.

Hawdon observed that it is only by having full legal backing that the community police can operate effectively.³⁸ Well-trained community police can effectively address both nomadic and pastoral terrorism. On the issue of training, Higazi noted that citizens conscripted as community police require prior experience in security duties. They must be prepared to master the ethics and practices of police duties, engage in patrol and surveillance, and be duty-bound to submit reports to the Nigerian Police Force, which oversees internal security engagement.³⁹ Questions have been raised about whether community policing can tackle the trans-border network of nomadic terrorists. It has been found that attacks unleashed by militant pastoralists directly afflict local communities, with poor or weak responses from the central government.⁴⁰ Hence, the appropriateness of community policing to mitigate the volatility of indigenous communities to nomadic terrorism.

There are other limitations to community police. The issue of trust and legitimacy is crucial to the success of community police in fulfilling their role. This limitation stems from the challenges in public perception of police activities and the existing ambivalence towards the roles of vigilantes in various Nigerian communities. The perception that these groups may, over time, engage in clandestine activities detrimental to public well-being has been a constraint to community policing. This increases the need for community police to earn public trust and to

convince the people that their roles are legitimate and are complementary rather than substitutionary to traditional policing activities. Trust and legitimacy are analogous to moral authority. Research indicates that incidents of involuntary contacts with the community by police usually erode the level of confidence in the police by such communities.⁴¹

Way Forward? The Imperative of Community Policing

The security situation of each community that makes up a state matters to the overall welfare of the country as a whole. Community policing in developed countries like the United States of America has experienced tremendous progress in the fight against terrorism because it was farsighted from the outset. Though pastoral terrorism in Nigeria has reached a phenomenal scale, it is crucial to implement effective mechanisms devoid of emotional appeals, religious sentiments, ethnic affiliations, notions of martyrdom, or any other factors that foster a divisive 'us versus them' mentality among the belligerent groups.

There are preconditions for a more organised community policing in Nigeria targeted towards pastoral terrorism. To begin with, there is a need to ensure that proper training and discipline are provided to the community police because of excesses that arise from a lack of training. The essence of providing quality training is to ensure that those entrusted with protecting lives and property do not become greater threats to peace than the very bandits they are meant to eliminate.

The efficacy of community policing in the long run is highly dependent on the government, public security officials and the communities as a whole. The political will belongs to the government. Several studies have insinuated that nomadic terrorism has worsened since the commencement of President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, and this has been linked to the President himself being a Fulani.⁴² To address the situation, the government must support the formalisation of community policing initiatives by ensuring fair legislation that prevents uncoordinated grazing and encroachment into communities by migrant Fulani pastoralists. On their own part, the public security officials need to take stock of what the communities know about pastoralist terrorism within their communities and neighbouring areas and what they can do to help. They need to engage influential figures in the community as partners in the policing of terrorism. There is a need to build many support groups within rural communities that provide programmes to deradicalise terrorists and succour to victims in order to enable social justice.

To build and maintain public confidence in the police through shared activities and contacts, this paper suggests adopting volunteer programs as part of community policing initiatives. Second, it is important to establish standards and criteria for evaluating community-oriented terrorism-monitoring units to avert recourse to the blatant encroachment on individual liberties. More importantly, community-oriented policing could be usefully adapted to enforce the requirements and the need for citizen participation in setting and maintaining standards of social norms

that would prevent terrorist recruitment in local communities. The communities have greater access, reach, knowledge, and relational synergies to articulate and understand the indoctrination of terrorist ideas across their unique social environments. When aggregated, individuals and groups within communities usually form dynamic agents of surveillance.

In harnessing community policing initiatives towards the problem of nomadic terrorism in Nigeria, the herders cannot be annihilated. There are Fulani settlements across virtually every place in the Federation, but most importantly in the South-Western and North-Central region of Nigeria. Some Fulani people have consolidated their settlements in those areas through intermarriage with the local community, which has increased the chances of social dialogue. Engaging some of the Fulani who have established integrity over the years in the community policing initiative would ensure a balance of power. Having only members of the host community in the community police would create a situation of community versus the Fulani nomadic tribesmen, and this may eventually foster more aggression on the part of the Fulani tribesmen, who will now find the confrontational security structure as a form of 'Semitism' against the Fulani tribe. Already, there are sentiments and narratives about the entire conflict as a terrorist attack geared against the diversity of the country. However, maintaining clear grazing laws and involving everyone, including both Fulani and community representatives, would indicate that security rather than ethnicity is the priority of the community policing effort.

Conclusion

This paper provides a comprehensive evaluation of the strengths and limitations of enhancing community policing to counter pastoral terrorism in Nigeria. Community policing stands out as a vital counterterrorism strategy, particularly for addressing nomadic terrorism driven by farmer-herder conflicts. Its strength lies in its capacity to empower local communities, enabling proactive engagement against terrorist threats through localised intelligence and collaboration. To maximize its effectiveness, robust political and economic support is essential to equip community police, reduce operational uncertainties, and bolster their commitment to safeguarding communities from herdsmen-related violence. Such support will enhance their confidence and dedication, ensuring a more resilient response to pastoral terrorism.

Most weaknesses identified in community policing can be mitigated through a well-structured recruitment and training program designed to instill the ethos of anti-terrorist surveillance in community police. Training must emphasize the need to set aside personal biases and emotions to ensure impartial security operations. The paper concludes that pastoral terrorism disproportionately impacts rural indigenous populations, and deploying community police to respond proactively to security threats is more effective than relying solely on centralized police forces.

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