

Journal of Public Management and International Relations (JPMIR)

ISSN: 3134-8769

Volume 1, Number 2, April 2026

Pp 218-232

Community Policing and Civil-Military Collaboration: A Path to Sustainable Security in Nigeria

Luqman Abdulrasaq Gidado

Institute of Governance of Development Studies,
Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria

gidadoluqman@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6624-9266>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51415/jpmir.v1i2.1747>

*Published by the Department of Public Management, Law and Economics
Durban University of Technology, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa*



Abstract

Nigeria's security architecture faces unprecedented challenges, including insurgency, terrorism, farmer–herder conflicts, kidnapping, banditry, and other violent crimes. Conventional responses, dominated by militarised and centralised approaches, have proven inadequate, eroding public trust and creating operational vacuums exploited by violent non-state actors. This study examines the intersection of community policing and civil–military collaboration as pathways to sustainable security in Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative and theoretical research design, the study relies on document and content analysis of secondary sources, including scholarly and policy materials. These methods enable the identification of key themes such as trust deficits, accountability gaps, militarisation, and community engagement within Nigeria's security discourse. Drawing on Social Capital Theory, Security Governance Theory, and the Collaborative Governance Model, the study situates these approaches within broader debates on legitimacy, accountability, and multi-actor participation. Community policing, introduced in 2004, sought to decentralise policing and foster trust between law enforcement and communities. While pilot programmes recorded modest successes, implementation has been undermined by underfunding, inadequate training, political interference, and weak legislative backing. Civil–military collaboration has enhanced operational capacity but raised concerns about militarisation, human rights abuses, and accountability deficits. The study identifies weak institutional frameworks, fragmented implementation, and persistent trust deficits as major obstacles, while highlighting the potential of integrated, community-centred models. It proposes reforms anchored in training, measurable outcomes, and governance frameworks aligned with national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: Community Policing, Civil–Military Collaboration, Security Governance, Inclusive Security Architecture

Introduction

Nigeria's security landscape has undergone a profound transformation over the past two decades, shifting from localised communal clashes into a complex web of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, militancy, and urban crime. The Boko Haram insurgency, which escalated in 2009, and the subsequent rise of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), destabilised vast areas of the North-East, displacing millions and overwhelming humanitarian systems (International Crisis Group, 2022). In parallel, the North-West has witnessed the emergence of banditry networks engaged in mass abductions, extortion, and arms trafficking (Onuoha, 2020), whilst the North-Central region continues to grapple with farmer–herder conflicts driven by land competition, climate-induced migration, and ethnic tensions (Akinola, 2021). The South faces its own challenges, including cult violence, armed robbery, and separatist agitations, further complicating Nigeria's fragile security environment (Chukwuma, 2020).

The trajectory of insecurity in Nigeria reflects both historical legacies and contemporary governance failures. Since the return to democracy in 1999, ethno-religious conflicts and communal clashes have exposed the fragility of Nigeria's social fabric. The Niger Delta militancy of the early 2000s highlighted grievances over resource control and environmental degradation, whilst the Boko Haram insurgency underscored the consequences of poverty, marginalisation, and weak state presence in the North-East (Alemika, 2013). Over time, insecurity has become more decentralised and adaptive, with criminal gangs, insurgents, and separatist groups exploiting governance vacuums and eroding state legitimacy (International Crisis Group, 2022). Successive governments have adopted a range of strategies to confront these threats. Military interventions reclaimed territory from insurgents but often failed to secure lasting peace due to limited community legitimacy (Alemika, 2013). Amnesty programmes in the Niger Delta temporarily reduced militancy but did not address structural grievances such as poverty and environmental degradation (Eke, 2021). Intelligence reforms sought to improve coordination but were undermined by bureaucratic inefficiencies and poor trust between agencies (Onuoha, 2020). Community policing initiatives, though promising, remain constrained by Nigeria's highly centralised police structure, which restricts state and local autonomy (Chukwuma, 2020). These efforts highlight a recurring pattern: whilst policies have achieved short-term gains, they have struggled to deliver sustainable security outcomes.

The persistence of insecurity despite heavy investment in defence and policing underscores that Nigeria's crisis is not merely one of capacity, but of structure and legitimacy. Citizens increasingly perceive security forces as distant, unaccountable, and sometimes complicit in abuses, deepening the trust deficit between the state and its people (Akinola, 2021). This disconnect has created operational vacuums that non-state actors exploit with impunity (Onuoha, 2020). In this context, the need for innovative, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to public safety is urgent. Models that prioritise community engagement, local intelligence, and collaborative governance offer a promising alternative to the status quo (Chukwuma, 2020). This paper contributes to the discourse on security sector reform by reframing Nigeria's insecurity as a problem of legitimacy and governance rather than capacity alone. It synthesises historical trends and policy responses, critically reviews their successes and failures, and advances the case for a paradigm shift towards community policing and civil–military collaboration (Eke, 2021). By integrating local knowledge, fostering civic participation, and enhancing accountability, these approaches can build a more resilient security architecture. The study therefore brings fresh insights to policymakers, scholars, and practitioners, offering practical recommendations for constructing a security framework that is inclusive, responsive, and trusted by the communities it seeks to protect.

Problem Statement

Nigeria's security architecture has become increasingly complex, characterised by insurgency, banditry, farmer–herder conflicts, kidnapping, militancy, and urban crime. Despite massive investments in defence and policing, over ₦6.57 trillion allocated to security-related spending in 2025, including ₦3.1 trillion for defence and ₦1.31 trillion for police affairs (BudgIT, 2025), and a 55% surge in military expenditure to \$2.1 billion (SIPRI, 2026), insecurity persists. Violent deaths remain alarmingly high, with more than 10,000 fatalities recorded in 2023 alone due to insurgency, banditry, and communal clashes (International Crisis Group, 2022). These figures underscore the paradox of heavy investment with limited impact, eroding public trust in state institutions and weakening the social fabric of affected communities. Conventional security responses remain largely reactive, militarised, and disconnected from local realities, resulting in slow response times, poor intelligence coordination, and limited citizen engagement.

The Nigeria Police Force, rooted in colonial legacies of centralised control, continues to prioritise regime security over community safety (Alemika, 2013), while military interventions in civilian spaces often exacerbate mistrust and human rights concerns (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2020). This alienation between security providers and the communities they serve has created operational vacuums that violent non-state actors exploit with impunity. Furthermore, the absence of a coherent national framework that integrates civil society, traditional institutions, and local actors into security governance has hindered the development of inclusive and sustainable solutions. This paper examines the potential of community policing and civil–military collaboration as complementary strategies for advancing inclusive, accountable, and resilient security governance in Nigeria, thereby contributing to the achievement of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). It also examines the institutional, political, and socio-cultural constraints that impede the effective implementation of these approaches and proposes reform pathways that align with Nigeria's broader development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Theoretical Grounding

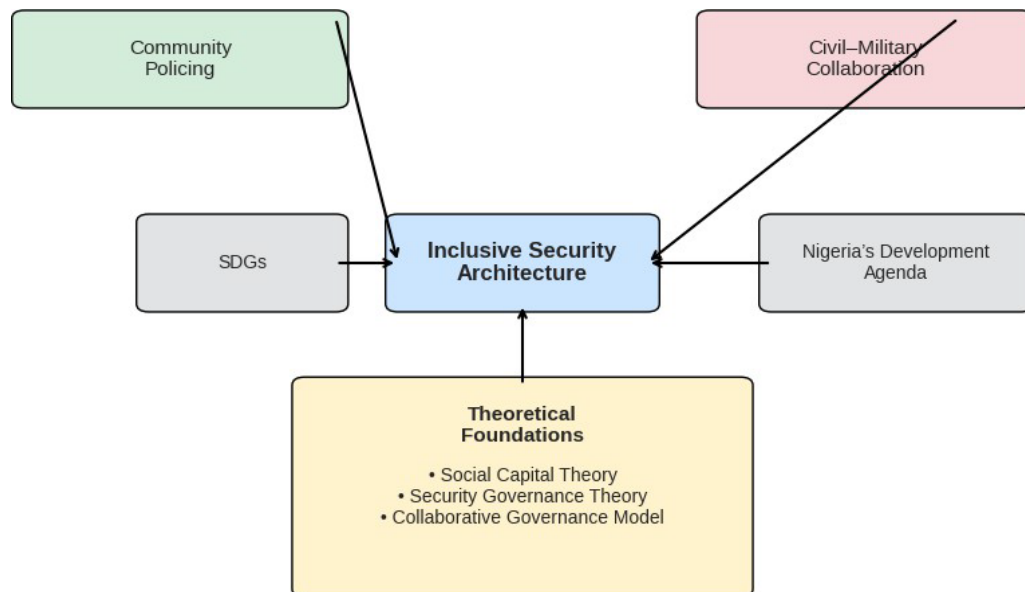
To critically examine the intersection of community policing and civil–military collaboration as a pathway to sustainable security in Nigeria, this study draws on three interrelated theoretical frameworks: Social Capital Theory, Security Governance Theory, and the Collaborative Governance Model. Together, these frameworks provide conceptual clarity and analytical depth, explaining why inclusive, trust-based, and multi-actor approaches are essential for addressing Nigeria's complex security challenges.

Collaborative Governance Model

The Collaborative Governance Model, developed by Ansell and Gash (2008), emphasises joint decision-making, shared accountability, and stakeholder inclusion in public policy and service delivery. Applied to the security sector, it provides a framework for analysing how diverse actors such as government agencies, civil society, traditional institutions, and community groups can work together to address complex security

challenges. Ansell and Gash (2008) describe collaborative governance as “a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative.” Trust-building, power-sharing, and sustained dialogue are central to this model. These elements are essential for overcoming fragmented institutional practices and bureaucratic compartmentalisation, mitigating conflict, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility. In practice, collaborative governance enhances the legitimacy of security interventions, improves intelligence flow, and reduces duplication of efforts. It also provides a platform for marginalised voices to influence security policy, thereby strengthening democratic accountability and social cohesion (Adebayo & Ojo, 2023).

Applied to Nigeria’s security sector, this model emphasises joint decision-making, stakeholder inclusion, and shared accountability among police, military, civil society, and local communities (Adebayo & Ojo, 2023). In Nigeria’s fragmented security environment, collaborative governance encourages inter-agency coordination through mechanisms such as joint task forces, integrated command structures, and multi-stakeholder security committees. It also promotes community engagement via town hall meetings, liaison officers, and participatory planning processes. These mechanisms help bridge the gap between formal institutions and local populations, ensuring that security strategies are context-specific and responsive. Together, these three frameworks provide a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how community policing and civil–military collaboration can contribute to a more inclusive, accountable, and resilient security architecture in Nigeria.



Source: Adapted from Nwizu-Okoye (2023), International Crisis Group (2022), & Chukwuma (2020).

The framework presented above is adapted from the works of Nwizu-Okoye (2023), International Crisis Group (2022), and Chukwuma (2020), which originally emphasised the fragmented nature of Nigeria’s security responses and the need for community-centred approaches. In this study, the construct has been adjusted to incorporate civil–military collaboration alongside community policing, recognising the central role of police and military in Nigeria’s security landscape and the necessity of synergy rather than parallel interventions. Furthermore, the framework explicitly integrates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Nigeria’s broader development agenda, situating security reform within both national priorities and global commitments. To strengthen analytical depth, the model also introduces theoretical foundations: Social Capital Theory, Security Governance Theory, and Collaborative Governance Models, which provide lenses for understanding trust-building, legitimacy, and multi-actor collaboration. These adjustments ensure

that the framework not only reflects Nigeria's unique security realities but also aligns with international development objectives, thereby offering a more holistic and policy-relevant approach to inclusive security governance.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, as articulated by Putnam (2000), posits that networks of trust, norms of reciprocity, and civic engagement are foundational to effective collective action. In the realm of security, social capital facilitates cooperation between citizens and law enforcement, enabling communities to co-produce safety through informal surveillance, early warning systems, and conflict mediation (Akinola, 2021). This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where formal security institutions often lack legitimacy in the eyes of local populations. Community policing thrives in environments rich in social capital. When citizens trust their local police and feel empowered to participate in security initiatives, they are more likely to report suspicious activity, mediate disputes, and support crime prevention efforts (Chukwuma, 2020). Conversely, in areas where social capital is weak due to ethnic divisions, political marginalisation, or historical abuses, community policing efforts may be met with scepticism or resistance. Social capital also plays a critical role in civil–military relations. In Nigeria, where the military is frequently deployed for internal security operations, building trust between soldiers and civilians is essential. Through joint community projects, transparent communication, and culturally sensitive engagement, military actors can foster reciprocal relationships that reduce hostility and enhance operational effectiveness (Eke, 2021). This relational infrastructure is vital for transforming security interventions from coercive to collaborative.

Security Governance Theory

Security Governance Theory challenges the traditional state-centric view of security provision and advocates a multi-actor approach that involves state institutions, non-state actors, civil society, and local communities (Krahmann, 2003). It recognises that in complex and fragile environments such as Nigeria, security cannot be monopolised by the state alone. Instead, it must be co-produced through decentralised, participatory models that reflect local realities and needs. This framework is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where state capacity is uneven and informal actors often fill security vacuums. Vigilante groups, traditional rulers, religious institutions, and community-based organisations frequently play critical roles in maintaining order and resolving conflicts. Security governance theory legitimises these actors as part of the broader security ecosystem, encouraging coordination rather than competition. Community policing aligns with this theory by empowering local actors to take ownership of safety initiatives, while civil–military collaboration reflects the need for integrated efforts across institutional boundaries. Importantly, security governance emphasises the principles of accountability, transparency, and legitimacy that are often lacking in Nigeria's current security architecture (International Crisis Group, 2022). Without clearly defined mandates, robust oversight mechanisms, and genuine community participation, security interventions risk deepening existing mistrust and exacerbating tensions rather than fostering stability and sustainable peace.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, relying exclusively on secondary sources to interrogate Nigeria's evolving security architecture. Document analysis and content analysis constitute the principal methodological approaches, enabling a systematic review of existing materials and the identification of recurring themes such as trust deficits, accountability gaps, militarisation, and community engagement. Data were sourced from reputable academic and policy databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and African Journals Online (AJOL), supplemented by government policy documents, international reports from organisations such as the International Crisis Group, SIPRI, and the Centre for Democracy and Development, as well as credible media publications including Premium Times, The Guardian Nigeria, and BBC Africa.

To ensure rigour, inclusion criteria focused on publications produced between 2010 and 2025 that explicitly addressed Nigeria's security architecture, community policing, civil–military relations, or governance legitimacy, while exclusion criteria ruled out non-scholarly blogs, opinion pieces, and sources lacking institutional credibility, as well as studies outside the timeframe unless historically significant. The search strategy employed systematic keyword combinations with Boolean operators, for example, "Nigeria and security architecture," "Community policing and Nigeria," "Civil–military collaboration and Nigeria," and

“Nigeria and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”, across multiple databases to minimise bias and capture diverse perspectives. Sources were initially screened for relevance through titles and abstracts, followed by full-text review, and subsequently coded thematically to highlight patterns, gaps, and contradictions in Nigeria’s security discourse. This methodological approach ensures that the study is grounded in credible evidence, analytically rigorous, and aligned with its objectives of exploring community policing and civil–military collaboration as pathways to inclusive and resilient security governance.

Inclusive Security Architecture

This refers to a security framework that prioritises participation, accountability, and legitimacy by integrating multiple actors such as state institutions, civil society, traditional authorities, and local communities into the design and implementation of security strategies. Unlike conventional militarised approaches, inclusive security emphasises trust-building, shared responsibility, and responsiveness to local realities. It seeks to bridge the gap between security providers and citizens by decentralising decision-making and fostering collaboration across different levels of governance. Scholars argue that inclusive models are essential in fragile contexts such as Nigeria, where over-centralisation and reactive, force-driven strategies have eroded public trust and created operational vacuums that are exploited by non-state actors (Nwizu-Okoye, 2023; Jugo, 2025).

At its core, inclusive security architecture is anchored in principles of human security, social capital, and collaborative governance, ensuring that security interventions are not only effective but also legitimate and sustainable. This approach recognises that communities are not passive recipients of security but active stakeholders whose knowledge, networks, and resilience are critical to addressing complex threats. By expanding the security architecture to empower vulnerable groups and promote accountability, inclusive security strengthens the social contract between the state and its citizens, thereby reducing mistrust and enhancing long-term stability (International Crisis Group, 2022; The Cable, 2023). In the Nigerian context, inclusive security architecture offers a pathway to reconfigure existing structures toward models that align with broader development goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Community Policing in Nigeria

Community policing in Nigeria emerged as a strategic response to the widening gap between formal law enforcement institutions and the communities they are mandated to protect. Historically, policing in Nigeria was rooted in colonial-era structures designed to enforce state authority rather than serve public interest. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), established in 1930, inherited this legacy of centralised control, operating under a rigid command system that prioritised regime security over citizen engagement (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). This model fostered alienation, distrust, and a lack of responsiveness to local security needs. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, Nigeria was grappling with rising urban crime, communal violence, and deteriorating public trust in the police. The inadequacy of the conventional policing model became increasingly evident, prompting calls from civil society, international partners, and reform-minded policymakers for a shift toward more inclusive and participatory policing strategies. In response, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) launched the Community Policing Initiative in 2004, with technical and financial support from the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and local organisations such as the Centre for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria (CLEEN Foundation, 2005).

The framework sought to decentralise policing by embedding officers within communities, encouraging collaborative problem-solving, and promoting proactive crime prevention. It emphasised partnership, accountability, and local intelligence gathering as key pillars of effective policing. Pilot programmes in states such as Enugu, Kaduna, and Lagos recorded initial successes in improving police–community relations and reducing petty crime (Odekunle, 2007). However, the broader institutionalisation of community policing across Nigeria has faced significant challenges. Political interference has frequently undermined neutrality and effectiveness, with local actors co-opted for partisan purposes. Adebayo and Ojo (2023) have noted that inconsistent policy support and the absence of legislative backing have resulted in fragmented implementation, with some states embracing the model while others remain resistant or indifferent.

Structural and operational weaknesses have further constrained the initiative. Chronic underfunding has left many communities' policing units without basic resources such as vehicles, communication tools, and operational allowances, limiting their reach and effectiveness (CLEEN Foundation, 2018). Training deficits also undermine professionalism and accountability. In the absence of standardised curricula, codified ethical guidelines, and sustained capacity-building initiatives, community policing risks being undermined by tendencies toward vigilantism or the misuse of authority, particularly in contexts where informal actors operate without adequate oversight or legally sanctioned mandates.

The 2020 nationwide #EndSARS protests marked a watershed in Nigeria's policing discourse. Sparked by widespread allegations of brutality by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), the protests revealed deep-rooted mistrust between citizens and law enforcement agencies. Although the government responded by disbanding SARS and reaffirming its commitment to police reform, the protests reignited public demand for genuine community-based policing models that prioritise human rights, transparency, and local accountability (Amnesty International, 2020). While community policing holds promise as a transformative approach to public safety in Nigeria, its success depends on sustained political will, institutional reform, and meaningful engagement with local stakeholders. Without these, the initiative risks becoming another well-intentioned but poorly executed policy experiment. The absence of a coherent national framework to harmonise community policing efforts across states exacerbates fragmentation and reduces the potential for scale and sustainability (Alemika, 2013). Ultimately, community policing in Nigeria remains a promising but fragile experiment, requiring stronger institutional support, adequate resources, and genuine commitment to democratic policing principles.

Community Policing and Civil-Military Collaboration Across the North-South Divide

In major urban centres across the Global North, community policing has played a pivotal role in rebuilding trust between law enforcement and marginalised populations. Cities such as New York, London, and Melbourne have implemented neighbourhood-based patrols, citizen advisory boards, and youth engagement programs to foster stronger relationships between police and the communities they serve. These initiatives have led to measurable reductions in crime and improved cooperation in investigations (Skogan, 2006). While civil-military collaboration is less prominent in routine policing, it becomes essential during national emergencies such as natural disasters, pandemics, or terrorist incidents, in which military units support civilian agencies with logistics, infrastructure protection, and crowd control. These coordinated efforts underscore the importance of inter-agency trust and preparedness in maintaining public safety and resilience. Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Sweden, and Denmark exemplify integrated public safety models that emphasise multi-agency collaboration and community engagement. In these societies, policing is embedded in local governance structures, enabling seamless coordination among law enforcement, social services, and municipal authorities. Programmes aimed at preventing radicalisation, domestic violence, and youth delinquency often involve joint efforts between police officers, educators, and social workers. Civil-military collaboration is institutionalised through national crisis management frameworks, where military support is activated during cyber threats, border control operations, and public health emergencies. These models are underpinned by democratic oversight, transparency, and a culture of civic participation, contributing to high levels of public trust and some of the lowest crime rates globally (Bayley, 2006).

In the Global South, countries such as Colombia and the Philippines have successfully leveraged community policing and civil-military collaboration to stabilise regions affected by insurgency and organised crime. In Medellín, Colombia, a combination of community policing, urban renewal, and civil-military coordination helped reclaim gang-controlled neighbourhoods. Police officers were trained to engage with local leaders, youth groups, and civil society organisations, thereby fostering trust and improving the flow of intelligence (Moncada, 2016). In the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao, joint patrols and town hall meetings between military units and community representatives have been used to reduce tensions and build consensus around security operations. These approaches demonstrate that when communities are treated as partners rather than passive recipients of security, the outcomes are more sustainable and inclusive (Buendia, 2005). Several African countries outside Nigeria have also adopted community-based and collaborative security models with notable success.

In Kenya, the National Police Service has implemented community policing initiatives in urban and rural areas, supported by legal reforms and civil society partnerships. These efforts have improved police responsiveness, reduced violent crime, and enhanced public trust, particularly in informal settlements like Kibera (Ruteere & Pommerolle, 2003). In Sierra Leone, post-conflict security sector reform included the integration of community policing and civil-military coordination, with local security committees playing a key role in conflict resolution and early warning systems (Albrecht & Jackson, 2009). Similarly, in Rwanda, the government has institutionalised community policing through regular community meetings (*umuganda*), joint patrols, and civic education campaigns, contributing to high levels of social cohesion and public safety (Chemouni, 2014). Across the Global North and Global South, a consistent theme emerges: security interventions are most effective when they are locally legitimate, inclusive, and grounded in trust. Whether in the urban neighbourhoods of London, the post-conflict zones of Medellín, or the community forums of Kigali, sustainable security is achieved not through force alone but through collaboration, transparency, and community ownership. These examples underscore the importance of reimagining security as a shared responsibility, one that values citizens' voices, respects local contexts, and integrates diverse actors into a coherent governance framework.

Overview of Insecurity Trends in Nigeria (2020–2025)

Nigeria's security landscape between 2020 and 2025 was characterised by escalating violence, shifting hotspots, and the emergence of new threat actors, with banditry, terrorism, farmer–herder clashes, and kidnapping dominating conflict trends (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025; Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 2025). Despite increased military deployments and policy interventions, insecurity remained pervasive, evolving in both complexity and geographic spread (International Crisis Group, 2022; Nwizu-Okoye, 2023; Chukwuma, 2020).

Table 1: Key Conflict Types and Trends

Year	Banditry	Terrorism	Farmer-Herder Clashes	Secessionist Violence	Politically Related	Kidnapping	Civil Unrest
2020	800	120	150	20	40	100	200
2021	950	100	170	25	45	110	180
2022	1100	90	200	30	50	115	160
2023	1200	70	220	32	55	118	140
2024	1306	43	240	35	50	120	80
2025	1250	50	260	38	52	125	100

Source: Nigeria Security Tracker, Council on Foreign Relations (2025); Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2025).

It is pertinent to note that Table 1 presents a year-by-year breakdown of seven major categories of violent conflict in Nigeria. These categories reflect the diversity and complexity of insecurity across the country.

Banditry

Trend: Sharp and consistent rise from 800 incidents in 2020 to a peak of 1,306 in 2024, followed by a slight dip to 1,250 in 2025.

Interpretation: Banditry has become the most dominant form of violence, particularly in the Northwest (Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina). The slight decline in 2025 may reflect intensified military operations or shifting tactics by armed groups.

Terrorism

Trend: Steady decline from 120 incidents in 2020 to 43 in 2024, with a modest uptick to 50 in 2025.

Interpretation: Boko Haram and ISWAP activities have reduced in frequency but remain lethal. The resurgence in 2025 suggests adaptive strategies or the emergence of new cells in the Northeast.

Farmer-Herder Clashes

Trend: Continuous increase from 150 incidents in 2020 to 260 in 2025.

Interpretation: These clashes are expanding geographically and now affecting Southern states such as Ondo and Delta. Climate change, land scarcity, and weak mediation mechanisms are key drivers.

Secessionist Violence

Trend: Gradual rise from 20 incidents in 2020 to 38 in 2025.

Interpretation: Mostly concentrated in the Southeast, linked to IPOB and other separatist movements. Attacks on police stations and electoral offices have intensified.

Politically Related Violence

Trend: Slight increase from 40 incidents in 2020 to 52 in 2025.

Interpretation: Election cycles, party rivalries, and governance disputes contribute to this category. The rise may reflect growing political polarisation.

Kidnapping

Trend: Steady growth from 100 incidents in 2020 to 125 in 2025.

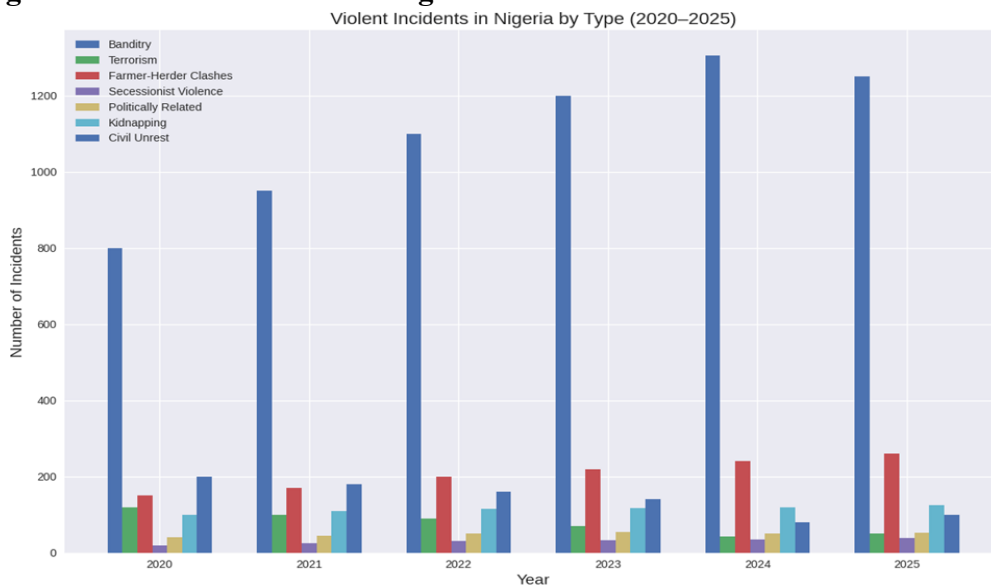
Interpretation: Kidnapping for ransom has become a lucrative enterprise, affecting highways, schools, and urban centres. The increase reflects both opportunism and weak deterrence.

Civil Unrest

Trend: Decline from 200 incidents in 2020 to 80 in 2024, with a slight rebound to 100 in 2025.

Interpretation: The drop post-EndSARS protests suggests temporary suppression, but economic hardship and governance failures continue to fuel unrest.

Figure 1: Violent Incidents in Nigeria



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2025).

Figure 1 above illustrates the data in Table 1. It uses colour-coded bars to show the number of incidents for each conflict type across the years.

Key Visual Insights

Banditry dominates the chart, with the tallest bars each year, signalling its overwhelming prevalence. Farmer-Herder Clashes show a clear upward trajectory, becoming the second most frequent conflict type by 2025. Terrorism and Civil Unrest show declining trends, with shorter bars over time. Kidnapping and Secessionist Violence maintain moderate but steady growth. Politically Related Violence remains relatively stable, with minor fluctuations.

Figure 1 underscores the urgent need for region-specific security interventions tailored to Nigeria's diverse conflict landscape. For instance, counter-banditry operations are critical in the Northwest, where armed groups have entrenched themselves; conflict resolution mechanisms are essential in the North Central to address escalating farmer-herder clashes; and de-escalation strategies are increasingly necessary in the Southeast amid rising secessionist violence. These patterns reveal the limitations of Nigeria's centralised security architecture, which often fails to respond effectively to localised threats. Instead, the data advocates for a multi-actor approach, one that integrates formal security agencies with community-based structures, traditional institutions, and civil society actors to build a more responsive and inclusive security framework.

Why Nigeria Needs More Than Guns and Uniforms

Nigeria's persistent insecurity has evolved into a multidimensional crisis that defies conventional state-centric responses. The country faces a complex web of threats that exposes the limitations of relying solely on formal state security agencies. These threats are not only geographically widespread but also structurally embedded in Nigeria's socio-political fabric, making them resistant to purely militarised or centralised solutions.

Structural Limitations of Formal Security Agencies

The (NPF), military, and intelligence services are overstretched, under-resourced, and often reactive rather than preventive. Despite increased budgetary allocations such as the ₦2.2 trillion earmarked for defence and security in the 2024 national budget, the impact on ground-level security remains minimal due to systemic inefficiencies, corruption, and poor accountability mechanisms (BudgIT, 2024). Equipment shortages, inadequate training, and low morale among personnel further undermine operational effectiveness. The police-to-citizen ratio remains alarmingly low. While the United Nations recommends a ratio of 1:450, Nigeria's ratio hovers around 1:600 or worse, with significant disparities between urban and rural deployment (CDD, 2025). This shortage is compounded by the centralised nature of policing, where decisions are made in Abuja with little input from local communities. Officers posted to unfamiliar regions often lack the linguistic and cultural competence necessary for effective engagement, leading to poor intelligence gathering and strained relations with residents (Gaskiya, 2025).

Insecurity in Ungoverned and Under-Governed Spaces

Large swaths of Nigeria remain effectively ungoverned, particularly in rural and border regions where state presence is minimal or symbolic. In Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina states, bandit groups have established quasi-administrative control, levying taxes, enforcing curfews, and negotiating ransoms. Despite repeated military operations such as Operation Hadarin Daji and Operation Forest Sanity, these groups continue to operate with impunity, exploiting difficult terrain, local grievances, and porous borders (Within Nigeria, 2025). The situation is equally dire in parts of Kwara and Plateau, where coordinated attacks have displaced thousands and disrupted farming and trade. These incidents reveal a troubling trend as insecurity is no longer confined to traditional hotspots but is metastasising into previously stable regions. The inability of federal forces to respond swiftly and decisively has eroded public confidence and emboldened non-state actors (Security Alert, 2025).

The Rise and Relevance of Informal Security Actors

In response to these gaps, communities have increasingly turned to informal security actors such as vigilante groups, hunters' associations, and traditional rulers. While these actors operate outside formal legal frameworks, they possess deep local knowledge, cultural legitimacy, and the agility to respond to threats in real time. In many cases, they have succeeded where formal agencies have failed in rescuing abductees, repelling attacks, and mediating conflicts. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the North Eastern and North Western states is a prime example. Formed in response to banditry, Boko Haram and insurgency, the CJTF has worked alongside the military to identify insurgents, secure communities, and provide local intelligence. Their contributions have been recognised by both state and federal authorities, although concerns remain about oversight and accountability (International Crisis Group, 2022). Similarly, in parts of Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kogi, Kwara, and Niger States, traditional rulers have played a crucial role in conflict resolution and early warning systems. Their ability to convene community dialogues and enforce

customary norms has helped prevent escalation in areas where formal institutions are absent or distrusted.

The Call for Multi-Actor Security Governance

Experts, civil society leaders, and policymakers increasingly advocate for a multi-actor approach to security, one that integrates formal agencies with community-based structures, civil society organisations, and local non-violent non-state actors. Jaye Gaskiya, Chair of the PCVE Development Management Team, argues that Nigeria's insecurity is not merely a policing failure, but a development crisis rooted in poor governance, inequality, and exclusion. He calls for a whole-of-society response that prioritises prevention, inclusion, and accountability (Leadership, 2025). Former House of Representatives Speaker Yakubu Dogara has echoed this sentiment, describing insecurity in Northern Nigeria as a national emergency. He urged governors to pool resources, coordinate regional strategies, and take ownership of security rather than relying solely on federal interventions (Daily Post, 2025). These calls reflect a growing consensus that sustainable security requires decentralisation, collaboration, and community empowerment.

Challenges of Civil-Military Collaboration in Nigeria

Civil-military collaboration in Nigeria, though increasingly adopted as a response to the country's multifaceted security crises, is constrained by structural, institutional, and normative challenges. These limitations not only weaken operational effectiveness but also undermine the legitimacy of security governance in the eyes of citizens. One of the most pressing concerns is the militarisation of civilian spaces. The Nigerian military, constitutionally mandated to defend against external aggression, has progressively assumed internal policing roles, particularly in counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram, anti-banditry campaigns in the Northwest, and interventions in communal clashes across the Middle Belt (Haruna, 2025). This expansion blurs the distinction between defence and law enforcement, embedding a culture of force-driven responses in contexts that require dialogue and trust-building. Scholars argue that such militarisation erodes democratic norms by normalising the presence of armed forces in everyday civic life, thereby diminishing the autonomy of civilian institutions (Alemika, 2017). Communities often interpret military deployment as coercive occupation rather than protection, which alienates citizens and obstructs intelligence-sharing, a critical component of community policing.

Closely tied to militarisation is the issue of accountability and human rights. Civil-military operations in Nigeria have been repeatedly marred by allegations of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and excessive use of force. Amnesty International (2023) documents numerous cases where military interventions in civilian areas resulted in human rights violations, often without subsequent investigation or prosecution. Not only that, but police brutality has been an issue of serious concern, which impedes trust between the citizens and the Police. Weak oversight mechanisms and limited transparency exacerbate these abuses, fostering impunity and deepening the trust deficit between citizens and security institutions (Aja Elechi & Ohazuruike, 2024). Trust is not merely symbolic; it is a functional necessity for collaboration. Without confidence in security actors, communities are reluctant to share intelligence or cooperate, thereby weakening the effectiveness of joint operations.

Another significant limitation lies in legal and policy ambiguities. Nigeria's 1999 Constitution permits military involvement in internal security under "exceptional circumstances," yet the scope of such interventions remains poorly defined (Oyebode, 2025). This vagueness allows discretionary deployments that often bypass civilian authority, creating uncertainty about the legitimacy of military actions. Similarly, policing laws remain outdated, failing to embed community policing principles or clarify operational boundaries between police and military forces (Alemika, 2017). The absence of coherent legislation contributes to institutional overlap, operational inefficiency, and jurisdictional conflicts. For example, in joint operations against banditry, disputes frequently arise over command structures and responsibilities, leading to duplication of efforts and reduced effectiveness (Haruna, 2025).

Furthermore, civil-military collaboration in Nigeria is often ad hoc and reactive rather than institutionalised. Unlike South Africa, where community police forums are legally mandated to facilitate dialogue between citizens and security actors (Akpa, 2024), Nigeria's mechanisms for collaboration largely depend on executive discretion. This reactive approach limits sustainability and consistency, as initiatives are frequently

tioned to specific crises or political directives rather than embedded within long-term security governance frameworks. The lack of institutionalisation means that lessons learned from past collaborations are rarely codified, leading to repeated mistakes and inefficiencies. Collectively, these challenges highlight the structural weaknesses that hinder civil–military collaboration in Nigeria. Militarisation alienates communities, accountability deficits foster distrust, legal ambiguities create uncertainty, and ad hoc mechanisms undermine sustainability. Together, they reveal that while collaboration is necessary in Nigeria’s complex security landscape, its current practice is constrained by deep-seated institutional and normative limitations that must be acknowledged before meaningful reform can be pursued.

Conclusion

Nigeria’s security challenges reveal the inadequacy of conventional, force-driven approaches in delivering sustainable peace. This study has demonstrated that community policing and civil-military collaboration, when grounded in trust, accountability, and inclusivity, offer a viable pathway toward a more resilient security architecture. By tracing the historical evolution of policing, examining comparative perspectives, and analysing the challenges and limitations of current practices, it becomes clear that Nigeria’s security governance is constrained by legacies of militarisation, weak accountability, and legal ambiguities. Community policing provides a framework for strengthening local intelligence, civic participation, and trust between citizens and security actors, while civil-military collaboration, if properly structured, can bridge institutional divides and enhance operational effectiveness. However, absent reforms that enhance the professionalisation of security personnel, institutionalise accountability mechanisms, and establish clearly defined legal mandates, collaborative security arrangements risk entrenching coercive practices and exacerbating public distrust. Ultimately, sustainable security in Nigeria must be understood not only as the absence of violence but as the presence of resilient institutions, inclusive governance, and a strong social contract between the state and its citizens. By embracing community-centred strategies and institutional reforms, Nigeria can move beyond reactive responses and build a security architecture that is legitimate, effective, and responsive to the complexities of its diverse society. In doing so, the country will not only address immediate threats but also lay the foundation for long-term peace, stability, and national development.

Policy Recommendations

For Nigeria to achieve sustainable security, civil-military collaboration and community policing must be supported by deliberate reforms that strengthen institutions, professionalise personnel, and embed accountability within a broader governance framework. This study proposes three interrelated pillars, which are capacity building and training, metrics of success, and integrated security governance, as a roadmap for actionable policy interventions. They are examined as follows:

Capacity Building and Training: The professionalisation of police, military personnel, and other security agencies is central to effective community engagement. Current practices often emphasise tactical responses while neglecting the interpersonal and trust-building dimensions of security governance. To address this imbalance, training curricula should incorporate modules on conflict sensitivity, human rights, and community liaison strategies, ensuring that personnel are equipped not only to enforce law but also to foster legitimacy and trust. Joint training exercises between police and military units are equally critical, as they help bridge institutional cultures, reduce operational friction, and promote coordinated responses to complex threats. It is important to stress that by embedding community engagement into professional standards, Nigeria can cultivate a security sector that is responsive, accountable, and trusted by the citizens it serves.

Metrics of Success and Evaluating Security Outcomes: Reforms must be accompanied by clear, measurable indicators to ensure they translate into tangible improvements. Traditional metrics such as crime reduction, arrest rates, and conflict resolution outcomes remain important, but they should be complemented by qualitative measures that capture citizens’ lived experiences. These include community trust surveys, perceptions of safety, and levels of civic participation in security initiatives. Such metrics provide a holistic understanding of security outcomes, moving beyond narrow statistics to assess legitimacy

and effectiveness. Regular evaluation not only strengthens accountability but also enables adaptive learning, allowing institutions to refine strategies in response to evolving challenges and shifting security dynamics.

Integrated Security Governance: Looking ahead, Nigeria's security architecture must evolve toward a hybrid model of integrated governance that combines state institutions, local communities, and non-state actors. Sustainable security cannot be achieved by force alone; it requires inclusive participation and shared responsibility. Civil society organisations, traditional leaders, and community-based groups should be formally incorporated into security planning and implementation, thereby creating multi-actor platforms for dialogue, intelligence sharing, and collaborative problem-solving. This integrated approach aligns with Nigeria's broader development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by linking security to economic stability, social cohesion, and democratic governance. A resilient security system is not only about preventing violence but also about enabling development, fostering trust, and strengthening the social contract between the state and its citizens.

References

- Adebayo, A., & Ojo, O. (2023). Community Policing and Security Sector Reform in Nigeria. *Journal of African Security Studies*, 15(2), 45–62.
- Aja Elechi, F., & Ohazuruike, K. (2024). Civil-Military Relationship and the Fight Against Security Challenges in Nigeria. *South East Journal of Political Science*, 10(2). <https://journals.npsa-se.org.ng/index.php/SEJPS/article/view/194>. Accessed 17 November, 2025.
- Akinola, O. (2021). Farmer–Herder Conflicts and the Politics of Security in Nigeria. *African Security*, 14(2), 116–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2021.1901181>. Accessed 26 November, 2025.
- Akpa, E. J. (2024). The Role of Community Policing in Crime Reduction: Comparative Analysis of South Africa and Kenya. *Newport International Journal of Current Issues in Arts and Management*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.59298/NIJCIAM/2024/4.1.121413>. Accessed 15 November, 2025.
- Alemika, E. E. O. (2013). History, Context and Crises of the Police in Nigeria. Police Service Commission. <https://psc.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/HISTORY-AND-CONTEXT.pdf>. Accessed 10 November, 2025.
- Alemika, E. E. O. (2017). *Civil-Military Relations and Democratic Governance in Nigeria*. Lagos: CLEEN Foundation.
- Alemika, E. E. O., & Chukwuma, I. (2000). *Police-Community Violence in Nigeria*. Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN).
- Amnesty International. (2020). Nigeria: Authorities Must End SARS Impunity. Amnesty International Reports. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/nigeria/>. Accessed 19 November, 2025.
- Amnesty International. (2023). Nigeria: Human Rights Concerns in Military Operations. Amnesty International Reports. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/nigeria/>. Accessed 31 October, 2025.
- Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 543–571.
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). (2025). ACLED Data Export Tool. <https://acleddata.com>. Accessed 15 April, 2026
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. (2025). Nigeria Conflict Data. Retrieved from <https://acleddata.com>. Accessed 2 April, 2026.
- Centre for Democracy and Development. (2020). *Multiple Security Challenges in Nigeria*.
- Chukwuma, I. (2020). *Community Policing in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges*. CLEEN Foundation Policy Brief.
- Chukwuma, I. (2020). Community Policing and Security Sector Reform in Nigeria. *African Journal of Criminology*, 12(1), 89–110.
- CLEEN Foundation. (2005). *Community Policing in Nigeria: A Manual for Implementation*. CLEEN Foundation.
- CLEEN Foundation. (2018). *Evaluation of Community Policing in Nigeria*. CLEEN Foundation.
- Eke, O. (2021). Civil–Military Relations and Internal Security in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Security Studies*, 9(1), 77–95.

- European Union Agency for Asylum. (2025). Country of Origin Information Report – Nigeria: Security Situation. Brussels: EUAA.
- International Crisis Group. (2020). Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling back the mayhem. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria>
- International Crisis Group. (2022). Managing Nigeria's Security Crisis. Crisis Group Africa Report No. 297.
- Kpae, G., & Adishi, E. (2017). Community Policing and Crime Control in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1), 23–34.
- Krahmann, E. (2003). Conceptualising Security Governance. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 38(1), 5–26.
- Nextier. (2025). Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database: Security and Conflict Outlook. Abuja: Nextier SPD.
- Nwizu-Okoye, C. (2023). *Inclusive security governance in fragile states: Lessons for Nigeria*. *African Journal of Peace and Development*, 18(2), 77–95.
- Odekunle, F. (2007). Crime and Policing in Nigeria: Myths, Realities and Prospects. CLEEN Foundation Monograph Series.
- Onuoha, F. (2020). Banditry and Insecurity in Nigeria's Northwest. *African Security Review*, 29(3), 223–240.
- Oyebode, A. (2025). History of the Nigeria Police Force: Colonial to modern. *Historical Nigeria*. <https://historicalnigeria.com/the-evolution-of-the-nigerian-police-force-from-colonial-origins-to-contemporary-challenges/>. Accessed 27 October, 2025.
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2021). Assessing the Impact of Conflict and Instability in the Lake Chad Basin Region. <https://www.undp.org>, Accessed 2 April, 2026.