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**ROLE OF LOCAL SECURITY OUTFITS AND THE KADUNA STATE VIGILANCE  
SERVICE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST BANDITRY IN KADUNA STATE.**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the escalating challenge of banditry in Kaduna State, Nigeria, focusing on the role of local security outfits, especially the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS), in addressing this threat. Using Securitization Theory as the analytical framework, the study explains how banditry is framed as a security issue through political discourse and practice. Employing a qualitative approach based on secondary data analysis, the research draws from diverse sources, including academic literature, government reports, policy documents, and media accounts, to assess the effectiveness, structure, and limitations of KADVS and community policing initiatives. The findings reveal that KADVS has secured some successes in intelligence gathering, crime prevention, and rescuing abductees. However, its overall impact is limited by challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficient training, and weak coordination with formal security agencies. The study also critiques the partial implementation of community policing policies, emphasizing the lack of genuine community engagement and transparency. Further concerns arise from the proliferation of informal vigilante groups, which often operate without clear accountability or respect for human rights. Structural factors like poverty, youth unemployment, poor governance, and marginalization are identified as root causes sustaining the banditry menace. The article concludes that while local security outfits and community policing are vital components in the fight against banditry, they require systemic reforms, adequate resources, and effective institutional oversight to function effectively. It recommends adopting a comprehensive, community-centred security framework aligned with democratic principles, and one that also addresses the underlying socio-economic conditions driving insecurity in Kaduna State.

**Keywords:** local security outfits, banditry, community policing, vigilante groups, rural insecurity, conflict



## **Introduction**

In the security landscape of contemporary Nigeria, Kaduna State has emerged as a significant epicentre of violence and instability, particularly within the Northwest geopolitical zone. This phenomenon has evolved beyond sporadic local events to become a widespread security issue, characterized by violent criminal acts such as kidnappings, cattle rustling, armed robbery, and attacks on communities and schools. The resulting consequences include loss of lives, destruction of livelihoods, forced displacement of populations, disruptions to market activities, and abduction of school children. Statistics data reflect the severity and persistence of the problem. For instance, in 2021 alone, Kaduna State recorded 3,348 banditry-related incidents resulting in 1,192 fatalities (Olapeju & Peter, 2021). Further data from the region and neighbouring states suggest a general upward trajectory in attacks, kidnappings, and violence linked to banditry continuing through 2023 and into 2024 (UNIDIR, 2024; Yunusa, 2024). The violence is notably concentrated in various Local Government Areas (LGAs) such as Chikun, Birnin Gwari, Giwa, Kajuru, and Igabi, consistently identified as hotbeds of bandit activity.

The study indicates that the rise in banditry in Kaduna and the wider Northwest region is rooted in complex interactions of socio-economic and governance factors. These include widespread poverty, particularly in rural areas, high youth unemployment, estimated around 53% for youth in the region (NBS, 2022), marginalization, weak governance, and limited state presence in rural communities. Environmental pressures such as declining arable land and water resources due to climate change have exacerbated competition over scarce resources, fuelling tensions between farmers and herders, sometimes exploited by armed groups (International Crisis Group, 2020; UNIDIR, 2024).

Bandit groups are fluid and militarised, employing rapid motorbike attacks from forested hideouts, frequently targeting local communities across the Local Government Areas (UNIDIR, 2024). The motivations behind bandit operations are primarily economic, including ransom from kidnappings, cattle rustling, extortion, and illegal mining. These activities significantly strain local economies and deepen insecurity, resulting in thousands of deaths, mass displacements, destruction of educational facilities, and food insecurity (Yunusa, 2024; UNIDIR, 2024).

This paper therefore focuses on the roles of local security arrangements, especially the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS), in countering banditry in this challenging environment.



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Through an assessment grounded in crime and security studies literature, the study investigates how community policing and state-sanctioned vigilance efforts operate, their effectiveness, and the limitations they face amid Kaduna's complex security landscape.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Kaduna State's escalating security crisis is deeply rooted in widely acknowledged shortcomings of the formal state security apparatus to adequately safeguard its citizens. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), constitutionally charged with maintaining internal law and order, has been extensively described in academic and policy literature as chronically underfunded, overstretched, ill-equipped, and suffering from a severe public trust deficit due to systemic corruption and human rights abuses (Olapeju & Peter, 2021; Adegbami, 2024). The immense scale and complexity of insecurity challenges, especially the asymmetric threats posed by agile, forest-based bandit groups, have exceeded police capacity. This insufficiency has compelled frequent involvement of the Nigerian military in internal security operations, despite its primary training being geared toward conventional external threats rather than counterinsurgency or community policing (Olapeju & Peter, 2021; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2024).

However, militarised responses have been insufficient to resolve the crisis. Military presence in civilian areas sometimes exacerbates tensions due to excessive force or lack of nuanced engagement, diminishing prospects for trust-building essential for sustainable security (Adegbami, 2024; Yunusa, 2024). Kaduna's difficult terrain, including vast forests, further complicates gathering timely intelligence to dismantle loosely structured, mobile bandit groups (UNIDIR, 2024). In response to these security inadequacies, community-based security initiatives have proliferated. One form with historical roots is the "Yan Sa Kai" (Hausa for "volunteer guards"), informal community vigilante groups emerging to provide grassroots protection in many northern Nigerian rural areas. These groups operate with varying degrees of coordination with formal agencies but face criticism for inconsistent training, unclear legal status, and occasional human rights abuses (Olapeju & Peter, 2021).

Recognizing the necessity and risks of decentralised efforts, Kaduna State instituted formal reforms by establishing the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS) in 2016. KADVS is a state-sanctioned outfit tasked with assisting the overstretched NPF in crime prevention, intelligence gathering, and community liaison (Yunusa, 2024). This marks a policy shift, acknowledging



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conventional policing limitations and imposing structure and state oversight on local security initiatives like Yan Sa Kai.

Despite these reforms, communities suffer devastating impacts from security failures. For example, in September 2024, armed bandits attacked the Primary Healthcare Centre in Kuyallo, Birnin-Gwari LGA, abducting nurses and patients after failing to find targets at a nearby school (ThisDay, 2024). Such incidents reveal the direct dangers civilians face and expose the limitations of both formal and local security forces. Recurrent violence uproots families, disrupts agriculture, and threatens education, with long-term socio-economic consequences (UNIDIR, 2024; Yunusa, 2024). These challenges show the imperative need to assess how effectively local security frameworks like KADVS and vigilante groups complement formal security. Understanding their operational strengths, weaknesses, and relationships with state agencies and communities is vital for designing sustainable, rights-respecting, responsive security strategies in Kaduna State.

### **Research Questions**

This research work shall be guided by the following research questions

1. What are the dynamics and socio-economic contexts that shape armed banditry in the selected Local Government Areas of Kaduna State?
2. How effective has the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS) been in combating banditry, and what challenges and successes define its operations?
3. In what ways do KADVS operations intersect with community policing principles, and what are the human rights implications for local populations?

### **Research Objectives**

The article is guided by a set of core research objectives derived from the pressing need to understand the relationship between banditry and local security responses in Kaduna State. The inquiry seeks to synthesize and critically evaluate the existing body of knowledge to answer the following:

1. To examine the dynamics and socio-economic context of armed banditry in the selected Local Government Areas of Kaduna State.
2. To critically evaluate the effective has the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS) been in combating banditry, and what challenges and successes define its operations?



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3. To analyse ways KADVS operations intersect with community policing principles, and what are the human rights implications for local populations?

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) design to critically examine the role of local security outfits in combating banditry in Kaduna State between 2016 and 2024, with a particular focus on Chikun, Birnin Gwari, Giwa, Kajuru, and Igabi Local Government Areas. The choice of this design is informed by the need to synthesize existing scholarly debates, policy documents, and empirical reports to generate a comprehensive understanding of the security dynamics in the region. The SLR method is particularly suitable because it allows for the rigorous collation, evaluation, and interpretation of diverse sources while ensuring a transparent and replicable process that systematically identifies knowledge gaps and policy implications. Moreover, given the security sensitivities and practical challenges of fieldwork in conflict-affected zones like Kaduna, the SLR approach provides a feasible alternative that harnesses existing knowledge without compromising on analytical depth.

Data for the review were drawn exclusively from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic theses, government policy documents, legal frameworks, institutional reports, think-tank analyses, and media publications. Priority was given to works published between 2016 and 2024 to capture the most relevant and up-to-date evidence within the period under review, although seminal works preceding this timeframe were also included where necessary to provide conceptual grounding. The databases and repositories consulted include JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, African Journals Online (AJOL), and institutional publications from organizations such as the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, CLEEN Foundation, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

A thematic analysis approach was employed to organize and synthesize the literature. Retrieved materials were first screened based on relevance to the research objectives, and duplicates or non-contextual sources were excluded. The selected texts were then categorized into key thematic clusters, including: (i) the dynamics and socio-economic context of banditry in Kaduna State, (ii) the role and operational effectiveness of the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS), (iii) community policing frameworks and their limitations, and (iv) the human rights and governance



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implications of local security interventions. This thematic categorization enabled the study to systematically identify recurring patterns, contradictions, and gaps across different sources.

To ensure validity and reliability, the review process adhered to standard SLR protocols. Sources were cross-verified through triangulation, whereby information from academic articles was compared with policy documents and independent media reports to minimize bias. Additionally, emphasis was placed on integrating perspectives from both local and international authors to provide a balanced analysis. The study also incorporated official statistics, such as government-reported crime data and displacement figures, to supplement perception-based evidence found in much of the literature.

The methodology is inherently qualitative and interpretive, with analysis driven by the research objectives rather than statistical generalizations. This allows for a nuanced understanding of how local security outfits operate within the broader security architecture and how their activities intersect with socio-economic realities, governance structures, and community experiences. Limitations of this methodology include the reliance on secondary data, which may reflect reporting biases or gaps in coverage, and the absence of direct field interviews with affected populations or security actors. However, by systematically analyzing a wide range of existing sources, the study provides a robust foundation for understanding the complexities of banditry and community-based security interventions in Kaduna State.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Securitization Theory**

The securitization framework in security studies, primarily developed by the Copenhagen School scholars Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998), explains how certain issues are framed and treated as security threats. It posits that issues become securitised not simply because they are inherently dangerous, but because political actors construct them as existential threats through speech acts and social practice. In other words, securitisation occurs when leaders, governments, or institutions declare an issue to be an urgent threat to the survival of a state, society, or collective identity. This framing justifies extraordinary measures, including the suspension of normal political procedures, increased security spending, or restrictions on civil liberties. For example, matters such as migration, banditry, or terrorism become securitized when labelled threats to national survival, moving them beyond routine political discourse into emergency



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security domains. Crucially, securitisation requires audience acceptance, the public, media, or international actors must buy into the threat narrative for it to be effective.

Therefore, the theory helps illuminate how Kaduna's political actors have constructed armed banditry as an existential threat to the state's stability and social order. By securitizing banditry, the Kaduna State Government legitimised unconventional security policies, such as the formal establishment of KADVS in 2016, to supplement overstretched formal security agencies. This securitised framing enabled the deployment of extraordinary security measures, including empowering KADVS with authority for intelligence gathering and community policing roles, often beyond typical civil policing functions. It shaped public acceptance, or contestation, of these local security initiatives as necessary responses to the menace of banditry. At the same time, securitisation theory provides a critical lens to assess how such emergency measures risk normalising militarised or extra-legal practices that may impact human rights and governance norms within Kaduna State.

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptualizing Banditry Beyond Rural Criminality**

The scholarly and policy literature on insecurity in Northwest Nigeria has progressively moved beyond simplistic definitions of banditry as mere rural criminality or cattle rustling. Contemporary analyses conceptualize the phenomenon as a complex and multifaceted form of organized crime that poses a strategic threat to both human security and state stability (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Banditry in this context is defined as a "composite crime" that encompasses a wide spectrum of violent and extractive activities, including mass kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, wanton killings, cattle rustling on a commercial scale, sexual and gender-based violence, the imposition of illegal levies and taxes on farming communities, and the trafficking of arms and drugs (Hassan, 2020; Salkida, 2021). This characterization highlights a departure from traditional forms of social banditry, where perpetrators might have been seen as previously perceived as peasant resistance to injustice.", to a more vicious and destructive form driven by commercial motives.

The strategic evolution and increasing sophistication of bandit groups have led to further conceptual refinements. According to Awotayo et al. (2023), the growing nexus between bandits and violent extremist organizations in terms of recruitment, logistics, and arms sharing has complicated the security landscape. This has prompted some scholars to describe the phenomenon



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### **The Evolution and Manifestations of Banditry in Kaduna's Epicentres**

The historical trajectory of banditry in Kaduna State and the broader Northwest region is rooted in a confluence of protracted conflicts and socio-economic pressures. The literature traces its origins to the intensification of farmer-herder conflicts over dwindling land and water resources, a situation exacerbated by climate change, ineffective land dispute resolution, and the historical socio-political marginalisation of Fulani pastoralist communities (International Crisis Group, 2020). These grievances provided the initial fuel for the formation of self-defence militias, such as the Fulani 'Yan Bindiga', which emerged in response to perceived injustices and attacks from Hausa farmer-dominated vigilante groups known as 'Yan sa kai' (Rufai, 2021). Over time, what began as a cycle of retaliatory violence was instrumentalised and commercialised, transforming these armed groups into organised criminal syndicates motivated primarily by financial gain (Mohammed, 2022).

This evolution is vividly manifested in the persistent and brutal attacks across the five focus LGAs of Kaduna State. In Chikun LGA, banditry has been marked by audacious mass kidnappings targeting educational institutions, such as the abduction of over 140 pupils from Bethel Baptist Secondary School in July 2021 and the kidnapping of 137 students from Kuriga in March 2024 (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2024). These incidents highlight a deliberate strategy of targeting vulnerable populations to maximise ransom revenues and generate widespread fear.

Birnin Gwari LGA has been described as a "danger zone" and an epicentre of banditry, characterized by frequent highway abductions, raids on communities, and direct assaults on state security infrastructure (SBM Intelligence, 2022). A notable incident was the April 2022 attack on a military base in Polwire by the jihadist group Ansaru, an ally of local bandits, which resulted in



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the deaths of seventeen soldiers and three civilian vigilantes, demonstrating the group's military capabilities and their challenge to state presence (ACLED, 2022).

In Giwa LGA, the security landscape is further complicated by clashes between rival bandit factions competing for territory and resources, leading to intense violence that traps local communities in the crossfire (Hassan & Owen, 2023). These internal conflicts do not diminish the threat to civilians; rather, they create a more volatile and unpredictable environment, alongside continued attacks by security forces aiming to neutralise bandit leaders in the area.

Kajuru LGA has experienced a relentless wave of kidnappings and attacks on villages and religious institutions, with reports of dozens of individuals, including women and children, being abducted in a single incident. The successful thwarting of a planned attack in the Tashan Ice community in February 2024, through a community-based early warning system involving the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS), underscores both the constant threat level and the potential of localised security responses (Premium Times, 2024). Finally, Igabi LGA has suffered from frequent attacks, killings, and kidnappings that have severely impacted rural livelihoods and led to the implementation of drastic, and often disruptive, government containment measures (Cadre Harmonisé, 2023).

The cumulative impact of incessant banditry across Kaduna State constitutes a profound socio-economic catastrophe, systematically dismantling the foundations of rural life and driving a severe humanitarian crisis. The most immediate consequence is the mass displacement of populations, as residents of attacked communities are forced to abandon their homes and lands, seeking refuge in safer urban centres or overcrowded Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. This displacement creates a secondary crisis, overwhelming the resources of host communities and leaving the displaced vulnerable and with limited access to fundamental necessities such as food, water, healthcare, and education. These scenarios lead to the desertion of entire communities, the dislocation of families, and the accentuation of humanitarian needs (Abdussalam et al., 2022).

The literature thus paints a clear picture of banditry evolving from a grievance-driven conflict into a self-sustaining criminal enterprise. The initial drivers, such as resource competition and marginalisation, created the conditions for violence. However, the primary manifestations of banditry today, kidnapping for ransom, illegal taxation, and large-scale cattle rustling—are fundamentally economic activities. This shift has created a powerful financial incentive structure



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that exists independently of the original grievances. The enormous profits generated from these criminal activities are reinvested into the "banditry economy" itself. Ransom payments, which can run into millions of Naira, are used to procure more sophisticated weaponry, fund operations, and recruit from the large pool of unemployed and disaffected youth, creating a dangerous feedback loop. Consequently, banditry is no longer merely a symptom of state failure but has become an entrenched economic system that actively resists resolution because key actors, both criminal and potentially collusive, profit from its continuation.

Furthermore, the state's response and the bandits' evolution reveal a strategic convergence between criminality and insurgency. The official designation of bandits as "terrorists" by the Nigerian government is not just a rhetorical move but a reflection of their functional capabilities and actions. Bandit groups increasingly employ tactics associated with insurgents, such as establishing control over territory, imposing their own systems of taxation and justice, and launching coordinated attacks against state symbols, including military bases. There is also growing evidence of operational collaboration, logistical sharing, and mutual recruitment between bandit groups and established violent extremist organisations like Ansaru and factions of Boko Haram.

### **Social Grievances of Banditry**

The literature is unequivocal in identifying deep-seated structural and socio-economic deprivations as the primary incubator for armed banditry in Kaduna State and the wider Northwest region. According to Rufus and Aliyu (2025), widespread poverty and high rates of youth unemployment are fundamental drivers that create a large and vulnerable pool of individuals susceptible to recruitment by armed criminal groups. In a context of extreme inequality, socio-economic exclusion, and a lack of viable livelihood opportunities, the allure of banditry as a means of survival and wealth accumulation becomes a powerful force. Governor Uba Sani of Kaduna State has himself highlighted poverty and economic exclusion as the root causes of insecurity, noting that populations with high rates of financial exclusion are particularly vulnerable to recruitment. This perspective is supported by numerous studies, which argue that as long as these underlying conditions of deprivation and desperation persist, violent criminality will continue to thrive.

Within this broader context of economic grievance, the specific historical narrative of the marginalisation of Fulani pastoralists is identified as a crucial catalysing factor in the initial emergence of organised violence. Scholars like Yahaya and Bello (2020) emphasise the link



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between banditry and the long-term socio-political and economic marginalisation of the Fulani ethnic group. This includes grievances related to the loss of traditional grazing routes, discriminatory land use policies that favoured sedentary farmers, and a sense of political exclusion and injustice. The feeling of being dispossessed, deprived, and frustrated among segments of the Fulani community, coupled with a weak justice system that failed to address their complaints, led to the formation of some of the earliest armed self-defence groups, which later morphed into criminal bandit gangs. While banditry has since become a more heterogeneous phenomenon involving multiple ethnic groups and purely criminal actors, its origins are deeply intertwined with these unresolved issues of social and economic justice.

The persistence and expansion of banditry are inextricably linked to profound deficits in governance and the institutional weakness of the Nigerian state. According to Mustapha (2019), the "fragility of the Nigerian state," characterised by weak security and justice institutions, is a primary enabling factor for the prevalence of banditry. This weakness manifests in the state's inability to project authority and provide basic security across its entire territory, leading to the existence of vast "ungoverned spaces" (Agbibo, 2013). These areas, particularly the extensive and rugged forest reserves like Kamuku, Kuyanbana, and Rugu that span Kaduna and neighbouring states, serve as ideal operational bases, training grounds, and safe havens for bandit groups, effectively beyond the reach of conventional security forces (United States Institute of Peace, 2021). The state's declining role in managing these forests and the general weakness of local government authorities have allowed bandits to exploit these enclaves to build their capacity and launch attacks with impunity.

This problem of state weakness is compounded by the porosity of Nigeria's international borders, particularly with the Sahel region, which facilitates the unchecked proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) (UNODC, 2022). The influx of sophisticated weaponry has dramatically increased the lethality and audacity of bandit groups, often leaving state security forces outgunned. Furthermore, pervasive corruption within the security sector and the broader political system undermines state capacity and erodes public trust (Transparency International, 2021). Allegations of corruption, human rights abuse by security forces, and the negative impact of military operations on local communities have been cited as significant challenges that hinder effective counter-banditry efforts (Amnesty International, 2022). This institutional decay creates an environment



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where criminal groups can operate with minimal fear of apprehension or prosecution, reinforcing a cycle of violence and impunity.

The ecological context of the Sahel and sub-Saharan regions of Nigeria provides another critical layer to the etiology of banditry. Environmental degradation, driven by factors such as climate change, desertification, and population growth, has intensified competition over scarce natural resources, particularly land for farming and pasture for grazing (Blench, 2010). According to Umar (2021), this climate-induced migration and resource competition is a prominent trigger of armed banditry in Northwest Nigeria. The conflict over land and water between nomadic Fulani pastoralists and predominantly Hausa farming communities, exacerbated by ineffective land dispute resolution systems, created the initial violent dissonance that spiraled into organized criminality (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

Government policies have, at times, aggravated these tensions. For instance, the decision by the Zamfara State government to clear extensive forests and grazing reserves for farming displaced numerous Fulani pastoralists, forcing them into areas where they were already victims of hostility and extortion from corrupt local officials and a weak justice system (Rufai, 2021). This process contributed to the radicalization of a fragmented group of dispossessed and frustrated individuals, giving birth to some of the earliest known armed bandit groups (Hassan, 2019). Therefore, while banditry has evolved into a complex criminal enterprise, its roots are deeply embedded in these environmental pressures and the unresolved, often violent, competition for the resources essential for survival in the region (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2022).

The failure of the state to effectively govern and provide security has created more than just a passive vacuum; it has opened up a market opportunity that bandit groups have actively and violently exploited. The state's inability to deliver on its core functions of security and justice is the foundational condition upon which the banditry economy is built (Ewetan & Ike, 2014). In the "ungoverned spaces" where state presence is minimal or non-existent, bandit groups have stepped in not merely to hide, but to establish a form of alternative, predatory governance (Meagher, 2018). They exercise de facto sovereignty by imposing their own rules, levying taxes on communities for protection or access to farmland, and violently mediating disputes. In this sense, they are not simply criminals operating within the confines of a weak state; they have become direct competitors to the state, offering a perverse and violent form of social contract. The weakness of



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the state is, therefore, the central pillar of the bandits' business model, making any genuine effort to strengthen governance a direct threat to their existence (Agbiboa, 2016).

### **The Nigerian State's Formal Security Apparatus**

The formal security architecture in Nigeria is constitutionally anchored in federal institutions, primarily the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Nigerian Armed Forces, which are tasked with maintaining internal and external security, respectively. The NPF holds the primary mandate for internal law and order, crime detection, and prevention (Alemika, 2013). In response to the escalating banditry crisis, both the police and the military have been deployed in various operations across Kaduna State, conducting patrols, engaging bandits in firefights, and attempting to secure vulnerable communities. These efforts have recorded some successes, including the neutralisation of bandit leaders and the foiling of attacks (International Crisis Group, 2023). However, the literature overwhelmingly concludes that the performance of these formal agencies has been largely inadequate to contain the scale and intensity of the threat (Oluwaniyi, 2011).

The limitations of the formal security apparatus are systemic and multifaceted. A primary and recurring theme is the chronic under-resourcing of these institutions. According to Abraham and Sakariyau (2023), security operations are consistently undermined by inadequate funding, which translates into a lack of sufficient personnel, modern arms, and essential equipment like night vision technology. This resource deficit is compounded by institutional challenges, including allegations of corruption, mismanagement, and debilitating inter-agency rivalry that hampers effective coordination (Harnischfeger, 2012). Perhaps most critically, there exists a profound and persistent trust deficit between the security forces and the civilian population. Decades of reported human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, extortion, and a culture of impunity have alienated communities, making them reluctant to share the very intelligence that is crucial for effective policing and counter-banditry operations (Human Rights Watch, 2022; CLEEN Foundation, 2020). This deep-seated mistrust renders collaborative security models like community policing largely ineffective in practice.

The manifest failure of the formal security sector to guarantee the safety of lives and property has directly precipitated the rise of vigilantism as a widespread, community-driven response. According to Onuoha (2017), the proliferation of non-state security actors in Nigeria is a direct consequence of the police's inability to fulfil their core mandate. This phenomenon is not new;



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non-state policing has historical roots in Nigeria's pre-colonial and colonial past, where communities fashioned their own citizens' responses to insecurity (Baker, 2007). In the context of the banditry crisis, vigilantism has emerged as a pragmatic, if often problematic, solution to fill the security vacuum left by the state (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009).

These local security outfits are not monolithic and can be broadly categorised. One category includes state-sponsored or state-recognised groups, such as the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS), which operate with a degree of legal backing and are intended to function in collaboration with formal security agencies. The other category comprises informal, often ad-hoc and ethnically-based militias, such as the Hausa-dominated 'Yan sa kai' (volunteer guards), which form organically in response to specific threats (Last, 2008). While these groups are often born from a genuine desire to protect their communities, their emergence introduces significant complexities and risks. Lacking formal training, operating outside clear legal frameworks, and often motivated by ethnic solidarity, these informal groups are prone to engaging in extrajudicial violence, torture, and unlawful arrests, thereby contributing to the cycle of violence rather than resolving it (Ibrahim, 2015). The formation of such groups along ethnic lines has been shown to exacerbate intercommunal tensions, as seen in the retaliatory violence between Hausa and Fulani militias that marked the early stages of the conflict in the Northwest (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

**Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Security Actors in Kaduna State**

To clarify the complex and overlapping roles of the various security providers operating in Kaduna State, the following table provides a comparative analysis based on key organizational and operational attributes identified in the literature.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Nigeria Police Force (NPF)</b>	<b>Nigerian Military</b>	<b>Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS)</b>	<b>Informal Vigilante Groups (e.g., Yan Sa Kai)</b>
<b>Legal Status</b>	Federal, Constitutional	Federal, Constitutional	State-level, Statutory Law (Law No. 10 of 2016)	Informal, Extra-legal



<b>Primary Mandate</b>	Internal law & order	External defence, internal security support	Assist NPF, crime prevention, protect public assets	Community self-defence
<b>Funding Source</b>	Federal Government	Federal Government	Kaduna State Government (often inadequate)	Community contributions, donations
<b>Recruitment</b>	Formal, national process	Formal, national process	Formalized state/local process, community nomination	Ad-hoc, voluntary, often ethnic-based
<b>Accountability</b>	Formal (Police Service Commission, etc.), but weak in practice	Formal (Court Martial), often opaque	State Vigilance Committee, liaison with NPF	To community leaders, often weak or non-existent
<b>Key Challenges</b>	Underfunding, corruption, trust deficit, overstretched	Unsuited for policing, human rights abuses	Poor funding, inadequate training, political capture	Extrajudicial violence, ethnic profiling, lack of training

### **The Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS)**

The formal security architecture in Nigeria is constitutionally anchored in federal institutions, primarily the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Nigerian Armed Forces, which are tasked with maintaining internal and external security, respectively. The NPF holds the primary mandate for internal law and order, crime detection, and prevention (Alemika, 2013). In response to the escalating banditry crisis, both the police and the military have been deployed in various operations across Kaduna State, conducting patrols, engaging bandits in firefights, and attempting to secure



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vulnerable communities. These efforts have recorded some successes, including the neutralisation of bandit leaders and the foiling of attacks (International Crisis Group, 2023). However, the literature overwhelmingly concludes that the performance of these formal agencies has been largely inadequate to contain the scale and intensity of the threat (Oluwaniyi, 2011).

The limitations of the formal security apparatus are systemic and multifaceted. A primary and recurring theme is the chronic under-resourcing of these institutions. According to Abraham and Sakariyau (2023), security operations are consistently undermined by inadequate funding, which translates into a lack of sufficient personnel, modern arms, and essential equipment like night vision technology. This resource deficit is compounded by institutional challenges, including allegations of corruption, mismanagement, and debilitating inter-agency rivalry that hampers effective coordination (Harnischfeger, 2012). Perhaps most critically, there exists a profound and persistent trust deficit between the security forces and the civilian population. Decades of reported human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, extortion, and a culture of impunity have alienated communities, making them reluctant to share the very intelligence that is crucial for effective policing and counter-banditry operations (Human Rights Watch, 2022; CLEEN Foundation, 2020). This deep-seated mistrust renders collaborative security models like community policing largely ineffective in practice.

The manifest failure of the formal security sector to guarantee the safety of lives and property has directly precipitated the rise of vigilantism as a widespread, community-driven response. According to Onuoha (2017), the proliferation of non-state security actors in Nigeria is a direct consequence of the police's inability to fulfil their core mandate. This phenomenon is not new; non-state policing has historical roots in Nigeria's pre-colonial and colonial past, where communities fashioned their own citizens' responses to insecurity. In the context of the banditry crisis, vigilantism has emerged as a pragmatic, if often problematic, solution to fill the security vacuum left by the state (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2011). These local security outfits are not monolithic and can be broadly categorized. One category includes state-sponsored or state-recognised groups, such as the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS), which operate with a degree of legal backing and are intended to function in collaboration with formal security agencies. The other category comprises informal, often ad-hoc and ethnically-based militias, such as the Hausa-dominated 'Yan sa kai' (volunteer guards), which form organically in response to specific



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threats (Last, 2008). While these groups are often born from a genuine desire to protect their communities, their emergence introduces significant complexities and risks. Lacking formal training, operating outside clear legal frameworks, and often motivated by ethnic solidarity, these informal groups are prone to engaging in extrajudicial violence, torture, and unlawful arrests, thereby contributing to the cycle of violence rather than resolving it (Ibrahim, 2015). The formation of such groups along ethnic lines has been shown to exacerbate intercommunal tensions, as seen in the retaliatory violence between Hausa and Fulani militias that marked the early stages of the conflict in the Northwest (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

### **The Policy Framework for Community Policing in Nigeria**

In response to the widely acknowledged limitations of the traditional, reactive policing model, Nigeria formally adopted the philosophy of community policing in 2004, a policy later reinforced by the Nigeria Police Act of 2020. The central aim of community policing is to fundamentally restructure the relationship between the police and the public, moving away from a model of confrontation and alienation towards one of partnership and collaboration (CLEEN Foundation, 2020). According to the framework adopted by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), community policing is designed to create an atmosphere where police and law-abiding citizens can work together to proactively solve problems, share resources, prevent crime, and improve the overall quality of community life. This represents a paradigm shift towards a democratic, participatory, and consultative approach to security, where the community is not merely a passive recipient of police services but an active co-producer of public safety (Olanrewaju, 2021).

The key principles of this model include establishing active partnerships, a commitment by the police to high-quality service delivery, and the development of appropriate skills and attitudes among police personnel through continuous training and mentoring. The policy also requires the police to involve communities in setting local policing priorities, thereby ensuring that law enforcement activities are aligned with the specific needs and concerns of the populace. The 2020 Police Act further institutionalized this by providing for the establishment of Community Policing Committees at the state level, comprising representatives from both the NPF and the local community, to enhance engagement and crime reduction (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020). In principle, this framework provides a robust foundation for building trust and fostering the



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cooperation necessary to tackle complex, localised security challenges like banditry (Ibeanu & Momoh, 2022).

Despite the existence of a formal policy framework, the practical implementation of community policing in Kaduna State has been fraught with challenges and has yielded limited success. A study focusing on the Kaduna Central Senatorial District concluded that community policing has had "little or no impact on reducing crimes," attributing this failure to ineffective strategies and significant implementation gaps (Bako & Ishaku, 2022). The primary strategies employed by the police, such as foot patrols, occasional community meetings, and public education programs, have not translated into a meaningful reduction in crime or a tangible improvement in security. The literature identifies several key reasons for this failure. According to Usman and Adamu (2023), these include poor implementation strategies that lack genuine community ownership, a persistent information gap between the police and the public, and a lack of adequate training for police officers in the core competencies of community engagement and problem-solving (Akinlabi, 2021).

Another critical implementation gap is the lack of genuine community involvement in the planning and execution of security initiatives. Rather than being equal partners, communities are often treated as passive sources of information, which leads to unrealistic expectations and disillusionment when crime rates do not fall. A study on public perception in Jema'a and Jaba LGAs found that while a majority of residents attested to the effectiveness of community policing in principle, they also identified significant problems, including inadequate funding, a lack of reliable information channels, poor training and equipment for participants, and the absence of clear enabling legislation at the local level (Yohanna, 2021). International organisations like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have attempted to address these capacity deficits by providing training on community policing and human rights to divisional police officers in Kaduna and other states, but these interventions are often limited in scale and face the challenge of overcoming deep-seated institutional inertia (UNODC, 2022).

The ultimate failure of community policing to take root in Kaduna State is intrinsically tied to the broader, systemic challenges that define police-community relations across Nigeria. The philosophy of community policing is predicated on mutual trust, but the NPF is plagued by a severe and historically entrenched trust deficit. Major segments of the Nigerian population view the police



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in negative terms, an image reinforced by pervasive corruption, brutality, and a perceived lack of accountability (Ikeanyibe & Asogwa, 2021). A 2022 Afrobarometer survey revealed that over 65% of Nigerians distrust the police, a sentiment that hinders any meaningful cooperation. This lack of trust creates a wide communication gap, where citizens are reluctant to report crimes or provide intelligence for fear of being exposed to criminals or extorted by the police themselves.

Furthermore, the implementation of community policing is obstructed by political interference, where powerful individuals influence the course of justice, and by an institutional resistance to change from within the NPF itself, where some corrupt officials prefer the status quo (Transparency International, 2021). Without addressing these fundamental issues of police legitimacy, accountability, and professionalism, the partnership model central to community policing cannot be actualised (Ojo, 2020). The policy, therefore, remains largely an unimplemented ideal, a blueprint for a relationship that does not yet exist on the ground.

A critical analysis of the security landscape in Kaduna suggests that the discourse around "community policing" may, in some instances, serve as a rhetorical cover for a different reality. The core tenets of community policing, deep partnership, trust-building, and joint problem-solving between the police and citizens, remain largely aspirational, as evidenced by studies showing its minimal impact and the persistent trust deficit. Concurrently, the state government's most visible security initiative has been the massive recruitment and deployment of the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS), a state-managed vigilante outfit. This indicates that the state's de facto security strategy relies more on outsourcing security functions to a paramilitary auxiliary body rather than undertaking the arduous and politically difficult institutional reforms required to build genuine trust and partnership between the NPF and local communities. Consequently, the "community policing" label is often applied to what is essentially a form of state-managed vigilantism, a practice that conveniently sidesteps the fundamental challenge of reforming the primary institution of policing and risks conflating community participation with the mobilisation of state-controlled local forces (International Crisis Group, 2020; Powell & O'Dea, 2022).

While the emergence of local security outfits is an understandable response to state failure, the literature provides a stark warning about their potential to become perpetrators of violence and human rights abuses. Lacking formal training, legal oversight, and institutional accountability, vigilante groups frequently resort to brutal and extrajudicial methods in the name of fighting crime.



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Reports from organisations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented numerous cases across Nigeria where vigilante groups have been responsible for scores of summary executions, torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, and arbitrary detentions (Amnesty International, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2022). These groups often operate with reckless abandon and impunity, killing and maiming people under the guise of enforcing order.

### **2.3. Synthesis and Discussion**

A synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals that the relationship between state failure and the rise of vigilantism is not merely a linear cause-and-effect sequence but a complex, symbiotic cycle. The initial failure of the state's formal security apparatus to protect citizens from banditry creates the demand and legitimacy for community-based self-help initiatives, including both informal vigilantes and state-sanctioned outfits like KADVS (International Crisis Group, 2020). However, the subsequent institutionalisation and reliance on these local outfits create a perverse incentive for the state to continue neglecting its primary security responsibilities. The existence of KADVS, for example, allows the state government to project an image of proactive security governance while simultaneously failing to undertake the fundamental and costly reforms needed to make the Nigeria Police Force effective and trustworthy (Powell & O'Dea, 2022).

This dynamic creates a durable, hybrid security order where the state does not hold a true monopoly on violence, but rather coexists with a range of local actors in a state of continuous negotiation, collaboration, and contestation (Ibeanu & Momoh, 2022). Vigilante groups become an indispensable part of the security landscape, yet their presence absolves the state of the pressure to fix its own broken institutions. This symbiosis perpetuates a cycle of state weakness: the state's incapacity necessitates vigilantism, and the presence of vigilantism enables the state's continued incapacity. Breaking this cycle requires not just supporting local security initiatives, but fundamentally rebuilding the capacity and legitimacy of the formal state security sector (Ojo, 2020).

The case of the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS) exemplifies the profound paradoxes inherent in the state's strategy of formalising non-state security actors. On one hand, the state government has used its legislative power to create KADVS, granting it a legal identity, a formal mandate, and the authority to operate as an official security body. This act of formalisation is an attempt to co-opt and regulate the organic trend of vigilantism, bringing it under a semblance of



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state control and accountability (Isine, 2022). On the other hand, this conferral of legitimacy is hollowed out by the state's simultaneous failure to provide the necessary financial capacity, training, and oversight for KADVS to function professionally and effectively (BudgIT, 2022).

This contradiction, legitimacy without capacity, is deeply problematic. It effectively outsources the state's monopoly on legitimate violence to a non-state actor without ensuring that this actor is adequately resourced, disciplined, or controlled. This raises fundamental questions about state sovereignty and the long-term implications for the rule of law. An underfunded, under-trained, and poorly supervised state-sanctioned armed group is a significant liability. It risks becoming a predatory force that abuses its state-backed authority for its own ends, further eroding public trust in all forms of governance and security provision (Amnesty International, 2023; Zenn & Pieri, 2020). The KADVS model, as currently implemented, represents a formalisation of state fragility rather than a sustainable solution to it (International Crisis Group, 2022).

### **Gaps in Knowledge and Avenues for Future Research**

While the existing literature provides a broad and insightful overview of the security crisis in Kaduna State, this systematic review has identified several critical gaps in knowledge that warrant further empirical investigation. These gaps represent important avenues for future research that can contribute to a more nuanced understanding and more effective policy responses.

First, there is a notable lack of granular, comparative research on the differential effectiveness of various local security models. While the literature discusses KADVS and informal vigilantes, it rarely compares their performance, community perception, and operational outcomes side-by-side within the same localities. A comparative study across the five focus LGAs, Chikun, Birnin Gwari, Giwa, Kajuru, and Igabi, is needed to understand which models, or combinations of models, are more effective in specific contexts and why.

Second, the internal dynamics of KADVS remain a "black box." There is insufficient research on the day-to-day operational realities, command-and-control challenges, recruitment practices, and internal culture of KADVS units at the ward and LGA levels. Understanding how the organisation functions from the bottom up is crucial for assessing its true capacity and accountability.

Third, the perspectives of the bandits themselves are largely absent from the scholarly literature. Most analyses rely on secondary reports or community perceptions. Research that seeks to understand the motivations, organisational structures, internal hierarchies, and strategic



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calculations of the bandit groups, as well as their perceptions of the local security outfits they confront, would provide invaluable insights for conflict resolution and security strategy.

Fourth, assessments of the effectiveness of community policing and vigilante groups often rely on perception-based data from community members. While important, there is a need for more rigorous impact evaluations that attempt to use more objective metrics, such as localised crime statistics (where available and reliable), displacement patterns, and economic activity indicators, to measure the impact of different security interventions.

Finally, the gender dimension of the conflict is underexplored. While the literature notes that women are frequent victims of sexual violence and kidnapping, there is limited research on the specific roles that women play within both bandit groups and local security outfits, and how the conflict differentially impacts men and women beyond victimisation.

### **Policy Recommendations for Reforming Kaduna's Security Framework**

Based on a synthesis of the challenges and potential solutions identified in the reviewed literature, a more effective and sustainable security framework for Kaduna State must be holistic, multipronged, and genuinely community-centred. The literature points towards the following key policy directions:

1. There is need to reform the capacity and legitimacy of the Nigeria Police Force and Kaduna State Police Command. The Federal Ministry of Interior and Kaduna State Ministry of Internal Security must lead efforts to increase funding for improved training, modern equipment procurement, enhanced welfare, and anti-corruption measures. Establishing robust, independent accountability and citizen oversight mechanisms is essential to rebuild public trust and operational effectiveness, reducing overdependence on local security outfits.
2. Kaduna's Ministry of Economic Planning must coordinate sectoral ministries to implement poverty alleviation programs, expand youth employment opportunities, improve access to quality education and healthcare, and promote inclusive rural economic development. Addressing socio-economic drivers is critical for sustainable peace and to undercut bandit recruitment and community frustrations.
3. The Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS), operating under the Ministry of Internal Security, should be governed by a clear, legally enforceable framework developed with the



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Kaduna State House of Assembly. This includes mandatory human rights-centred training curricula, enforceable codes of conduct, disciplinary procedures, and independent oversight involving civil society and community representatives. Adequate and consistent financial support is necessary to prevent abuses and ensure professionalism.

4. Local Government Councils, supported by the Kaduna State Ministry of Internal Security, should empower and resource civilian-led Community Peace Committees and Early Warning-Early Response (EWER) Stakeholder Networks. These models encourage bottom-up security governance by linking communities, formal agencies, and local governments, fostering dialogue and locally led conflict resolution.
5. The Ministry of Internal Security and Kaduna State Bureau of Statistics must prioritize strengthening data collection on crime, displacement, and socio-economic indicators for rigorous impact measurement of security interventions. The Ministry of Women Affairs should integrate gender-sensitive analysis into security programming to address the different impacts of banditry and security measures on men and women.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the security landscape of Kaduna State, and Northwest Nigeria more broadly, is defined by crisis of state capacity and legitimacy. The manifest failure of the formal security apparatus, coupled with the largely rhetorical and unimplemented policy of community policing, has compelled the state to adopt a de facto strategy of outsourcing security to state-sponsored vigilante groups like the Kaduna State Vigilance Service (KADVS).

This study has argued that this approach represents a fundamental paradox of legitimacy without capacity. While the state legally empowers these local outfits, it simultaneously fails to provide the adequate funding, training, and oversight necessary for them to function as professional and accountable bodies. This dynamic creates a dangerous and volatile situation, turning a potential security asset into a significant liability prone to human rights abuses, predatory behaviour, and political capture.

Ultimately, the reliance on state-managed vigilantism is not a sustainable solution but rather a formalization of state fragility. It perpetuates a symbiotic cycle where the state's weakness necessitates local security actors, and their existence, in turn, absolves the state from the difficult but essential task of fundamental security sector reform. Breaking this cycle requires moving



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beyond stopgap measures and committing to the comprehensive rebuilding of trust, professionalism, and capacity within the primary institutions of state security.

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