State Response to Insecurity in North-Western Nigeria: An Institutional Analysis of the Katsina State Community Watch Corps

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Abstract

Since 2023, the Katsina State Government in North-western Nigeria has responded to a sustained crisis of banditry, kidnapping, and rural displacement by establishing the Community Watch Corps (KSCWC), a sub-national, community-anchored security outfit that now belongs to a wider family of state-level interventions including Amotekun in the South-West and the Hisbah Corps in Kano. This article undertakes an institutional analysis of the KSCWC, situating its emergence within the broader trajectory of insecurity in Nigeria's North-West and examining the tension between the state government's official narrative of success and available evidence of continuing attacks, personnel losses, and accountability concerns. Drawing on community policing theory, human security theory, and state capacity theory, the article argues that the KSCWC exemplifies a recurring pattern in Nigerian sub-national security governance: rapid institutional build-out that outpaces the legal, financial, and oversight architecture needed to sustain it. The analysis further demonstrates that headline statistics on Nigeria's insecurity crisis diverge sharply depending on whether they derive from householdperception surveys or eventbased conflict monitoring, a methodological distinction with direct implications for how the Corps' performance should be measured. The article concludes by identifying the specific empirical and institutional questions that require systematic evaluation, and by proposing a framework through which the KSCWC and comparable outfits might be assessed. It contributes to a thin but growing literature on sub-

national security governance in Nigeria and offers a template for the mixed-methods institutional evaluation this literature currently lacks.

Keywords: community watch corps; sub-national security; banditry; Katsina State; Nigeria; institutional capacity; human security

1. Introduction

Since the return of civil rule in 1999, the Nigerian state has struggled to guarantee the safety of lives and property across its constituent parts. What began as isolated pockets of communal disagreement, cattle theft, and highway robbery has, over the past decade and a half, developed into overlapping crises of insurgency, secessionist agitation, farmerherder conflict, and armed banditry that now define the country's security landscape (Human Rights Watch, 2026). Nowhere is this transformation more evident than in North-western Nigeria, where banditry has displaced cattle rustling as the region's defining security threat, and where Katsina State has emerged as one of the most heavily affected states in the federation.

It is against this backdrop that the Katsina State Government, under Governor Dikko Umaru Radda, established the Community Watch Corps (KSCWC) in 2023: a subnational, communitybased security outfit that has since expanded rapidly in personnel, equipment, and territorial coverage. Government officials have described the Corps as instrumental in reducing response times and improving intelligence gathering, and the state has been presented to visiting delegations as a reference model for communitydriven security (Katsina Mirror, 2026; The Nation, 2026). Yet this official narrative sits alongside contrary evidence: as at mid-2025, four local government areas remained under active bandit control despite the Corps' presence, and over one hundred Corps operatives and thirty police officers had been killed in the line of duty since 2024 (Blueprint Newspapers, 2025). Editorial commentary has further questioned the adequacy of the Corps' rules of engagement, legal oversight, and disciplinary mechanisms (Daily Trust, 2025).

This tension between proclaimed success and documented strain is not unique to Katsina. It reflects a broader pattern across Nigeria's expanding landscape of sub-national security outfits, including the Western Nigeria Security Network (Amotekun), the Civilian Joint
Task Force in Borno and Yobe, the Hisbah Corps in Kano, and the Ebubeagu network in the South-East (International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 2025). Despite the proliferation of these outfits, independent, systematic evaluation of their institutional performance remains rare; existing scholarship on Katsina State, in particular, has concentrated heavily on the socio-economic consequences of banditry rather than on the state's own institutional response to it (Faruk, 2022; Atiyaye et al., 2025). This article addresses that gap by offering an institutional analysis of the KSCWC: its emergence, its stated mandate, the evidence available on its performance, and the theoretical lenses through which its record can be understood. In doing so, it also confronts a methodological problem that has received insufficient attention in the wider literature on Nigerian insecurity: the striking divergence between household-perception survey data and event-based conflict-monitoring data, a divergence with direct consequences for how any security intervention's impact is measured.

2. The Insecurity Context: Nigeria, the North-West, and Katsina State

Nigeria's contemporary insecurity is multidimensional. In the North-East, the Boko Haram insurgency and its factions, including the Islamic State West Africa Province, continue to stage attacks notwithstanding repeated official claims that the group has been militarily degraded (Human Rights Watch, 2026). In the North-Central zone, protracted farmer-herder tensions have hardened into cycles of reprisal killing and displacement, while in the South-East, agitation linked to separatist groups has bred its own pattern of violence. It is, however, the North-West that has come to bear the heaviest and most sustained human cost of the country's security failures, driven almost entirely by armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom.

The scale of this crisis is difficult to state with precision, and the difficulty is itself analytically instructive. A National Bureau of Statistics household-perception survey covering May 2023 to April 2024 put the nationwide death toll from insecurity at over 600,000, with the North-

West alone accounting for more than 206,000 of these deaths (as reported in Vanguard, 2026). By contrast, event-based conflict-monitoring data for the same region show fatalities linked specifically to rural banditry and cattle rustling rising from 892 in 2023 to 1,452 in 2024, with Katsina, Zamfara, and Kaduna recording the highest tolls (European Union Agency for Asylum,
2025). These figures differ by roughly two orders of magnitude for what is substantially the same phenomenon. The gap is best read not as a contradiction to be resolved in favour of one source, but as evidence that household-perception surveys and event-based trackers measure different things: broad, self-reported exposure to violence across a national sample versus confirmed, attributable fatalities from documented incidents. Any evaluation of a specific security intervention, including the KSCWC, should specify which type of measure it relies on, since the two will rarely tell the same story.

Within this national picture, Katsina State's position is acute. A criminal economy of cattle rustling, kidnapping, and rural extortion grew out of earlier, more localised disputes over grazing routes and water resources, before hardened criminal gangs took advantage of the state's porous forests and weak security coverage to entrench themselves (Atiyaye et al., 2025). By 2024, twenty-two of the state's thirty-four local government areas were considered under active threat (Leadership, 2023; Daily Trust, 2025), and by mid-2025 Katsina recorded the highest number of kidnapping incidents of any Nigerian state, 131 in total, representing 13.1 per cent of the national figure for the review period (SBM Intelligence, 2025, as cited in Vanguard, 2025). Beyond the direct loss of life, agricultural production, the mainstay of the rural economy, has been severely disrupted: a study of maize farmers in Dandume Local Government Area found that annual output fell from about 60,000 bags before the onset of large-scale banditry to roughly 2,800 bags at the height of the crisis (Dutse International Journal of Social and Economic Research, 2024), while a related study spanning six local government areas found that banditry had measurably worsened poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and access to education and healthcare (Faruk, 2022). It is this combination of physical insecurity and socioeconomic collapse that created the conditions under which a community-based alternative could gain political and popular traction.

3. Theoretical Framework

Three bodies of theory inform the analysis that follows. Community policing theory holds that sustainable public safety depends on a collaborative relationship between security agencies and the communities they serve, in which local residents contribute knowledge, legitimacy, and oversight rather than functioning as passive recipients of security provision (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990). The KSCWC's recruitment of operatives from within the communities they patrol, and its establishment of a State Security Council Advisory Committee bringing together traditional rulers and religious leaders (The Nation, 2026), can be read as an attempt to operationalise this model, though the theory equally implies that legitimacy is contingent on accountability structures that residents can trust.

Human security theory reorients the referent of security away from the state and toward the individual, emphasising freedom from fear and freedom from want as jointly constitutive of security (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). Applied to Katsina, this framework directs attention beyond attack and casualty counts to the Corps' effect on residents' ability to farm, trade, and move without fear, a dimension that pure incident-count metrics can obscure.

State capacity theory, meanwhile, distinguishes between a state's despotic capacity, the raw ability to deploy coercive force, and its infrastructural capacity, the ability to implement policy, enforce rules, and sustain institutions through routine, legitimate channels (Migdal, 1988; Fukuyama, 2004). The KSCWC's rapid build-out in personnel and equipment illustrates a state exercising despotic capacity relatively quickly; the accountability concerns raised in public commentary, by contrast, point to a shortfall in the infrastructural capacity, legal oversight, disciplinary mechanisms, prosecutorial follow-through, needed to make that coercive capacity sustainable and legitimate (Daily Trust, 2025). Read together, these three frameworks suggest that an adequate evaluation of the KSCWC cannot rest on operational output alone; it must also examine institutional design and the lived experience of the communities the Corps is meant to protect.

4. Institutional Emergence and Evolution of the KSCWC

Governor Radda, who assumed office on 29 May 2023 on a campaign platform that placed insecurity at its centre, moved quickly to institutionalise a community-based response. Following consultations with security agencies, traditional and religious leaders, and civil society actors, his administration secured legislative backing through the Katsina State Community Watch Corps Law, signed on 6 September 2023, before formally launching the Corps on 10 October 2023 with a first batch of 1,456 trained operatives, supported by ten armoured personnel carriers, seventy patrol vehicles, and seven hundred motorcycles (Leadership, 2023; Katsina Mirror, 2025).

Recruitment proceeded in phases thereafter: a second batch of 550 operatives was inaugurated in November 2024, and a third batch of 100 officers followed in October 2025, extending the Corps' coverage to twenty of the state's thirty-four local government areas (Voice of Nigeria, 2024; Katsina Mirror, 2025). The government has since complemented the Corps with a dedicated Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs (The Nation, 2026), signalling an intent to embed the outfit within a permanent bureaucratic structure rather than treat it as an emergency, time-limited measure.

This institutional expansion has, however, been accompanied by significant strain. Over one hundred Corps members and thirty police officers have reportedly been killed in bandit attacks since 2024 (Blueprint Newspapers, 2025), and four local government areas, Kankara, Safana, Faskari, and Matazu, remained under active threat as at mid-2025 notwithstanding the Corps' deployment (Blueprint Newspapers, 2025). In June 2024, coordinated attacks on five villages in Kankara Local Government Area left more than fifty people dead in a single day, including members of the Corps itself (Premium Times, 2024, as republished in Genocide Watch, 2024). These episodes suggest that territorial expansion and personnel growth have not, on their own, translated into a commensurate reduction in the underlying threat in the most heavily contested local government areas.

5. Discussion: Reading the Gap Between Official Narrative and Ground Reality

The Katsina State Government has consistently presented the Corps as a largely successful intervention, citing expanded coverage, improved intelligence gathering, and a general decline in attacks in several local government areas (Katsina Mirror, 2026; The Nation, 2026). The evidence reviewed above suggests a more mixed picture, one in which despotic capacity has grown considerably while infrastructural capacity, legal clarity on rules of engagement, functioning prosecution mechanisms for erring members, and independent oversight, appears to lag behind (Daily Trust, 2025). This is consistent with a recurring pattern identified across Nigeria's sub-national security outfits more broadly (International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 2025): rapid, often politically popular institutional build-out, followed only later, if at all, by the legal and administrative scaffolding needed to sustain accountability and effectiveness. A second observation concerns measurement. Much of the public debate over the Corps' performance, and over Nigeria's insecurity crisis generally, relies on statistics whose divergent methodological bases are rarely made explicit. Treating a household-perception survey estimate and an event-based fatality count as interchangeable measures of the same underlying reality risks both overstating and understating an intervention's effect, depending on which figure is invoked and for what purpose. Any credible evaluation of the KSCWC, or of comparable outfits elsewhere, needs to specify its measurement basis explicitly and, where possible, triangulate across multiple data types, including resident perception, official patrol and incident records, and independent conflict-monitoring data, rather than relying on any single source.

Third, the human security lens draws attention to dimensions of the Corps' effect that incident counts alone cannot capture: whether farmers have resumed cultivation in previously abandoned fields, whether displaced residents have returned, and whether the pervasive fear documented in the socio-economic literature on Katsina (Faruk, 2022) has measurably eased. These are precisely the outcomes that a mixed-methods evaluation, combining trend analysis with structured resident interviews and surveys, is positioned to capture, and that a purely administrative or media-based account cannot.

6. Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

The Katsina State Community Watch Corps represents one of the most ambitious subnational security interventions in contemporary Nigeria, and its trajectory to date illustrates both the promise and the limits of rapid, community-anchored institutionbuilding undertaken in response to an acute security crisis. The evidence available at this stage indicates real gains in territorial coverage and personnel deployment, alongside persistent gaps in accountability, legal oversight, and the containment of violence in the most heavily affected local government areas. Understood through the combined lenses of community policing, human security, and state capacity theory, the Corps' record to date is best characterised as an expansion of coercive capacity that has outpaced the institutional infrastructure needed to govern it.

What is required to move beyond this characterisation is systematic, independent evaluation: a rigorous before-and-after analysis of insecurity trends using event-based data, a structured assessment of resident perceptions across the affected local government areas, and a documentary and institutional analysis of the Corps' legal framework, funding, and disciplinary mechanisms. This article has argued for the conceptual and theoretical scaffolding such an evaluation requires; a companion empirical study, currently in progress, undertakes that evaluation directly. Beyond Katsina, the analysis offered here provides a framework applicable to the wider family of Nigerian subnational security outfits, whose rapid proliferation across the federation makes independent, comparable institutional evaluation an increasingly urgent research priority.

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