



**Governance and National Security in Nigeria:
A Study of Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria Local Government Areas of Kaduna State**

**By
Abiodun Joseph Oluwadare**

&

Solomon Enema Ogidi

of

**Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Nigerian Defence
Academy, Kaduna**

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between governance and national security in Nigeria, with a specific focus on three local government areas in Kaduna State: Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria. Drawing on qualitative data and an extensive review of literature, the study interrogates how governance deficits manifested in poor service delivery, institutional weakness, corruption, and political exclusion, have fueled persistent insecurity across the three study areas. The paper adopts the failed-state theory and the human security framework as its analytical lenses. Findings reveal that Jama'a LGA is beleaguered by farmer-herder conflicts and kidnapping, exacerbated by weak state presence; Kajuru LGA continues to suffer deadly communal clashes along ethno-religious fault lines that have resisted government intervention; while Zaria LGA faces urban insecurity, banditry and the residual effects of the 2015 Zaria massacre. The paper argues that sustainable security in these localities requires governance reforms anchored in accountability, community engagement, and state-society trust. It recommends decentralised security governance, improved intelligence architecture, and inclusive political processes as pathways to peace.

Keywords: Governance, National Security, Farmer-Herder, Conflict, Banditry, Human Security



1. INTRODUCTION

The connexion between governance and national security constitutes one of the most debated themes in contemporary African political discourse. In Nigeria, this debate has assumed particular urgency given the country's escalating security challenges, ranging from Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East to banditry in the North-West and farmer-herder conflicts in the north central and beyond. Kaduna State, historically regarded as one of the most strategically important states in Northern Nigeria, sits at the epicentre of these converging threats, making it an ideal laboratory for examining the governance-security connexion at the sub-national level (Abdullahi, 2020; Ojielo, 2023).

Governance, broadly understood as the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority in the management of public affairs, remains a central determinant of state stability. When governance institutions are weak, unresponsive, or captured by narrow interests, the security environment deteriorates rapidly. Nigeria's 2019 National Security Strategy (NSS) itself acknowledges this linkage, recognising that poor governance, poverty, unemployment, and inequality constitute root causes of national insecurity (Nigeria NSS, 2019). Assessments of the NSS have, however, highlighted significant gaps between policy articulation and implementation, especially at the subnational level (Faseke, 2020; Ojielo, 2023).

Within Kaduna State, three local government areas stand out as particularly instructive case studies: Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria. Jama'a LGAs, located in the southern senatorial zone, has been a recurring hotspot for inter-communal violence, kidnapping and banditry, reflecting the governance vacuum created by inadequate state presence and socioeconomic marginalisation. Kajuru LGA, similarly located in southern Kaduna, has witnessed some of the most gruesome mass killings in Nigeria's recent history, with persistent attacks linked to farmer-herder antagonisms and ethno-religious polarisation. Zaria LGA, in the northern zone of the state, represents a different dimension of insecurity one rooted in urban violence, historical religious grievances, and the lingering consequences of the December 2015 military crackdown on the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) (Amnesty International, 2016; Wahab, 2024).

This paper investigates how governance deficits in Kaduna State have contributed to and in some cases created the security crises observable in Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria LGAs. The paper proceeds as follows: Section two establishes the conceptual and theoretical framework; Section



three provides a focused empirical review; Section four situates the study within the broader historical and socio-political context of Kaduna State; Section five offers an empirical analysis of each study area; Section six interrogates governance deficits and their security implications; Section seven concludes the paper; and Section eight proffers policy recommendations.

1.2 Conceptual Clarification

Governance

The concept of governance has undergone considerable scholarly refinement since its popularisation in development discourse during the late 1980s. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines governance as the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. This encompasses the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens articulate interests, exercise legal rights, meet obligations, and mediate their differences (UNDP, 2010). In a Nigerian context, governance operates at three interrelated levels federal, state, and local with each level bearing distinct responsibilities for service delivery, security, and developmental outcomes.

National Security

National security, as a concept, has evolved significantly from its Cold War-era preoccupation with military threats and territorial defence. Contemporary scholarship embraces a more expansive understanding that incorporates human security, economic security, environmental security, and community security (Wahab, 2024; Ojielo, 2023). Nigeria's 2019 National Security Strategy reflects this evolution, defining national security in holistic terms that encompass protection of citizens, preservation of territorial integrity, and promotion of national development (Nigeria NSS, 2019).

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored in two complementary theoretical frameworks: failed-state theory and the human security paradigm. Failed-state theory, as elaborated by scholars such as Robert Rotberg and Francis Fukuyama, posits that states fail when their central institutions lose the capacity or willingness to provide core public goods security, education, health, and justice to their citizens. In such environments, violent non-state actors, warlords, and criminal networks



fill the vacuum left by retreating state institutions (Ojielo, 2023; Wahab, 2024). Nigeria does not qualify as a failed state by most conventional indices; however, functional state failure the localised collapse of governance in specific regions or communities is a well-documented phenomenon in the country, particularly in rural areas of Kaduna, Zamfara, and Katsina states (Obi et al., 2023).

The human security paradigm, introduced by the UNDP's landmark 1994 Human Development Report and subsequently refined by the United Nations, shifts the referent object of security from the state to the individual. It identifies seven dimensions of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. This framework is especially appropriate for examining the security conditions in Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria, where threats are not principally external but emanate from the collapse of community order, economic marginalisation, and political exclusion. As Ojielo (2023) argues, sustainable national security in Nigeria requires addressing these human security deficits at the grassroots level, rather than relying solely on militarised responses.

1.4 Empirical Review

The empirical review on governance and security in Kaduna State has expanded considerably, reflecting the escalating nature of insecurity in the state. Abdullahi (2020) conducted a comprehensive study of the Kaduna State government's role in managing security challenges, finding that institutional fragmentation, poor inter-agency coordination, and limited community engagement have severely hampered effective security management. The study, based at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, surveyed 100 respondents from multiple local government areas and concluded that governance deficits are as responsible for insecurity as are external threats from armed groups. Abdullahi's findings provide a critical empirical baseline for the present study.

Faseke (2020) reviewed and analysed Nigeria's 2019 National Security Strategy, identifying significant gaps between the strategy's ambitious human security orientation and actual implementation at the state and local government levels. The study noted that local communities, frustrated by the state's failure to deliver security, have increasingly turned to vigilante groups and other self-help mechanisms. This finding has particular resonance for Jama'a and Kajuru LGAs, where vigilante groups have proliferated and, in several cases,



escalated rather than reduced violence (Faseke, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2019). The study's qualitative methodology, relying on key informant interviews and policy document analysis, informs the methodological approach of the present paper.

The farmer-herder conflict literature offers critical insights for understanding violence in Jama'a and Kajuru LGAs. Ugwueze et al. (2022) examined the nature of government responses to land-related conflicts in Africa, with specific reference to the Nigerian farmer-herder crisis. Their study, published in the journal *Society*, concluded that government responses have been characterised by reactive militarisation rather than structural conflict transformation, thereby addressing symptoms rather than root causes. This conclusion is consistent with the observations of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, cited in *Kashere Journal*, 2024), which noted that the farmer-herder conflict in Kaduna State de-escalated between 2013 and 2019 only to re-emerge with greater intensity in 2020.

Historical and Socio-Political Context of Kaduna State

Kaduna State, established as North-Central State in 1967 and renamed Kaduna State in 1976, occupies a pivotal position in Nigeria's political geography. With a land area of approximately 46,053 square kilometres and an estimated population of over 9 million people, the state hosts a remarkable diversity of ethnic groups including the Hausa-Fulani, Gbagyi, Adara, Bajju, Ham, Kataf, and over 60 other groups and religious communities, with Christians predominating in the south and Muslims in the north (Abdullahi 2020). This demographic composition has historically been a source of both cultural richness and ethno-religious tension, making governance a complex, multi-dimensional challenge.

The state's security history is punctuated by a series of violent episodes that trace the trajectory of governance failures. The Kaduna riots of 2000, in which between 1,000 and 5,000 people were killed following the introduction of Sharia law, set a grim precedent for the politicisation of religious identity (Abdullahi (2020). Subsequent decades witnessed the intensification of farmer-herder conflicts, the spread of Boko Haram-linked violence, and, most recently, an explosion of armed banditry, kidnapping, and mass atrocities. A particularly tragic milestone was the December 2015 crackdown by the Nigerian Army on the Islamic Movement of Nigeria in Zaria, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of IMN members and was subsequently condemned by Amnesty International (2016) as unlawful killings constituting possible crimes



against humanity.

Under the administration of Governor Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai (2015-2023), Kaduna State pursued a governance agenda that emphasised technocratic reform, infrastructure development, and social investment. However, the security situation continued to deteriorate, with the state recording the highest number of bandit attacks in north-western Nigeria 342 incidents out of 909 recorded regionally between 2013 and 2022 (Rufa'i et al., 2023). Critics, particularly from southern Kaduna, repeatedly accused the el-Rufai administration of bias in its security responses and inadequate protection of Christian and minority communities (AJCR, 2025; Hoffmann, 2023). The current administration of Governor Uba Sani, which came to power in 2023, has articulated a seven-pillar governance agenda with safety and security as the first pillar, signalling an awareness of the primacy of security in the state's developmental trajectory (KDSG, 2026).

The state is administratively divided into 23 local government areas, grouped into three senatorial zones: Kaduna North, Kaduna Central, and Kaduna South. The study areas Jama'a and Kajuru fall within the southern zone, while Zaria falls within the central zone. Each zone presents a distinct security profile, shaped by its particular social composition, economic structure, and political history, thereby providing a cross-sectional view of the governance-security connexion in the state.

1.5 Empirical Analysis of the Study Areas

Jama'a Local Government Area

Jama'a Local Government Area is located in the southern senatorial zone of Kaduna State, with Kafanchan as the largest commercial town in its vicinity. The LGA is home to several minority ethnic groups, including the Ham (Jaba) people, and has experienced recurrent inter-communal violence rooted in land disputes, ethno-religious differences, and competition over resources. Historically, the area has served as a flashpoint for southern Kaduna tensions, and recent years have seen a significant escalation in kidnapping, banditry, and attacks on farming communities (Abdullahi, 2020).

The governance architecture in Jama'a LGA reflects several systemic weaknesses that have direct security implications. First, the local government council, like most LGAs in Nigeria,



suffers from severe fiscal dependency on state government allocations, leaving it with minimal discretionary capacity to invest in community security infrastructure, early warning systems, or conflict mediation mechanisms. Ugwueze et al. (2022) identify this structural financial disempowerment of LGAs as a key contributor to the governance vacuum that armed groups exploit in rural areas. In Jama'a, the result has been an acute underinvestment in roads, schools, healthcare, and water supply precisely the public goods whose absence breeds resentment and makes communities susceptible to recruitment by violent groups.

Second, the deployment of security forces in Jama'a LGA has been inadequate relative to the geographic expanse of the area and the mobility of armed groups. Faseke (2020) observes that the proliferation of vigilante groups in such areas is a direct response to the state's security deficit, though these groups often lack proper training, oversight, and integration into formal security structures. In Jama'a, as in other parts of southern Kaduna, vigilante activities have sometimes degenerated into reprisal attacks, thereby perpetuating cycles of violence rather than containing them. The Centre for Democracy and Development has noted that the farmer-herder conflict in Kaduna State re-emerged with exceptional intensity in 2020, after a relative lull between 2013 and 2019, suggesting that the peace achieved during that period was a product of temporary suppression rather than structural governance reform.

Third, the relationship between traditional institutions and formal governance structures in Jama'a is characterised by tensions that undermine conflict resolution capacity. Obi et al. (2023) found that in several north-western communities, traditional rulers had formed covert alliances with bandits, sharing intelligence in exchange for protection of their domains. While this finding relates specifically to Zamfara State, its implications for Jama'a and similar communities are significant, as it raises questions about the integrity of the traditional governance structures that are frequently cited as potential vehicles for peacebuilding. In Jama'a, allegations of partisan patronage networks that reward political supporters and disadvantage political opponents in the allocation of security resources have further eroded community trust in governance institutions (Abdullahi, 2020).

The economic dimensions of insecurity in Jama'a LGA deserve particular emphasis. Agriculture is the dominant livelihood activity in the area, and the persistent insecurity has displaced farming communities, reduced agricultural output, and exacerbated food insecurity. The AJCR (2025) study on southern Kaduna found that farmer-herder violence has adversely



affected agriculture and the regional economy in the affected communities, with billions of naira in projected agricultural revenue lost annually. This economic devastation feeds directly back into the security environment, as unemployed youth become susceptible to recruitment by armed groups.

Kajuru Local Government Area

Kajuru Local Government Area, also located in southern Kaduna, is arguably the most emblematic case study of the governance security breakdown in the state. The LGA has been the site of some of the most catastrophic episodes of communal violence in recent Nigerian history. The Kajuru killings of February 2019, in which over 130 people were killed across multiple attacks and reprisals, attracted international condemnation and prompted emergency security deployments. The Coalition Against Kajuru Killings confirmed that the attacks followed a pattern of escalating communal retaliations that the state government was unable or unwilling to contain promptly. Subsequent years continued to witness attacks in Kajuru, with kidnappings of residents reported at various intervals through 2022 and 2023 (Premium Times, 2019-2023).

The governance deficits in Kajuru is most visible in the state's institutional response to the violence. Rather than pursuing long-term structural solutions such as land tenure reform, resettlement of displaced communities, and institution of independent conflict mediation mechanisms successive administrations have relied primarily on military deployments and curfews. Ugwueze et al. (2022) argue that this approach, replicated across Nigeria, treats land-related conflicts as law and order problems rather than governance deficits, thereby foreclosing sustainable resolution. The AJCR (2025) study found specific evidence of this pattern in southern Kaduna, noting that state and local governments have lacked adequate resources, commitment, and synergy in their security infrastructure to deal with the issues of land disputes, ethnic grievances, and migration.

The Chatham House analyst Hoffmann (2023) observed that the violence in southern Kaduna threatens to undermine Nigeria's democratic stability as a whole, arguing that the chronic failure of governance to address the root causes of the crisis risks normalising violence as a political and communal resource. In Kajuru specifically, the displacement of farming communities, the destruction of homes and livelihoods, and the erosion of intergroup trust have



created a security landscape in which even temporary peace is fragile. The farmer-herder conflict in Kajuru, as elsewhere in the region, is not reducible to ancient ethnic animosities; it is, at its core, a product of governance decisions and non-decisions regarding land access, resource management, and the equal protection of all citizens (Obi et al., 2023; AJCR, 2025).

Zaria Local Government Area

The most defining security episode in recent Zaria history is the December 2015 crackdown by the Nigerian Army on the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), also known as the Shia movement, led by Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky. In the course of suppressing an IMN procession, the Army killed hundreds of IMN members and buried many of them in a mass grave an act Amnesty International (2016) characterised as unlawful killings and a possible crime against humanity. The episode exposed profound governance failures: the absence of crowd-management protocols, the lack of accountability for security force excesses, and the state's reliance on kinetic force as the primary tool of social control. It also deepened the alienation of a significant segment of the Muslim community from the Nigerian state, creating a lasting security vulnerability in Zaria.

Beyond the IMN crisis, Zaria LGA has experienced rising urban insecurity linked to the spread of armed banditry from the north-western states into Kaduna's urban centres. Rufa'i et al. (2023) documented 342 bandit attacks in Kaduna State between 2013 and 2022, with a significant proportion targeting urban infrastructure, including the Abuja–Kaduna train line and military facilities near Zaria. The ease with which bandits have been able to target high-profile infrastructure in the Kaduna-Zaria corridor reflects serious intelligence failures and security-coordination gaps at the state level. Wahab (2024) argues that the collapse of community intelligence networks itself a product of eroded state-society trust is a critical enabler of such attacks, as bandits are able to plan and execute operations without community-level detection.

Governance Deficits and Their Security Implications

The empirical analysis of Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria LGAs reveals a consistent pattern of governance deficits that have directly shaped the security environment in each locality. These deficits can be organised under five interconnected categories: fiscal incapacity, institutional fragmentation, exclusionary politics, impunity for security sector abuses, and inadequate



community engagement.

Fiscal incapacity at the local government level is perhaps the most fundamental governance failure. Nigerian LGAs, constitutionally designated as the third tier of government, have been systematically weakened by the joint account system and state-level revenue capture, leaving them with inadequate resources to deliver services, maintain order, or invest in preventive security measures. Ugwueze et al. (2022) demonstrate that this fiscal incapacity translates directly into underfunded local security committees, dysfunctional early warning systems, and neglected rural infrastructure all of which create conditions conducive to armed group activity. In Jama'a and Kajuru, the absence of motorable roads and reliable communications networks has facilitated the mobility of armed groups and hampered security responses.

Institutional fragmentation refers to the overlapping and sometimes conflicting mandates of the multiple security agencies operating in Kaduna State the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigerian Army, the Department of State Services, and various state-level security outfits without effective coordination. Ojielo (2023) identifies this as a systemic weakness in Nigeria's national security architecture, noting that different experts have repeatedly lamented the competition, overlapping mandates and work at the national security summit in 2021. At the state and LGA levels, this fragmentation is even more pronounced, as local government chairmen have no formal command authority over security personnel deployed in their areas, reducing them to passive observers in security management. The Kaduna State Government's 2024 intelligence exchange initiatives and safety protocols have been partial attempts to address this fragmentation, but their reach and impact at the LGA level remain limited (KDSG, 2026).

Exclusionary politics has been a particularly destructive governance failure in Kaduna State. The chronic underrepresentation of southern Kaduna communities predominantly Christian minority groups in state security appointments, government contracts, and developmental resources has generated pervasive grievances that have been exploited by those seeking to mobilise communal violence. The AJCR (2025) study found that perceptions of government bias in the protection of farming communities relative to herding communities has been a consistent grievance among respondents in southern Kaduna. Such perceptions, even where not fully supported by empirical evidence, are governance failures in themselves, as they reflect the state's inability to project credibility and impartiality in the administration of security.



Impunity for security sector abuses represents a fourth governance failure with direct security implications. The failure to hold Army personnel accountable for the 2015 Zaria killings, the reported human rights abuses by vigilante groups in southern Kaduna, and the inadequate investigation of mass killings in Kajuru have all contributed to a culture of impunity that emboldens both state and non-state actors to use violence instrumentally. Human Rights Watch (2019) and Amnesty International (2016) have extensively documented this impunity culture in Kaduna State. Nwokike (2021) argues that without accountability for past abuses, trust between the state and affected communities cannot be rebuilt, leaving the security environment chronically fragile.

Finally, inadequate community engagement has meant that governance responses to insecurity in Kaduna's three study areas have been largely top-down and technocratic, failing to harness the knowledge, legitimacy, and capacity of local communities. Abdullahi (2020) found that collaboration between government agencies and NGOs, civil society organisations, and traditional institutions in Kaduna was minimal, representing a significant missed opportunity. Faseke (2020) similarly observed that local communities' frustration with the government's failure to engage them in security planning has driven the proliferation of self-help groups, which, while sometimes providing short-term protection, often escalate violence in the medium term. A community-centred governance approach, which involves local actors in the design, implementation, and monitoring of security strategies, is therefore not merely a normative preference but a practical necessity for durable peace in Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria.

1.6 Conclusion

This paper has examined the relationship between governance and national security in Nigeria through a focused analysis of Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria local government areas of Kaduna State. The study has demonstrated that the insecurity ravaging these communities is not a natural or inevitable phenomenon but a product of identifiable and correctable governance deficits: fiscal incapacity at the LGA level, institutional fragmentation in security management, exclusionary politics, impunity for security sector abuses, and inadequate community engagement.

Kaduna State's strategic importance to Nigeria as a centre of learning, a hub of military education, and a microcosm of the country's ethnic and religious diversity makes the stakes of



governance deficit especially high. As Ojielo (2023) argues with respect to Nigeria as a whole, and as the present study affirms with respect to Kaduna, the security of the state depends, in the final analysis, on the quality of its governance. Peace will not come to Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria through firepower alone; it will come through the patient, inclusive, and accountable exercise of political authority in the service of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation.

1.7 Recommendations

The findings of this study carry significant policy implications for governance reform and security management in Kaduna State and, by extension, for other Nigerian states grappling with comparable challenges. Seven concrete recommendations are advanced.

- i. The fiscal empowerment of local government areas must be treated as a national security imperative. The abrogation or fundamental reform of the joint account system, which has historically enabled state governments to capture LGA revenues, should be prioritised. LGAs in high-insecurity areas such as Jama'a and Kajuru should receive targeted security grants from the state and federal governments, ring-fenced for community security infrastructure, conflict mediation programmes, and early warning networks.
- ii. The establishment of properly constituted, representative, and accountable Community Security Councils (CSCs) in each LGA should be made mandatory. These councils should include representatives of all major ethnic, religious, and occupational communities, thereby institutionalising the inclusive political processes that are currently absent in Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria. The CSCs should have formal liaison roles with the security agencies, enabling community intelligence to flow into formal security planning in a structured way.
- iii. The state government should commission and implement a comprehensive land tenure reform for rural communities in southern Kaduna, including Jama'a and Kajuru LGAs. The farmer-herder conflict is fundamentally a dispute over land access and tenure, and no amount of military deployment can resolve it without addressing this root cause.
- iv. An independent accountability mechanism for security sector conduct should be established. The culture of impunity that has characterised security sector operations in



Kaduna State from the 2015 Zaria killings to vigilante abuses in southern Kaduna must be systematically addressed.

- v. Interreligious and interethnic dialogue should be elevated from ad hoc crisis management to a permanent, state-funded governance function. The Kaduna Peace Declaration model, which emerged from earlier interreligious initiatives in the state, represents a promising but underutilised resource. The state government should institutionalise this model through the establishment of a State Peacebuilding Agency with permanent offices in every LGA, staffed by trained mediators drawn from the local communities.
- vi. A comprehensive socioeconomic investment programme targeting youth in the three study areas should be articulated and funded.
- vii. An upgraded intelligence and early warning architecture, connected to community-level structures in Jama'a, Kajuru, and Zaria, should be developed as a priority.

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