

**OLD OYO PARK, UNGOVERNED SPACES AND THE POLITICS OF SECURITY IN
NIGERIA:
A POSITION PAPER ON CONFLICT-SENSITIVE RESPONSE TO FOREST CRIMINALITY**

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Abstract

The transformation of Old Oyo National Park into a zone of criminal activity illustrates the security consequences of ungoverned spaces in Nigeria. Using the allegory of Fágúnwà's Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmole, this paper analyzes the political economy of forest criminality, the failure of reactive security architecture, and the imperative for intelligence-led, community-integrated response. Drawing on the 1999 Constitution, the Firearms Act, and published works by Barrister Adebayo Akinade, the paper rejects self-help arming and proposes a framework centered on declared priority zoning, integrated forest surveillance, depoliticized community security integration, and eco-tourism as a security strategy.

Keywords: Ungoverned Spaces, Old Oyo Park, Forest Criminality, Community Security, Eco-Tourism, State Policing

1. Introduction

Old Oyo National Park, spanning 2,512 square kilometres and housing the relics of Ọ̀yó-Ilé, has deteriorated from a potential eco-tourism and heritage asset into a zone of kidnapping, banditry, and criminal occupation. The phenomenon reflects a broader national challenge: ungoverned forests becoming operational bases for non-state actors. This paper examines the drivers of this transformation and proposes a conflict-sensitive response that preserves rule of law while restoring state presence.

2. Methodology

The analysis combines case study review, political economy analysis, and doctrinal review of Nigeria's legal framework. It integrates insights from published works by Barrister Adebayo Akinade on security operations, community policing, strategic communication, agrosecurity, tourism security, and communal conflict prevention.

3. Ungoverned Spaces and the Political Economy of Forest Criminality

Ungoverned spaces are not empty; they are governed by actors hostile to the state. Old Oyo Park's size, terrain, and weak surveillance make it attractive for:

1. Kidnapping and ransom operations targeting travelers and rural communities
2. Arms trafficking and IED preparation
3. Illegal logging, mining, and taxation of local populations

Akinade's Agrosecurity, Bioterrorism and Environmental Protection demonstrates that criminal occupation of forests directly undermines food security, rural livelihoods, and national heritage. The economic cost extends beyond security to lost tourism revenue and degraded ecological capital.

4. The Failure of Reactive Security Architecture

Nigeria's response to forest criminality has been predominantly reactive: deployment after incidents, press briefings, and ad hoc operations. This approach fails because:

- Criminal actors select terrain and timing, granting them operational advantage
- Lack of persistent presence allows criminal networks to prepare defensive measures such as IEDs
- Fragmentation between federal, state, and community actors reduces intelligence flow

Akinade's Managing Strategic Security and Crime Prevention Models argues that prevention requires persistent presence, intelligence integration, and capacity-building before incidents occur.

5. The Limits and Potential of Sub-National Security Outfits

Amotekun and similar outfits were created to address localized intelligence and response gaps. Their effectiveness depends on:

1. Integration into the formal intelligence cycle with the Nigeria Police Force and Department of State Services
2. Training, equipment, and command protocols that prevent abuse
3. Depoliticized deployment free from partisan or personal grievances

Without these conditions, sub-national outfits remain under-utilized and vulnerable to operational failure.

6. Categories Lawfully Permitted to Possess Arms in Nigeria

Under the Firearms Act Cap F28 LFN 2004:

- A. State Security Agencies: Nigeria Police Force, Armed Forces, DSS, NSCDC, and other statutory agencies for official duties.
- B. Licensed Private Security Organisations: Firms licensed by the Nigeria Police Force for armed protection under regulated conditions.
- C. Licensed Individuals: The President may grant licenses for self-defence, sport, hunting, or collection after vetting, medical evaluation, and demonstrated need.
- D. Traditional Institutions: Limited ceremonial firearms under historical licenses.

Self-help arming by communities or unlicensed groups is illegal and accelerates communal violence. Akinade's Communal Conflict and Violence: Response, Resolution and Prevention shows that such actions transform criminal incidents into identity-based conflicts.

7. A Conflict-Sensitive Response Framework for Old Oyo Park

A. Declare National Security and Economic Priority Zone

The Federal Government should formally designate Old Oyo Park as a priority zone. This enables dedicated funding, inter-agency command, and legal flexibility for rapid deployment.

B. Integrated Forest Surveillance and Presence

Deploy a combination of drone and satellite surveillance under single command, forest guard units trained in documentation and evidence preservation, and joint patrols involving Nigeria Police Force, NSCDC, Amotekun, and vetted local hunters. Akinade's Communications in Security and Law Enforcement Operations emphasizes that persistent presence and intelligence sharing deny criminal actors operational space.

C. Depoliticized Community Security Integration

Establish Community Security Integration Boards that include traditional rulers, retired security personnel, and vetted local hunters. These boards provide early warning and terrain knowledge without creating parallel armed structures. Public Policing and Private Protection for Maximum Security provides the framework for this integration.

D. Eco-Tourism as Security Strategy

Rehabilitate access roads, develop eco-tourism infrastructure, and pursue UNESCO recognition for Òyó-Ilé. Tourism creates economic stakes for local communities and generates resources for park maintenance. Akinade's Managing Security and Safety in Tourism, Cultural Festivals and Mega Events outlines protocols for securing tourism assets, managing crowd safety, and integrating community intelligence into event and site protection. Poverty reduction reduces recruitment into criminal networks.

E. Strategic Communication

Maintain a public posture of non-negotiation with kidnapers. Use single incident command to avoid signaling concession. Publicize successes in prosecution and recovery to restore deterrence.

8. Leadership and Political Will

Securing Old Oyo Park requires moving beyond rhetoric to sustained resource allocation and inter-governmental coordination. Federal, state, and local governments must align on command, funding, and accountability. The alternative is the replication of the Sambisa model in the South-West, with consequences for national stability and heritage.

9. Recommendations

1. Declare Old Oyo Park a priority zone and establish a joint command center with federal and state participation.
2. Deploy integrated surveillance using drones, ground patrols, and community intelligence.
3. Institutionalize Community Security Integration Boards with clear licensing and command protocols.
4. Invest in eco-tourism infrastructure and apply tourism security protocols from Akinade's 2007 work.
5. Train and equip investigating officers on documentation standards to improve prosecutions.
6. Establish a Victim Support Fund and community economic empowerment programs around the park.

10. Conclusion

Old Oyo Park stands at the intersection of heritage, ecology, and security. If left ungoverned, it will continue to serve criminal enterprises. If secured through intelligence-led, community-integrated, and lawful means, it can become an engine of tourism, employment, and national pride. The choice is between reactive capitulation and proactive statecraft.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Model Command Protocol for Joint Forest Operations

Appendix B: Licensing and Integration Framework for Community Hunters and Forest Guards

Appendix C: Early Warning Indicators for Forest and Rural Protection

Appendix D: Draft Eco-Tourism and Heritage Development Plan for Old Oyo Park.

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