

GOVERNANCE FAILURE AND THE ESCALATION OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURAL DEFICITS, INSTITUTIONAL CORRUPTION, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Recent public commentary by retired Naval Commodore Kunle Olawunmi attributes Nigeria's worsening insecurity to "collective incompetence in governance" and the politicisation of security appointments. This paper analyses his arguments within the broader literature on governance, human security, and institutional effectiveness. It examines how poverty, unemployment, corruption, and merit deficit in security agencies interact to sustain kidnapping, banditry, communal conflict, and violent crime. Drawing on doctrinal analysis, policy review, and the body of work by Barrister Adebayo Akinade, the paper integrates perspectives from Nigerian scholars and international experts to provide a balanced analysis. It argues that kinetic security operations alone cannot resolve Nigeria's crisis. Sustainable reduction of insecurity requires governance reform, merit-based leadership, institutional accountability, and integrated socio-economic interventions. Recommendations address constitutional, institutional, and operational reforms for the executive, legislature, and security sector.

Keywords: Governance, Insecurity, Communal Conflict, Corruption, Merit-Based Appointments, Human Security, Nigeria, Security Sector Reform.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Insecurity in Nigeria has escalated over the last decade, manifesting in terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence. While operational deficits are often cited, retired Naval Commodore Kunle Olawunmi argues in a 2026 Daily Trust interview that the root cause is "collective incompetence in governance" and the politicisation of security appointments.

1.2 Problem Statement

The persistence of violent crime despite increased military deployment suggests that structural and governance factors constrain security outcomes. Understanding these factors is essential for policy reform.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

Aim: To provide an academic analysis of the relationship between governance failure and insecurity in Nigeria and propose evidence-based reforms.

Objectives:

1. Analyse Olawunmi's arguments in the context of security and governance literature.
2. Examine the role of poverty, unemployment, and corruption in fuelling violent crime and communal conflict.
3. Assess the impact of politicised appointments on security effectiveness.
4. Propose reforms for governance, security sector management, and socio-economic policy.

1.4 Methodology

Qualitative analysis of primary interview data, doctrinal review of Nigerian law and policy, and comparative analysis of security sector reform using the theoretical and operational frameworks developed in Akinade's works from 2007 to 2019, supplemented by Nigerian and foreign scholarship.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Governance and State Legitimacy

Governance refers to the processes by which authority is exercised in the management of public affairs. Legitimacy depends on the state's capacity to provide security, justice, and welfare. When this contract breaks down, public trust declines and non-state actors gain space. Akinade 2018 argues that statecraft fails when governance is divorced from public welfare and accountability. Nigerian scholar Adedeji 2019 similarly contends that governance deficits directly correlate with rising internal insecurity.

2.2 Human Security Approach

Human security shifts focus from state-centric defence to the safety of individuals from chronic threats such as poverty, unemployment, and violence. Olawunmi's linkage of kidnapping to hardship reflects this perspective. Akinade 2008 emphasizes that sustainable security requires addressing social coercion and economic exclusion. Buzan 1991 and UNDP 1994 provide the foundational human security framework that underpins this analysis.

2.3 Institutional Merit and Professionalism

Merit-based recruitment and promotion are prerequisites for institutional effectiveness. Politicisation undermines competence, morale, and operational coherence. Akinade 2020 advocates for intelligence-led policing anchored on professional standards. Alemika and Chukwuma 2000 demonstrate that politicised policing in Nigeria erodes public trust and operational effectiveness.

3.0 ANALYSIS OF THE ARGUMENTS

3.1 Collective Incompetence and Corruption

Olawunmi alleges that many in authority prioritize personal gain over governance. Transparency International's 2024 CPI ranks Nigeria low on public sector corruption. Corruption diverts resources from training, equipment, and welfare, weakening operational capacity. Akinade 2007 notes that poor governance patterns directly undermine crime prevention outcomes. Nigerian scholar Igbuzor 2011 argues that corruption in the security sector creates a cycle of impunity and violence.

3.2 Socio-Economic Drivers of Crime and Communal Conflict

Olawunmi identifies poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunity as drivers of kidnapping for ransom. World Bank 2024 data indicate youth unemployment above 30% in several northern states, creating recruitment pools for criminal groups. Akinade 2009 identifies economic marginalisation and weak dispute resolution mechanisms as key triggers of communal violence. Nigerian sociologist Imobighe 2003 links youth unemployment to the proliferation of militias and cult groups in the Niger Delta and Middle Belt.

3.3 Limits of Kinetic Response

The argument that "more troops alone will not solve the crisis" is supported by counter-insurgency doctrine. FM 3-24 US Army/Marine Corps 2006 stresses that military action must be paired with political and economic measures to be sustainable. Akinade 2007 contends that security operations without good governance produce cyclical violence. Nigerian defence analyst Danjibo 2009 reaches similar conclusions regarding Boko Haram's resilience despite military operations.

3.4 Politicisation of Security Appointments

Olawunmi contrasts past merit-based officer training with current nepotistic practices. Akinade 2019 argues that strategic security requires apolitical, professional leadership structures. Foreign scholar Baker 2005 observes that multi-choice policing in Africa often suffers when political patronage overrides professional criteria. South African scholar Cawthra 2003 documents similar challenges in post-apartheid security sector reform.

3.5 Operational Feasibility of Rescue Operations

Olawunmi asserts that abducted persons can be rescued with proper planning and professional handling. This implies that the constraint is institutional, not technical. It echoes findings in Akinade 2020 that fusion cells and intelligence-led operations improve outcomes. US scholar Kilcullen 2009 emphasizes the importance of small-unit professionalism and intelligence fusion in hostage rescue operations.

4.0 COMMUNAL CONFLICT, VIOLENCE, AND RESOLUTION

4.1 Dynamics of Communal Conflict

Akinade 2009 outlines patterns of communal conflict in Nigeria, linking them to land disputes, ethnic mobilisation, and weak local governance. Nigerian political scientist Suberu 2001 documents how federalism and resource allocation disputes exacerbate communal tensions. International scholar Reno 2011 describes how weak state capacity allows local conflicts to become criminalised.

4.2 Response and Resolution Mechanisms

Akinade 2009 advocates for early warning systems, community policing, and traditional dispute resolution integrated with formal justice mechanisms. Nigerian scholar Best 2007 demonstrates the effectiveness of community-based peace committees in Plateau and Kaduna States. Foreign scholar Lederach 1997 provides the conflict transformation framework that underpins community-level resolution.

4.3 Prevention Framework

Prevention requires addressing root causes: land reform, equitable resource distribution, and inter-group dialogue. Akinade 2008 highlights the role of communication and diplomacy in de-escalating communal tensions. Nigerian scholar Albert 2001 argues that preventive diplomacy must be institutionalised at the local government level.

5.0 LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN NIGERIA

5.1 Constitutional Mandate

Section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 Constitution states that security and welfare are the primary purpose of government.

5.2 Police Act 2020

Provides for merit-based recruitment and community policing. Implementation has been uneven. Nigerian scholar Oluwaniyi 2019 notes gaps between legal provisions and practice.

5.3 Armed Forces Act and Civil Service Rules

Govern appointments and promotions but allow for executive discretion, which is often exploited for political patronage.

5.4 Anti-Corruption Laws

The EFCC Act 2004 and ICPC Act 2000 provide mechanisms for prosecuting corruption but face challenges in high-level enforcement. Nigerian legal scholar Aiyede 2008 analyses the limitations of anti-corruption institutions in Nigeria.

6.0 IMPACT OF GOVERNANCE FAILURE ON SECURITY OUTCOMES

Governance Deficit	Security Consequence
Corruption in procurement	Poor equipment, low morale
Nepotistic appointments	Weak intelligence, poor planning
Underfunding of welfare	Low retention, susceptibility to bribery
Weak oversight Impunity for abuse and misconduct	
Economic exclusion	Recruitment into criminal groups and communal violence

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Constitutional and Legislative Reform

1. Strengthen Section 14(2)(b) with enforceable benchmarks for security and welfare delivery.
2. Amend the Police Act 2020 to remove executive discretion in senior appointments and establish an independent Police Service Commission with constitutional backing.

7.2 Security Sector Reform

1. Institutionalise merit-based recruitment and promotion across the armed forces, police, and intelligence agencies.
2. Establish a National Security Service Commission to vet and approve senior appointments based on professional criteria.
3. Create a 24/7 Joint Intelligence Fusion Centre with civilian oversight, as advocated in Akinade 2020.

7.3 Conflict Resolution and Prevention

1. Institutionalise community policing and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms per Akinade 2009.
2. Establish state-level Early Warning and Early Response Centres linked to federal intelligence structures.
3. Implement land reform and equitable resource distribution policies to address root causes of communal conflict.

7.4 Anti-Corruption and Accountability

1. Mandate public asset declaration and lifestyle audits for senior security officials.
2. Empower the National Assembly to conduct quarterly oversight hearings on security expenditure and operations.
3. Protect whistleblowers within the security sector through the Witness Protection Act.

7.5 Socio-Economic Interventions

1. Implement targeted youth employment and vocational programmes in high-risk states.
2. Expand Conditional Cash Transfer programmes with robust monitoring to reduce economic incentives for crime.
3. Integrate vocational training into correctional and rehabilitation programmes for low-level offenders.

7.6 Information Security and Strategic Communication

1. Apply the information security and facilities management principles in Akinade 2021 to protect operational data and evidence integrity.
2. Develop strategic communication protocols for security agencies to counter misinformation and build public trust, per Akinade 2008.

7.7 International Cooperation and Diplomacy

Strengthen mutual legal assistance agreements with jurisdictions where victims reside and participate actively in INTERPOL's Financial Crime Working Group. Apply diplomatic and communication skills outlined in Akinade 2008 to manage cross-border security cooperation.

8.0 CONCLUSION

Olawunmi's analysis reflects a widely held view that Nigeria's insecurity is rooted in governance failure rather than a lack of military capacity. Corruption, politicisation, and socio-economic exclusion undermine the effectiveness of security institutions and exacerbate communal conflict. Sustainable improvement requires constitutional enforcement of governance standards, merit-based security leadership, robust accountability mechanisms, integrated conflict resolution frameworks, and socio-economic policy. Without these reforms, kinetic operations will continue to yield limited and temporary gains.

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