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The Citizen-State Conflict Process and Its Implications for National Security in North-Central Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study examines the causes and effects of conflict in Kogi state, north central zone and its implication on the citizen-state relations and national security in Nigeria. The relationship between citizens and the state constitutes a fundamental dimension of national security because the legitimacy, effectiveness, and responsiveness of state institutions influence citizen's willingness to cooperate with government and security structures. Grounded in Thomas Hobbes (1651), Locke (1689), and Rousseau (1762) protracted social contract theory, this paper adopts a descriptive survey research design supported by qualitative evidence from relevant secondary literature. The study examined how socioeconomic deprivation, perceived government failure, insecurity, institutional weaknesses, and declining public trust shape citizen-state relations and security outcomes. Findings indicate that citizen-state conflict is multidimensional and is intensified by perceived governance failures, inadequate security infrastructure, poor communication, limited institutional accountability, socioeconomic deprivation, and declining confidence in security institutions. The findings further show that community participation, traditional institutions, neighbourhood watch groups, local intelligence, and collaborative security mechanisms can complement formal security institutions by enhancing early warning, information sharing, community surveillance, and institutional responsiveness. However, political interference, inadequate resources, weak interagency coordination, poor regulation of informal security actors, and distrust constrain their effectiveness. The study concludes that persistent insecurity can reinforce a cycle in which declining public trust reduces citizen cooperation, weakens intelligence gathering, and increases reliance on coercive security responses. It recommends strengthening accountable and participatory governance, improving institutional responsiveness, promoting community engagement, enhancing coordination among security actors, and developing regulated community-state security partnerships to support sustainable national security in North-Central Nigeria.

Keywords: Citizen state National security Community policing North-Central Nigeria

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Introduction

The relationship between citizens and the state is central to the stability and security of every political system. The state derives its legitimacy from its capacity to provide security, justice, public goods, social order, and opportunities for citizens to participate meaningfully in governance. In return, citizens are expected to obey legitimate laws, pay taxes, cooperate with public institutions, and contribute to the maintenance of social order. Where this reciprocal relationship becomes strained, the resulting tensions can develop into distrust, protest, civil disobedience, communal conflict, crime, political violence, or other forms of confrontation between citizens and state institutions (Akinlabi, 2022).

In Nigeria, the citizen–state relationship has historically been affected by institutional weaknesses, socio-economic inequalities, corruption, insecurity, political exclusion, unemployment, inadequate public services, and perceptions of unequal treatment. These conditions are particularly significant in North-Central Nigeria, where Kogi, Benue, Niger, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kwara, and the Federal Capital Territory have experienced different forms of insecurity, including kidnapping, banditry, communal violence, farmer-herder conflicts, land disputes, political violence, and criminality (Alemika, 2013).

The North-Central zone occupies an important strategic position within Nigeria. It connects several geopolitical zones and contains important agricultural, educational, commercial, transportation, and administrative centres. The region also contains extensive rural areas and forests that can be difficult for conventional security agencies to monitor effectively. These geographical and socioeconomic characteristics have created security vulnerabilities that criminal and violent groups can exploit (Aliyu, & Lawal, 2020).

According to the Citizens Rights and Development Centre (2015), Kogi State records a low level of budget transparency and public participation in the state budgetary process. Similarly, the State Budget Transparency Index (2019), opined that the state scored 8 out of 100 in public access to budget documents. Although most budget documents are reportedly produced, they are not made publicly accessible. The Citizen's Budget is also not produced, further limiting citizen's access to simplified information on government revenue and expenditure. Additionally, public participation in the budget process remains limited. Kogi State scored 6 out of 100 in this area, indicating minimal opportunities for citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) to contribute to budget formulation and approval. The Kogi State House of Assembly provides limited opportunities for public participation, with only a

few committee hearings opened to the public during the budget approval process. These conditions suggest significant gaps in budget transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in public financial management.

Recent conflict assessments demonstrate the seriousness of the security situation. For example, conflict monitoring by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (2026), has documented violent attacks, farmer-herder conflicts, banditry, displacement, and communal disputes across North-Central states. The persistence of these conflicts raises important questions about the relationship between communities and the institutions established to protect them.

Citizen–state conflict should not, however, be understood exclusively as open confrontation. It can occur through a gradual process in which citizens initially experience insecurity, socioeconomic deprivation, or exclusion and subsequently perceive the state as unable or unwilling to address their concerns. Such perceptions may generate frustration and distrust, particularly where citizens believe that government institutions are ineffective or unresponsive (Gurr, 1970; Migdal, 1988). Distrust may, in turn, reduce citizens’ willingness to cooperate with formal security agencies, thereby weakening information sharing, intelligence gathering, and early-warning mechanisms. Where the state responds to insecurity primarily through increased surveillance or coercive security measures, citizens may perceive such actions as excessive, discriminatory, or illegitimate, further deepening distrust (Buzan, 1991; Migdal, 1988). Consequently, a cycle of insecurity, distrust, reduced cooperation, and coercive state response may develop, creating conditions that can further strain citizen–state relations and undermine national security.

Citizen–state cooperation in security provision is particularly important for national security because the effectiveness of security institutions depends partly on citizens’ willingness to provide information, report suspicious activities, cooperate with investigations, and support lawful security operations. Research on police–citizen relations in Nigeria demonstrates that cooperation cannot simply be assumed; it is influenced by citizen’s perceptions of institutional effectiveness, legitimacy, procedural fairness, and previous experiences with security agencies (Akinlabi, 2022).

The problem is further complicated by the growth of community-based security mechanisms where state security institutions are perceived as distant or ineffective, citizens may rely on

neighbourhood watch groups, vigilantes, traditional institutions, hunters' associations, religious organisations, and other informal security networks. Such actors can contribute to local surveillance and community protection; however, their activities may also generate additional security challenges when they are poorly regulated, politicised, or involved in extrajudicial practices (Fourchard, 2008; Meagher, 2012).

This study therefore investigates the conflict between citizens and state institutions in North-Central Nigeria and examines its implications for national security in Kogi state Nigeria. Particular attention is given to the relationship between insecurity, state responsiveness, citizen trust, community participation, and collaborative security.

North-Central Nigeria continues to experience multiple and overlapping forms of insecurity, including kidnapping, banditry, communal violence, farmer–herder conflicts, armed attacks and other forms of criminality. These security challenges have affected communities, livelihoods, agricultural activities and the general well-being of populations across the region (Okpeh et al., 2021; Suchi & Musa, 2023).

The persistence of insecurity raises important questions about the capacity of state institutions to provide effective protection for citizens. Where recurring security incidents create perceptions of inadequate state protection, communities may increasingly rely on vigilante organisations and other informal security structures. This development reflects the growing importance of community-level responses to insecurity, particularly in rural areas where formal security presence may be limited (Orkar, 2023).

The problem is therefore not merely the existence of crime but also the relationship between citizens and the institutions responsible for providing security. Where citizens have limited confidence in formal security institutions, their willingness to share information and cooperate with security agencies may decline. This can create difficulties for intelligence gathering and early-warning mechanisms, thereby affecting the capacity of security institutions to prevent and respond effectively to threats. Research on North-Central Nigeria has consequently emphasised the importance of stronger collaboration between security agencies, traditional institutions, religious organisations and local communities in intelligence gathering and insecurity management (Orkar, 2023).

At the same time, security responses that are perceived by communities as ineffective, excessive or insufficiently accountable may further weaken public confidence. This creates a

significant challenge for national security because effective security provision requires not only the coercive capacity of the state but also cooperation and information-sharing between security institutions and the communities they serve. The central concern of this study is therefore to examine how citizen–state relations and the processes of interaction between citizens and security institutions influence national security in North-Central Nigeria.

Literature Review

Acoording to Ajayi and Michael (2025), violent conflicts have become daily occurrence in Nigeria. In particular, experiences in the last one decade have painted the northcentral as the most incendiary hotspot in the recurrent discourse on rural violence and insecurity relating to sectarian struggle (Amadi et al. 2019). Okoli and Ukwandu (2021: 81) opine that “dynamic and opportunistic, often feeding into the existing primordial and structural fault lines” Thus, the situation in northcentral is reflective of ethnic struggle and protection of homeland.

Conflict refers to a situation in which individuals, groups, institutions, or states perceive that their interests, values, objectives, needs, or expectations are incompatible. Conflict does not necessarily imply violence; it may manifest through disagreement, competition, protest, resistance, distrust, negotiation, or confrontation (Coser, 1956; Deutsch, 1973; Galtung, 1969).

Conflict becomes particularly significant to national security when disagreements between citizens and state institutions are inadequately managed. A dispute over public services, land, security, political representation, or economic opportunities may escalate when communication channels and institutional mechanisms for conflict management and resolution are weak or ineffective (Burton, 1990; Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

In the North-Central Nigerian context, conflicts frequently involve multiple and overlapping actors, including citizens, traditional institutions, state and local governments, federal security agencies, farmers, pastoralists, youth groups, vigilantes, criminal organisations, political actors, and civil society organisations. The involvement of multiple actors makes conflict processes more complex because their interests, grievances, resources, and strategies may differ considerably.

Citizen–state relations describe the political, social, legal, and institutional interactions between individuals and government institutions. These relations involve reciprocal expectations and obligations between citizens and the state. From a social contract

perspective, citizens accept the authority of the state in return for protection, security, justice, and the provision of conditions necessary for social and economic wellbeing (Hobbes, 1651/1996; Locke, 1689/1988; Rousseau, 1762/1997).

Citizens generally expect the state to provide protection of lives and property, equality before the law, access to public services, accountable governance, opportunities for participation in decision-making, and socioeconomic opportunities. The state, in turn, expects citizens to obey legitimate laws, cooperate with lawful authorities, provide relevant information concerning threats to public safety, fulfil civic obligations, and contribute to the maintenance of social order (Hobbes, 1651/1996; Locke, 1689/1988; Migdal, 1988).

When either citizens or state institutions perceive that these reciprocal expectations are not being fulfilled, tensions may emerge. Persistent failures in service delivery, security provision, justice, accountability, or citizen participation may weaken public trust and affect the willingness of citizens to cooperate with state institutions. Conversely, widespread non-compliance with laws and declining cooperation with legitimate authorities may weaken the capacity of the state to maintain social order and provide effective security (Migdal, 1988).

National security traditionally focused on the protection of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the state from external military threats. Contemporary approaches, however, have broadened the concept to include political stability, economic security, social cohesion, human security, critical infrastructure, and protection from internal violence and other threats to the wellbeing of populations (Buzan, 1991; Buzan et al., 1998; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994).

From a human-security perspective, national security cannot be separated entirely from citizens' everyday experiences of safety and wellbeing. Insecurity resulting from kidnapping, banditry, communal violence and other forms of criminality can affect education, economic activities, mobility, livelihoods, investment, psychological wellbeing, and public confidence. Thus, threats to human security can also undermine broader national security by weakening social cohesion, economic productivity, institutional trust, and citizens' confidence in the capacity of government to protect them.

In North-Central Nigeria, kidnapping and other forms of insecurity have been associated in the literature with socioeconomic deprivation, unemployment, weak governance, inadequate security provision, marginalisation, and institutional weaknesses. At the same time,

kidnapping can generate fear, disrupt economic activities, restrict movement, affect educational activities, and undermine confidence in formal security institutions. The relationship therefore operates in both directions: weaknesses in governance and security provision may create conditions conducive to insecurity, while persistent insecurity can further weaken citizens' confidence in the state and place additional pressure on state institutions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Contract Theory and Collective Efficacy Theory. The combination of these theories provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between citizens, the state, and community-based security mechanisms in North-Central Nigeria.

Social Contract Theory

Social Contract Theory, associated with Thomas Hobbes (1651), John Locke (1689), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), explains the relationship between individuals and the state. The theory is based on the idea that citizens accept certain obligations and restrictions in exchange for protection, security, and the provision of public goods by the state. Hobbes (1651) argued that individuals require a strong authority to maintain peace and protect them from insecurity. Locke (1689), on the other hand, emphasized the responsibility of government to protect citizens' fundamental rights, particularly life, liberty, and property. Rousseau (1762) focused on the collective will and the responsibility of individuals to participate in creating a legitimate political order. In the context of this study, Social Contract Theory helps explain how insecurity can weaken trust between citizens and the state. Where government institutions are perceived as unable to provide adequate security, citizens may become less willing to cooperate with state security agencies. This may contribute to the development or strengthening of alternative community-based security arrangements such as vigilante groups, neighbourhood watches, traditional institutions, hunter's associations, and community policing initiatives.

Collective Efficacy Theory

Collective Efficacy Theory, developed by Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997), emphasizes the ability of members of a community to work together to achieve shared

objectives and maintain social order. The theory combines social cohesion with a community's willingness to intervene for the common good.

The theory is particularly relevant to community-based security because effective crime prevention often depends on cooperation among community members. Communities with strong social relationships and a willingness to act collectively may be better positioned to identify security threats, share information, protect vulnerable members, and cooperate with formal security institutions.

Relationship Between the Two Theories

Social Contract Theory and Collective Efficacy Theory complement each other in explaining community-based security and citizen–state cooperation. Social Contract Theory focuses primarily on the relationship and reciprocal responsibilities between citizens and the state, while Collective Efficacy Theory emphasizes the capacity of communities to cooperate and respond collectively to security challenges.

In North-Central Nigeria, the relationship can be understood as follows: when the state provides effective security and responds to citizens' needs, citizens are more likely to trust government institutions and cooperate with security agencies. At the community level, strong social cohesion and collective willingness to act can further support crime prevention and information sharing. Conversely, persistent insecurity and perceived failures in state protection may weaken trust and encourage communities to rely more heavily on informal security mechanisms.

Therefore, the two theories provide a complementary framework for examining how state responsibility, citizen cooperation, community capacity, and community-based security mechanisms interact in addressing kidnapping and other security challenges in North-Central Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design based on secondary data, relevant information was obtained from existing sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government and policy documents, institutional reports, conflict assessments, and credible publications on insecurity and citizen–state relations in North-Central Nigeria, with particular focus on Kogi, State. The collected secondary data were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

Results/Finding & Discussion

Causes of Conflict Between Citizens and the State

Conflict between citizens and the state in Kogi State can be understood as the result of interacting political, socioeconomic, security, institutional, and governance-related factors. These factors may create a gap between citizens' expectations of government and their experiences with public institutions (Okpeh, & Mamuda, et.al 2021).

1. Insecurity and Perceived Failure of State Protection: One major source of tension is insecurity, including kidnapping, armed robbery, communal violence, and other forms of violent crime. When citizens perceive that the government or security agencies are unable to adequately protect lives and property, confidence in state institutions may decline. This can also encourage communities to rely more heavily on informal or community-based security arrangements (Kanu & Maryann 2020).

2. Poverty and Unemployment: According to Ikuteyijo and Rotimi (2012), poverty and limited employment opportunities can generate socioeconomic grievances. Young people in particular may experience frustration where they perceive limited opportunities for economic advancement. Where government policies are perceived as inadequate in addressing unemployment and poverty, socioeconomic grievances can develop into broader dissatisfaction with the state

3. Perceived Poor Governance: Poor public-service delivery, weak institutional responsiveness, inadequate infrastructure, and limited government engagement with communities can contribute to strained citizen–state relations. Citizens may become less willing to cooperate with government when they perceive that public institutions are not adequately addressing their needs (Gitoru & Muna 2019).

4. Corruption and Lack of Accountability: Perceptions of corruption can weaken confidence in government institutions. When citizens believe that public resources are mismanaged or that public officials are not adequately accountable for their actions, the legitimacy of state institutions may be questioned (Buzan 1991 cited by Amadi & Igwe et.al (2019).

5. Distrust of Security Agencies: Relations between citizens and security agencies can become strained where communities have experienced or perceived arbitrary arrests,

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excessive use of force, harassment, extortion, or other forms of misconduct. Research on Nigeria shows that perceptions of police legitimacy, procedural fairness, effectiveness, and previous experiences with police influence citizens' willingness to cooperate with the police (Akinlabi, 2022).

6. Political Exclusion and Perceived Marginalisation: Citizens may experience conflict with state authorities when they perceive unequal political representation, exclusion from decision-making, or unequal distribution of public resources. In a diverse state such as Kogi, perceptions of political or communal marginalisation can become sources of tension between communities and government.

7. Communal and Ethnic Tensions: Kogi State has considerable ethnic and cultural diversity. Competition over political representation, land, resources, traditional authority, or access to government benefits can generate tensions among communities. Where state institutions are perceived to handle such disputes unfairly, communal grievances may become grievances against the state itself.

8. Farmer–Herder and Land-Related Conflicts: Competition involving agricultural land, grazing routes, water resources, and other livelihood interests can generate conflict. The manner in which government and security institutions respond to such disputes can influence citizens' perceptions of state neutrality and effectiveness.

9. Weak Justice and Grievance-Resolution Mechanisms: When citizens perceive formal mechanisms for resolving grievances as slow, inaccessible, expensive, or ineffective, they may seek alternative methods of resolving disputes. This can include reliance on traditional institutions, community leaders, or informal security structures, potentially weakening reliance on formal state institutions (Amadi & Igwe et.al 2019).

Implications of Citizen-State Conflict on National Security in Kogi State

Conflict between citizens and the state has significant implications for national security because effective security depends not only on the capacity of government institutions but also on public trust, cooperation, and access to reliable local information. In Kogi State, strained citizen–state relations can affect security through several interconnected mechanisms.

1. Reduced Cooperation with Security Agencies: National security relies partly on citizens reporting crimes, suspicious activities, emerging threats, and information about criminal

networks. Where citizens distrust security agencies, they may be reluctant to provide such information. This can limit intelligence gathering and make crime prevention more difficult (Aborisade, 2022).

2. Weakening of Intelligence Gathering and Early Warning: Communities are often the first to observe changes in local security conditions. Citizen–state conflict can therefore undermine community-based early-warning systems when residents are unwilling to communicate with security institutions. Delayed information can reduce the ability of security agencies to prevent or respond to emerging threats (Maguire, 2018).

3. Growth of Informal Security Structures: Okafor and Arichie, (2018), opined that distrust in formal security institutions may encourage communities to rely increasingly on vigilante groups, neighbourhood associations, traditional institutions, or other informal security arrangements. These structures can contribute useful local knowledge, but weak regulation and coordination may create challenges for accountability and the lawful use of force.

4. Increased Crime and Insecurity: Where cooperation between citizens and security institutions is weak, criminals may exploit gaps in surveillance and intelligence. Kidnapping, armed robbery, communal violence, and other forms of insecurity can become more difficult to prevent. Consequently, citizen–state conflict can indirectly contribute to an environment in which insecurity persists Okafor & Arichie, 2018).

5. Threat to Social Cohesion: According to Ajayi & Michael (2025). Conflict between citizens and government can deepen divisions between communities and public institutions. When particular communities believe that government security responses are unfair or discriminatory, existing social tensions may become stronger. This can undermine solidarity and collective efforts to address insecurity.

6. Increased Reliance on Coercive Security Measures: Low levels of public cooperation may encourage greater dependence on enforcement and coercive approaches. Where dialogue, community engagement, and intelligence-based approaches are weak, security responses may become increasingly focused on enforcement rather than prevention and cooperation (Adebusuyi, 2023)

7. Displacement and Disruption of Livelihoods: Persistent insecurity can force people to leave affected communities or abandon farms, businesses, and other economic activities. In

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an agrarian state such as Kogi, disruption of agricultural activities can have consequences for household income, food security, and local economic stability.

8. Negative Effects on Economic Development: Insecurity and strained relations with government can discourage investment and disrupt commercial activities. Businesses may face increased security costs, restricted movement, loss of property, or reduced customer activity. These effects can undermine local economic development and indirectly affect broader national economic security.

9. Weakening of State Legitimacy: One of the most significant implications is the potential erosion of state legitimacy. Social Contract Theory suggests that political authority is connected to the state's ability to provide security and protect citizens' rights (Hobbes, 1651; Locke, 1689; Rousseau, 1762). When citizens consistently perceive that these responsibilities are not being fulfilled, their relationship with state institutions may become increasingly strained.

10. Wider Implications for National Security: Although the conflict may originate at the local level, its consequences can extend beyond Kogi State. Persistent insecurity can affect population movement, economic activities, interstate transportation, agricultural production, and regional stability. Kogi's geographical position and connections with several parts of Nigeria mean that significant insecurity within the state can have implications beyond its immediate communities. (Adebusuyi, 2023).

Conclusion & Policy Implications/Recommendations

The study concludes that citizen–state conflict in Kogi State is closely associated with insecurity, weak institutional responsiveness, socio-economic challenges, declining public trust, and limited citizen participation in security governance. These conditions can reduce cooperation between communities and state institutions, limit the sharing of security information, and make it more difficult to prevent and manage insecurity. Sustainable national security therefore requires not only effective security agencies but also stronger and more responsive relationships between citizens and government.

Institutional Reforms

The Kogi State Government and security agencies should strengthen accountability, responsiveness, and transparency in the provision of security. Effective channels should be

established to enable citizens to report security threats, grievances, and suspicious activities. Security agencies should also improve their response to information provided by communities in order to strengthen public confidence and cooperation.

Community Engagement

Community-based security actors, including traditional institutions, neighbourhood groups, and other local security structures, should be appropriately regulated, trained, and coordinated with formal security agencies. Regular community–state dialogue should also be encouraged to improve trust, information sharing, and cooperation. Civil society and peacebuilding organisations can support community dialogue, civic education, early-warning systems, and conflict-resolution initiatives.

Socioeconomic Interventions

Government should address the socio-economic conditions that may contribute to insecurity by expanding employment opportunities, youth empowerment programmes, agricultural support, and access to essential public services. Particular attention should be given to vulnerable communities and young people who may be affected by unemployment and limited economic opportunities.

Overall, strengthening trust, accountability, community participation, institutional responsiveness, and socio-economic opportunities can improve cooperation between citizens and the state and contribute to sustainable national security in Kogi State.

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