Insight: Vol. 4, No. 6 November 2026
pp. x-xx
E-ISSN: 3032-453X
https://doi.org/10.59888/insight.v4i6.128

The Role of The Nigeria Police Force in Combating Insecurity and Safeguarding National Security in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects (2015–2026)

Nura Umar Manya Manya
Nigerian Defence Academic, Kaduna, Nigeria
Corresponding Author: um.nura2026@nda.edu.ng

Keywords:
Nigeria Police Force; police legitimacy; banditry; vigilantism; community policing

This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.

Copyright © 2026 by Author. Published by Worldwide Research Publishing

ABSTRACT

Background: Between 2015 and 2026, Nigeria faced armed banditry, mass kidnapping, residual Boko Haram/ISWAP violence and communal conflict that tested the capacity and legitimacy of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF).

Objective: The study examines the NPF's contribution to internal security, the constraints on its performance and the prospects for reform. Unlike earlier work that explains vigilantism from the community side, it analyses the institutional side of the same problem.

Methods: A qualitative documentary design was used. Thirty-five documents (peer-reviewed studies, legal instruments, and official and independent reports) retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar, AJOL and institutional repositories were coded with a framework derived from Social Disorganization Theory and Procedural Justice Theory.

Results: About 371,800 officers serve roughly 236.7 million people (157 per 100,000, or 1:637), below the commonly cited benchmark of 222 per 100,000, and more than 100,000 officers guarded VIPs before the November 2025 withdrawal order. Underfunding, perceived corruption (73% of citizens see most or all police as corrupt), weak intelligence capacity and centralised command slowed responses to banditry and kidnapping, while low trust sustained vigilante self-help.

Conclusion: Capacity and legitimacy deficits reinforce informal self-help. Sustained recruitment with redeployment of VIP guards, accountable community policing and stronger oversight should be prioritised. The study offers an integrated institutional explanation of policing failure and self-help in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity has become one of the defining governance problems of sub-Saharan Africa. The Global Terrorism Index 2026 reports that six of the ten countries most affected by terrorism are in sub-Saharan Africa and that the Sahel accounted for nearly half of all terrorism deaths in 2025, even though terrorism deaths fell worldwide (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026). Across the continent, ordinary policing rather than military force carries much of the burden of protecting civilians, yet many police organisations combine low staffing with weak public trust; in Afrobarometer surveys of 39 African countries, fewer than half of citizens said they trust the police (Krönke et al., 2024). These regional pressures make the capacity and legitimacy of national police forces a central question for internal security.

The protection of lives and property is a foundational responsibility of the Nigerian state. The Nigeria Police Force, as the lead agency for internal security and law enforcement under Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the Police Act 2020, is mandated by Section 4 of the Act to prevent and detect crime, preserve public order, protect lives and property, and enforce all laws and regulations (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, 2020). Between 2015 and 2026, however, Nigeria experienced sustained and multi-dimensional insecurity—ranging from the Boko Haram/ISWAP insurgency in the North-East, to large-scale armed banditry and mass kidnapping in the North-West and North-Central zones, farmer–herder conflicts, secessionist-related violence in the South-East, and urban criminality. Nigeria ranked fourth on the Global Terrorism Index 2026, with terrorism deaths rising by 46% to 750 in 2025 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026), and Amnesty International documented at least 10,217 people killed by armed groups in seven northern states between May 2023 and May 2025 (Amnesty International, 2025). These threats are not equivalent in their demands on the police. Counter-insurgency in the North-East is led by the armed forces, with the police in a supporting role, whereas kidnapping, banditry-related crime, public order and everyday crime fall directly within the statutory remit of the NPF. These threats have repeatedly tested the capacity, legitimacy, and public standing of the NPF.

Previous studies link the persistence of insecurity to structural weaknesses within formal security institutions. Among young Nigerians, perceived procedural justice shaped police legitimacy (Akinlabi, 2017), while in Southwest Nigeria perceived police effectiveness and procedural justice, rather than legitimacy itself, predicted self-reported compliance with the law (Akinlabi & Murphy, 2018). Tiwa (2024) described an institutional distrust trap in which public distrust pushes officers towards informal practices that deepen distrust, and Madueke (2025) attributed the weak police response to banditry to manpower shortages, underfunding, poor welfare and a centralised command structure that Igba (2026) traces to colonial continuities in Nigerian federalism. When communities perceive the police as ineffective, delayed, corrupt, or procedurally unfair, confidence erodes and alternative forms of order maintenance—organized vigilante groups and spontaneous mob justice ("jungle justice")—proliferate. The documentary study by Manya Manya (2026a) demonstrates that declining public trust, perceived procedural unfairness, ineffective policing, judicial delays, corruption, and weak governance constitute major drivers of such self-help justice, with further reinforcement from poverty, unemployment, fear of crime,

misinformation, and cultural acceptance of informal mechanisms. These studies, however, are either survey based and regionally bounded (Akinlabi, 2017; Akinlabi & Murphy, 2018), focused on a single threat (Madueke, 2025), or concerned mainly with the public side of distrust (Tiwa, 2024; Manya Manya, 2026a). None has examined, across the whole 2015 to 2026 period, how the role of the NPF, its institutional constraints and the growth of self-help justice relate to one another.

This paper therefore situates the role of the NPF within that broader institutional and social context. It asks: (RQ1) What has been the contribution of the Nigeria Police Force to combating insecurity and safeguarding national security in the period 2015–2026? (RQ2) What structural and operational challenges have constrained its performance? And (RQ3) what realistic prospects exist for strengthening its capacity and legitimacy so that communities are less inclined to take the law into their own hands?

The research gap is therefore the absence of an integrated, period-wide analysis that links the operational role of the NPF, its capacity and legitimacy constraints, and the community self-help that those constraints encourage. The novelty of this study lies in reading these three elements together through two theories that are usually applied separately: Social Disorganization Theory, which explains why informal order emerges where formal control is weak, and Procedural Justice Theory, which explains why citizens withdraw cooperation from institutions they regard as unfair. Where Manya Manya (2026a) asked why communities take the law into their own hands, this paper asks what it is about the police institution that leaves room for them to do so, and it extends Madueke (2025) from banditry to the full range of internal security threats.

The analysis is urgent for three reasons. Fatalities from armed group violence rose sharply after 2023 (Amnesty International, 2025; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026); in November 2025 the federal government declared a national security emergency, ordered the withdrawal of police officers from VIP protection and raised the police recruitment drive to 50,000 officers (State House Nigeria, 2025a, 2025b); and the debate on state police and constitutional reform remains open (Igba, 2026; Madueke, 2025). Decisions taken in this period will shape Nigerian policing for a generation.

The objective of this study is to analyse the role of the NPF in combating insecurity from 2015 to 2026, to identify the constraints that limit that role, and to assess feasible reform pathways. RQ1 is answered in the sub-section on the role of the NPF, RQ2 in the sub-sections on challenges and their implications, and RQ3 in the sub-section on prospects and pathways. Theoretically, the study shows how the two frameworks combine to explain a cycle of weak formal control and informal self-help in a postcolonial setting. Practically, it gives the Ministry of Police Affairs, the Police Service Commission and the National Assembly an evidence-based order of priorities. The main implication concerns the sequencing of reform: adding officers without improving procedural fairness, or improving oversight without improving capacity, is unlikely to reduce reliance on self-help.

National security in the Nigerian context encompasses the protection of the state and its citizens from both external and internal threats. Internal security management—crime prevention, public order, counter-banditry, and counter-insurgency support—falls primarily to the NPF in

cooperation with other security agencies, while the armed forces lead counter-insurgency operations (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Igba, 2026). Effective performance of this mandate requires not only kinetic capacity but also legitimacy, public cooperation, and the rule of law.

Social Disorganization Theory originated in the Chicago School and holds that crime and informal social control mechanisms are more likely to emerge where formal institutions are weak and unable to regulate behaviour effectively (Kubrin & Wo, 2016). Kubrin and Wo (2016) note that the main challenge for the theory is to identify the mechanisms that link structural conditions to crime; in this study the mechanism of interest is the reach of formal social control, observed through police density, response capacity and presence in rural areas. In the Nigerian setting, structural factors such as ineffective policing, weak governance, poverty, unemployment, and declining public trust create environments in which communities develop alternative systems of order maintenance, including vigilantism and mob justice (Manya Manya, 2026a, 2026c). Four themes from the theory (institutional weakness, formal and informal social control, community structure, and informal enforcement) were used as deductive codes in the analysis.

Procedural Justice Theory (Tyler, 1990, 2006) emphasizes that citizens are more willing to obey laws and cooperate with authorities when they perceive legal institutions as fair, transparent, impartial, and respectful. Legitimacy depends not solely on crime-control effectiveness but on the quality of treatment and decision-making processes, which Sunshine and Tyler (2003) identified as the main antecedent of public support for policing. When police are perceived as corrupt, delayed, or disrespectful, support for formal institutions declines and tolerance for extrajudicial measures rises. Empirical work in Ghana has shown that perceived police trustworthiness (operating through procedural fairness) is a stronger predictor of support for vigilante self-help than perceived effectiveness alone (Tankebe, 2009b), and that procedural fairness shapes cooperation with the police (Tankebe, 2008, 2009a). Studies in Pakistan likewise link police illegitimacy and righteous anger to approval of vigilante violence (Asif & Weenink, 2022; Asif, 2023). These findings cannot be transferred to Nigeria without caution, because Akinlabi and Murphy (2018) found that effectiveness weighs more heavily than legitimacy in Nigerian compliance decisions; perceived effectiveness and procedural fairness were therefore coded separately. In the documents, procedural justice was identified through four indicators: fairness of decisions, neutrality, voice (the opportunity to be heard or to complain) and respectful treatment.

Figure 1 summarises the analytical pathway. The constitutional and statutory mandate defines what the NPF is expected to do. Capacity constraints (manpower, funding, logistics, intelligence and command structure) and legitimacy constraints (corruption, abuse and weak accountability) limit how far that mandate is delivered. Weak delivery produces delayed response, low trust and rising insecurity, which communities answer with vigilantism and mob justice. Self-help in turn weakens the rule of law and the state's monopoly of legitimate force, which feeds back into institutional weakness. Social Disorganization Theory explains the path from capacity constraints to informal control; Procedural Justice Theory explains the path from legitimacy constraints to the withdrawal of cooperation. Reform prospects act on both sets of constraints.

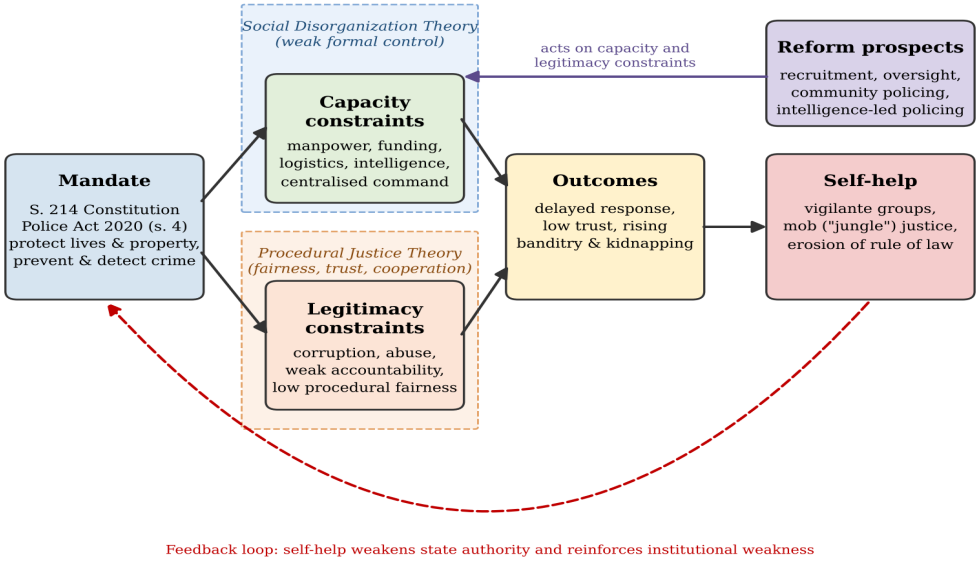


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework linking NPF mandate, capacity and legitimacy constraints, outcomes, self-help and reform prospects, with the feedback loop and the domain of each theory shown (informed by Social Disorganization and Procedural Justice Theory). Source: Author's construct (2026).

METHOD

Research type and design. This study adopts a qualitative documentary research design. Document analysis suits the research questions because institutional mandates, capacities and public assessments of the police are recorded in laws, official statements, independent reports and scholarly studies, and the READ approach (ready materials, extract data, analyse data, distil findings) provides a transparent procedure for analysing such sources (Dalglish et al., 2020). The unit of analysis is the document. The scope is national, with particular attention to the North-West and North-Central zones where banditry and kidnapping are concentrated, and the period covered is January 2015 to October 2026.

Data sources and selection. Documents were retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar and African Journals Online (AJOL), and from the repositories of the National Bureau of Statistics, State House Nigeria, the European Union Agency for Asylum, Afrobarometer, the Institute for Economics & Peace and Amnesty International. Search strings combined "Nigeria Police Force" OR "Nigerian police" with insecurity, banditry, kidnapping, vigilant*, "mob justice", legitimacy, "procedural justice", "community policing" and "police reform". Documents were included if they (a) focused on Nigeria, or on comparable African and South Asian settings where they tested the two theories; (b) were published between 2015 and 2026, except for foundational theoretical works; (c) were peer reviewed or produced by an official or established independent body; and (d) addressed at least one research question. Opinion pieces without identifiable authorship and figures that could not be traced to an original source were excluded. The final search was completed in October 2026, and 35 documents were retained for analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Documents included in the analysis, by type

Document type	n	Documents
Peer-reviewed journal articles	20	(Akinlabi, 2017; Akinlabi & Murphy, 2018; Asif, 2023; Asif & Weenink, 2022; Igba, 2026; Ikuteyijo, 2009; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022; Madueke, 2025; Manya Manya, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c; Nnabuihe et al., 2023; Ojo et al., 2023; Pratten, 2008; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tankebe, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Tiwa, 2024; Verjee & Kwaja, 2021)
Books and book chapters	3	(Kubrin & Wo, 2016; Tyler, 1990, 2006)
Legal instruments	4	(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, 2019, 2020, 2023)
Official and intergovernmental reports and statements	4	(European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025; National Bureau of Statistics & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019; State House Nigeria, 2025a, 2025b)
Independent survey and monitoring reports	4	(Amnesty International, 2025; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026; Krönke et al., 2024; Kweitsu, 2023)
Total	**35**	**Methodological references (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Dalglish et al., 2020) are not part of the corpus**

Source: Data Processed

Research instrument and analysis. The research instrument was a document coding sheet. Each document was recorded with its bibliographic details, type, year, geographic focus and a credibility note (authorship, method and traceability of figures) in a spreadsheet, and was coded against a framework derived from the two theories: mandate and role; capacity (manpower, funding, logistics, intelligence and training); legitimacy (corruption, abuse, accountability and procedural fairness); self-help responses; insecurity outcomes; and reform. Analysis followed reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) in five stages: familiarisation, deductive coding against the framework, inductive coding of additional themes, review and definition of themes, and write-up. Coding was iterative; a theme that emerged inductively, over-centralised command, was added to the framework and then applied to all documents. The number of documents supporting each theme is reported in Table 3 in place of the earlier percentage weights.

Numerical data and validity. Numerical data are used descriptively. Where sources disagreed, for example on police strength or population, the most recent official or institutional figure was preferred, its reference year was recorded, and ratios were recomputed from the stated inputs instead of being copied from secondary statements; officers per 100,000 people were calculated as officers divided by population multiplied by 100,000. The illustrative values used in the earlier version were replaced with sourced values. Credibility was strengthened by triangulating official statements with independent reports and peer-reviewed studies. The design has limits: documents reflect the purposes of their authors, official operational figures are rarely verified independently, and documentary association cannot establish causation. Findings are therefore read as patterns supported by several sources, not as causal estimates.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of the Nigeria Police Force in Combating Insecurity

Constitutional and Statutory Mandate

Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution establishes the NPF as the only police force for the Federation, item 45 of the Exclusive Legislative List places the police under the National Assembly, and Section 215 vests operational command in the Inspector-General of Police; the armed forces, under Section 217, lead the suppression of insurrection and act in aid of civil authority (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The statutory responsibility of the NPF, set out in Section 4 of the Police Act 2020, therefore covers crime prevention and detection, public order and the protection of lives and property, while counter-insurgency is shared with the military (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020). The Police Act 2020 modernizes the legal framework, emphasizing transparency, accountability, community policing, and the protection of human rights. The Force is organized into Force Headquarters, zonal commands, state commands, area commands, and divisional and station levels, enabling (in principle) nationwide coverage. This constitutional monopoly is now contested. Regional and state outfits such as Amotekun (2020) and Ebube Agu (2021) were created to fill gaps left by a centralised force (Nnabuihe et al., 2023), and proposals to establish state police remain under debate (Igba, 2026; Madueke, 2025). The outcome of this debate will directly redefine the future role of the NPF.

Operational Contributions 2015–2026

Over the review period the NPF conducted investigations, arrests, and rescue operations against armed robbery, kidnapping syndicates, cultism, and other conventional crimes. In coordination with the Armed Forces and other agencies, police units have supported operations against banditry and residual insurgent activity. Official figures released by the Force in 2025 reported the rescue of 1,581 hostages and the arrest of more than 30,000 suspects; these figures come from the Force itself and have not been independently verified. Because most counter-banditry operations are joint, such outcomes cannot be attributed to the NPF alone, and independent monitoring over the same period recorded rising fatalities (Amnesty International, 2025). The main institutional initiatives of the period are summarised in Table 2. Community policing initiatives and neighbourhood watch partnerships have been promoted in various states, although implementation and public awareness remain uneven (Ikuteyijo, 2009; Nnabuihe et al., 2023).

Table 2. Key NPF-related legal and institutional initiatives, 2015 to 2026

Year	Initiative or development	Relevance to the NPF	Source
2019	Nigeria Police Trust Fund (Establishment) Act	Dedicated fund for equipment, training and welfare	(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019)
2020	Police Act 2020 replaces the colonial-era Police Act	Legal basis for community policing, human rights protection and accountability	(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020)
October 2020	#EndSARS protests; dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad and state judicial panels of inquiry	Accountability response to police abuse; lasting legitimacy deficit	(Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022)
2020 to 2021	Creation of Amotekun (South-West) and Ebube Agu (South-East)	Regional outfits fill gaps left by a centralised force; coordination challenge	(Nnabuihe et al., 2023)
2023	Inspector-General states need for about 190,000 additional personnel	Official recognition of the manpower gap	(European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025)
November 2025	Withdrawal of police officers from VIP protection; recruitment of 30,000 officers approved	Redeployment of personnel to core duties	(State House Nigeria, 2025a)
November 2025	National security emergency; police recruitment raised to 50,000	Largest planned expansion of the Force in the period	(State House Nigeria, 2025b)

Source: Data Processed

Nevertheless, the scale and sophistication of contemporary threats—especially mass kidnapping and rural banditry have often exceeded the rapid-response and intelligence capacity of local police formations, particularly in sparsely policed rural areas of the North-West and North-Central zones (Madueke, 2025). The mass abduction of more than 300 boys from the Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, in December 2020 and of between 279 and 317 girls from the Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, in February 2021 (Verjee & Kwaja, 2021), and the abduction of pupils at Kuriga in March 2024, all occurred in rural communities far from effective police cover. Madueke (2025) shows that rural areas where banditry is most active remain under-policed while safer southern cities retain a visible police presence, and Amnesty International (2025) links the death toll to the absence of governance in rural communities.

Challenges Constraining the Nigeria Police Force

Manpower Deficit and Misallocation

One of the most consistently cited constraints is the chronic shortage of personnel relative to population and territory. The strength of the NPF is reported at about 371,800 officers, a figure that has changed little in official statements for many years, serving an estimated 236.7 million people in 2024 (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025). This gives about 157 officers per 100,000 people, or one officer for every 637 residents (371,800 ÷ 236,747,130 × 100,000 = 157).

The figure covers all ranks and units, so the number available for frontline duty is smaller. The ratio is often compared with a benchmark of about 1:450 (222 per 100,000) that Nigerian officials attribute to the United Nations; because no binding United Nations standard of this kind exists, the benchmark is used here only as a commonly cited reference point. In 2023 the Inspector-General of Police stated that the Force needed about 190,000 additional personnel to reach that ratio (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025).

Compounding the numerical shortfall is the widespread practice of deploying a large share of available personnel—reported at more than 100,000 officers, or at least 27% of total strength (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025)—to VIP and personal protection duties for politicians, traditional rulers, business figures, and other elites. This leaves a comparatively small residual force for general policing, crime prevention, and emergency response across 36 states, the FCT, and 774 local government areas. The earlier figure of 70 to 80 percent could not be traced to a verifiable source and has been removed. Because the 100,000 figure refers to total personnel rather than deployable officers, the share of operational strength diverted is likely to be higher than 27%. On 23 November 2025 the President ordered the withdrawal of police officers from VIP protection, with VIPs to obtain protection from the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps instead (State House Nigeria, 2025a). The Force subsequently reported recalling 11,566 officers from VIP duties (late November 2025).

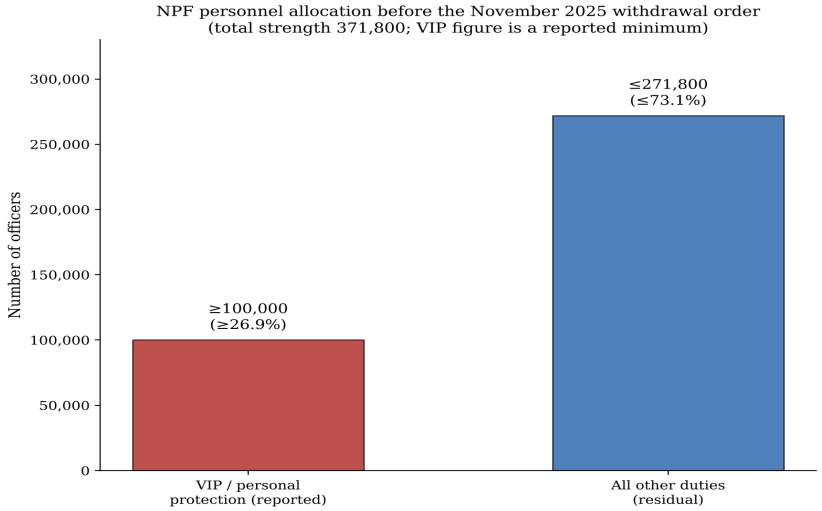


Figure 2. Reported allocation of NPF personnel to VIP and personal protection before the November 2025 withdrawal order (denominator: total strength of 371,800; the VIP figure is a reported minimum). Source: computed from European Union Agency for Asylum (2025).

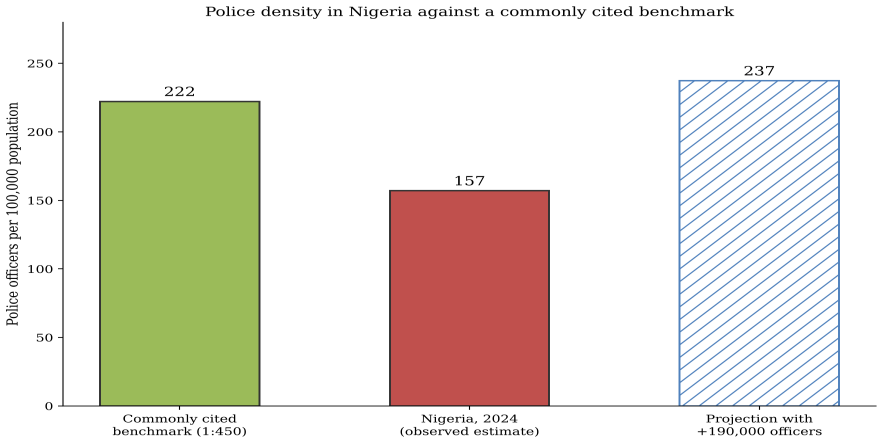


Figure 3. Police officers per 100,000 population: commonly cited benchmark (1:450), Nigeria's 2024 estimate (371,800 officers; 236.7 million people) and a projection with 190,000 additional officers at the 2024 population (hatched bar, not an observed value). Source: computed from European Union Agency for Asylum (2025).

Underfunding, Logistics, and Equipment

Budgetary allocations to the police, while increasing in nominal terms in some years, have remained inadequate relative to the scale of the internal security challenge and the cost of modern policing. For 2025, the institutional budget estimate of the Force (₦1.896 trillion) was reduced to ₦1.252 trillion during budget preparation, and the Inspector-General asked for the police to be removed from the envelope budgeting system and for a special operations account to fund emergency operations (2025 budget defence, January 2025). Capital support through the Nigeria Police Trust Fund has also been irregular: the Fund's 2024 budget of ₦124.29 billion was approved only in May 2025, and its 2025 and 2026 budgets (₦170.10 billion and ₦233.96 billion) were approved together in July 2026 after legal disputes over the Fund's revenue sources (Senate approvals, 2025 to 2026). Stations frequently lack functional vehicles, communication equipment, forensic capacity, and even basic office supplies, and law enforcement agencies still rely on outdated tools for gathering and preserving evidence (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025; Madueke, 2025). Poor logistics translate directly into delayed response times and limited presence in rural and high-risk areas: without vehicles and radios, a station that receives a distress call cannot reach a village under attack in time, which is the gap that bandits exploit.

Corruption, Accountability, and Public Trust

Survey evidence consistently places the police among the institutions most associated with bribery. In the second national corruption survey, conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in 2019, police officers accounted for more than one third (35.7%) of all bribes paid to public officials (National Bureau of Statistics & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). In the Afrobarometer Round 9 survey of 2022, 73% of Nigerians said that most or all police officials are corrupt, the worst rating among eleven institutions, and only 15% trusted the police somewhat or a lot (Kweitsu, 2023); across 39 African

countries, Nigeria had the lowest share (13%) of citizens who said the police often or always act professionally and respect citizens' rights (Krönke et al., 2024). These are measures of perception and reported experience; they do not establish the prevalence of misconduct across all officers. Practices such as arbitrary arrest, extortion, and excessive use of force erode procedural legitimacy. As Procedural Justice Theory predicts, such experiences reduce willingness to cooperate with the police and increase tolerance for alternative, including extrajudicial, responses, a pattern consistent with Akinlabi's (2017) findings on young Nigerians and with the institutional distrust trap described by Tiwa (2024). The #EndSARS protests of October 2020, triggered by abuses attributed to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, led to the dissolution of the unit and to judicial panels of inquiry in several states, but the violent end of the protests at the Lekki toll gate deepened the legitimacy deficit rather than resolving it (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022). #EndSARS shows how a single unit's conduct can damage the standing of the whole Force; it does not by itself measure how widespread misconduct is.

Training, Professionalism, and Intelligence Capacity

Training and continuous professional development remain uneven. Madueke (2025) links poor training and welfare to weak counter-banditry performance, and the Nigeria Police Trust Fund, created in 2019 partly to finance training and equipment, has been slowed by delays in approving and releasing its budgets (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). Intelligence-led policing is constrained by weak data systems, limited analytical capacity, and inter-agency coordination challenges with the Department of State Services, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and the armed forces, alongside state-backed outfits such as the Civilian Joint Task Force and Yan Sakai that operate with uneven links to the police (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025). Over-centralization of command can delay local initiative and responsiveness to fast-moving threats such as mass abductions, because operational control rests with the Inspector-General and state governors cannot direct police deployments without reference to the centre (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Igba, 2026).

Synthesis of Challenges

Table 3 synthesises the challenges by reporting how many documents in the corpus support each theme and which sources support it. The earlier pie chart, which presented percentage weights without a documented coding procedure, has been removed.

Table 3. Thematic synthesis of the constraints on the NPF (n = number of corpus documents coding each theme)

Theme	Indicators coded	n	Main sources
Manpower and deployment	Police density, VIP diversion, recruitment, rural presence	6	(European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025; Madueke, 2025; Igba, 2026; State House Nigeria, 2025a, 2025b; Verjee & Kwaja, 2021)
Funding, logistics and training	Budget envelope, Trust Fund releases, vehicles, communication, forensic tools, welfare	3	(European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025; Madueke, 2025; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019)
Corruption and legitimacy	Bribery, abuse, trust, professionalism, procedural fairness	10	(National Bureau of Statistics & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019; Kweitsu, 2023; Krönke et al., 2024; Akinlabi, 2017; Akinlabi & Murphy, 2018; Tiwa, 2024; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tankebe, 2008, 2009a)
Intelligence and centralised command	Data systems, inter-agency coordination, control by the Inspector-General	5	(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Igba, 2026; Madueke, 2025; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025; Nnabuihe et al., 2023)
Self-help responses	Vigilante groups, mob justice, regional outfits	8	(Manya Manya, 2026a, 2026c; Pratten, 2008; Tankebe, 2009b; Asif & Weenink, 2022; Asif, 2023; Tiwa, 2024; Nnabuihe et al., 2023)
Insecurity outcomes	Fatalities, abductions, banditry dynamics	5	(Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026; Amnesty International, 2025; Verjee & Kwaja, 2021; Ojo et al., 2023; Manya Manya, 2026b)

Source: Data Processed

Implications for Public Security and Social Stability

The documented weaknesses of formal policing have direct consequences for both public security and social stability. Ineffective or delayed police response, combined with perceptions of procedural unfairness and corruption, contributes to the conditions under which communities turn to vigilantism and mob justice (Manya Manya, 2026a; Tiwa, 2024). Two forms should be distinguished. Organised vigilante groups have long histories in Nigeria and are often sponsored or tolerated by local and state authorities (Pratten, 2008), whereas mob justice is spontaneous and usually directed at individual suspects. The Ghanaian evidence that perceived police trustworthiness predicts support for violent self-help (Tankebe, 2009b) and the Pakistani evidence on anger and illegitimacy (Asif, 2023) suggest that both forms draw on the same deficit of trust. Self-help also has other drivers, including the availability of weapons, local conflict dynamics,

poverty and slow access to the courts (Manya Manya, 2026a; Ojo et al., 2023), so the documents support an association, not a single cause. While organized vigilante groups and spontaneous collective punishment may produce short-term deterrence in some localities, they frequently generate human rights violations, wrongful targeting, retaliatory cycles, and further erosion of the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Perceived impunity reinforces this pattern. When suspects arrested by the police are released without visible investigation or prosecution, communities read the outcome as a failure of the security and justice chain, of which the police are the most visible part. Breaches of custodial facilities, such as the July 2022 attack on the Kuje Medium Security Custodial Centre in Abuja, strengthen this perception. Correctional administration lies outside the mandate of the NPF and is therefore noted here only as context.

Table 4 replaces the earlier illustrative fatality chart with sourced indicators. Terrorism deaths in Nigeria fell from their 2014 and 2015 peak, reached a low around 2022 and have risen steadily since, with 750 deaths and 171 incidents in 2025 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026). Because the Global Terrorism Index excludes much criminal banditry, these figures understate total violence; the Amnesty International (2025) count of at least 10,217 deaths in seven northern states over two years gives a fuller picture of the burden placed on rural policing.

Table 4. Selected sourced indicators of insecurity and police legitimacy in Nigeria, 2015 to 2026

Indicator	Period	Value	Source
Rank on the Global Terrorism Index	2025	4th (up two places)	(Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026)
Deaths from terrorism	2025	750 (46% higher than 2024)	(Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026)
Terrorist incidents	2024 to 2025	120 to 171	(Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026)
People killed by armed groups in seven northern states	May 2023 to May 2025	At least 10,217 (Benue 6,896; Plateau 2,630)	(Amnesty International, 2025)
Mass school abductions (Kankara; Jangebe)	December 2020; February 2021	More than 300 boys; 279 to 317 girls	(Verjee & Kwaja, 2021)
Police officers per 100,000 people	2024	157 (1:637)	(European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025)
Share of all bribes paid to police officers	2019	35.7%	(National Bureau of Statistics & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019)
Citizens saying most or all police are corrupt; trust in police	2022	73%; 15%	(Kweitsu, 2023)

Source: Data Processed

In short, the NPF's capacity and legitimacy deficits are not merely operational problems; they are structural drivers of a broader security–justice–social stability nexus in which formal weakness and informal self-help reinforce each other. The evidence for this nexus comes from three of the preceding themes: low police density and VIP diversion (Figures 2 and 3), perceived corruption and low trust (Table 4), and the spread of vigilante and regional outfits (Table 2). In Social Disorganization terms, weak formal control leaves space for informal control; in Procedural Justice terms, perceived unfairness removes the reasons citizens have to wait for formal control. The two mechanisms reinforce each other, because self-help further reduces cooperation with the police. Since the evidence is documentary, this is an interpretation of converging sources rather than a demonstrated causal chain.

Prospects and Pathways for Strengthening the NPF

The pathways below are grounded in the documented gaps and ordered by priority. Each identifies the responsible institutions and the main implementation constraint.

Recruitment, Welfare, and Force Strength

Sustained, transparent recruitment toward a more adequate police-to-population ratio is essential. Reaching 222 officers per 100,000 at the 2024 population would require about 525,600 officers, a gap of roughly 154,000 over the reported strength (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025). The 50,000 recruits authorised in November 2025 (State House Nigeria, 2025b) would close about one third of that gap, before attrition. With population growth of about 2% a year, the requirement itself rises by roughly 10,000 officers annually, so recruitment of at least 30,000 to 40,000 a year net of retirements would be needed for several years; each intake adds recurrent personnel costs that the current envelope budgeting system does not accommodate. Parallel attention to welfare—salaries, housing, insurance, and conditions of service—is required to improve morale, reduce corruption incentives, and attract higher-calibre recruits. Reducing the proportion of officers diverted to VIP protection would immediately expand the pool available for general duties. The November 2025 withdrawal order (State House Nigeria, 2025a) shows that this is legally possible under existing powers; its effect will depend on enforcement by the Inspector-General, on the capacity of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps to absorb VIP protection, and on whether exemptions erode it. The responsible institutions are the Ministry of Police Affairs, the Police Service Commission (recruitment and discipline) and the National Assembly (appropriation).

Logistics, Technology, and Intelligence-Led Policing

Investment in vehicles, communications, forensic laboratories, and digital case-management systems is indispensable, and the Nigeria Police Trust Fund was created for exactly this purpose (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019); the priority is predictable release of its budgets and transparent, published procurement. Strengthening intelligence fusion, crime analysis, and inter-agency coordination (including multi-agency anti-kidnap cells) can improve preventive and rescue capacity. These measures respond directly to the logistics and intelligence gaps in Table 3.

They require safeguards: personal data collected through surveillance and case-management systems must be handled under the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023), systems should be interoperable across agencies, and independent oversight is needed so that new surveillance capacity is not turned against protesters or political opponents, a risk made clear by #EndSARS (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022).

Procedural Justice, Accountability, and Community Policing

Reforms must address not only capacity but also fairness and respect in police–citizen encounters. Independent oversight, effective complaint mechanisms, human-rights training, and genuine community policing partnerships can help rebuild trust. The Police Service Commission and the Force's Complaint Response Unit already provide channels for complaints, but low trust (15%) and the very low share of citizens who see the police as professional (Kweitsu, 2023; Krönke et al., 2024) indicate that these channels are not yet seen as effective. Community policing has faced similar problems since its introduction, including weak funding, suspicion between police and residents and limited local ownership (Ikuteyijo, 2009). Community policing, when properly resourced and locally owned, offers a lawful channel for citizen participation that reduces the demand for extrajudicial alternatives. Genuine ownership requires community representation that includes women and young people, published accountability rules for community police officers, and safeguards so that local power holders cannot capture the structures for partisan or ethnic purposes.

Regulation of Non-State Security Actors

Clear legal frameworks, training, and supervision for community security outfits are needed to prevent vigilantism from sliding into abuse. Amotekun in the South-West was established under state laws in 2020 after the federal government challenged it as an unconstitutional regional police, and now operates as a state-based network that supports the police mainly with intelligence; Ebube Agu was created by South-East governors in 2021 to cooperate with existing agencies (Nnabuihe et al., 2023). In the North-East and North-West, the Civilian Joint Task Force and Yan Sakai groups operate alongside the security forces with uneven accountability (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025). A distinction is needed between formally constituted community security arrangements, which can be regulated and linked to the NPF through joint command protocols, and unlawful vigilantism or mob justice, which the police must prosecute.

Socioeconomic and Governance Context

Policing reforms alone cannot eliminate the structural drivers of crime and insecurity. In the North-West, armed banditry draws recruits from rural youth facing unemployment, poverty and weak local governance (Ojo et al., 2023; Manya Manya, 2026b). The priorities are therefore youth employment and skills programmes in banditry-affected states, restoration of rural schooling, and stronger local government presence. These measures are not effects that this

documentary study can establish; they are conditions under which police reform is more likely to succeed.

CONCLUSION

On RQ1, the NPF remained the main agency for crime control, kidnapping response and public order between 2015 and 2026, but its contribution was concentrated in urban areas and in joint operations whose outcomes cannot be attributed to the police alone. On RQ2, its performance was constrained by low police density (about 157 officers per 100,000 people), the diversion of more than 100,000 officers to VIP protection, irregular funding, weak intelligence capacity, centralised command and a deep deficit of public trust. On RQ3, the most feasible pathways are sustained recruitment combined with enforced redeployment of VIP guards, predictable capital funding, accountable community policing and stronger oversight of both police and non-state security actors. Theoretically, the study shows that Social Disorganization Theory and Procedural Justice Theory explain two linked halves of the same cycle: weak formal control opens space for self-help, and perceived unfairness removes the incentive to wait for formal control. Practically, it indicates that reforms should be sequenced so that capacity and legitimacy improve together, with priority given to redeploying existing officers, funding stability and credible complaint mechanisms. The study relies on secondary documents, and official operational figures are rarely independently verified; the findings therefore describe converging patterns, not causal effects. Future research should use surveys and interviews with officers and community members, compare police performance across states and zones, and evaluate the effects of the 2025 redeployment and recruitment measures once data become available.

FUNDING

The author received no specific financial support, grant, or sponsorship from any public, private, or institutional funding agency for the research and publication of this article. The research was conducted independently.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest concerning the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Manya–Manya U.N. was solely responsible for the conceptualisation, research design, methodology, documentary data collection, analysis, interpretation of findings, writing of the original manuscript, and final approval of the article for publication.

GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

The author declares that artificial intelligence (AI) tools, where applicable, were used solely for language refinement, grammar correction, and improvement of writing clarity. AI tools

were not used to replace the author's scholarly judgment, research analysis, interpretation, or conclusions. The author takes full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

REFERENCES

Akinlabi, O. M. (2017). Young people, procedural justice and police legitimacy in Nigeria. Policing and Society, 27(4), 419–438. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2015.1077836

Akinlabi, O. M., & Murphy, K. (2018). Dull compulsion or perceived legitimacy? Assessing why people comply with the law in Nigeria. Police Practice and Research, 19(2), 186–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2018.1418170

Amnesty International. (2025). Nigeria: Mounting death toll and looming humanitarian crisis amid unchecked attacks by armed groups. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/05/nigeria-mounting-death-toll-unchecked-attacks-armed-groups/

Asif, M. (2023). Police legitimacy and approval of vigilante violence: The significance of anger. Theoretical Criminology, 27(2), 305–325. https://doi.org/10.1177/13624806221101369

Asif, M., & Weenink, D. (2022). Vigilante rituals theory: A cultural explanation of vigilante violence. European Journal of Criminology, 19(2), 163–182. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370819887518

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? Qualitative Research in Psychology, 18(3), 328–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Dalglish, S. L., Khalid, H., & McMahon, S. A. (2020). Document analysis in health policy research: The READ approach. Health Policy and Planning, 35(10), 1424–1431. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czaa064

European Union Agency for Asylum. (2025). Nigeria: Country focus (Country of Origin Information Report). https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/coi-report-nigeria-country-focus-1

Igba, S. (2026). Federalism and policing in Nigeria: Colonial continuities and contemporary complexities. African Security, 19(3), 318–339. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2026.2614886

Ikuteyijo, L. O. (2009). The challenges of community policing in Nigeria. International Journal of Police Science & Management, 11(3), 285–293. https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.2009.11.3.130

Institute for Economics & Peace. (2026). Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the impact of terrorism. https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf

Iwuoha, V. C., & Aniche, E. T. (2022). Protests and blood on the streets: Repressive state, police brutality and #EndSARS protest in Nigeria. Security Journal, 35(4), 1102–1124. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41284-021-00316-z

Krönke, M., Isbell, T., & Kakumba, M. R. (2024). Law enforcers or law breakers? Beyond corruption, Africans cite brutality and lack of professionalism among police failings (Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 90). Afrobarometer. https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/PP90-PAP6-Africans-cite-corruption-and-lack-of-professionalism-among-police-failings-Afrobarometer-24jan24.pdf

Kubrin, C. E., & Wo, J. C. (2016). Social disorganization theory's greatest challenge: Linking structural characteristics to crime in socially disorganized communities. In A. R. Piquero (Ed.), The handbook of criminological theory (pp. 121–136). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118512449.ch7

Kweitsu, R. (2023). Amid growing insecurity, Nigerians fault police for corruption and lack of professionalism (Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 715). Afrobarometer. https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/AD715-Nigerians-fault-police-for-corruption-and-lack-of-professionalism-Afrobarometer-10oct23.pdf

Madueke, O. (2025). Why the Nigeria police struggles to tackle banditry in Nigeria. The Round Table, 114(4), 436–450. https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2025.2518321

Manya Manya, N. U. (2026a). Factors influencing communities to take the law into their own hands: Implications for public security and social stability. Journal of Law and Social Politics, 4(5), 1313–1329. https://doi.org/10.59261/jlsp.v4i5.252

Manya Manya, N. U. (2026b). The paradox of force: A qualitative analysis of armed banditry and its implications for Nigeria's national security (2010–2025). Academos Journal, 2(1), 33–43. https://doi.org/10.65921/9g0pvf65

Manya Manya, N. U. (2026c). Coerced disorganization: Rethinking social disorganization theory for armed rural communities in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Iustitia Criminal Science, 1(1). https://doi.org/10.68374/ics.v1i1.7

National Bureau of Statistics, & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2019). Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and trends. Second survey on corruption as experienced by the population. https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1031

Nnabuihe, O. E., Ashindorbe, K., & Odobo, S. O. (2023). Politics of security sector reform: Violence and the emergence of regional security outfits in Nigeria. African Studies Quarterly, 21(4), 50–64. https://asq.africa.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/168/V21i4a4.pdf

Ojo, J. S., Oyewole, S., & Aina, F. (2023). Forces of terror: Armed banditry and insecurity in North-west Nigeria. Democracy and Security, 19(4). https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924

Pratten, D. (2008). The politics of protection: Perspectives on vigilantism in Nigeria. Africa, 78(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.3366/E0001972008000028

Sunshine, J., & Tyler, T. R. (2003). The role of procedural justice and legitimacy in shaping public support for policing. Law & Society Review, 37(3), 513–548. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5893.3703002

Tankebe, J. (2008). Police effectiveness and police trustworthiness in Ghana: An empirical appraisal. Criminology & Criminal Justice, 8(2), 185–202. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895808088994

Tankebe, J. (2009a). Public cooperation with the police in Ghana: Does procedural fairness matter? Criminology, 47(4), 1265–1293. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2009.00175.x

Tankebe, J. (2009b). Self-help, policing, and procedural justice: Ghanaian vigilantism and the rule of law. Law & Society Review, 43(2), 245–270. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5893.2009.00372.x

Tiwa, D. F. A. (2024). Institutional distrust trap: An analysis of the effect of public distrust in the Nigeria Police Force. Policing and Society, 34(8), 846–860. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2024.2341121

Tyler, T. R. (1990). Why people obey the law. Yale University Press.

Tyler, T. R. (2006). Why people obey the law (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press.

Verjee, A., & Kwaja, C. M. A. (2021). An epidemic of kidnapping: Interpreting school abductions and insecurity in Nigeria. African Studies Quarterly, 20(3), 87–105. https://journals.flvc.org/ASQ/article/view/135980

Legal and Institutional Documents

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended).

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2019). Nigeria Police Trust Fund (Establishment) Act, 2019.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2020). Nigeria Police Act, 2020.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2023). Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023.

State House Nigeria. (2025a, November 23). President Tinubu orders the withdrawal of police officers guarding VIPs for core police duties [Press release]. https://statehouse.gov.ng/president-tinubu-orders-the-withdrawal-of-police-officers-guarding-vips-for-core-police-duties/

State House Nigeria. (2025b, November 26). President Tinubu declares a security emergency, orders army, police to recruit more personnel [Press release]. https://statehouse.gov.ng/president-tinubu-declares-a-security-emergency-orders-army-police-to-recruit-more-personnel/