



FOSTERING CIVIC AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT AS A STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NORTH-WESTERN NIGERIA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY¹

Abdullahi Sarkin Gulbi¹ and Umar Ahmed²

¹Department of Nigerian Languages, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, PMB 2346, Sokoto.

²Department of Linguistics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, PMB 2346, Sokoto.

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ABSTRACT: *The persistent security challenges in North-Western Nigeria necessitate innovative and sustainable solutions that go beyond conventional military and policing efforts. This exploratory study examines the potential of fostering civic awareness and engagement as a strategy for addressing security challenges in North-Western Nigeria, a region plagued by banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, and inter-communal violence, resulting in loss of lives, displacement, and socio-economic disruption. Despite security agencies' efforts, the region's security remains a significant concern. This study argues that enhancing civic awareness and engagement offers a crucial, yet often overlooked, path to sustainable peace and security. Using qualitative research through training workshops, post-training interviews, and focus group discussions in six affected communities in Katsina and Zamfara, the study employs thematic analysis to reveal that existing civic initiatives have been largely ineffective due to inadequate funding, poor coordination, and implementation. However, it identifies opportunities for building trust between security agencies and local communities, facilitating information sharing, and promoting peaceful coexistence. The study proposes strategies for fostering civic engagement, such as mobilizing key stakeholders, traditional rulers, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and youth groups and tailoring initiatives to the local context. It also addresses challenges like fear of retribution (revenge), illiteracy, and resource constraints, offering solutions to overcome them. This study contributes to the literature on civic engagement's role in security, providing insights and practical recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders to promote sustainable peace and security in North-Western Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Civic awareness and engagement, Security challenges, North-western Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

North-Western Nigeria, a region once known for its vibrant agricultural production and rich cultural heritage, now finds itself grappling with a relentless tide of insecurity (Adepoju, 2020). Banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, and inter-communal violence have become a grim reality, casting a long shadow over the lives of millions (Onuoha, 2020). These security issues have resulted in the loss of lives, displacement of people, and disruption of socio-economic activities in the region (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021). Despite the efforts of security agencies, the security situation in the region remains a significant concern for the Nigerian government and its citizens (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2020). Therefore, there is a need to explore alternative approaches to complement the efforts of security agencies in addressing these security challenges. One such approach is civic awareness and engagement, which involves educating and mobilizing citizens to take an active role in promoting security in their communities (Adepoju, 2020). This paper argues that fostering civic awareness and engagement among the populace presents a crucial, yet often overlooked, path towards sustainable peace and security in the region.

Historically, the North-West region of Nigeria has been characterized by a high level of ethnic diversity, with various ethnic groups co-existing within the same geographical space (Suberu, 2007). While this diversity has contributed to the region's rich cultural heritage, it has also been a source of tension and conflict. Ethnic rivalries and competition for resources have often resulted in violent clashes, leading to the loss of lives and property (Onuoha, 2020). The government's inability to effectively manage these conflicts has further exacerbated the situation, creating a sense of marginalization and exclusion among some ethnic groups (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021).

In addition to ethnic tensions, the North-West region has also been plagued by poverty and unemployment (Adepoju, 2020). The region is predominantly agrarian, with a majority of the population engaged in subsistence farming. However, lack of access to modern farming techniques, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to credit facilities have hindered agricultural productivity, resulting in low income and high poverty levels (Onuoha, 2020). The high level of poverty and unemployment has created a pool of young, idle, and disgruntled youth who are easily recruited by criminal gangs and terrorist groups (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021).

Weak governance and corruption have also contributed to the rise of insecurity in the North-West region (Adepoju, 2020). The region has been characterized by weak institutions, lack of accountability, and poor service delivery. The government's inability to provide basic social services such as education, healthcare, and water has further eroded public trust and confidence in the government (Onuoha, 2020). Corruption has also undermined the effectiveness of security agencies, with some security personnel accused of colluding with criminal gangs and terrorist groups (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021).

Furthermore, the porous nature of the region's borders has facilitated the influx of small arms and light weapons, which have been used to perpetrate criminal activities (Adepoju, 2020). The proliferation of these weapons has made it easier for criminal gangs and terrorist groups to operate with impunity, overwhelming the capacity of security agencies to respond effectively (Onuoha, 2020).



The rise of terrorism in the North-West region can be traced to the activities of Boko Haram, which initially started in the North-East region but later spread to other parts of the country (Onuoha, 2020). The group's ideology and tactics have inspired other criminal gangs and militia groups, who have adopted similar methods of operation (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021). The government's response to the activities of these groups has often been reactive and heavy-handed, leading to human rights abuses and further alienation of affected communities (Adepoju, 2020).

The cascading effects of these security challenges are deeply damaging. The agricultural sector, the cornerstone of the region's economy, has been crippled (Onuoha, 2020). Fear of attacks deters farmers from tending their fields, leading to food shortages and rising prices (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021). Markets once bustling with activity now stand deserted, as economic opportunities dwindle and the flow of goods and services contracts (Adepoju, 2020). Education, a critical driver of development, suffers immensely. Schools become targets for attacks, forcing closures and depriving children of their right to education (Onuoha, 2020). The healthcare system, already strained, becomes further burdened by casualties from violence and the displacement of populations (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021).

Beyond the tangible economic and social costs, the psychological toll on the populace is profound (Adepoju, 2020). A constant sense of fear and uncertainty pervades, eroding social cohesion and fueling mistrust between communities (Onuoha, 2020). The social fabric, once woven by shared traditions and ancestry, becomes frayed under the pressure of violence (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021). Youth, disillusioned and lacking opportunities, become vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups (Adepoju, 2020).

In the face of this complex crisis, a renewed focus on civic awareness and engagement presents a promising avenue for long-term security (Adepoju, 2020). Civic awareness, in this context, refers to the citizenry's understanding of their rights and responsibilities, security threats and solutions, and the role they can play in promoting peace and stability (Onuoha, 2020). Civic engagement, on the other hand, translates this awareness into action – through participation in community watch programs, information sharing with security forces, fostering inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation, and holding authorities accountable for their actions (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021).

Civic awareness and engagement have been identified as crucial elements in addressing security challenges globally (Adepoju, 2020). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) emphasizes the importance of civic engagement in promoting peace and security, stating that it enables citizens to participate in decision-making processes, hold their governments accountable, and contribute to the development of their communities (UNDP, 2016). In Nigeria, civic awareness and engagement have been used to address security challenges in some parts of the country, such as the Niger Delta region, with significant success (Onuoha, 2020). However, there is a paucity of research on the role of civic awareness and engagement in addressing security challenges in North-western Nigeria (Akintunde & Akinola, 2021).

This paper aims to fill this gap by examining the potential of civic awareness and engagement in addressing security challenges in North-western Nigeria. Specifically, the paper seeks to answer the following research questions:



1. What are the existing civic awareness and engagement initiatives in North-western Nigeria, and how effective have they been in addressing security challenges?
2. What are the opportunities and challenges of using civic awareness and engagement as a strategy for addressing security challenges in North-western Nigeria?

This paper delves deeper into the potential of civic awareness and engagement as a solution to the security challenges plaguing North-Western Nigeria. By exploring the historical, socio-economic, and political factors contributing to the rise of insecurity, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context within which civic engagement can be most effective. The limitations of traditional security approaches will be examined, highlighting the need for a more holistic approach that empowers citizens.

Furthermore, the paper explores various strategies for fostering civic awareness and engagement. This includes identifying key stakeholders, such as traditional rulers, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and youth groups, who can play a crucial role in mobilizing communities. Specific initiatives and programs, tailored to the local context, will be proposed to empower citizens and build bridges of cooperation between communities and security agencies. Recognizing the potential challenges that might impede civic engagement, such as fear of retribution, illiteracy, and resource constraints, the paper addresses these concerns and suggests strategies to overcome them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of insecurity in North-western Nigeria has been a subject of academic discourse for several years. Several studies have explored the root causes, dynamics, and implications of the security challenges in the region. This section provides a review of some of the relevant literature on the topic, focusing on previous studies on security challenges in North-western Nigeria, the role of civic awareness and engagement in addressing security challenges, and the theoretical framework and concepts that underpin this study.

Previous Studies on Security Challenges in North-Western Nigeria

Several studies have explored the security challenges in North-western Nigeria from different perspectives. For instance, some studies have focused on the activities of armed groups such as Boko Haram and bandits (Akinyemi, 2017; Onuoha, 2014), while others have examined the impact of the conflicts on the local population (Olatunji, 2017; Umar, 2018). Some studies have also explored the role of the state and security agencies in addressing the security challenges (Adebayo & Akinola, 2018; Eze, 2018).

One common theme that runs through these studies is the acknowledgement of the complexity of the security challenges in North-western Nigeria. The studies highlight the interplay of various factors such as poverty, inequality, ethnic and religious tensions, and weak governance in fueling the conflicts. They also emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the conflicts and involves the active participation of local communities.



The Limitations of Traditional Security Approaches

The reliance on military force has been a common approach in addressing the security challenges in North-West Nigeria. This approach is based on the assumption that the use of force can effectively neutralize the criminal gangs and terrorist groups responsible for the insecurity in the region. However, the limitations of this approach have become increasingly apparent, as the security situation in the region continues to deteriorate despite the heavy military presence. One of the main limitations of the militaristic approach is that it fails to address the root causes of insecurity in the region (Aning et al., 2020). The security challenges in North-West Nigeria are not solely a result of the activities of criminal gangs and terrorist groups, but are also a product of the historical, socio-economic, and political factors that have created an enabling environment for these groups to thrive. The use of military force may temporarily disrupt the activities of these groups, but it does not address the underlying factors that have contributed to their emergence and growth.

Furthermore, the reliance on military force can have unintended consequences that exacerbate the security challenges in the region. One of the most significant unintended consequences is the risk of civilian casualties. The use of force in populated areas can result in the loss of innocent lives, which can further alienate communities and undermine public support for the government's efforts to address insecurity (Aning et al., 2020). The heavy-handed tactics of the military can also lead to human rights abuses, which can further fuel grievances and create new recruits for criminal gangs and terrorist groups.

Another unintended consequence of the militaristic approach is the potential for the militarization of society. The heavy military presence in the region can create a culture of militarism, where the use of force becomes the primary means of resolving conflicts. This can undermine the rule of law and create a sense of impunity among security personnel, leading to further abuses and human rights violations (Aning et al., 2020).

Moreover, the reliance on military force can also lead to the neglect of other critical aspects of security, such as intelligence gathering and community engagement. The military's focus on kinetic operations can result in a lack of investment in intelligence capabilities, which are essential for understanding the dynamics of the security challenges in the region. The lack of community engagement can also create a disconnect between the security agencies and the communities they are meant to protect, further undermining public trust and confidence.

To address the limitations of the militaristic approach, there is a need for a more comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of insecurity in North-West Nigeria. This approach should prioritize non-military measures such as community engagement, intelligence gathering, and socio-economic development. Community engagement can help to build trust between security agencies and communities, while intelligence gathering can provide valuable insights into the activities of criminal gangs and terrorist groups. Socio-economic development can also address the underlying factors that contribute to the emergence of these groups, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services.

In addition, there is a need for greater accountability and transparency in the use of military force. The government should ensure that security personnel are held accountable for any human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law. There should also be



greater transparency in the operations of the military, including the sharing of information with the public and civil society organizations.

The Role of Civic Awareness and Engagement in Addressing Security Challenges

The role of civic awareness and engagement in addressing security challenges has been recognized in several studies. For instance, Ibrahim (2019) argues that civic education can help to promote peace and security in Nigeria by enhancing citizens' understanding of their rights and responsibilities and fostering a culture of democratic governance. Similarly, Adeniran (2018) contends that community engagement can help to prevent violent extremism in Nigeria by building trust between security agencies and local communities and facilitating the sharing of information.

Other studies have highlighted the potential of civil society organizations (CSOs) in promoting peace and security in conflict-affected areas. For example, Ojewale (2016) notes that CSOs can contribute to peacebuilding efforts by providing early warning systems, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, and advocating for policy reforms. Similarly, Abdullahi (2018) argues that CSOs can help to address the root causes of conflicts in North-western Nigeria by promoting socio-economic development, good governance, and social cohesion.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the concept of civic engagement, which refers to the process of active participation by citizens in the political, economic, and social affairs of their communities (Putnam, 2000). Civic engagement encompasses various forms of political and non-political activities, such as voting, volunteering, and community organizing, aimed at promoting the common good (Adler & Goggin, 2005). An empowered citizenry can act as a force multiplier, supporting traditional security measures. Informed communities can provide valuable information to security agencies, aiding in the identification and apprehension of criminals. Engaging local communities in dialogue and conflict resolution processes that fosters trust and cooperation, leading to a more sustainable peace. By holding authorities accountable for their actions, citizens can push for reforms that address the root causes of insecurity. Ultimately, civic awareness and engagement can empower communities to reclaim their sense of security and become active participants in building a more peaceful and prosperous future. The study also draws on the concept of social capital, which refers to the networks, norms, and trust that enable collective action for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995). Social capital is considered a critical resource for promoting peace and security in conflict-affected areas by facilitating cooperation, information sharing, and collective problem-solving (Varshney, 2002). Furthermore, the study is grounded in the theory of human security, which emphasizes the protection and empowerment of individuals and communities as the primary goal of security policy (UNDP, 1994). The human security approach recognizes the interconnectedness of various dimensions of security, such as economic, political, and social, and highlights the importance of addressing the root causes of insecurity (Paris, 2001).



METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design employed in this study is qualitative, which is an appropriate approach for exploring complex social phenomena such as security challenges and civic engagement (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative research design enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards the research topic (Merriam, 2009). The design is particularly useful in this study as it allows for the exploration of the impact of civic awareness and engagement in addressing security challenges in North-Western Nigeria, from the perspectives of the workshop participants.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods used in this study include training of participants drawn from six affected communities across the two North-Western Nigerian states of Katsina and Zamfara, and the use of post-training interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) to elicit information from the workshop participants on the impact and/or potential impact and relevance of the training on civic awareness and engagement to addressing security challenges.

The training of participants involved the use of a manual that covered topics such as the nature and causes of security challenges in North-Western Nigeria, the role of civic awareness and engagement in addressing security challenges, and strategies for promoting civic awareness and engagement in the affected communities. The training was conducted over a period of two days and facilitated by experts in the field of security and civic engagement.

Six months after the training, post-training interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with the workshop participants. The interviews and focus group discussions were conducted using semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion guides respectively. The interview guides and focus group discussion guides were developed based on the research questions and the objectives of the study.

The post-training interviews were conducted with a purposely selected sample of 20 workshop participants, who were selected based on their active participation in the training and their willingness to participate in the interviews. The interviews were conducted in a private setting and lasted for approximately 40 minutes each. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The focus group discussions were conducted with a total of six focus groups, one for each of the six affected communities. Each focus group consisted of eight to ten participants who were purposely selected based on their active participation in the training and their willingness to participate in the focus group discussions. The focus group discussions were conducted in a private setting and lasted for approximately two hours each. The discussions were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis procedures involved using a qualitative approach. The data collected from the post-training interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a widely used method for analyzing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



Thematic analysis involves the identification of patterns and themes within the data through a process of coding and categorization. The analysis process began with the transcription of the audio recordings of the interviews and focus group discussions. The transcripts were then read and re-read to gain familiarity with the data.

The next step involved the coding of the data, which involved assigning codes to segments of the data that related to the research questions and objectives. The codes were then grouped into broader categories based on their similarities and differences. The categories were then refined and reduced to form themes that captured the essence of the data.

The analysis process was iterative, involving moving back and forth between the data and the emerging themes to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the data. The analysis was conducted manually, using Microsoft Excel to organize the data and facilitate the coding and categorization process.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Civic Awareness and Engagement as a Counter-Narrative

As stated in section one, civic awareness and engagement refer to the process of educating and empowering citizens to participate in the democratic process and contribute to the well-being of their communities. In the context of security challenges in North-West Nigeria, civic awareness and engagement involve educating citizens about the nature of the security threats in their communities, the role of security agencies, and the steps they can take to contribute to improved security. In a key informant interview (KII), a participant to the training on civic awareness and engagement reported: “We benefited a lot from the training. We have started implementing what we learnt and we have begun to see the impact. Farmers- headers Conflict and banditry activities have reduced in our communities.”

By promoting civic awareness and engagement, citizens can become active participants in the security architecture of their communities, complementing the efforts of security agencies. In this section, we explore some of the ways in which an informed and engaged citizenry can contribute to improved security in North-West Nigeria.

Community Watch Programs

The preliminary findings of the study were shared with key stakeholders across the target states of Katsina and Zamfara. This might have contributed to the establishment of community watch programs in the two states. The programs are a form of community-based policing that involves citizens working together to monitor their neighborhoods and report suspicious activities to security agencies. In Katsina, the Community Watch Corps was created in October 2023 by the State Governor Dikko Umaru Radda. The Corps is a community-based security outfit established in Katsina State, Nigeria, to complement the efforts of conventional security agencies in maintaining law and order in the state. The Corps is made up of volunteers from various communities who are trained to provide security services to their communities.

The primary responsibility of the Katsina Community Watch Corps is to gather intelligence and provide information to security agencies on criminal activities within their communities.



They also assist in maintaining peace and order during public events, such as religious festivals, markets, and political gatherings.

The Katsina Community Watch Corps operates under the supervision of the Nigerian Police Force NPF and other security agencies in the state. The Corps members are not armed but are trained in basic security techniques such as surveillance, patrol, and communication. They are also trained in conflict resolution and mediation skills to help them manage disputes within their communities.

The establishment of the Katsina Community Watch Corps has helped to improve security in the state, especially in rural communities where there is a limited presence of conventional security agencies. The Corps has also helped to promote community participation in security matters and has enhanced the relationship between the police and the communities they serve. However, there have been concerns about the lack of proper funding and equipment for the Corps, which could affect their effectiveness in carrying out their responsibilities.

Similarly, in January 2024, the Zamfara State Governor Dauda Lawal Dare inaugurated the Zamfara Community Protection Guard (ZCPG) which is another community-based security initiative established by the Zamfara State government in Nigeria to address the growing insecurity in the state, particularly in rural communities. The ZCPG is made up of local volunteers across the state who are trained and equipped to provide security services to their communities.

The primary responsibility of the ZCPG is to gather intelligence and provide information to security agencies on criminal activities within their communities. They also assist in maintaining law and order, preventing crimes, and protecting lives and property.

The ZCPG operates under the supervision of the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies in the state. The volunteers are not armed but are trained in basic security techniques such as surveillance, patrol, and communication. They are also trained in conflict resolution and mediation skills to help them manage disputes within their communities.

The establishment of the ZCPG has helped to improve security in the state, especially in rural communities where there is a limited presence of conventional security agencies. The initiative has also helped to promote community participation in security matters and has enhanced the relationship between the police and the communities they serve. However, there have been concerns about the lack of proper funding and equipment for the ZCPG, which could affect their effectiveness in carrying out their responsibilities. There have also been reports of human rights abuses by some members of the ZCPG, which the government has promised to investigate and address the matter.

Community watch programs can be an effective way of addressing security challenges in North-West Nigeria if properly handled, particularly in rural areas where the presence of security agencies may be limited. By promoting community watch programs, citizens can become active participants in the security architecture of their communities, helping to deter criminal activities and improve the response time of security agencies.



Information Sharing with Security Forces

Information sharing between citizens and security agencies is critical to addressing security challenges in North-West Nigeria. By providing timely and accurate information to security agencies, citizens can help to prevent attacks and apprehend perpetrators. However, information sharing requires trust between citizens and security agencies, which can be challenging to achieve in communities where there is a history of mistrust or human rights abuses by security forces. To promote information sharing, it is essential to build trust between citizens and security agencies through community engagement and transparency.

Analysis of the field data shows that the training on civic awareness and engagement conducted for some residents of the insecurity-affected communities in Katsina and Zamfara has created some awareness about the necessity of community involvement in addressing security challenges. Interviews and FGDs with some training participants in some affected communities revealed that they have understood the necessity of supporting the government and security agents in tackling the problem. A participant in Zamfara stated that, "thanks to the training, we have learnt the necessity of cooperating with the security agents. We always share intelligence with them [security agents] and they are happy with the support they are getting from community members. This has resulted in a reduction in banditry activities in our area." Another participant concurred: "Before the training, we lacked understanding of how to cooperate with the government to address security challenges affecting our communities. We have also learnt better ways of responding to insecurity in our community."

Fostering Inter-Ethnic Dialogue

Inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts significantly contribute to the security challenges in North-West Nigeria. To reduce tensions and promote social cohesion, fostering inter-ethnic dialogue and understanding is crucial. According to a community leader in Zamfara, "Before, there was inter-ethnic conflict between Hausas and Fulani in our area. However, with the training, the conflict has been resolved, and there is now mutual understanding between the two ethnic groups. Everyone in the community has now understood the importance of peace and harmony." Another participant reported, "The training has equipped us with alternative dispute resolution skills. We now know how to amicably resolve disputes among ourselves. We no longer allow things to deteriorate. We have used the knowledge we acquired during the training to set up structures to enable us to address conflicts and disputes in our communities."

Citizens can play a critical role in fostering inter-ethnic dialogue by promoting tolerance, respect for diversity, and peaceful coexistence. This can be achieved through community-based initiatives such as interfaith dialogues, cultural festivals, and sports events. By promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and understanding, citizens can contribute to building a more peaceful and cohesive society.

Holding Authorities Accountable

Holding authorities accountable is critical to addressing the root causes of insecurity in North-West Nigeria. Citizens can hold authorities accountable by demanding transparency, accountability, and good governance. This can be achieved through advocacy, peaceful protests, and engagement with elected officials. By holding authorities accountable, citizens can help to address issues such as corruption, poor governance, and lack of access to basic services, which are significant contributors to the security challenges in the region.



STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING CIVIC AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

In order to effectively address the security challenges in North-Western Nigeria through civic awareness and engagement, it is essential to identify key stakeholders who can play a significant role in promoting these efforts. These stakeholders include traditional rulers, civil society organizations, religious leaders, volunteer vigilant groups and the youths. By leveraging their influence and networks, these stakeholders can help to mobilize citizens, promote awareness, and foster engagement in security-related issues.

Traditional rulers are ambassadors of peace and are highly respected and influential figures in many communities in North-Western Nigeria. They have the ability to convene community meetings and engage with their subjects on important issues. As such, they can play a critical role in promoting civic awareness and engagement by educating their subjects on security issues, encouraging them to participate in community watch programs, and facilitating dialogue between communities and security agencies.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are also crucial stakeholders in promoting civic awareness and engagement. CSOs have the expertise and resources to design and implement educational campaigns on security issues and citizen rights. They can also provide training programs on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, which can help to equip citizens with the skills needed to address security challenges in their communities. In addition, CSOs can utilize local media and communication channels to disseminate information and promote awareness of security-related issues.

Religious leaders are another important group of stakeholders who can contribute to promoting civic awareness and engagement. They have the ability to reach out to their followers and educate them on security issues from a moral and ethical perspective. Religious leaders can also promote interfaith dialogue and understanding, which can help to reduce tensions and promote social cohesion.

Youth groups are also critical stakeholders in promoting civic awareness and engagement. Young people are often the most affected by insecurity and have the potential to be agents of change in their communities. Youth groups can be mobilized to participate in community watch programs, engage in dialogue with security agencies, and promote peacebuilding initiatives.

To empower citizens and promote civic awareness and engagement, specific initiatives and programs can be implemented. Educational campaigns on security issues and citizen rights can be designed and implemented by CSOs and government agencies. These campaigns can focus on topics such as the role of citizens in promoting security, the importance of reporting suspicious activities, and the rights of citizens in dealing with security agencies.

Training programs on conflict resolution and peacebuilding can also be provided to citizens. These programs can equip citizens with the skills needed to address conflicts in their communities and promote peaceful coexistence. The training can be provided by CSOs, religious leaders, and traditional rulers.

Local media and communication channels can also be utilized to disseminate information on security-related issues. This can include radio programs, community bulletin boards, and social media platforms. These channels can be used to provide timely and accurate information on



security threats, promote awareness of citizen rights, and encourage engagement with security agencies.

Creating platforms for community dialogue and collaboration with security agencies is also essential. These platforms can provide opportunities for citizens to engage with security agencies, share information, and address security-related concerns. Platforms for dialogue can be established by traditional rulers, CSOs, and government agencies.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Challenges

While fostering civic awareness and engagement is critical to addressing security challenges in North-Western Nigeria, there are potential challenges that must be acknowledged and addressed. Some of these challenges include fear of retribution, illiteracy, and resource constraints. This section will discuss these challenges and propose strategies to overcome them.

Fear of Retribution

One of the significant challenges in promoting civic awareness and engagement is the fear of retribution from criminal elements or security forces. In many communities, findings reveal that citizens are hesitant to report criminal activities or engage with security agencies due to fear of reprisals. This fear can be exacerbated by the lack of trust in security agencies, which may be perceived as complicit in criminal activities or human rights abuses.

To overcome this challenge, it is essential to build trust between citizens and security agencies. This can be achieved through community engagement initiatives that promote transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights. Security agencies should also provide assurances of anonymity and protection to citizens who report criminal activities or provide information. In addition, community-based security initiatives, such as neighborhood watch programs, can be established to empower citizens to take an active role in promoting security in their communities while minimizing the risk of retribution.

Illiteracy

Illiteracy is another significant challenge in promoting civic awareness and engagement in North-Western Nigeria. Many citizens in the region lack access to education, and as a result, may not have the necessary literacy skills to engage with security issues or understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

To address this challenge, educational initiatives should be developed to improve literacy rates and promote civic education. These initiatives can be implemented through formal education systems, such as schools and universities, or through community-based programs, such as adult literacy classes. Educational campaigns on security issues and citizen rights should also be designed to be accessible and understandable to individuals with low literacy levels.



Resource Constraints

Resource constraints are another challenge in promoting civic awareness and engagement. Many communities in North-Western Nigeria lack access to basic resources, such as healthcare, education, and water, which can limit their ability to engage with security issues. In addition, civil society organizations and community-based initiatives may lack the necessary resources, such as funding, equipment, and personnel, to effectively promote civic awareness and engagement.

To overcome this challenge, it is essential to mobilize resources and support for community-based initiatives and civil society organizations. This can be achieved through partnerships with local and international organizations, government agencies, and private sector actors. In addition, resources should be directed towards addressing the underlying socio-economic issues that contribute to insecurity in the region, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges

To overcome the challenges in promoting civic awareness and engagement in North-Western Nigeria, several strategies can be employed. These strategies include:

- i. Building trust between citizens and security agencies is critical to promoting civic awareness and engagement. This can be achieved through community engagement initiatives that promote transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights.
- ii. To overcome the fear of retribution, security agencies should provide assurances of anonymity and protection to citizens who report criminal activities or provide information.
- iii. Community-based security initiatives, such as neighborhood watch programs, can empower citizens to take an active role in promoting security in their communities while minimizing the risk of retribution.
- iv. Educational initiatives should be developed to improve literacy rates and promote civic education. These initiatives can be implemented through formal education systems or community-based programs.
- v. Resources and support should be mobilized for community-based initiatives and civil society organizations. This can be achieved through partnerships with local and international organizations, government agencies, and private sector actors.
- vi. Resources should be directed towards addressing the underlying socio-economic issues that contribute to insecurity in the region, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the security challenges in North-Western Nigeria are complex and multifaceted, requiring a comprehensive approach that goes beyond traditional military force. The paper has argued that civic awareness and engagement present a crucial path towards sustainable peace and security in the region. By empowering citizens to participate in the security architecture of their communities, complementing the efforts of security agencies, an informed and engaged citizenry can contribute to improved security.

The paper has explored various strategies for fostering civic awareness and engagement, including community watch programs, information sharing with security forces, fostering inter-ethnic dialogue, and holding authorities accountable. Key stakeholders such as traditional rulers, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and youth groups have been identified as critical players in promoting these efforts.

However, the paper acknowledges potential challenges in fostering civic awareness and engagement, such as fear of retribution, illiteracy, and resource constraints. To overcome these challenges, strategies such as building trust between citizens and security agencies, providing assurances of anonymity and protection, improving literacy rates, mobilizing resources and support, and addressing underlying socio-economic issues have been proposed.

Ultimately, the paper emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of insecurity in North-Western Nigeria. By addressing historical, socio-economic, and political factors contributing to the rise of insecurity, fostering civic awareness and engagement can empower communities to reclaim their sense of security and become active participants in building a more peaceful and prosperous future.

It is hoped that this paper will contribute to the ongoing discourse on addressing security challenges in North-Western Nigeria and provide valuable insights for policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders working towards sustainable peace and security in the region.

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