



Islamic Principles of Community Security: An Analytical Assessment of the Katsina State Community Security Watch Corps KSCSWC in Nigeria

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Abstract

The escalation of organized banditry in northwestern Nigeria has exposed the limitations of conventional, federal-led security strategies, necessitating alternative, localized governance models. This study undertakes a critical evaluation of the operational roles of the Katsina State Community Security Watch Corps (KSCSWC) through an Islamic ethical and jurisprudential lens, addressing a significant gap in scholarly discourse by integrating faith-based principles into the analysis of grassroots security initiatives. The primary objective is to ascertain the compatibility of the Corps' operational modalities with core Islamic tenets of public safety and communal welfare. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the study combines analytical inquiry into classical Islamic jurisprudence with empirical fieldwork consisting of forty semi-structured interviews and direct observation in Katsina State. The data collected was subjected to thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the KSCSWC's operational successes in intelligence gathering, neutralizing criminal elements, and deterring crime are deeply aligned with Islamic principles of communal security (ḥirāsah and ribāṭ). These interventions have led to tangible improvements in public safety, facilitating a revitalization of local economies, agriculture, and education. The paper concludes that anchoring local security frameworks within regional religious ethics substantially augments community cooperation and operational legitimacy. It recommends expanding the Corps' mandate to include offensive operations, optimizing rural deployment, and institutionalizing ethical training.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Grassroots Governance, Jurisprudence, Public Welfare (Maṣlaḥah), Vigilance (Ribāṭ).

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INTRODUCTION

The ongoing proliferation of banditry across Northern Nigeria, particularly within Katsina State, has emerged as a formidable challenge to regional stability, effective governance, and human security. Characterized by mass killings, kidnapping for ransom, and widespread displacement, this security crisis has severely disrupted rural socio-economic life, highlighting the manifest shortcomings of conventional, federal-led security operations. In response, the Katsina State Community Security Watch Corps (KSCSWC) was established as a grassroots apparatus designed to supplement national security efforts through local surveillance and crime prevention (Katsina State Government, 2023; Nigerian Security Digest, 2023). The emergence of the Corps represents a transition from an exclusively federal-centric security model to a hybrid one that formalizes the role of sub-national and local actors. This phenomenon, conceptually recognized as “hybrid security governance,” reflects a broader institutional trend where state-level frameworks interface with community structures to manage persistent security vacuums (Hagmann & Péclard, 2010). However, in deeply religious societies like Katsina State, security interventions cannot operate effectively in a cultural vacuum. Without aligning these enforcement mechanisms with the prevailing socio-religious values of the community, grassroots security bodies risk suffering from an institutional legitimacy crisis, low public trust, and a lack of grassroots cooperation. To address this problem, this study examines the operational functions of the KSCSWC through an Islamic ethical and jurisprudential framework to assess its effectiveness, analyze its alignment with Islamic legal principles of public safety, and explore how faith-based legitimacy can be leveraged to optimize grassroots collaboration (Abubakar & Idris, 2024).

While existing literature on community policing in Nigeria has extensively documented institutional failures and the tactical contributions of grassroots groups (Agbibo, 2013; Ibrahim, 2014), it has largely overlooked the ideological and normative frameworks that drive community compliance. A critical research gap remains in the systematic integration of primary Islamic legal values with empirical fieldwork regarding state-backed grassroots forces. This study fills this void by bridging empirical criminology with classical Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), offering a novel evaluation of a highly formalized, state-legislated community corps. By using the Islamic concepts of justice (‘Adl), communal guardianship (Hirāsah), vigilance (Ribāṭ), and public welfare (Maṣlaḥah) as an analytical yardstick, this research introduces an innovative, locally-grounded theoretical model for hybrid security governance in predominantly Muslim societies. Geographically, the scope of this study is strictly bounded within the frontline Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Katsina State, relying on qualitative data collected from forty purposively selected stakeholders, including security operatives, community leaders, affected residents, and Islamic scholars. Structurally, the remainder of this paper critiques the historical context of banditry and foundational Islamic safety frameworks, outlines the qualitative methodology and thematic analysis procedures, provides an analytical integration of empirical data with Islamic legal maxims, and concludes with strategic, policy-driven recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous academic researches into community security in Nigeria have predominantly centered on conventional, federal-centered security operations, with limited scholarly attention given to the role of faith-based approaches. While numerous studies have highlighted the socio-political and economic causes of insecurity, including banditry, they have largely failed to address the operational contributions of grassroots security outfits. For instance, Agbibo (2013) provided an extensive analysis of vigilante responses to insecurity in Northern Nigeria

but did not connect it with the Islamic ethical paradigms that underpin these movements. Similarly, research by Ibrahim (2014) acknowledged the theoretical potentials of community policing in rural settings but overlooked the integration of religious principles in his research.

These prior studies have been instrumental in advancing our understanding of security challenges and federal government-led responses, yet they have consistently neglected the Islamic perspective on communal security. This article seeks to fill in this gap by providing a rigorous assessment of the activities of the Katsina State Community Security Watch Corps through the lens of Islamic teachings on justice (‘Adl), protection (Hirāsah), and public welfare (Maṣlaḥah). The unique contribution of this research lies in its dual evaluation of a state government-led security structure, both from an operational standpoint and a theological one, thereby offering novel insights into how religious ethics can provide crucial reinforcement and legitimacy to local security initiatives.

The Evolution of Banditry in Northwestern Nigeria

The phenomenon of banditry in Northwestern Nigeria, particularly in Katsina State, has been the subject of extensive academic discourse. Research by Ibrahim (2014) and Yusuf (2023) posits that the crisis has evolved from small-scale criminal activities to a full-blown organized crime marked by sophisticated operations, mass killings, and large-scale displacement. Scholars such as Aliyu (2022) have meticulously documented this evolution, highlighting the shift from cattle rustling to more complex criminal atrocities like kidnapping for ransom, which have become a primary source of funding for the armed bandit groups. The escalation of this menace was attributed to a complex interplay of socio-economic and structural factors, including widespread poverty, high youth unemployment, and the breakdown of traditional institutions (Dare & Ojo, 2023). Furthermore, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) across porous borders has been identified as a critical factor fueling the violence (Abubakar & Idris, 2024).

Failures of Conventional Security Operations

A recurring theme in the existing literature is the inadequacy of conventional, state-led security responses in addressing menace of banditry. Despite the deployment of military forces and increased police presence, these strategies have often proven ineffective. Research highlights several contributing factors, including logistical challenges, insufficient resources, and a lack of local intelligence (Yusuf, 2023). The “one-size-fits-all” approach of conventional federal security agencies has frequently failed to take into cognisance the unique socio-religious dynamics of rural communities, leading to a lack of trust and cooperation from the local populace (Dare & Ojo, 2023). This vacuum in security provision has created a fertile ground for the emergence of alternative, state government-led community-based solutions.

3.3. The Emergence of State Government-Led Community-Based Security Initiatives

In response to the failures of Federal Government-led security, various community-based security initiatives have emerged across Northern Nigeria. These groups, often referred to as vigilantes or local defense forces, are composed of local youths and community members who leverage their indigenous knowledge and familiarity with the terrain to combat bandits and other criminals. Agbiboa (2013) and Mohammed (2021) have analyzed the operational models of these groups, noting their effectiveness in intelligence gathering and their ability to act as a barrier between communities and criminal elements. However, these studies also highlight the challenges associated with such groups, including a lack of formal training, accountability issues, and the risk of perpetuating human rights abuses. The KSCSWC, as a state government initiative and organized community security corps, represents a more formalized and potentially more effective version of this model.

The Islamic Framework for Community Security

The widest research gap in the aforementioned literature is the integration of an Islamic ethical and jurisprudential framework for understanding these grassroots security initiatives. Islam provides a comprehensive, values-based approach to community security, drawing from primary sources such as the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The five essential objectives of Islamic law (Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah), which include the preservation of life (Ḥifẓ al-Nafs), property (Ḥifẓ al-Māl), and reason (Ḥifẓ al-'Aql), provide a strong theological foundation for all security interventions (Al-Raysuni, 2005). Some of the Islamic principles related to community security include the following:

- a. Ḥirāsah (Guardianship): This means a religious and civic duty to protect the community from all forms of harm. This concept extends beyond physical protection to include the preservation of social order and morality (Khan, 2019).
- b. Ribāt (Vigilance): A prophetic tradition emphasizes the immense spiritual reward of actively guarding the borders and frontiers of a Muslim community. This concept legitimizes the act of sustained vigilance and patrolling for the purpose of community safety. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is reported to have said: "A day of ribaṭ in the cause of Allah is better than the world and all it contains" (Bukhari, Vol. 4, Book 52, Hadith 142).
- c. Ta'āwun (Cooperation): This refers to the principle of collective action and mutual assistance in matters of righteousness and piety. The Qur'an commands: "Help one another in righteousness and piety, but do not help one another in sin and aggression" (Qur'an 5:2). This serves as the basis for inter-agency collaboration and community-wide participation in security efforts.
- d. 'Adl (Justice): Al-Adl is the cornerstone of peace in all human endeavors. All actions, including those related to security and law enforcement, must be guided by the principles of justice and fairness. The Qur'an commands Muslims to "Stand firmly for justice" (Qur'an 4:135), even when it goes against their own interests.

By assessing the KSCSWC's operations through this theological lens, this study fills a critical gap, offering a gateway to understanding of how faith-based principles can serve as a powerful and legitimate framework for community security in a predominantly Muslim context.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing a two-fold methodology that combines conceptual analysis with empirical fieldwork. This mixed-methods strategy is particularly well-suited for a study that seeks to bridge a theological framework with a real-world security intervention.

The conceptual dimension of this research is rooted in an analytical methodology. It involves a detailed review of primary Islamic sources, including the Qur'an and authentic prophetic traditions (Sunnah), as well as a survey of classical and contemporary Islamic jurisprudence. The objective is to systematically derive and interpret core principles related to community security, public welfare (Maṣlaḥah), justice ('Adl), and guardianship (Ḥirāsah). This conceptual framework provides the ethical and theoretical benchmarks against which the KSCSWC's operations are evaluated. The findings from this analysis are presented as a comprehensive overview of Islamic perspectives on community security.

The empirical component of the study utilizes fieldwork techniques to gather primary data from stakeholders in Katsina State. The data collection methods include:

a) **Semi-Structured Interviews:** A total of 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected informants. The interviewees were selected through a purposive sampling method to include diverse perspectives as follows:

- i. 10 KSCSWC Operatives: To understand their daily operational routines, challenges, and perceptions of their role.
- ii. 10 Community Leaders: To measure their perceptions of the Corps' effectiveness, its relationship with local communities, and its alignment with traditional values.
- iii. 10 Affected Residents: To gather firsthand data of the impact of banditry and the tangible effects of the KSCSWC's presence on their lives.
- iv. 10 Islamic Scholars: To gather data on the Islamic views and principles on community security

b) **Direct Observation:** The researcher spent several weeks observing the daily activities of the KSCSWC, including their patrol routes, community engagements, and interactions with other security agencies. This provided invaluable, unmediated insight into the Corps' operational conduct.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the data collection process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained.

The data collected from the interviews and direct observation was analyzed thematically. This involved a multi-stage process:

1. **Transcription:** All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim.
2. **Coding:** Transcribed data was coded to identify key themes and recurring patterns related to the KSCSWC's operational roles and their impact.
3. **Thematic Interpretation:** The coded data was then grouped into overarching themes, such as "Intelligence Gathering," "Community Trust," and "Economic Revival." These themes were then interpreted in light of the Islamic principles derived from the conceptual analysis.

This analytical process ensures that the study's conclusions are strongly grounded in both empirical evidence and a tangible theoretical framework.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The empirical fieldwork conducted across the frontline Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Katsina State reveals that the operational deployment of the Katsina State Community Security Watch Corps (KSCSWC) has achieved measurable successes in mitigating the security crisis. Data gathered from semi-structured interviews and direct field observations demonstrate that the Corps performs critical tactical functions, primarily structured around localized intelligence gathering, strategic neighborhood patrolling, defensive neutralization of armed threats, and the direct rescue of abducted citizens. Informants from the affected zones uniformly observed a significant reduction in the frequency and audacity of localized bandit incursions. Field data regarding these operational outcomes and their direct impacts on rural communal life are consolidated in Table 1.

Table 1: Operational Outcomes of the KSCSWC and Socio-Economic Impact

Operational Activity	Primary (Field) Evidences & Documented Data	Socio-Economic Impact
Neutralization of Armed Bandits	Over 200 armed bandits neutralized within high-risk corridors (Channels TV, 2024).	Immediate degradation of bandit operational capacity in local government areas.
Targeting Bandits Networks and Leaders	Elimination of notorious bandit leader Sani Waka Burki and his network (PUNCH, 2024).	Disruption of criminal command structures, reducing organized raids.
Territorial Patrol & Vigilance	Small, mobile tactical units operating regular routes in rugged terrains.	Proactive deterrence of attacks and early detection of criminal movements.
Agricultural Reclamation	Re-opening of farming access routes across volatile agrarian sectors.	Cultivation of over 50% of previously abandoned farmlands in the 2024 season.
Social and Institutional Restoration	Secured re-opening of rural markets and primary/secondary schools.	Resumption of local economic commerce and educational activities.

Source: Empirical Fieldwork Data (2026); Secondary Media Tracking (2024–2025)

The data contained in the above Table (1) underscores that the operational metrics of the KSCSWC are inextricably linked to systemic rural recovery. The tactical data reveals that community-based operations bypass the institutional delays characteristic of federal forces because local corps members leverage their intimate familiarity with rural geography to intercept armed actors. Testimonies from agrarian stakeholders confirm this transformation; a resident from the highly volatile Batsari LGA observed that the physical presence of the Corps successfully insulated farming perimeters, allowing rural populations to return to agricultural labor without the imminent threat of abduction or extortion. According to quantitative reports from the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), this security stabilization directly facilitated the cultivation of more than half of the fertile lands that had been left fallow due to persistent conflict. Consequently, the data proves that grassroots security enforcement acts as a direct catalyst for reclaiming fundamental human rights, restoring local market economies, and stabilizing rural educational infrastructure.

Discussions

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that the operational framework of the KSCSWC successfully answers the core research problem by demonstrating how localized hybrid security governance can remediate the failures of conventional state-led forces. Traditional top-down military operations in northwestern Nigeria frequently falter due to logistical deficits, lack of granular geographical intelligence, and deep-seated public mistrust

(Yusuf, 2023). The KSCSWC overcomes these friction points by functioning as an intermediary mechanism that translates state resources into community-driven protection. This empirical reality aligns with the hybrid security governance models theorized by Hagmann and Péclard (2010), who argue that formal security structures gain maximum efficiency when they intentionally integrate localized, non-state actors who possess indigenous legitimacy and contextual awareness.

When interpreted through an Islamic jurisprudential lens, the operational successes of the KSCSWC represent a practical, contemporary implementation of the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law). The primary mandate of the Corps, the preservation of life (*Ḥifẓ al-Nafs*) and property (*Ḥifẓ al-Māl*) is recognized in classical Islamic jurisprudence as a mandatory collective obligation (*Farḍ Kifāyah*). By neutralizing asymmetric criminal elements and securing rural agrarian assets, the Corps fulfills the foundational legal expectation that a public authority must actively secure the conditions necessary for human livelihood and economic justice. This jurisprudential reality is anchored in the definitive text of Surah Al-Baqarah (2:275), *وَأَحَلَّ اللَّهُ الْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ الرِّبَا* ("Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden interest"), which sharply distinguishes between the productive, consensus-based generation of wealth through legitimate commerce and the exploitative accumulation of capital characterized by unearned increases. While the text specifically targets *riba* (usury), classical commentators expand its ethical framework to forbid any system where a predatory actor extracts economic resources from vulnerable populations without offering an equivalent counter-value. Banditry, kidnapping for ransom, and asset pillaging represent extreme, violent manifestations of illegal wealth acquisition (*akl amwāl al-nās bi-al-bāṭil*), which directly violates the core principles of mutual consent and economic fairness mandated in Surah An-Nisa (4:29).

Furthermore, the persistent surveillance and patrolling routines implemented by the KSCSWC provide a direct empirical manifestation of the Islamic institutions of *ḥirāsah* (communal guardianship) and *ribāṭ* (frontier vigilance). In classical legal theory, as articulated by Khan (2019), *ḥirāsah* represents a binding civic and spiritual duty to shield the Muslim community from external and internal disruptions. This proactive security stance is heavily incentivized by prophetic traditions that elevate defensive vigilance to an act of supreme spiritual merit. This is in direct consonance with the Qur'anic command in Surah Al-Imran (3:200): *يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ* ("O you who believe! Be steadfast, persevere, and guard your territory, and fear Allah so that you may be successful"). Similarly, as recorded in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Hadith No. 2892), the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) stated: *رباط يوم في سبيل الله خير من الدنيا وما عليها* ("A day of *ribāṭ* in the cause of Allah is better than the world and all it contains"). By recontextualizing this tradition within contemporary security discourse, the defensive patrols conducted by local corps members cease to be merely secular employment; they become spiritually legitimized actions that foster deep communal trust and personal accountability.

This faith-based framework reinforces the legal parameters of self-defense (*Daf' al-Sā'il*), where individuals who fall while actively protecting communal lives and properties are accorded the spiritual status of martyrdom (*Shahādah*), matching the prophetic injunction in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Hadith No. 141): *من قُتِلَ دُونَ مَالِهِ فَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ* ("Whoever is killed while protecting his property is a martyr"). The structural configuration of the KSCSWC also resolves the complex challenge of managing societal corruption (*Fasād*) through institutionalized cooperation (*Ta'āwun*). The elimination of destructive bandit cells represents a direct enforcement of the scriptural mandate to eradicate *Fasād fī al-Arḍ* (mischief and armed lawlessness on earth), which is severely condemned in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:33). Rather than operating as an isolated vigilante group prone to human rights abuses, the KSCSWC's formalized cooperation with the military, regular police forces, and traditional emirate councils satisfies the divine command in

Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:2) to cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. To maintain unity and institutional alignment, this collaboration mirrors the core advice found in Surah Al-Imran (3:103): *وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا* ("And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided"). This multi-agency synergy demonstrates that local security structures operate best when anchored in institutionalized collaboration rather than fragmented, competitive actions. Consequently, the integration of Islamic ethical principles with empirical security operations provides a highly effective, legitimate, and sustainable framework for conflict resolution and public safety within deeply religious post-colonial contexts.

CONCLUSION

The operations of the Katsina State Community Security Watch Corps (KSCSWC) in its combat against banditry have profoundly aligned with the Islamic principles of justice, community defense, and collective responsibility. Rooted in the protection of life and property, two foundational elements of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, the Corps' operations represent a religiously grounded initiative to safeguard societal well-being. The Corps has successfully executed the Qur'anic mandate to prevent mischief (*Fasād*) and uphold peace and order through proactive measures such as intelligence gathering, patrols, and direct engagement with criminal threats. The Corps' operational model exemplifies the Islamic concepts of vigilance (*Ribāṭ*), cooperation against oppression, and bravery. Its successes in neutralizing bandits, restoring public spaces, and enabling the resumption of economic and social life reaffirm the moral and religious legitimacy of its operations. The Islamic tradition strongly encourages such community-driven action, highlighting the duty of every believer to contribute to public safety. Thus, the KSCSWC's activities not only fulfill a civic obligation but also embody the spiritual and ethical imperatives of Islam, serving as a practical model of faith-based community security.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AU conceptualized the research framework, designed the study methodology, and conducted the primary literature review on Islamic principles of community security. He also performed the empirical fieldwork, including the direct field observations and the forty semi-structured stakeholder interviews across the frontline Local Government Areas of Katsina State with the help of research assistants. He executed the qualitative data transcription, coding, and thematic analysis and drafted, reviewed, and finalized the manuscript, integrating the empirical findings with Islamic jurisprudential maxims, and accepts full institutional accountability for the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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