BEYOND EQUIPMENT AND OPTICS: ASSESSING THE IMPACT AND REPLICABILITY OF GOVERNOR AHMED USMAN ODODO'S SECURITY STRATEGY IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v10i5.13

Keywords

Sub-national security; Security strategy; Community policing; Security sector investment; Policy transferability.

Abstract

Research Problem: *Sub-national insecurity is one of Nigeria's most persistent governance problems, and the decisions of individual state governors increasingly shape security outcomes that federal policing alone has not delivered. This paper examines the security strategy pursued in Kogi State under Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo, combining kinetic and non-kinetic measures.*
Methods/Theory: *The study adopts a case-study approach drawing on government records, media reporting and available crime and public-perception to assess whether these interventions have produced measurable improvements in safety or function mainly as symbolic and infrastructural signalling.*
Results: *The paper identifies a gap between input-based claims, equipment donated, facilities commissioned, and outcome-based evidence such as crime trends, response times and public trust, while acknowledging the difficulty of attributing causation to any single administration.*
Conclusion: *The model's transferability is evaluated, identifying which elements offer replicable lessons for other governors.*
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The study demonstrates that state-level security interventions in Nigeria are currently assessed on activity rather than impact, and that the Kogi model offers a concrete case for examining how state executives can operationalise security governance within federal limits.*
Recommendation: *Independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be embedded into state-level security spending so that outcomes, not inputs, become the basis for judging performance and informing replication elsewhere.*

Introduction

Nigeria's security problems are usually discussed as a national emergency, yet the experience of insecurity is intensely local. Banditry, kidnapping for ransom, highway robbery and communal violence are felt in particular corridors, markets, forests and farming communities, and the people most exposed to them look first to the nearest layer of authority for relief. That layer is the state government. The 1999 Constitution names governors the chief security officers of their states while withholding from them operational command over the police; Section 215 places the Nigeria Police Force under federal control, with the Inspector-General answerable to the President, so that governors may give lawful directions but cannot compel their execution (Miango, 2026). The result is a recurring contradiction in which state executives are held responsible for security failures they are not constitutionally equipped to prevent (Adekunle, 2025).

Within this constraint, governors have not been passive. Several have built parallel or complementary security arrangements, funded federal agencies operating in their territory, created regional outfits such as the South-West's Amotekun, and absorbed vigilante labour into state payrolls (Samuel, 2026). The scale of the threat gives these efforts urgency. The National Bureau of Statistics' Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey for May 2023 to April 2024 estimated 51.89 million household crime incidents nationally, with the North-Central zone, which includes Kogi, recording the second highest burden at 8.77 million incidents, behind only the North-West (The Nation, 2024). The same survey put kidnapping incidence at roughly 2.24 million and estimated total ransom payments of about ₦2.23 trillion over the period, with 65% of affected households paying (Tunji, 2024).

Kogi State sits at the meeting point of Nigeria's north and south. Its highways carry traffic between Abuja and Lagos and between the North-Central and South-South zones, and its forests have at times sheltered armed groups operating across the borders with Kwara, Niger, Nasarawa, Benue and Edo (Labaran, 2025). This location has made the Kabba–Obajana–Lokoja corridor and the Lokoja–Okene–Auchi road recurring sites of abduction (Labaran, 2025). It is against this background that Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo, who took office on 27 January 2024, has assembled a security programme that mixes hard-security investment with community integration and youth-focused economic measures (Odofin, 2024).

The most recent and visible element of that programme is the Police Force Violent Crime Response Unit (VCRU) commissioned in Lokoja on 4 June 2026, a purpose-built facility accompanied by four Toyota Hilux operational vehicles, a bullet-proof Buffalo armoured personnel carrier and three Toyota Sienna vehicles (Oyewale, 2025; allAfrica, 2026). The commissioning followed a year of similar announcements: the distribution of 49 vehicles to security agencies in November 2025, the handover of 125 vehicles and 300 motorcycles described in December 2025, the creation of Metropolitan Quick Response Units in Lokoja, Okene and Anyigba, and the formal absorption of vigilante operatives into the state civil service (Eneojoh, 2025; Thisday Live, 2025). Alongside these measures the administration has run the Ododo Youth Empowerment and Skills Acquisition programme and distributed livelihood grants to thousands of young people and women (NG-CARES, 2024).

This paper asks a straightforward question with a difficult answer: has this strategy made Kogi measurably safer, or does much of it amount to symbolic and infrastructural

signalling whose effect on crime is asserted rather than demonstrated? The distinction matters because security spending is easy to measure on the input side, vehicles bought, facilities opened, personnel recruited, and hard to measure on the output side, where the relevant indicators are crime trends, response times and public trust. Governments and the outlets close to them tend to report inputs and treat them as evidence of outcomes (Odofin, 2024). An honest assessment has to separate the two.

The Nigerian security literature has largely developed along two tracks that rarely intersect. One track focuses on structural explanations for insecurity: poverty, youth unemployment, weak governance and the failure of the federal police (CISLAC, 2025). The other engages the constitutional and institutional debates about how policing should be organised, most prominently whether the 1999 Constitution should be amended to permit state-controlled police (Ogunsanya, 2026). Both tracks have produced useful scholarship, but neither systematically addresses the question of evaluation: given what governors are currently doing, how would we know whether it is working?

On the structural side, the evidence is reasonably clear. Research on banditry in Bida, Niger State, found statistically significant associations between poverty and banditry and between unemployment and banditry, identifying weak governance and the absence of legitimate economic opportunity as the primary drivers (Gbadebo, 2025). Analysis of the kidnapping economy reaches the same conclusion: unless criminal networks are dismantled and the underlying conditions of poverty and weak law enforcement addressed, the cycle of abductions will continue (Businessday, 2025). These findings imply that security interventions addressing only the kinetic dimension, more vehicles, more patrols, more arrests, will have limited durable effect without addressing the structural conditions that sustain recruitment into criminal groups. They do not, however, specify what the evidence threshold for "limited effect" looks like, nor do they engage the question of how a state-level intervention should be assessed against these structural drivers.

The constitutional and institutional literature is more directly engaged with governance, but its focus is normative rather than evaluative. Miango (2026) documents the constitutional constraints under which governors operate: Section 215 of the 1999 Constitution places the Nigeria Police Force under federal command, making the governor constitutionally responsible for security but institutionally unable to direct its primary instrument. Adekunle (2025) argues that this creates a governance trap in which governors bear political blame for security failures they cannot prevent. Samuel (2026) and Ogunsanya (2026) examine the community security outfits that have emerged partly to fill this gap, from Amotekun in the South-West to informal vigilante networks across the North-Central, noting both their operational value and the risks of abuse and political capture that decentralised armed groups carry. Akhimien (2026) and Ailemen (2026) report the current push for constitutional reform, with the Presidency describing a framework for state policing as near completion.

What this literature does not do, and what the present study attempts, is to ask how a governor's security programme should be assessed within the current constitutional arrangement, before any structural reform, and regardless of whether such reform eventually occurs. The debate about state police is important, but it should not crowd out the question of whether existing interventions are

working. Ogunsanya's (2026) concern that community security groups could become instruments of political intimidation is well founded, but it is an argument about institutional design, not an evaluation of specific programmes. Samuel's (2026) account of how vigilante networks operate provides useful descriptive detail but does not engage systematically with the evidence for their effectiveness. These omissions motivate the present analysis: a framework for moving from description to assessment.

There is also a methodological problem in the existing literature that needs to be made explicit. Several of the sources most useful for understanding Kogi's security situation are either official records, which are promotional by nature, or media reports, which capture attention-commanding incidents rather than systematic trends. The National Bureau of Statistics crime survey for the year to April 2024 is the closest available approximation to systematic measurement, but the survey was withdrawn from the NBS website within weeks of publication, without clear public explanation, which raises questions about its reliability and about the political conditions under which security data is produced and controlled in Nigeria (Businessday, 2025). This is not simply a data quality issue; it is a symptom of the accountability deficit that this analysis identifies as central to understanding subnational security governance. A literature that takes official claims at face value, or that relies uncritically on government press releases, will systematically overstate the effectiveness of whatever governors are doing.

The existing scholarship therefore leaves three related gaps. One is the absence of an evaluative framework for assessing subnational security strategies: a set of criteria that distinguishes inputs from outputs from outcomes and specifies what evidence would be required to conclude that a strategy is working. Another is the failure to engage systematically with the attribution problem: even where security conditions improve, it is rarely clear how much of the change should be attributed to state-level interventions as opposed to federal military operations, economic cycles or the movement of armed groups. A third, and less discussed, gap concerns the accountability deficit in security data production: the conditions under which governments generate, present and, as the NBS case suggests, sometimes suppress security indicators. These limitations shape the analytical framework developed below, primarily through the Kogi case but with implications for subnational security governance more broadly.

Conceptual Clarification

The terms used in this paper are not neutral. Each one carries assumptions about where security problems originate, who is responsible for solving them, and how success should be measured. Unpacking those assumptions is part of the analytical work.

Sub-national insecurity is used here to mean threats to life, property and order that vary in intensity across states, local governments and communities, banditry, kidnapping for ransom, highway robbery and communal violence being the dominant forms in north-central Nigeria (Labaran, 2025). The term is a deliberate choice against the more common framing of these threats as a federal problem requiring federal solutions. That framing has dominated Nigerian security discourse for decades and has consistently obscured the role of state governments as actors in their own right. Miango (2026) notes that constitutional assignment of policing to the federal government has encouraged analysts to treat governors as passive recipients of federal

security provision rather than as decision-makers whose choices shape local outcomes. This paper treats sub-national insecurity as a governance problem at the state level precisely to challenge that habit.

Security strategy is used strictly to mean a coordinated set of measures linking resources to actions to intended ends. The word *coordinated* matters. In Nigerian state governance, security spending is often reactive and episodic a vehicle donation here, a vigilante disbursement there without any logic connecting the parts (Businessday, 2026). Calling a collection of such gestures a strategy inflates them. This paper applies the term to the Ododo administration's approach because there is sufficient documentary evidence of deliberate sequencing across kinetic and non-kinetic measures, but it holds that label open to revision if the evidence of coordination does not hold under scrutiny.

The distinction between **kinetic and non-kinetic measures** is standard in security studies but is applied unevenly in Nigerian state-level analysis, where non-kinetic work community engagement, economic interventions, intelligence cooperation tends to be treated as supplementary rather than structurally important. Odofin (2024) argues that this hierarchy reflects a deeper bias in how Nigerian governments account for security spending: hardware is visible, auditable and photographable at a commissioning ceremony; social interventions are not. That bias shapes what gets funded and what gets claimed as achievement, which is part of what this paper is examining.

Inputs, outputs and outcomes are kept analytically separate here because they are routinely collapsed in official accounts of security performance. Abdulozumi (2026) documents how Nigerian state governments consistently present input activity vehicles procured, units commissioned as if it constitutes improved security. The conceptual move this paper makes is to treat that collapse not merely as a measurement error but as a political strategy: reporting inputs as outcomes allows a government to claim success before any citizen has experienced a change in safety. Holding the three categories apart is therefore not just methodological tidiness; it is a precondition for honest assessment.

Symbolic and infrastructural signalling is used descriptively rather than dismissively. Commissioning ceremonies and fleet handovers communicate commitment, and that communication carries real value it can reassure the public, alter offender calculations and motivate security personnel (Odofin, 2024). The problem arises when signalling is treated as equivalent to outcome, or when the political incentive to signal crowds out the institutional work of building durable capacity. The paper is interested in the boundary between the two, which is rarely a clean line.

Community policing in the Nigerian context refers to arrangements that draw on local knowledge and participation to fill the gap left by a centralised and chronically under-resourced federal police force. Samuel (2026) traces how this gap has been filled differently across the country, from the relatively institutionalisedAmotekun in the South-West to looser vigilante networks in the north-centre and north-east. What most of these arrangements share is constitutional ambiguity: they operate at the edge of what the 1999 Constitution permits, tolerated rather than authorised. The Kogi approach of absorbing vigilante operatives onto the state payroll is analytically interesting precisely because it attempts to resolve that ambiguity through formalisation rather than through constitutional reform a pragmatic workaround whose implications for

accountability and command have not been adequately examined in the literature.

Security sector investment at the state level is the principal lawful means by which a governor can influence the capacity of federal agencies operating in the state, given that direct command of the police is constitutionally prohibited (Abdulozumi, 2026). But investment without leverage over how that capacity is deployed raises a problem the literature has not fully addressed: a state government can equip a police division but cannot direct it, which means the return on investment depends on the cooperation of a federal agency with its own priorities and command structures. This paper treats that dependency as a structural constraint on the Kogi model, not a peripheral detail.

Policy transferability used interchangeably here with replicability is not simply a question of whether a measure can be copied. CISLAC (2025) argues that most analyses of security policy transfer in Nigeria focus on the instrument and ignore the conditions that made it work, which is why so many replicated models fail quietly in new settings. This paper takes the position that transferability analysis must begin with those enabling conditions fiscal capacity, quality of state-federal relations, the specific character of the local threat rather than with the instrument itself. That reordering changes what counts as a lesson from the Kogi case.

Inputs, Outcomes and the Politics of Security Signalling

The distinction between inputs, outputs and outcomes is standard in programme evaluation, but in Nigerian state-level security governance it carries a political charge that the literature has not adequately confronted. Inputs are the resources committed: money, vehicles, weapons, buildings, personnel. Outputs are what those resources make possible: patrols mounted, checkpoints staffed, suspects arrested. Outcomes are what citizens actually experience: fewer abductions, faster response times, a willingness to travel or farm without fear, rising confidence that the state can protect them. The three categories are routinely collapsed in official accounts, and that collapse is not accidental. It is a rational response to the incentive structure governors face.

The incentive problem is straightforward. Inputs are visible, attributable and fast. A governor handing over patrol vehicles or commissioning a response unit produces a ceremony, a photograph and a headline within a single news cycle. Outcomes are slow, statistical and stubbornly resistant to clean attribution, because crime rates respond to economic conditions, the movement of armed groups across state lines, the behaviour of federal forces, and many other variables outside any governor's control. Oyewale (2025) documents how the official record in Kogi leans heavily on input claims, vehicles distributed, facilities commissioned, operatives enrolled, and asserts that highways have become safer, without presenting an independent dataset that would allow the assertion to be tested. This pattern is not unique to Kogi. It is the default mode of security communication across Nigerian states, and recognising it as a systemic political behaviour rather than isolated poor practice is the first step toward understanding why outcome data remain so scarce. What makes Kogi worth examining in this regard is that the Ododo administration has invested enough in non-kinetic and structural measures to raise a genuine question about whether it has broken from that default or simply added a more sophisticated vocabulary to the same input-centred accounting.

Odofin (2024) argues that commissioning ceremonies carry real value, reassuring a frightened public, signalling state mobilisation to criminal networks, and helping governors attract the private and community contributions on which security trust funds depend. That argument is defensible, but it stops short of the harder question. The political value of a ceremony and the evidentiary value of outcome data are not competing alternatives, and a government confident in its results should welcome both. When the count of vehicles handed over becomes the headline measure of security performance and no outcome data follow, the reasonable inference is not that the data do not exist but that they do not support the headline. A reluctance to publish outcome data, whatever its stated cause, is itself informative. The literature's tendency to treat input reporting as a measurement problem rather than a deliberate political strategy has left that inference underexplored, and this paper treats it as a substantive analytical claim rather than a methodological footnote.

The constitutional structure within which all of this happens is equally important and equally underanalysed. Because policing remains on the exclusive legislative list, governors cannot lawfully raise their own forces, and state-level security responses have had to work through community policing arrangements permitted under the Police Act 2020 or through informal vigilante structures operating outside any clear legal mandate (Miango, 2026). The Act created Community Policing Committees, but six years after its passage few states had activated them, a failure of implementation that reveals something about the relationship between federal legislation and state-level action in Nigeria (Miango, 2026). The gap was not filled by federal follow-through. It was filled by regional and local outfits, of which Amotekun in the South-West is the most developed, operating in deliberate constitutional ambiguity (Miango, 2026).

Taken together, Miango's observations point to a governance pattern in which the federal centre legislates and then retreats, leaving states to improvise within a legal vacuum. The Kogi administration's decision to absorb vigilante operatives into the civil service is one such improvisation, an attempt to resolve that ambiguity through formalisation by giving extra-constitutional capacity a payroll, a rank structure and a nominal accountability chain. Whether formalisation alone produces accountability, or merely regularises a parallel force without disciplining it, is a question the literature on community policing in Nigeria has not yet answered convincingly, and it is one this paper directly addresses.

That question becomes more consequential against the backdrop of the state police debate. President Tinubu has urged the National Assembly to amend the 1999 Constitution to permit state-controlled police, and near-consensus among governors has formed around the proposal (Ailemen, 2026; Akhimien, 2026). The standard arguments on both sides are well rehearsed. Proponents cite faster response, better local intelligence and community buy-in, while opponents invoke the First Republic's regional police forces and their use as instruments of political intimidation, and question whether most states have the fiscal base to fund professional forces (Akhimien, 2026; Ogunsanya, 2026; Adekunle, 2025). These arguments have circulated for years, but what the literature has consistently failed to do is connect the state police debate to what is currently being built at the state level. Ogunsanya (2026) hints at the risk that existing capacity investments could shape future

command structures but does not develop the point. This paper develops it directly.

The Ododo administration's investments in vehicles, facilities, a formalised vigilante corps and a dedicated response unit are not simply a response to present insecurity. They are, whether intentionally or not, a working prototype for what state police command architecture might look like in Kogi. The accountability norms embedded in those structures today will not disappear when a constitutional amendment arrives. A governor who builds capacity without transparent oversight is also establishing the institutional culture under which a future state force would operate, and that observation reframes what might otherwise seem like a local administrative story into a question with national governance implications.

The third strand concerns causation. Research consistently associates banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria with poverty, youth unemployment and governance failure. Gbadebo (2025), drawing on a study of 300 respondents in Bida, found statistically significant associations between unemployment and banditry, with respondents identifying limited legitimate economic opportunity as the primary driver of recruitment into criminal networks. Businessday (2025) reaches a parallel conclusion in its analysis of the kidnapping economy, arguing that dismantling criminal networks without addressing underlying economic deprivation simply displaces the problem rather than resolving it. Read together, these studies point toward a demand-side theory of intervention: reduce the conditions that make criminal recruitment attractive and the supply of recruits to armed groups contracts. The Ododo administration's vocational training and start-up grant programmes follow exactly this logic, framing economic support for at-risk youth as a structural complement to kinetic operations (Jimoh, 2026).

The framing is consistent with the evidence, but the evidence also implies a scale requirement that current programmes almost certainly do not meet, and this is where the existing literature falls short of its own implications. Gbadebo (2025) and Businessday (2025) are writing about structural conditions, labour market failure, weak governance, and chronic poverty, that operate across entire populations. Kogi's training programmes reach a few hundred beneficiaries. The literature acknowledges the structural drivers of insecurity without ever confronting what an adequately scaled response would actually require, and that omission does quiet but consequential work: it allows modest programmes to claim the credibility of a structural argument without bearing its burden of proof. This paper holds that claim to account.

Methodology

This study uses a single-case design centred on Kogi State between January 2024 and June 2026, the period of the Ododo administration to date. The case is chosen because the administration has made security a defining theme and has produced an unusually dense record of announcements, which makes it a useful test of the difference between input activity and demonstrated outcome. The paper uses official record: statements, press releases and event reports issued by media reporting from national newspapers and broadcasters covering specific incidents and the administration’s security measures.

Each source type carries limits that shape what can be concluded. Government records are reliable for what was announced and delivered, the existence of a facility, the number of vehicles handed over, but they are not independent

evidence of effect, and their framing is promotional. Treating a government claim that highways are "significantly safer" as established fact would be a category error; such claims are recorded here as assertions to be tested, not as findings. Independent reporting is valuable for documenting incidents but cannot, on its own, establish a trend, because the volume of reporting reflects editorial attention as much as the underlying rate of crime. The national datasets are the closest available approximation to outcome measurement, but they are produced at national and zonal levels rather than for individual states, so they cannot isolate Kogi, and at least one of them has its own reliability problem: the National Bureau of Statistics withdrew the 2024 survey from its website weeks after publication, without a clear public explanation (Businessday, 2025).

Two further limitations follow. The first is attribution. Even where crime in a corridor falls, that change cannot be assigned with confidence to a single administration's measures, because federal military operations, the movement of armed groups, ransom dynamics and economic conditions all act at the same time. The second is the absence of a published state-level baseline against which the administration's own performance could be measured. No independent, periodic series of Kogi-specific crime and perception indicators is publicly available for the study period, which is precisely the gap this paper identifies as a policy weakness. The analysis therefore avoids causal claims and instead asks a more answerable question: given the evidence that exists, is the case for measurable improvement strong, weak or simply untested? Where the evidence does not support a firm answer, the paper says so.

The Threat Environment in Kogi State

Kogi's exposure to organised crime follows from its geography. The state is a corridor linking the northern and southern halves of the country, and the same routes that carry commerce carry victims. The chair of the Kogi NGO Network has described a shift from occasional criminal activity to a more coordinated and frequent pattern of insecurity, with armed groups occupying forests near major roads and using them as bases to attack travellers and villages (Labaran, 2025). Kidnapping for ransom has concentrated on the Kabba–Obajana–Lokoja corridor and the Abuja–Lokoja expressway, and in the local government areas of Yagba East, Yagba West, Ijumu, Okene and Koton-Karfe (Labaran, 2025).

The most prominent recent incident illustrates the scale of the problem and its national reach. On 10 November 2025, six directors of the Federal Ministry of Defence were abducted on the Kabba–Lokoja highway while travelling from Lagos to Abuja for a promotion examination; their captors demanded ₦150 million, and the fate of two of the victims remained unresolved after a reported ransom payment (Mbachii, 2025). That senior federal officials could be taken on a major highway in daylight indicates how far the threat extends beyond isolated rural areas. Other documented incidents include the killing of a bystander and abduction of three passengers on the Okene–Lokoja road in September 2025, an attack interrupted by a state vigilante patrol that exchanged fire with the assailants and rescued several passengers (Dunamis, 2025).

The current wave of insecurity has roots that predate the present administration, which matters for any fair assessment of what one governor can change. Between 2020 and 2021, armed groups attacked police stations and

commercial banks in the Kogi towns of Egbe, Okene, Isanlu and Odo-Ere on several occasions, with some bank branches reportedly remaining closed years later, and a raid at Isanlu in June 2020 killed several police officers, including a divisional officer, alongside bystanders (Labaran, 2025). This history points to an entrenched and adaptive threat rather than a recent surge that decisive action could quickly reverse. It also tempers both the administration's claims of transformation and any critique that treats continued insecurity as proof of failure, since a governor inherits conditions built up over years and operates against groups that change tactics and move across porous state borders.

The National Bureau of Statistics recorded the North-Central zone as the second most crime-affected in the country, with 8.77 million household crime incidents in the year to April 2024, and found that rural areas experienced more crime than urban ones (Ofikhenua, 2024). The survey also captured the weakness of formal response: nationally, only about a third of respondents said security agencies answered emergency calls within 30 minutes, and barely more than a third of home-robbery victims reported the crime to police, citing low confidence that reporting would lead to any result (Tunji, 2024). These response-time and reporting figures matter for Kogi because they describe the baseline conditions that a state-level intervention is trying to change, and because they suggest that official crime counts understate the true incidence.

The wider kidnapping economy compounds the picture. Report from Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) (2025), documented at least 4,722 abductions across 997 incidents nationally between July 2024 and June 2025, with 762 people killed and about ₦2.57 billion paid against demands totalling some ₦48 billion (Businessday, 2025). The firm characterised kidnapping as a structured, profit-driven enterprise thriving on weak governance and large stretches of unpoliced rural space, and identified poverty and unemployment as the conditions that sustain recruitment (Businessday, 2025). While the North-West remained the epicentre, the same dynamics, forest hideouts, highway ambushes, ransom economics, operate along Kogi's corridors, and the state's position between several conflict-affected zones leaves it exposed to spillover from neighbouring states (Labaran, 2025). This is the environment the Ododo strategy is designed to address, and any assessment of the strategy has to be measured against the persistence and adaptability of these threats rather than against a single year's announcements.

The Components of the Ododo Security Strategy

Hard-Security Investment

The most heavily publicised element of the strategy is direct investment in the equipment and facilities of security agencies operating in the state. The commissioning of the Violent Crime Response Unit in Lokoja on 4 June 2026 is the clearest example. The unit received a purpose-built headquarters, four Toyota Hilux operational vehicles, a bullet-proof Buffalo armoured personnel carrier and three Toyota Sienna vehicles (Thisday Live, 2026; allAfrica, 2026). The state Commissioner of Police described the unit as a creation of the Inspector-General's reform agenda, established to tackle kidnapping, banditry and highway robbery through intelligence-led operations and rapid response, with personnel selected after screening and professional assessment (Businessday, 2026). The governor, represented by his deputy, presented the facility as part of a sustained programme of support that has included communication equipment, the renovation of

police facilities, the repair of armoured personnel carriers and welfare support for officers (Abdulozumi, 2026).

The VCRU sits on top of a steady flow of earlier equipment transfers. In November 2025 the administration distributed 49 vehicles to security agencies, a mix of new, refurbished and donated units along with motorcycles (Odofin, 2024). In December 2025 the government described having handed over 125 vehicles and 300 motorcycles to security agencies and vigilantes, and announced Metropolitan Quick Response Units in Lokoja, Okene and Anyigba(Oyewale, 2025). The administration has also reported supplying surveillance equipment and drones and paying allowances to personnel deployed under regional operations (Oyewale, 2025). To sustain this spending, the government has required mining and high-value companies to contribute vehicles to the State Security Trust Fund and has used the Fund and a security summit to mobilise additional resources (Odofin, 2024). The governor's own instruction that vehicles be used for the purpose for which they were intended acknowledges the risk that resources can be diverted or underused (Eneojoh, 2025). Without data on patrols mounted, response times achieved or incidents prevented, the contribution of these transfers to safety remains an assumption.

Integration of Community and Vigilante Structures

The administration has expanded vigilante ranks, recruited 1,050 hunters and equipped them with security gadgets (Odofin, 2024), and, most consequentially, absorbed vigilante operatives into the state civil service, a step the government and traditional rulers have described as professionalising local intelligence and improving accountability in community policing (Eneojoh, 2025). The logic is sound. Vigilante and hunter networks possess the local knowledge, language and terrain familiarity that federal police deployed from outside the community often lack, and across Nigeria such groups have at times reduced petty crime and deterred kidnappers where formal forces were slow to respond (Samuel, 2026). The Kogi vigilante service has demonstrated operational value, as in the September 2025 highway rescue (Dunamis, 2025).

Bringing these operatives onto the state payroll and into a formal structure addresses two recognised weaknesses of vigilantism: inadequate funding and training, and the absence of coordination with formal agencies and of accountability for conduct (Samuel, 2026). A salaried, supervised force is, in principle, easier to discipline and direct than a loose network of volunteers. The approach mirrors the broader national trend toward state-backed community security outfits, of which Amotekun is the most developed example (Miango, 2026). It also carries the risks that attend that trend. Self-defence groups have, in places, been accused of abuses and of acting on communal lines, and their growth raises the longer-term question of accountability for an armed force closely tied to a state executive (Ogunsanya, 2026). Formalisation can reduce these risks by imposing oversight, but only if the oversight is real; absorbing operatives into the civil service without independent conduct review would entrench the risks rather than resolve them.

Economic Measures for At-Risk Youth

The third component targets the conditions that feed insecurity. Through the Ododo Youth Empowerment and Skills Acquisition programme, delivered by the state-owned Nigeria-Korea Friendship Institute for Vocational and Advanced Technology, the administration has trained young people in

vocational fields such as automotive mechatronics, welding and fabrication, and has stated an aim of training at least 1,000 youths by 2027, with starter packs provided to graduates (The Authority, 2025). Separately, under the World Bank-supported Kogi State Community Action for Resilience and Economic Stimulus programme, the government distributed ₦100,000 livelihood grants to 8,000 youths and women across the state's 21 local government areas (NG-CARES, 2024). Officials have explicitly linked the skills programme to reducing unemployment and crime (The Authority, 2025).This element aligns most closely with the evidence on the drivers of insecurity. If poverty and youth unemployment expand the pool from which armed groups recruit, then training and capital that move young people into legitimate work address a root cause rather than a symptom (Gbadebo, 2025). The difficulty is scale and measurement.

Coordination and Financing

Underpinning the three operational components is a set of coordinating and financing arrangements. The State Security Trust Fund pools resources, including the mandated contributions from mining and high-value firms, and the administration has used security summits to raise funds and to frame Kogi's security as connected to national stability, citing the state's position as a gateway between north and south (Jimoh, 2026; Eneojoh, 2025). The governor has issued directives extending responsibility to local government chairmen for regular security meetings and support to vigilantes, and has signalled a willingness to use coercive measures, including the demolition of properties found to harbour criminals (Eneojoh, 2025). These arrangements give the strategy an organisational structure and a revenue stream beyond the state's ordinary budget, which is significant given the fiscal limits most states face.

Assessing Impact: Activity Versus Effect

The administration's central outcome claim is that its measures have made Kogi's highways safer, with the government stating that the once-dreaded Lokoja–Abuja and Lokoja–Okene roads are significantly safer and presenting the state as one of the safest in the country (Oyewale, 2025). What can be established is the input record, and it is substantial: a new VCRU facility with dedicated vehicles and an armoured carrier, 49 vehicles in one tranche and a reported 125 vehicles and 300 motorcycles in another, Metropolitan Quick Response Units in three towns, the absorption of vigilante operatives, thousands of youth trained or granted start-up funds, and a financing structure to sustain the spending (Thisday Live, 2026). These are real commitments with plausible mechanisms by which they could improve safety. They are not, by themselves, evidence that safety has improved. The recurrence of serious incidents during the same period, most strikingly the abduction of six federal directors on the Kabba–Lokoja highway in November 2025, after more than a year of security investment, shows that the threat remained capable of high-profile operations on exactly the corridors the strategy targets (Labaran, 2025; Mbachii, 2025).

The attribution problem cuts in both directions. If abductions on a given road declined, the change could reflect federal military operations, such as the army ambush that disrupted a kidnapping near Obajana in November 2025, as much as state-supplied vehicles or vigilante patrols (Mbachii, 2025). If they rose, that too could reflect factors beyond the governor's control, including displacement of armed groups from neighbouring states. This is why honest evaluation depends on isolating

the state's contribution through measurement rather than inferring it from activity. The national datasets cannot do this, because they report at zonal level and cannot separate Kogi from the rest of the North-Central, and because the most relevant survey was withdrawn from public access shortly after release (Businessday, 2025).

The available perception data also caution against confident conclusions. The national survey found low confidence in formal security response and low crime-reporting rates, conditions that take sustained change to shift and that are not captured by counting equipment (Tunji, 2024). Public trust, the willingness to report crimes, to travel and farm, and to cooperate with security agencies, is the outcome that ultimately matters, and it is precisely the outcome the current record does not measure. The administration's integration of local vigilantes could plausibly improve trust by embedding security in the community, but the claim is testable only with perception surveys that have not been published for the state.

The metrics that would settle the question are well established and were captured at national level by the same survey the administration could emulate. That survey measured the share of emergency calls answered within 30 minutes at about a third nationally, the share of home-robbery victims who reported to police at roughly a third, and the proportion of respondents who expected to become victims of crime in the coming year, which was higher in rural areas than in urban ones (Tunji, 2024). Tracked for Kogi over time and by corridor, indicators of this type would show whether response capacity, reporting confidence and fear of crime were moving in the direction the strategy intends. Their absence from the state's public reporting is the difference between a programme that can demonstrate progress and one that can only assert it.

The fair conclusion is therefore neither endorsement nor dismissal. The strategy is coherent: it combines response capacity, local knowledge and economic prevention in a way that matches the documented drivers of insecurity, and its components have recognised mechanisms of effect. But the case that it has produced measurable improvement is, on the public record, unproven. The administration has demonstrated activity at scale and asserted results without supplying the independent evidence that would convert assertion into demonstration. That gap is not unique to Kogi; it is characteristic of input-led security politics across Nigeria. It is, however, a gap that a serious programme should want to close, because doing so would either validate the spending or reveal where it is not working.

Replicability and Transferability

The question of whether the Kogi model can be copied has to separate the elements that travel from the conditions that make them work. Three features are, in principle, transferable to other states operating under the same constitutional limits. The first is direct logistical support to federal security agencies. Any state with the revenue can supply vehicles, fuel, communications and facilities, and the legal basis for doing so is uncontroversial. The second is the formalisation of community security labour: absorbing or contracting vigilante and hunter networks gives a state usable local capacity without waiting for constitutional reform, and the practice is already widespread, from Amotekun in the South-West to community guards in the North-Central (Samuel,2026). The third is economic prevention through skills training and grants, which any state can run and

which addresses a driver of insecurity common to most of the country (Gbadebo, 2025).

The conditions that determine whether these elements succeed are less easily transferred. Fiscal capacity is the most obvious. Sustained equipment transfers and a salaried vigilante force require a revenue stream that many states, already struggling to meet existing obligations, do not have, and which the establishment of formal state police would strain further (Ogunsanya, 2026: Adekunle, 2025). Kogi's use of a security trust fund and mandated corporate contributions is one answer, but it depends on having mining and industrial firms to levy and on the political capacity to enforce the levy (Eneojoh, 2025). The second condition is governance quality. Formalising vigilantes improves security only where oversight is genuine; absent that, the same step can produce an unaccountable armed body attached to the governor, which is the central fear raised about decentralised security in Nigeria (Samuel, 2026). The third condition is the threat profile itself. Measures calibrated to highway kidnapping and forest-based banditry in a transit state may not fit a state facing insurgency, farmer-herder conflict or urban violence, which require different responses.

A further transferability concern is the model's reliance on the personal engagement of the office-holder. Reporting on Kogiemphasises the governor's visible, hands-on involvement with security agencies, and much of the strategy's coordination runs through the executive (Eneojoh, 2025). Personalised models can mobilise resources quickly but are fragile: they depend on the priorities of an individual and may not survive a change of administration or outlast the political incentives that sustain them. A model built around institutions, funded units, published indicators, standing oversight bodies, is more transferable and more durable than one built around a personality, because it can be adopted by a successor or another state without requiring the same individual drive. The most replicable version of the Kogi approach would therefore be its institutional scaffolding rather than its political style.

The most valuable lesson for other governors may be negative as well as positive. The positive lesson is that a state can assemble a meaningful security role within existing constitutional limits by combining logistics, local integration and economic prevention. The negative lesson is that doing so without independent measurement leaves the government unable to prove its case, vulnerable to the charge that its spending is symbolic, and unable to learn which elements work. A governor copying Kogi's programme would do well to copy its breadth while correcting its weakest feature, which is the absence of evaluation.

Conclusion

Governor Ododo's security strategy in Kogi State is a substantial response to a real and adaptable threat. It combines hard-security investment, the formalisation of community security and economic measures aimed at the conditions that feed insecurity, financed through a dedicated trust fund and coordinated through the executive. However, the public record documents inputs in abundance and asserts outcomes, safer highways, a safer state, without the independent, disaggregated data that would allow the claim to be tested, and serious incidents on the targeted corridors persisted well into the investment period. This is less a failing peculiar to Kogi than an instance of a national pattern in which security performance is measured by activity because activity is visible and outcomes are not. The transferable core of the model is its breadth and its institutional

scaffolding; its replicable weakness is the absence of independent analysis.

That is what this paper has attempted to do, to highlight the Kogi situation and to show that the claims being made show that safety has improved, and the economic component in particular aligns with the evidence on what drives banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria. The strategy shows what a governor can do within the constraints of a constitution that makes him responsible for security while denying him command of the police. What the strategy has not done is demonstrate its effect, it is time for more indepth research to measure its real-life impact.

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