INSECURITY, GOVERNANCE DEFICITS, AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA'S NORTH CENTRAL ZONE: A HUMAN SECURITY AND STATE FRAGILITY ANALYSIS

BASSEY VICTORY NKOYO
Department of Defence and Security Studies, Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, National Defence College, Nigeria
victorybasseyn@yahoo.com

DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v10i8.16

Keywords

Human Security, Democratic Consolidation, Governance, North Central Nigeria, Farmer-Herder Conflicts, State Fragility

Abstract

Research Problem: *Nigeria's North Central Zone, comprising Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, and the Federal Capital Territory, is both the country's agricultural breadbasket and a convergence point of diverse ethno-religious communities, yet since 1999 the zone has experienced persistent and multidimensional insecurity, including farmer-herder conflicts, insurgency, banditry, ethno-religious violence, and politically motivated attacks that have displaced populations, undermined livelihoods, and weakened public confidence in democratic institutions. Existing scholarship has examined insecurity and governance weaknesses in the zone largely in isolation. This paper asks how insecurity, underpinned by governance deficits, undermines democratic consolidation in the region.*

Methods/Theory: *Anchored on the Human Security perspective and the State Fragility Framework, the paper adopts a qualitative design using secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, policy reports, and government documents, analysed through thematic content analysis.*

Results: *Findings show that weak institutions, elite manipulation of identity politics, inadequate security architecture, and the politicisation of conflict have hollowed out citizens' human security, reduced confidence in democratic institutions, and increased the risk of democratic reversal.*

Conclusion: Democratic consolidation in the North Central Zone cannot be achieved through elections alone. It requires a holistic reconstruction of governance that prioritises human security, inclusive citizenship, and institutional reform.

Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The paper contributes by integrating the Human Security Perspective and State Fragility Framework at the sub-national level, linking institutional conditions of fragility to citizen-level security outcomes and democratic consolidation.*

Recommendation: *The paper recommends community-based early warning mechanisms, comprehensive land reform, operationalising state policing, inclusion of displaced persons in electoral processes, and strengthening anti-corruption and electoral institutions.*

1. Introduction

Insecurity and democratic fragility are not unique to Nigeria. Across Africa, sub-national conflict has repeatedly outpaced the capacity of post-transition states to consolidate democratic gains (Arthur, 2025). Nigeria's North Central Zone, often called the Middle Belt, illustrates this tension. The zone produces significant quantities of the country's yam, cassava, maize, and sorghum, and hosts smallholder farmers across ethnic communities such as the Tiv, Idoma, Igala, Nupe, Berom, Jukun, Gbagyi, and Atyap (Chiaka et al., 2022). Over the past decade, the zone has become a theatre of insecurity that in specific periods has proven deadlier than the Boko Haram insurgency it stands alongside (Comolli, 2015). The International Crisis Group (2018) found that farmer-herder violence killed roughly six times more people nationally than Boko Haram over the same period. This lethality has continued alongside recurrent banditry, ethno-religious riots, and the displacement of millions (Onimisi & Okoli, 2025; Adeyinka & Achem, 2019).

The return to democratic governance in 1999 generated expectations of improved security, accountable leadership, and the consolidation of democratic institutions. Yet insecurity has continued to pressure democratic governance (Ukiwo, 2003; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). Across the North Central Zone, insecurity has constrained civic participation, compromised electoral processes, forced hundreds of thousands of citizens in Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau states into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, with attendant violations of dignity, while the social contract between citizens and the state remains contested (Unumen, 2019; Atim & Gbamwuan, 2022; Okpeh et al., 2021).

Existing scholarship approaches this reality from three directions. One strand treats the North Central Zone primarily as a security problem, examining the patterns and drivers of insurgency, banditry, and armed conflict (Onimisi & Okoli, 2025; Comolli, 2015). A second, working from a human security perspective, documents the lived costs of violence, displacement, food insecurity, and livelihood loss, but rarely connects these harms to the institutions responsible for preventing them (Adeyinka & Achem, 2019; Atim & Gbamwuan, 2022; Okpeh et al., 2021). A third diagnoses Nigeria's state fragility and institutional weakness at the national level but seldom examines how these weaknesses operate, are produced, or experienced within a particular geopolitical zone (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019; Fagbadebo, 2009). What none of these strands does is bring citizen-level human security and sub-national institutional analysis into the same frame. The literature therefore leaves insufficiently explained the relationship between institutional weakness, citizen-level insecurity, and democratic consolidation at the sub-national level.

This study addresses that gap by examining how state fragility produces human insecurity in the North Central Zone and how that insecurity weakens the institutional and social conditions necessary for democratic consolidation. The research problem is therefore not insecurity as an isolated security failure, but insecurity as a governance problem with implications for democratic consolidation. The study examines three objectives: (a) to examine the patterns and drivers of insecurity in the zone; (b) to interrogate the governance deficits that allow this insecurity to persist; and (c) to analyse their implications for democratic consolidation.

These objectives are guided by three research questions:

i. What are the dominant patterns and drivers of insecurity in the North Central Zone?

ii. How have governance deficits interacted with insecurity to weaken democratic institutions in the zone?

iii. What policy measures are required to strengthen both human security and democratic consolidation in the zone?

The paper integrates human security and state fragility perspectives at the sub-national level to explain this relationship, with implications for wider debates on policing, electoral reform, and federalism. It proceeds through a literature review, materials and methods, theoretical framework, discussion of findings, conclusion, and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising Insecurity and Human Security

Security was traditionally understood in state-centric terms centred on territorial sovereignty and from external aggression. The post-Cold War expansion of the security agenda shifted the referent towards the individual. Nigerian scholarship demonstrates the multidimensional character of insecurity. Nasirudeen and Kadir (2023) and Abaji et al. (2025) show that insecurity in North Central Nigeria produces displacement, food insecurity, weakened livelihoods, and deteriorating social services, while also generating gendered and urban vulnerabilities. Oghuvbu (2024) links persistent human insecurity to gaps between policy formulation and implementation, pointing towards institutional failure without developing a sustained institutional analysis. Taken together, these studies establish the breadth of human insecurity but leave less developed the institutional mechanisms through which insecurity is produced and sustained.

2.2 Governance Deficits and State Fragility in Nigeria

Governance refers to the processes and institutions through which public authority is exercised. Governance deficits arise where accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and the rule of law are weak or absent. Fagbadebo (2009) and Orogun (2010), from different regional contexts, identify elite capture and manipulation of public authority as important mechanisms of institutional weakness. Fagbadebo (2009) approaches the problem through the paradox of persistent insecurity amid abundant national resources, while Orogun (2010) emphasises elite manipulation and the failure of true federalism in the Niger Delta. While Yagboyaju and Akinola (2019) extend this diagnosis across Nigeria's Fourth Republic, linking governance failure to constitutional defects, corruption, economic mismanagement, and electoral malpractice, they also propose a tripartite typology of Cultural, Rule-Based, and Survival-Based societies to explain the dissonance between formal institutions and everyday practice. Unumen (2019) highlights weak legislative and judicial institutions, and constitutional manipulation as obstacles to democratic consolidation.

Arieja et al. (2025) move more explicitly towards a state-fragility perspective, arguing that failure to provide security undermines related public goods such as dispute settlement, education, health, and political participation. These accounts, however, remain predominantly national in scope. Their principal limitation for this study is therefore not the absence of evidence of institutional weakness, but the limited attention to how such weakness is experienced at citizen level and within a specific geopolitical zone.

2.3 Insecurity in the North Central Zone: Patterns and Drivers

The literature identifies farmer-herder violence, armed banditry, and communal conflict as major manifestations of insecurity in the North Central Zone, producing displacement, loss of life, and food insecurity, particularly in Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa states (UN Human Rights Council, 2026; ISS Africa, 2025). Three drivers recur across the literature.

The first is resource competition over land and grazing routes. Adeyinka and Achem (2019) document its human costs, while Akov (2017) connects recurring violence to deteriorating state-society relations and the absence of credible mechanisms for resolving resource disputes. The second is absent or weak governance, which allows disputes to escalate rather than being institutionally mediated. Akov's contribution is significant because it connects human insecurity with institutional erosion, although the mechanism remains insufficiently developed. The third is information disorder. BBC News (2018) and Adigun (2022) show how false or misleading information can amplify tensions and deepen intercommunal mistrust. Information disorder therefore functions as an accelerant, turning resource competition and weak governance capacity into open conflict. These drivers are generally examined separately, and their interaction as part of a wider governance-security process remains underdeveloped.

2.4 Farmer-Herder Conflicts and Electoral Politics

Beyond competition over land and resources, insecurity in the North Central Zone is closely intertwined with electoral politics. Aliyu et al. (2018) link perceptions of government bias in conflict responses to heightened political tension and ethno-regional divisions. Tade (2020) documents perception that official responses to violence are shaped by electoral calculation. This suggests that politicisation operates both in how conflict is framed and in how it is managed.

The consequences extend beyond violence. Okpeh et al. (2021) associate farmer-herder conflict with underdevelopment in the North Central through its effects on food security, infrastructure, and economic activity, consistent with evidence from Mercy Corps (2015) and McDougal et al. (2015) on wider economic and household income losses. Oderinde et al. (2022) further identify climate variability and resource competition as aggravating factors. Together, these studies suggest a reinforcing relationship in which insecurity damages livelihoods and institutions, while weak institutions struggle to manage the conflicts that produce insecurity (Zartman, 1995).

2.5 Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

Linz and Stepan (1996) define democratic consolidation as the institutionalisation of democratic procedures as the established and legitimate means of political competition and conflict resolution. Nigeria has maintained electoral democracy and successive transfers of power since 1999, but Ukiwo (2003) observes that citizens' expectations of improved living conditions have not been consistently realised, weakening the legitimacy associated with democratic governance.

The broader literature shows that electoral continuity does not necessarily produce deeper democratic consolidation. Carothers (2002), Diamond (2002), and Levitsky and Way (2010) examine contexts in which elections coexist with weak accountability and institutional depth, while Oko (2008) situates Nigeria within broader African problems of institutional weakness and executive overreach. Yet these approaches remain largely national or comparative, providing limited explanation

of how insecurity, displacement, and governance deficits interact with democratic consolidation within a particular Nigerian geopolitical zone.

2.6 Identified Gaps in the Literature

Four gaps emerge. First, the human security literature (Nasirudeen & Kadir, 2023; Oghuvbu, 2024; Abaji et al., 2025; Adeyinka & Achem, 2019) documents lived insecurity in empirical detail but does not systematically link it to institutional failure, with partial exception to Akov (2017). Second, the governance and state-fragility literature (Fagbadebo, 2009; Orogun, 2010; Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019; Unumen, 2019; Arieja et al., 2025) diagnoses institutional weakness without adequately examining its consequences for individual citizens' security. Third, the democratic consolidation literature (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Carothers, 2002; Diamond, 2002; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Oko, 2008) operates primarily at national or continental scales and provides limited explanation of sub-national democratic strain. Fourth, the literature does not sufficiently integrate human security and state fragility into a single analytical lens capable of showing how insecurity feeds back into democratic erosion at the sub-national level. This is the gap the theoretical framework and methodology address.

3. Materials and Methods

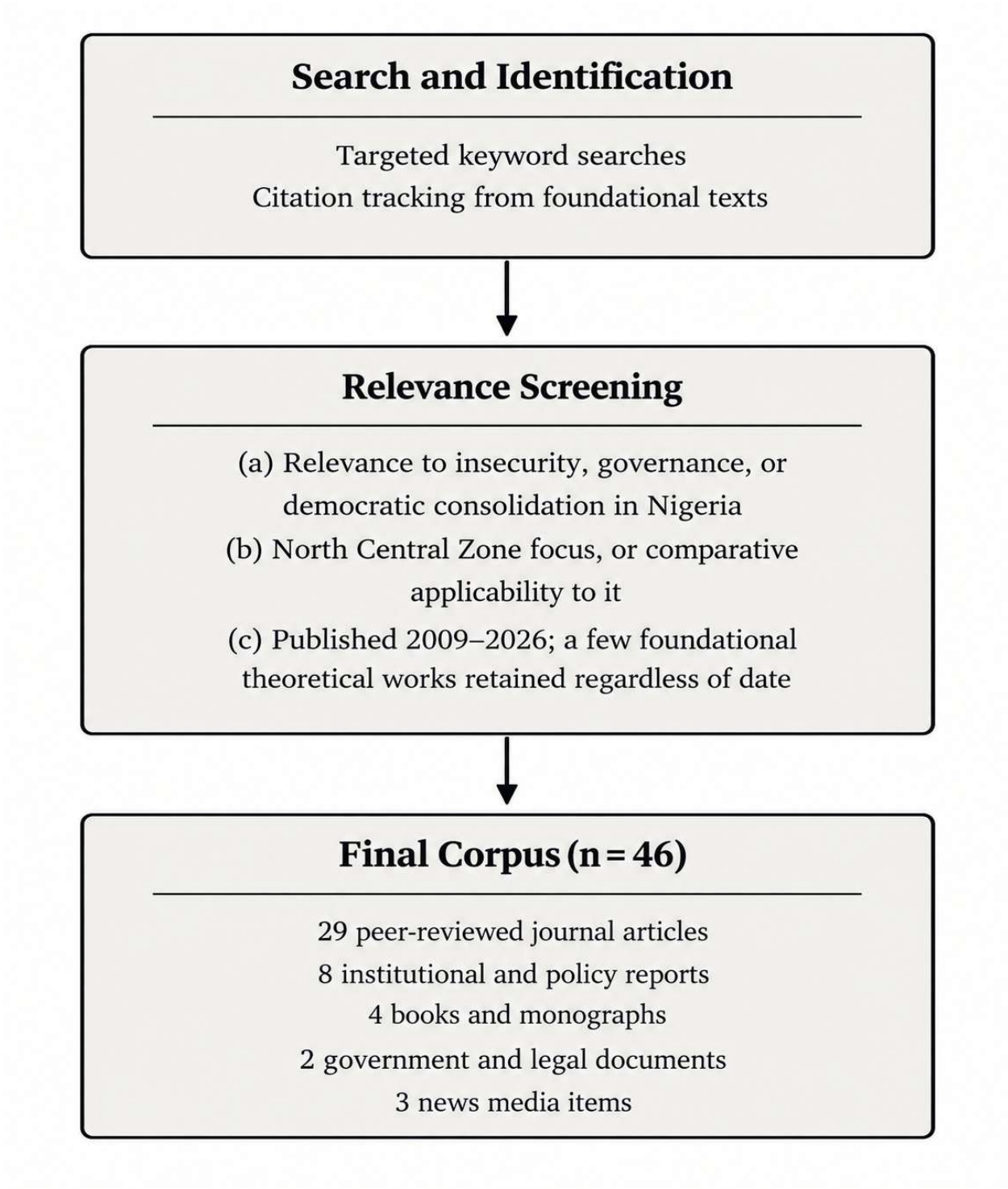
This study adopted a qualitative research design relying on secondary data. The qualitative approach was considered most appropriate because the research problem is explanatory and contextual, requiring interpretive depth rather than numerical estimation.

3.1 Source Selection Process.

Sources were identified through targeted keyword searches, "farmer-herder conflict," "North Central Nigeria," "democratic consolidation," "state fragility," and "human security", supplemented by citation tracking from foundational works such as Linz and Stepan's consolidation framework and Levitsky and Way's hybrid-regime typology. Records were screened for: (a) direct relevance to insecurity, governance, or democratic consolidation in Nigeria; (b) focus on the North Central Zone or comparative relevance to it; and (c) publication between 2009 and 2026. Foundational theoretical works published earlier were retained where they supplied the study's theoretical vocabulary. Sources without direct relevance to the North Central Zone or comparable Nigerian conditions were excluded.

The resulting corpus comprises 46 sources: 29 peer-reviewed journal articles, 8 institutional and policy reports, 4 books and monographs, 2 government and legal documents, and 3 news media items. Figure 1 summarises the selection process, while Table 1 categorises the sources by analytical role.

Figure 1: Source selection process.



Source: Author's compilation.

Table 1. Summary of secondary data sources by category.

Source Type	N	Examples	Themes Addressed	Role in Analysis
Peer-reviewed journal articles	29	Yagboyaju & Akinola (2019); Aliyu et al. (2018); Okpeh et al. (2021)	Patterns and drivers of insecurity; governance deficits; state fragility; democratic consolidation theory	Primary evidentiary base and theoretical grounding
Institutional and policy reports	8	International Crisis Group (2017, 2018); ISS Africa (2025); OECD (2015); Mercy Corps (2015)	Casualty and displacement statistics; fragility indices; economic costs	Verification and triangulation of figures in peer-reviewed sources
Books and monographs	4	Comolli (2015); Levitsky & Way (2010); Linz & Stepan (1996); Zartman (1995)	Democratic consolidation theory; hybrid-regime trajectories; state collapse	Theoretical grounding for Section 4
Government and legal documents	2	UN Human Rights Council (2026); State Failure Task Force (1995)	Human rights conditions in the Middle Belt; fragility indicators	Independent, non-academic corroboration
News media	3	BBC News (2018); BusinessDay (2026); The Conversation (2020)	Misinformation dynamics; elite manipulation; food-system shocks	Evidence on fast-moving developments not yet in peer-reviewed literature

Note. N = number of sources in the reference list assigned to each category. Classification, theme assignment, and role compiled by the author from this study's reference list.

3.2 Analytical Procedure.

Thematic content analysis proceeded through five stages. First, the researcher familiarized herself with the full corpus through repeated close reading. Second, open coding identified claims relating to phenomenon such as "displacement," "elite manipulation," "institutional capture," "electoral bias," and "information disorder." Third, related codes were grouped into broader themes; codes for elite manipulation, electoral bias, and institutional capture were grouped into a governance-deficit theme, while codes for displacement, food insecurity, and livelihood loss were grouped into a human-security-erosion theme. Fourth, themes were mapped onto the dual theoretical framework: institutional design and state capacity were examined through the State Fragility Framework, while citizen-level consequences were examined through the Human Security Perspective. Fifth, themes were cross-referenced with the three research questions to ensure analytical coverage. Material that did not address a research question directly was retained only as contextual evidence rather than developed as standalone finding.

3.3 Deriving Conclusions.

Analytical conclusions were derived through triangulation across the source categories in Table 1. Where academic, policy, and news sources converged on the same pattern, such as the economic costs of farmer-herder conflict, convergence was treated as stronger evidence

than any single source. Where sources differed in emphasis, particularly between human-security and governance explanations of insecurity, the divergence was retained as an analytical finding rather than resolved by privileging one perspective. This approach reflects the study's central argument that the two literatures have largely developed in parallel.

3.4 Limitations.

This study has four principal limitations. First, it relies exclusively on secondary data and therefore cannot independently verify all claims or directly capture the experiences and perceptions of conflict-affected populations. Second, the availability and quality of sub-national data are uneven, particularly regarding casualties, displacement, livelihood losses, and electoral exclusion; triangulation across source types was therefore used to strengthen the evidentiary base. Third, the study is geographically bounded to Nigeria's North Central Zone, limiting generalisation to other geopolitical zones. Finally, its qualitative and interpretive design identifies patterns and plausible mechanisms but does not permit statistical estimation of causal relationships. These limitations define the scope of the findings while also pointing to the need for comparative, longitudinal, primary, and quantitative research.

4. Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Human Security Perspective and the State Fragility Framework. Together, they provide a multi-level lens for examining how insecurity and governance deficits undermine democratic consolidation in Nigeria's North Central Zone. The human security perspective discusses the micro-level consequences of insecurity for individuals and communities, while the state fragility framework explains the institutional weaknesses (meso-level) that allow insecurity to persist.

The human security perspective places the individual, rather than the state, at the centre of security. It gained global prominence through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report, which argued that real security comes from protecting people's welfare, dignity, and opportunities, and not from military strength alone (UNDP, 1994). The report identified seven dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security.

Nigerian scholars demonstrate the relevance of this multidimensional approach to the North Central Zone, where insecurity manifests through displacement, food insecurity, loss of livelihood, gendered vulnerability, and weakened social services (Oghuvbu, 2024; Nasirudeen and Kadir, 2023; Abaji et al., 2025; Atim and Gbamwuan, 2022).

The perspective is useful because it treats insecurity as a direct assault on substantive citizenship. Its breadth, however, is also a limitation. Paris (2001) argues that the concept is sufficiently broad and ambiguous to provide limited practical guidance. More importantly for this study, human security identifies what citizens lose but does not adequately explain the institutional processes responsible for those losses. A household may lose its harvest, income, and physical safety, for example, without the framework alone explaining why the state failed to prevent those losses.

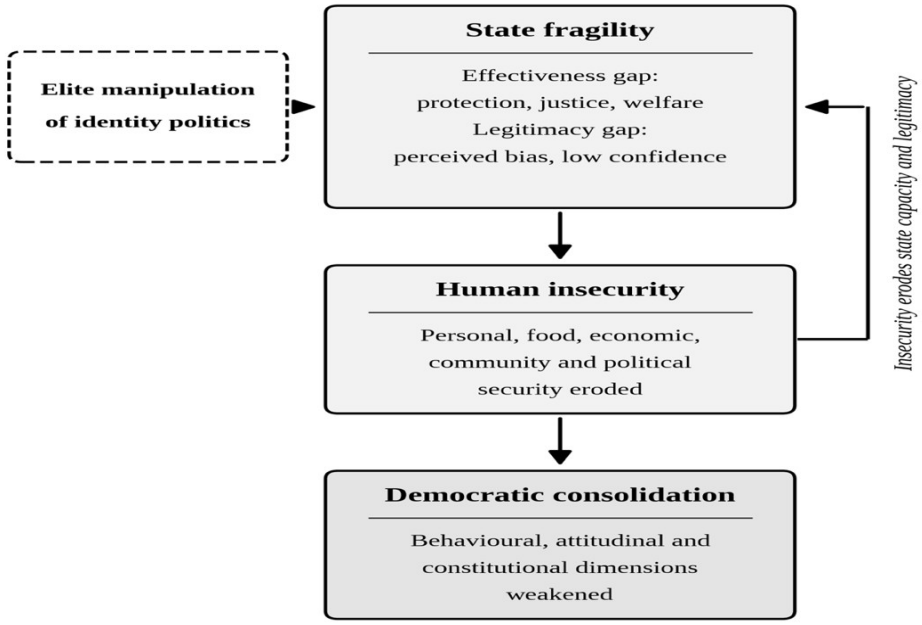
The State Fragility Framework addresses this institutional dimension by examining the capacity and legitimacy of states to provide core political goods, particularly security, justice, and welfare. Its foundations include the State Fragility Index and Matrix (Marshall & Cole, 2008), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) multidimensional fragility framework (OECD, 2015), and the State Failure Task Force model (1995). Nigerian scholarship similarly associates fragility with failures to provide

security and public goods (Arieja et al., 2025). Yagboyaju and Akinola (2019) also emphasise that fragility is relational. Their tripartite typology demonstrates the tension between formal institutions, communal norms, and survival-based practices, through which weaknesses in state capacity can create opportunities for insecurity.

The framework is not without limitations. Call (2008) questions the analytical value of loosely applied "failed" and "fragile" state labels, while Grimm, Lemay-Hébert, and Nay (2014) highlight the concept's origins in donor and Western policy priorities. Its state-centred orientation also says less about how institutional weakness is experienced within particular communities. Moreover, a continuum from strong to failed states can understate the political processes through which fragility is produced. Elite manipulation of farmer-herder conflict illustrates this agency dimension (Aliyu et al., 2018; Tade, 2020).

The two perspectives are therefore complementary. Human security identifies citizen-level consequences of insecurity, while state fragility explains the institutional conditions that produce or permit them. Their integration traces a reinforcing process: weak state capacity and legitimacy (especially in rural communities) enable insecurity; insecurity produces losses in safety, food, livelihoods, and political participation; and these losses weaken participation and confidence in democratic institutions, further undermining state legitimacy and capacity. Elite manipulation of identity politics can intensify this cycle. Figure 2 presents the resulting conceptual model.

Figure 2: Conceptual model of state fragility, human insecurity, and democratic consolidation.



Source: Author's construct.

The frameworks are operationalised through five human-security dimensions and two state-fragility dimensions. Human security is examined through five of the seven UNDP (1994) dimensions: food security, through disruption of farming and food supply; economic security, through loss of livelihood and household income; personal security,

through killings, attacks, and displacement; community security, through intercommunal mistrust and identity-based violence; and political security, through citizens' ability, including that of displaced persons, to participate in electoral and civic life. Health and environmental security are considered where they directly bear on these dimensions.

State fragility is assessed through effectiveness and legitimacy (Marshall & Cole, 2008). Effectiveness concerns the state's capacity to protect people and territory and provide justice and welfare reflecting the core goods discussed by Arieja et al. (2025) and the security and access to justice concerns reflected in the OECD (2015) framework. Legitimacy concerns public confidence in state institutions and perceptions of bias in the state's responses to violence (Aliyu et al., 2018; Tade, 2020). Democratic consolidation constitutes the outcome and follows Linz and Stepan's (1996) dimensions: whether significant actors adhere to democratic means, whether citizens regard democratic institutions as legitimate, and whether conflicts are resolved through established lawful procedures.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1 State Fragility and the Patterns of Insecurity

Insecurity in the North Central Zone is not separate from governance failure. Viewed through the effectiveness dimension of state fragility, persistent insurgency, banditry, and farmer-herder violence reflect the state's limited capacity to provide its core political good: protection of people and territory. Onimisi and Okoli (2025) describe continuing insecurity despite government intervention, suggesting that the existence of intervention does not necessarily translate into effective state capacity.

The findings also indicate that resource competition and political manipulation are complementary rather than competing explanations of farmer-herder violence. Nkwunonwo et al. (2019) and Adeyinka and Achem (2019) emphasise land pressure, changing grazing patterns, and population growth, while Aliyu et al. (2018) and Tade (2020) highlight the political instrumentalisation of conflict. Resource competition creates conditions for violence, while elite manipulation can influence how conflicts escalate and are managed. The latter operates through the legitimacy dimension of state fragility, particularly where citizens perceive official responses as politically biased. Displacement therefore represents not only a failure of personal security but also an erosion of political security among conflict-affected populations.

5.2 Human Security and the Lived Consequences of Insecurity

The same evidence reveals a cascading pattern across the human-security dimensions operationalised in Section 4. Atim and Gbamwuan (2022) show that displacement in Benue State is associated with simultaneous deficits in food security, shelter, livelihood, and psychosocial wellbeing. Women in displacement camps face additional sexual and economic vulnerabilities, demonstrating how personal, economic, food, and community security can deteriorate together.

Abaji et al. (2025) and Oderinde et al. (2022) extend these consequences beyond displaced populations. Insecurity-driven migration places pressure on urban infrastructure, while disruption to agricultural production threatens livelihoods and food supply. The 2023 ginger blight reported by BusinessDay (2026) provides a useful limiting case: food insecurity can also arise from weaknesses in agricultural support systems without direct violence. The evidence

therefore supports interconnected but analytically distinct human-security dimensions, with insecurity capable of generating cumulative rather than isolated harms.

5.3 Governance Deficits as the Proximate Cause

The findings identify governance deficits as the mechanism connecting state fragility to human insecurity. Yagboyaju and Akinola (2019) identify corruption, institutional weakness, constitutional defects, and executive dominance as broader governance problems. Within the North Central context, these weaknesses become consequential through inadequate security provision, politicised responses, and weak conflict-prevention mechanisms. Governance deficit is therefore not a third variable alongside fragility and insecurity; it is the mechanism through which institutional weakness becomes a lived security problem.

Orogun's (2010) analysis of the Niger Delta further demonstrates that governance fragility is not unique to the North Central Zone. However, the effects of institutional weakness vary according to the conflicts with which it intersects. In the North Central Zone, governance deficits interact with identity politics, ecological pressure, and multiple forms of armed conflict, illustrating that fragility is a necessary but not sufficient condition for particular security outcomes.

5.4 Implications for Democratic Consolidation

The findings have implications for all three dimensions of democratic consolidation identified by Linz and Stepan (1996). First, the behavioural dimension is affected where political actors exploit insecurity to constrain participation. Aliyu et al. (2018) and Tade (2020) document allegations that displaced voters in Nasarawa State were prevented from participating in the 2019 elections, illustrating how insecurity can be incorporated into political competition rather than resolved through democratic procedures.

Second, the attitudinal dimension is affected when prolonged insecurity weakens citizens' capacity to experience democratic institutions as effective and legitimate. Atim and Gbamwuan (2022) demonstrate how displacement strips affected populations of meaningful access to social and political life, while Abaji et al. (2025) and Oderinde et al. (2022) show how persistent food and livelihood insecurity can constrain citizens' capacity for political participation.

The evidence does not establish a comparable breakdown of the constitutional dimension: Nigeria continues to operate within a formally democratic constitutional order. The more defensible finding is therefore that insecurity and governance deficits place pressure on the behavioural and attitudinal foundations of consolidation before any formal constitutional breakdown becomes evident.

5.5 The State Fragility-Human Security Nexus

Taken together, the findings support the integrated framework proposed in Section 4. State fragility, expressed through weaknesses in effectiveness and legitimacy, enables persistent insecurity; insecurity generates interconnected losses across human-security dimensions; and these losses weaken confidence in institutions and the conditions necessary for democratic participation. Governance deficits provide the proximate mechanism connecting these processes.

The relationship is therefore reinforcing rather than linear. Weak institutional capacity permits insecurity to persist, while the resulting displacement, livelihood loss, and political exclusion weaken the legitimacy and social foundations of democratic governance.

This, in turn, can further constrain effective state response. The central implication is that interventions addressing insecurity without the governance mechanisms sustaining it are unlikely to break the cycle identified in the study.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined why insecurity in Nigeria's North Central Zone has persisted despite more than two decades of civilian rule and why its consequences extend beyond physical safety. It argued that insecurity cannot be understood through security capacity alone because governance deficits connect state effectiveness and legitimacy to citizen-level human insecurity and pressures on democratic consolidation. By integrating the Human Security Perspective with the State Fragility Framework, the study provides a multi-level explanation connecting institutional conditions to lived consequences of insecurity.

The findings indicate that weak state effectiveness and legitimacy enable insecurity to persist, while displacement, livelihood loss, food insecurity, political exclusion, and declining confidence in institutions pressure the behavioural and attitudinal foundations of democratic consolidation. The relationship is reinforcing rather than linear. Institutional weaknesses permit insecurity to persist; insecurity generates cumulative human-security losses; these losses constrain political participation and confidence in democratic institutions; and weakened legitimacy can further constrain effective state response. Governance deficits therefore constitute the proximate mechanism through which state fragility becomes experienced as human insecurity.

The study nevertheless does not claim that all insecurity in the North Central Zone is reducible to governance failure, nor does it establish a statistically causal relationship between state fragility and democratic consolidation. Its conclusions are bounded by its reliance on secondary data, uneven availability of sub-national evidence, qualitative interpretation, and geographical focus on the North Central Zone. The absence of primary fieldwork also means that the study cannot independently establish how affected populations interpret institutional legitimacy, political exclusion, and insecurity. These limitations are particularly important in a conflict environment where evidence is often incomplete, contested, and temporally uneven.

These limitations also establish an agenda for future research. Comparative studies across Nigeria's geopolitical zones could test whether the relationships identified here operate under different conflict and institutional conditions. Longitudinal research could examine changes in institutional trust, electoral participation, displacement, and state legitimacy over time. Primary research involving conflict-affected communities, displaced populations, security actors, traditional institutions, and political stakeholders could test and refine the proposed mechanisms. Quantitative research could subsequently assess whether measurable relationships exist between sub-national indicators of state fragility, human security, and democratic consolidation.

Ultimately, human security should not be treated solely as a consequence of governance to be addressed after stability is restored. In the North Central Zone, protecting livelihoods, political participation, community security, and human dignity is itself part of rebuilding institutional legitimacy and strengthening the social foundations of democratic consolidation. Sustainable democratic consolidation therefore requires not only electoral procedures but also institutions capable of protecting citizens, managing conflict fairly, and sustaining confidence in the democratic state.

7. Recommendations

The findings indicate that governance deficits connect state fragility to human insecurity, with two implications for these recommendations. First, strengthening institutional independence and accountability is therefore a precondition for the effectiveness of other recommendations. Land reform, resource reallocation, and state policing all create discretionary powers that can be captured without oversight. Second, the recommendations differ considerably in feasibility. Constitutional reform, for instance, cannot be treated as equally actionable as a media-literacy programme. They are therefore sequenced according to institutional priority and feasibility.

1. **Immediate priority:** strengthen institutional independence and accountability. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission, the Code of Conduct Bureau, the Independent National Electoral Commission, and the judiciary should be adequately resourced and insulated from political interference. Stronger institutional accountability is foundational because weak oversight allows security provision, public resources, and electoral processes to be captured for political advantage. The principal constraint is political resistance from actors who may benefit from weak oversight. Stronger legislative safeguards, transparent funding arrangements, including development-partner support where appropriate, and external monitoring could help mitigate this constraint.

2. **Short term:** strengthen community security and political inclusion. Community-based early warning systems should integrate traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms with ICT-enabled reporting in Plateau, Benue, and Nasarawa States, alongside media-literacy and fact-checking partnerships to counter misinformation. The Independent National Electoral Commission should provide inclusive electoral arrangements for displaced populations, including registration and voting centres in IDP camps and host communities. Post-conflict rehabilitation programmes should prioritise victims and displaced communities rather than ex-combatants alone, with traditional institutions, religious leaders, and civil society involved in a whole-of-society approach. These measures can be piloted at state or local government level without changes to Nigeria's constitutional or fiscal architecture, although effective oversight remains necessary to prevent political manipulation.

3. **Medium term:** strengthen livelihood and address land-based conflict. Agricultural resilience and rural livelihood measures should strengthen seed banking systems, disease surveillance, season-ahead planning for flooding and biological shocks, rural infrastructure, and youth-focused skills acquisition in conflict-affected areas. Land reform should recognise customary tenure, demarcating grazing reserves, and establishing enforceable dispute-resolution mechanisms involving traditional authorities and civil society. These reforms require sustained investment and negotiation among competing interests and should therefore follow the initial institutional and community-level measures.

4. **Long term:** pursue structural and constitutional reform. Two reforms require constitutional or near-constitutional change and should follow

the measures above so that the necessary accountability and institutional capacity are already in place. State policing should be operationalised with safeguards against political capture, allowing state-controlled police units to respond more directly to local intelligence and community-level conflict dynamics. Federal resource allocation should also better reflect the ecological and infrastructural pressures affecting the North Central Zone, with greater investment in rural local government areas. Given the political difficulty of comprehensive revenue reform, targeted federal security and ecological interventions could serve as an interim measure while broader fiscal reforms are pursued.

References

Abaji, A. S., Akoji, S. J., Rintep, F. C., & Gonten, W. M. (2025). Insecurity, rural–urban migration and food security in North-Central Nigeria: Implications for national security and social stability. Local Development & Society. Advance online publication.

Adeyinka, A., & Achem, V. (2019). A concentric approach to understanding herders–farmers clashes in Benue and Nasarawa States, Nigeria. International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 11, 37–42. https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2019.0803

Adigun, O. W. (2022). Analysing the patterns and dominant narrative(s) of Nigeria's farmer-herder conflicts (Policy & Practice Brief No. 56). African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes. https://www.accord.org.za/publication/analysing-the-patterns-and-dominant-narratives-of-nigerias-farmer-herder-conflicts/

Akov, E. T. (2017). The resource-conflict debate revisited: Untangling the case of farmer-herdsman clashes in the North Central region of Nigeria. African Security Review, 26(3), 288–307.

Aliyu, M. K., Ikedinma, H. A., & Akinwande, A. E. (2018). Assessment of the effects of farmers herdsmen conflicts on national integration in Nigeria. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 8(10), 118–128.

Arieja, D. G., Mukoro, A., & Okereka, O. P. (2025). The pattern of agitations for restructuring, resource control and secession in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Journal of Political Science and Public Administration, 13, 78–96.

Arthur, P. (2025). Countering the wave of democratic backsliding and the crisis of democracy in West Africa. Insight on Africa, 17(2), 213–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/09750878241312188

Atim, G., & Gbamwuan, A. (2022). Farmer-herder conflicts and the socio-economic predicaments of women in North Central Nigeria. Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal, 9(6), 90–105.

BBC News. (2018, June 29). Fake news and Nigeria's herder crisis. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-44655148

BusinessDay. (2026). N12bn shock: How Nigeria's ginger crisis exposes deep cracks in food security, policy delivery. https://businessday.ng/exclusives/article/n12bn-shock-how-nigerias-ginger-crisis-exposes-deep-cracks-in-food-security-policy-delivery/

Call, C. T. (2008). The fallacy of the "failed state." Third World Quarterly, 29(8), 1491–1507. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590802544207

Carothers, T. (2002). The end of the transition paradigm. Journal of Democracy, 13(1), 5–21.

Chiaka, J. C., Zhen, L., Yunfeng, H., Xiao, Y., Muhirwa, F., & Lang, T. (2022). Smallholder farmers' contribution to food production in Nigeria. Frontiers in Nutrition, 9, Article 916678. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2022.916678

Comolli, V. (2015). Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist insurgency. Hurst & Co.

Diamond, L. (2002). Thinking about hybrid regimes. Journal of Democracy, 13(2), 21–35.

Fagbadebo, O. M. (2009). Nigeria and the perennial problem of governance: Explaining state failure in the midst of abundant resources. Journal of Social Policy and National Productivity, 2(1), 28–48.

Grimm, S., Lemay-Hébert, N., & Nay, O. (2014). "Fragile states": Introducing a political concept. Third World Quarterly, 35(2), 197–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.878127

Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2009). Another step forward for Ghana. Journal of Democracy, 20(2), 138–152.

Institute for Security Studies. (2025, June 26). Nigeria's North Central violence reveals systemic state failure. ISS Today. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/nigeria-s-north-central-violence-reveals-systemic-state-failure

International Crisis Group. (2017). Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict (Africa Report No. 252).

International Crisis Group. (2018). Stopping Nigeria's spiralling farmer-herder violence (Africa Report No. 262).

Iornumbe, D. A. (2025). Effects of farmers or herders conflict on food security in Benue State. Jurnal Restorasi: Hukum dan Politik, 3(1), 73–86.

Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War. Cambridge University Press.

Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. (1996). Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Marshall, M. G., & Cole, B. R. (2008). Global report on conflict, governance and state fragility 2008. Center for Systemic Peace. https://www.systemicpeace.org/vlibrary/GlobalReport2008.pdf

McDougal, T. L., Hagerty, T., Inks, L., Ugo-Ike, C., Dowd, C., Conroy, S., & Ogabiela, D. (2015). The effect of farmer-pastoralist violence on income: New survey evidence from Nigeria's Middle Belt states. Economics of Peace and Security Journal, 10(1), 54–65.

Mercy Corps. (2015). The economic costs of conflict and the benefits of peace: Effects of farmer-pastoralist conflict on state, sector, and national economies. Mercy Corps.

Nasirudeen, L. O., & Kadir, N. A. (2023). Human security as a basic ingredient for the smooth running of society: The Nigerian experience. RUDN Journal of Public Administration, 10(3), 404–417. https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2023-10-3-404-417

Nkwunonwo, U. C., Okeke, F. I., Chiemelu, E. N., & Ebinne, E. S. (2019). Geospatial technology potentials in reawakening the consciousness of soil distribution in Nigeria's North-Central region and mediating the herdsmen-farmers conflicts.

Journal of Geoscience and Environment Protection, 7(2), 156–175. https://doi.org/10.4236/gep.2019.72011

Oderinde, F. O., Akano, O. I., Adesina, F. A., & Omotayo, A. O. (2022). Trends in climate, socioeconomic indices and food security in Nigeria: Current realities and challenges ahead. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems, 6, Article 940858. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.940858

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2015). States of fragility 2015: Meeting post-2015 challenges. OECD Publishing.

Oghuvbu, E. A. (2024). Boko Haram insurgency and the challenges of internally displaced persons in Nigeria. RUDN Journal of Public Administration, 11(1), 98–111. https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2024-11-1-98-111

Oko, O. (2008). The challenges of democratic consolidation in Africa. New England Law Review, 43, 165–198.

Okpeh, O. O., Mamuda, A., Okoli, A. C., Azom, S. N., & Ugwu, A. C. (2021). Farmer-herder conflicts and human security in North Central Nigeria: Issues and remedies. African Renaissance, 18(2), 103–123. https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-5305/2021/18n2a5

Onimisi, T., & Okoli, B. C. (2025). Insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria: Dissecting the existing policy options. International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies, 1(2), 153–164. https://doi.org/10.18485/fb_ijcss.2025.1.2.11

Orogun, P. S. (2010). Resource control, revenue allocation and petroleum politics in Nigeria: The Niger Delta question. GeoJournal, 75(5), 459–507. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-009-9320-7

Paris, R. (2001). Human security: Paradigm shift or hot air? International Security, 26(2), 87–102.

State Failure Task Force. (1995). State Failure Task Force report: Phase I findings. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Tade, O. (2020, September 1). What's triggered new conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria? The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/whats-triggered-new-conflict-between-farmers-and-herders-in-nigeria-145055

Ugwueze, M. I., Omenma, J. T., & Okwueze, F. O. (2022). Land-related conflicts and the nature of government responses in Africa: The case of farmer-herder crises in Nigeria. Society, 59(3), 240–253.

Ukiwo, U. (2003). Politics, ethno-religious conflicts and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The Journal of Modern African Studies, 41(1), 115–138.

United Nations Development Programme. (1994). Human development report 1994. Oxford University Press.

UN Human Rights Council. (2026). Communication to the Government of Nigeria concerning alleged human rights violations in the "Middle Belt" region (Ref. AL NGA 1/2026). Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30821

Unumen, J. O. (2019). Strong institutions and the challenge of democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth republic. Canadian Social Science, 15(1), 29–35.

Yagboyaju, D. A., & Akinola, A. O. (2019). Nigerian state and the crisis of governance: A critical exposition. SAGE Open, 9(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019865810

Zartman, I. W. (Ed.). (1995). Collapsed states: The disintegration and restoration of legitimate authority. Lynne Rienner.