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Enhancing Community Security in Nigeria through Youth Participation: Challenges, Innovations, and Governance Implications

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the role of youth participation in community security governance in Nigeria, a country where young people constitute over 60% of the population yet remain systematically excluded from security decision-making processes. Drawing on participatory governance theory, the securitisation of youth framework and human security approaches, the paper argueds that sustainable community security in Nigeria cannot be achieved without the meaningful inclusion of young people in governance structures. The study employed qualitative analysis of policy frameworks, institutional mechanisms and emerging practices across Nigerian states, drawing on recent empirical evidence from 2020–2026. Findings revealed that while Nigeria has developed progressive policy frameworks—including the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security and various state-level initiatives—implementation remains the critical challenge. Youth exclusion from security governance manifests through symbolic representation without decision-making power, inadequate funding for youth-led security initiatives, and the persistence of top-down security models that treat young people as threats rather than partners. However, emerging innovations across states demonstrate the potential of youth-led security strategies: Akwa Ibom's integration of Village Youth Presidents into security architecture, Kano's Neighbourhood Watch Corps, Lagos's Police-Youth Dialogue programme, and Ogun State's youth-led community security strategies. The paper contributes to theoretical debates on participatory security governance and offers practical recommendations for institutional reform, including the establishment of Youth-Police Advisory Councils, the mainstreaming of youth inclusion in security sector reform, and the development of community-based security frameworks that recognise young people as co-producers of security.

Keywords: **Youth Participation, Security, Nigeria, Governance, Peace**

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between youth and security in Nigeria presents a profound paradox. Young people constitute the majority of the population—over 60% are under the age of 30, and 65% are estimated to be in the age category of 15–35 years —yet they remain systematically excluded from security governance and decision-making processes. This demographic reality places Nigeria at a critical crossroads: harnessing the potential of its youth population could drive unprecedented development and stability, while continued exclusion and marginalisation risks fuelling radicalisation, conflict, and instability.

Nigeria faces multiple security challenges that disproportionately affect young people. The Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast has killed tens of thousands and displaced millions; communal conflicts in the Middle Belt continue to claim lives and displace communities; banditry and kidnapping have become widespread across the northwest and north-central regions; and separatist agitations in the southeast have intensified. Young people are not merely victims of these conflicts, hey are often the primary targets of recruitment by extremist groups, the perpetrators of violence, and simultaneously the most active agents of

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peacebuilding at the community level . Research by Arisukwu et al. (2020) found that youths constitute a greater percentage of suspects at police stations for crime, with unemployment and poverty among the rural populace, especially youths, responsible for these criminalities .

The governance of community security in Nigeria has historically been characterised by top-down, militarised approaches that treat young people as security threats rather than partners in security provision. This approach has proven ineffective: despite decades of military spending and security sector interventions, insecurity has worsened across most regions of the country. A growing body of evidence suggests that sustainable security requires participatory approaches that engage communities—and young people in particular—as co-producers of security. The Niger Delta region presents a unique case study for understanding how youth populations transition from conflict perpetuation to peacebuilding across different historical periods. From pre-colonial age-grade systems in which youth performed security functions, to colonial disruption of traditional governance structures, to the emergence of armed militancy in the 1990s and 2000s, to the 2009 Presidential Amnesty Programme, the Niger Delta experience demonstrated both the potential and limitations of youth engagement in security governance.

Recent developments across Nigerian states demonstrate the potential of youth-led community security strategies. In Akwa Ibom State, Governor Umo Eno has integrated 2,272 Village Youth Presidents into the state's security architecture to strengthen intelligence gathering and deepen youth participation in governance . In Kano State, the government has inaugurated 2,000 members of the Neighbourhood Watch Corps, with Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf declaring that "an idle mind is vulnerable, but an engaged and employed youth is a fortress against crime" . In Lagos, the Police-Youth Dialogue programme has created unprecedented opportunities for young people to engage directly with police leadership, resulting in the proposal for a Nigeria Police Youth Advisory Council. In Ogun State, the government has trained over 21,000 youths in vocational and digital skills while strengthening youth participation in community security .

At the national level, Nigeria adopted a National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security in September 2021, becoming the second country in the world, after Finland, to do so . The plan, which aligns with the pillars of UN Security Council Resolution 2250—Participation, Prevention, Protection, Partnerships, and Disengagement and Reintegration—represents a recognition that "sustainable peace in Nigeria cannot be achieved without the inclusion, participation, protection and leadership of young people" . However, as stakeholders at a national conference on Youth, Peace and Security warned in May 2026, "Nigeria's efforts at tackling insecurity and promoting national unity may continue to fail unless young people are deliberately included in peacebuilding, governance and decision-making processes" . Implementation has often been "more promise than practice" , with chronic underfunding and lack of institutional support holding back youth-led initiatives .

This paper investigated the relationship between youth participation and community security governance in Nigeria. It argued that the exclusion of young people from security decision-making constitutes a fundamental governance failure that perpetuates insecurity and undermines state legitimacy. Conversely, meaningful youth participation in community security governance has the potential to enhance security outcomes, strengthen state-community relations, and contribute to sustainable peace. The paper is organised into eight sections. Section 2 reviewed the theoretical and conceptual literature on youth participation, community security governance, and participatory security approaches. Section 3 examined the policy and institutional framework for youth inclusion in Nigeria. Section 4 analyses the challenges of youth exclusion from security governance. Section 5 presented evidence of emerging youth-led community security innovations across Nigerian states. Section 6 examined the governance implications of youth participation. Section 7 offered policy recommendations, and Section 8 concludes.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptualising Youth

The concept of youth is socially constructed and varies across contexts. The United Nations defines youth as individuals aged 15–24, while the African Youth Charter (2006) and ECOWAS Youth Policy (2010) define

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youth as individuals aged between 15 and 35 years, a broader range that reflects the diverse socio-economic conditions across African countries. Nigeria's National Youth Policy (2009) defined youth as persons aged 18 to 35 years, but the revised National Youth Policy (2019) narrowed this to 15 to 29 years, based on demographic evidence showing that less than five percent of Nigerians are still in school beyond age 29, and most males and females are married by this age, thereby marking a major social transition to adulthood . The "Not Too Young to Run" Act sets 30 years as the minimum age for presidential eligibility, signalling adulthood .

For the purposes of this paper, youth is understood as the period between adolescence and full adult independence, recognising that this transition is shaped by economic, social, and political factors that delay adult status in many Nigerian contexts. As Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2025) note, in Nigeria, the transition to independent adult life in terms of achieving economic and social stability may extend into the late twenties and sometimes beyond . This extended transition has significant implications for youth participation in governance and security.

Securitisation of Youth

The "securitisation of youth" framework provides a critical lens for understanding how young people are constructed as security threats in policy discourse and practice. Drawing on the work of the Copenhagen School, securitisation theory examines how issues are framed as existential threats requiring extraordinary measures. In the Nigerian context, youth have been securitised through discourse that associates young people with violence, crime and extremism, justifying surveillance, repression, and exclusion from governance.

This securitisation has concrete consequences. Young people, particularly in northern Nigeria, are viewed with suspicion by security forces and are disproportionately targeted by security operations. Arisukwu et al. (2020) found that youths constitute a greater percentage of suspects at police stations for crime, with unemployment and poverty among the rural populace especially youths responsible for these criminalities. The absence of social infrastructure, inadequate police presence, and government support to unemployed youths made the crime situations worse in rural areas .

The Niger Delta experience illustrates the consequences of youth securitisation. According to historical analysis, the Nigerian state's military response to youth dissent—such as the 1999 Odi massacre, where the military destroyed an entire Bayelsa community—demonstrated the state's willingness to employ disproportionate force, deepening youth alienation and militant recruitment . As Obi (2023) argues, the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in November 1995 marked a turning point, convincing many youth that non-violent resistance was futile against a state willing to murder peaceful activists .

Participatory Governance and Human Security

Participatory governance theory provides a framework for understanding how citizens can be meaningfully involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives. In the security domain, participatory governance implies that communities—including young people—should have a voice in security policy formulation, implementation, and oversight. This approach is grounded in the recognition that security provision is not the exclusive domain of the state but involves multiple actors, including communities, civil society, and the private sector.

The human security framework, developed in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, broadens the concept of security beyond the protection of the state to include the protection of individuals and communities from threats to their survival, livelihood, and dignity. In the Nigerian context, human security is threatened by multiple factors- poverty, unemployment, inadequate healthcare, environmental degradation, community violence, political exclusion, and personal insecurity. The Niger Delta experience demonstrates how environmental degradation from oil production devastated traditional youth livelihoods in fishing and farming, creating a generation of youth unable to follow their parents' occupations .

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Community Security Governance

Community security governance refers to the processes and institutions through which communities

participate in the provision of security. This concept encompasses formal mechanisms—community policing, neighbourhood watch, local security committees—and informal mechanisms—traditional conflict resolution, community vigilance, and social networks. Community security governance is grounded in the recognition that effective security requires the participation of communities, who have the local knowledge and social capital necessary for effective security provision.

Arisukwu et al. (2020) highlight the importance of community participation in crime prevention and control in rural Nigeria, noting that inadequate amenities and weak police presence have led rural communities to evolve community policing to protect their neighbourhoods . The study found low levels of community interactions with the police in crime prevention and control, recommending increased police-public partnership .

The Niger Delta historical experience showed hat pre-colonial age-grade systems provided structured pathways for youth voice and agency, with youth age grades possessing certain autonomy and the ability to influence communal decisions through collective action . During inter-communal disputes, youth warriors defended community interests while elder mediators pursued diplomatic resolution, creating complementary roles that balanced force and negotiation . This historical model offers insights for contemporary community security governance.

Youth as Peace Actors

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly recognised young people as central actors in peacebuilding and security governance. Ukanwa (2025) examined youth engagement in peace-building initiatives in Nigeria's North-East conflict belt, finding a high level of youth engagement in peace-building, with socio-economic factors significantly influencing youth engagement—improved education and livelihood opportunities enhance willingness to participate in peace initiatives . The study found that conflict exposure and institutional support strongly predicted engagement levels, indicating that youths who experienced conflict firsthand and had access to NGO or government support were more motivated to contribute to peace-building activities .

Effevottu (2025) analysed the participation of young people in Nigeria's peace and security processes, examining the extent to which youth and youth-led initiatives contribute to peacebuilding . The findings indicated that young people in Nigeria play a crucial role in shaping peace and security outcomes, challenging the narrative that positions youth primarily as perpetrators of violence or victims of conflict .

Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2025) underscore the critical need to mainstream youth inclusion in peacebuilding for the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria, noting that the youths have been identified as one of the critical actors in peace initiatives due to their substantial number within the country's population . Their active involvement in peacebuilding ensures societal challenges are effectively addressed .

Youth-Led Security Strategies

Youth-led security strategies represent a distinct approach to community security governance in which young people take the lead in identifying security threats, developing responses, and implementing security initiatives. These strategies recognise that young people possess unique strengths for security provision: digital fluency, social engagement, and deep insight into community trends.

As articulated by Kayode Akinmade, pecial Adviser to the Ogun State Governor on Media and Strategy, "Youth-led security strategies do not mean assigning policing duties to young people. Rather, they refer to structured avenues where the youth contribute meaningfully to securing our society through community intelligence, digital early-warning tools, civic influence, campus peacebuilding, social media awareness, neighbourhood vigilance, and technology-enabled reporting systems" . These approaches "capitalize on the

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unique strengths of our youth – their digital fluency, social engagement, and deep insight into community trends"

Policy and Institutional Framework for Youth Inclusion

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 and Nigeria's National Action Plan

In December 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted UNSCR 2250, recognising that youth should actively be engaged in shaping lasting peace and contributing to justice and security . The resolution established five pillars: Participation, Prevention, Protection, Partnerships, and Disengagement and Reintegration. The adoption of this resolution marked a significant shift in international policy, acknowledging that "young people are not simply beneficiaries of peace; they are leaders, innovators and change-makers whose voices must shape the future of our nation" .

In September 2021, supported by the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), the Nigeria Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security (NCYPS) launched the Nigerian National Action Plan on Youth Peace and Security (NAPYPS) . Nigeria became the second country in the world, after Finland, to adopt such a plan, demonstrating leadership in domesticating the UN resolution .

The National Action Plan is, as Rafiu Adeniran Lawal, Executive Director of Building Blocks for Peace Foundation, observed, "not merely a policy document. It is a recognition that sustainable peace in Nigeria cannot be achieved without the inclusion, participation, protection and leadership of young people. It is an acknowledgment that young people must not only be consulted occasionally, but systematically integrated into peacebuilding, governance, conflict prevention, security decision-making and national development processes" .

Implementation Challenges

Despite its adoption, implementation of the NAPYPS remains the critical challenge. In September 2024, the NCYPS launched its 2nd Impact Report on the Implementation of the NAPYPS, highlighting success stories, challenges, and opportunities . Out of the 36 states of Nigeria, only two states had launched their State Action Plans (SAPs) on YPS between 2021 and 2022, with another launching in 2024 . A dozen more states were at various stages of development of their SAPs, demonstrating readiness and ownership at the sub-national level .

However, challenges persist. Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2025) identified several challenges hindering youth inclusion in peacebuilding: lack of political will, exclusion and marginalisation, inadequate funding and resources, socio-economic challenges including unemployment, poverty and lack of access to educational opportunities, and lack of implementation of Youth, Peace and Security frameworks at the state and local government level . As Dambo (2025) notes, "implementation has often been more promise than practice. Many youth-led initiatives are thriving, full of creativity, energy, and hope, but chronic underfunding and lack of institutional support hold them back" .

Federal Ministry of Youth Development

The Federal Ministry of Youth Development is the primary government institution responsible for youth policy and programming. In March 2026, Minister Ayodele Olawande reaffirmed the government's commitment "to empowering young people as critical stakeholders in promoting peace and security across Nigeria" . The Minister emphasised "the importance of actively engaging young people in community-based peacebuilding initiatives, noting that youth participation remains central to achieving sustainable security and national development" .

The Ministry, with the support of partners such as the European Union, "continues to promote initiatives that empower young people to serve as ambassadors of peace and stability within their communities" . These initiatives include the Department of Networks and Social Mobilisation, which serves as "a key platform for

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youth mobilisation and engagement nationwide" . The Minister called for the "practical implementation of the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security, stressing that meaningful results can only be achieved through deliberate action rather than prolonged discussions" .

State-Level Policy Innovations

State governments have developed various policy innovations for youth participation in community security:

Akwa Ibom's Youth Security Integration: Governor Umo Eno has integrated 2,272 Village Youth Presidents into the security architecture, making them "vital links between local communities, traditional institutions, and security agencies" . The Governor directed all Local Government Chairmen to appoint Security Supervisors to coordinate security activities and serve as liaison officers . Security agencies are developing "comprehensive training programmes for the youth leaders" . A reward system incentivises intelligence: "Credible information that helps security agencies prevent crime and apprehend criminals will be rewarded" .

Kano's Neighbourhood Watch Corps: Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf inaugurated 2,000 Neighbourhood Watch Corps members with 88 Hilux operational vehicles and 440 motorcycles to support operations . The Governor described this as "a dual strategy of professionalising community security while providing dignity and livelihoods to young men and women who would now serve on the front lines of public service" .

Lagos's Police-Youth Dialogue: The Lagos State Police Command has institutionalised dialogue with young people through the Police-Youth Dialogue programme, resulting in the proposal for a Nigeria Police Youth Advisory Council. Commissioner Olohundare Moshood Jimoh's "willingness to appear physically—not through representatives—gave the dialogue extraordinary credibility" .

Ogun's Youth-Led Security Strategies: The state has trained over 21,000 youths in vocational and digital skills and strengthened the Amotekun Corps with youthful operatives . The state is scaling toward 10,000 youths trained as CyberSquad Digital Technicians by 2027 .

Challenges of Youth Exclusion From Security Governance

Systemic Exclusion from Decision-Making

Despite progressive policy frameworks, young people in Nigeria remain systematically excluded from security decision-making. As stakeholders at the May 2026 national conference warned, "millions of young Nigerians are at the centre of these challenges, yet they are often excluded from meaningful participation in shaping policies and solutions" .

This exclusion operates through multiple mechanisms. Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2025) identify "exclusion and marginalisation" as a key challenge, noting that despite instruments and policies introduced to promote youth engagement in peacebuilding, their actual involvement remains low . The study emphasises "the critical need to mainstream youth inclusion in peacebuilding for the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria" .

The Niger Delta historical experience illustrates this pattern. Colonial administrators deliberately undermined the political functions of age-grade systems, removing youth from recognised political participation channels and creating resentment . This pattern of exclusion has persisted through various historical periods, from the post-independence era to the present.

Symbolic Representation Without Power

Even when young people are included in security governance, their inclusion is often symbolic rather than substantive. As Jaye Gaskia, Chairman of the Partnership Against Violent Extremism, observed: "If it is a youth peace and security framework, who should lead its implementation? Youth participation must go beyond symbolic representation" .

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Symbolic representation manifests through token youth appointments without decision-making authority, youth consultation exercises that do not influence policy, and youth participation that is limited to implementation rather than design. Gaskia "argued that youth participation should go beyond symbolic representation, adding that civic spaces for young people to engage in governance and policy conversations must be protected and expanded" .

Inadequate Funding and Institutional Support

Youth-led community security initiatives suffer from chronic underfunding. Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2025) identify "inadequate funding and resources" as a key challenge hindering youth inclusion in peacebuilding . Dambo (2025) notes that "chronic underfunding and lack of institutional support hold back" youth-led initiatives .

The absence of dedicated funding streams for youth-led security initiatives means that young people must compete for scarce resources with more established actors. The result is that many promising youth-led security initiatives remain small-scale, time-limited, and unsustainable.

Socio-Economic Challenges

Socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and lack of access to educational opportunities—constitute significant barriers to youth participation in community security governance. Arisukwu et al. (2020) found that "unemployment and poverty among the rural populace especially youths were responsible for these criminalities" . The absence of social infrastructure and government support to unemployed youths made the crime situations worse in rural areas .

Ukanwa (2025) found that socio-economic factors significantly influenced youth engagement in peace-building, with improved education and livelihood opportunities enhancing willingness to participate in peace initiatives . This suggests that addressing socio-economic exclusion is essential for enabling youth participation in security governance.

Historical Patterns of Marginalisation

The Niger Delta historical experience demonstrates how patterns of youth marginalisation have evolved across different periods. In the pre-colonial era, age-grade systems provided structured pathways for youth voice and agency . Colonial disruption removed youth from recognised political participation channels . The oil boom of the 1970s paradoxically deepened marginalisation, with environmental degradation destroying traditional livelihoods and youth unemployment reaching crisis levels despite unprecedented national wealth .

The era of armed militancy (1996-2009) saw the proliferation of armed youth militant groups, with militant groups filling governance voids in areas where state presence was minimal or predatory . The Amnesty era (2009-2015) offered important lessons about both the possibilities and limitations of youth-focused peacebuilding, including critiques that the amnesty created a "payment for peace" model that rewarded violence while ignoring law-abiding youth who never took up arms .

Emerging Youth-Led Community Security Innovations

Akwa Ibom: Village Youth Presidents in Security Architecture

Akwa Ibom State has pioneered the integration of youth leaders into the security architecture. Governor Umo Eno has integrated 2,272 Village Youth Presidents into the state's security framework, recognising that "the villages remain the first line of defence in any society. People know one another in their communities, and they can easily identify strange movements and suspicious activities" .

The initiative positions youth leaders as "vital links between local communities, traditional institutions, and security agencies to facilitate intelligence flow and strengthen vigilance at the grassroots" . To support this integration, the Governor directed Local Government Chairmen to appoint Security Supervisors to coordinate

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security activities and serve as liaison officers. Security agencies are developing "comprehensive training programmes for the youth leaders" .

A reward system incentivises intelligence: "We have always said, 'If you see something, say something.' Today, we are taking it a step further. If you see something, say something and win something. Credible information that helps security agencies prevent crime and apprehend criminals will be rewarded" . The state has also expanded the Quick Response Force to cover all ten federal constituencies for faster emergency response.

Kano: Neighbourhood Watch Corps

Kano State has inaugurated 2,000 members of the Neighbourhood Watch Corps, established by law to "complement conventional security agencies" . The initiative was described by Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf as a "dual strategy of professionalising community security while providing dignity and livelihoods to young men and women who would now serve on the front lines of public service" .

The Corps has been provided with 88 Hilux operational vehicles, two for each of the state's 44 local government areas, and 440 motorcycles, 10 allocated to every council . The Governor explained that "lasting peace is built on security and opportunity. An idle mind is vulnerable, but an engaged and employed youth is a fortress against crime" .

Lagos: Police-Youth Dialogue and Advisory Council

Lagos State has institutionalised dialogue between police and young people through the Police-Youth Dialogue programme, held across the five IBILE divisions in November 2025. The programme brought young people "directly with the police in a series of frank, emotionally charged, and constructive conversations" .

The Commissioner reiterated "that bail is free and insisted that no police officer has the right to search a citizen's phone without a warrant" and publicly shared "his personal phone number for reporting misconduct" . The dialogue led to the proposal for a Nigeria Police Youth Advisory Council, which CP Jimoh "welcomed wholeheartedly, describing it as a timely mechanism for integrating youth perspectives into policing strategies" .

Ogun: Youth-Led Community Security Strategies

Ogun State has pursued a comprehensive approach to youth-led community security, including the training of "over 21,000 youths in vocational and digital skills through OGSTEP and related initiatives—reducing unemployment pressures and strengthening lawful economic pathways" . The state has strengthened the Amotekun Corps through "recruitment of additional youthful operatives and enhancement of operational equipment to deepen community policing across the state" .

The state has launched a "CyberSquad" initiative, with the first cohort of "CyberSquad Digital Technicians from Ogun TechHub" graduating after "a three-month intensive training—with the programme set to scale toward 10,000 youths trained by 2027" .

Youth Organisations and Civil Society Initiatives

Youth organisations and civil society have been active in promoting youth participation in community security. The Nigeria Youth Organisation (NYO) launched a "National Youth Security Emblem" campaign in 2026, carrying inscriptions including "Community Security: A Collective Responsibility of All Nigerian Youths" and "Nigerian Youths, Operation Defend Your Community" .

The National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) launched a "Back to Street" initiative in Lagos State, focusing on "anti-cultism advocacy, drug abuse prevention, and the promotion of civic responsibility and political participation among youths" . Building Blocks for Peace Foundation (BBFORPEACE) launched a

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Strategic Plan 2026–2030 aligned with the Youth, Peace and Security framework, including "participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, disengagement and reintegration" .

Governance Implications of Youth Participation

Enhancing Security Outcomes

Youth participation in community security governance has the potential to enhance security outcomes by leveraging the unique assets that young people bring to security provision: digital fluency, social engagement, insight into community trends, and physical capacity. Ukanwa (2025) found that youth engagement in peace-building initiatives in Nigeria's North-East conflict belt is substantial, with an overall mean of 3.42 indicating consistent involvement in community dialogues, peace campaigns, and mediation activities .

The Akwa Ibom experience demonstrates how youth leaders can serve as "vital links between local communities, traditional institutions, and security agencies" for intelligence gathering . The Kano experience shows how youth employment in security can simultaneously address unemployment and enhance security . The Lagos experience demonstrates how youth-police dialogue can build trust and reduce police misconduct .

Strengthening State Legitimacy

Youth participation in community security governance also has the potential to strengthen state legitimacy. When young people are included in security decision-making, they are more likely to perceive the state as legitimate and responsive to their concerns. When security agencies engage with young people through dialogue and partnership, trust between citizens and the state increases.

The Lagos Police-Youth Dialogue programme illustrates this dynamic. The Commissioner's "willingness to appear physically—not through representatives—gave the dialogue extraordinary credibility" . The result was not only improved police-youth relations but also increased confidence in the police as an institution.

Conversely, youth exclusion from security governance undermines state legitimacy. As Gaskia warned, "shrinking civic spaces and weakening youth engagement platforms could undermine democratic participation and peacebuilding efforts" .

Reducing Conflict and Radicalisation

Youth participation in community security governance has the potential to reduce conflict and radicalisation by addressing the grievances that extremists exploit. The Niger Delta historical experience shows how political manipulation of youth militancy created perverse incentives that perpetuated violence while preventing genuine grievance resolution . When young people are included in security governance, they have a stake in the system and are less likely to support violence. As Governor Yusuf of Kano State observed, "an idle mind is vulnerable, but an engaged and employed youth is a fortress against crime" .

Promoting Democratic Consolidation

Youth participation in community security governance contributes to democratic consolidation by expanding participation in governance, strengthening accountability, and building citizenship. The Not Too Young To Run movement, which "helped to lower the constitutional age limit to hold political offices, is a milestone of youth advocacy to be permitted to participate in the government" . The #EndSARS movement demonstrated the potential of youth participation to advance democratic reform.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementing the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security

The most urgent priority is the implementation of the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security. As Lawal argued, "implementation remained the biggest challenge confronting the Youth, Peace and Security

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agenda" . The question is how "the framework could move beyond policy discussions in Abuja to communities, local governments and campuses where many young people are directly affected by violence, poverty and exclusion" .

Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2025) recommend "the need to deepen youth inclusion in peacebuilding through peace education, increased capacities of youth to prevent, reduce and cope with conflict, promote inclusive governance and empowerment of youths" . This requires the establishment of implementation mechanisms at federal, state, and local levels; dedicated funding for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives; monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; and partnerships with youth organisations and civil society.

Establishing Youth-Police Advisory Councils

The establishment of Youth-Police Advisory Councils, as proposed in Lagos State, should be replicated across Nigeria. These Councils would provide "a timely mechanism for integrating youth perspectives into policing strategies" . They should be established by law, with clear mandates, resources, and accountability mechanisms, and should include representatives from diverse youth organisations and communities.

Integrating Youth into Security Architecture

State governments should follow the example of Akwa Ibom State in integrating youth leaders into security architecture. The Kano Neighbourhood Watch Corps model, which "professionalises community security while providing dignity and livelihoods to young men and women," should be replicated across states . Integration should extend beyond intelligence gathering to include youth participation in community policing, conflict resolution, and security oversight.

Scaling Up Youth-Led Security Innovations

Promising youth-led security innovations should be scaled up across states. The Ogun State "Youth-Led Strategies for Community Security" approach, which leverages "community intelligence, digital early-warning tools, civic influence, campus peacebuilding, social media awareness, neighbourhood vigilance, and technology-enabled reporting systems," should be replicated and adapted to local contexts .

Reforming Police-Youth Relations

Reforming police-youth relations is essential for building trust and enabling youth participation in community security. Arisukwu et al. (2020) recommend increased police-public partnership in crime prevention and control in rural Nigeria . Reform requires institutionalising dialogue between police and young people; police training on youth engagement, human rights, and community policing; accountability mechanisms for police misconduct; and youth-friendly police services.

Addressing Structural Drivers of Youth Insecurity

Addressing the structural drivers of youth insecurity—poverty, unemployment, and exclusion—is essential for sustainable community security. Ukanwa (2025) found that socio-economic factors significantly influenced youth engagement in peace-building, with improved education and livelihood opportunities enhancing willingness to participate . Addressing these drivers requires investment in youth employment and entrepreneurship, investment in education, and addressing social exclusion.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the role of youth participation in community security governance in Nigeria. Drawing on participatory governance theory, the securitisation of youth framework, and human security approaches, the paper has argued that sustainable community security cannot be achieved without the meaningful inclusion of young people in governance structures. Nigeria has developed progressive policy frameworks for youth inclusion in peace and security, including the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security and various state-level initiatives. These frameworks reflect a growing recognition that "sustainable

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peace cannot be achieved without empowering young people and integrating them into governance, conflict prevention, security decision-making and development initiatives" . However, implementation remains the critical challenge. Young people continue to be systematically excluded from security decision-making, with even symbolic representation often lacking substantive power.

The path forward requires a fundamental shift in how security governance is conceived. Security structures are most effective when personnel are familiar with and connected to the communities they serve" . This requires moving beyond top-down, militarised approaches toward participatory security governance that engages communities—and young people in particular—as co-producers of security. Nigeria's efforts at tackling insecurity and promoting national unity may continue to fail unless young people are deliberately included in peacebuilding, governance and decision-making processes" . This warning should guide policy and practice: youth inclusion is not optional but essential for sustainable peace and security. Nigeria's youth population is its greatest asset. When empowered and included, young people can be agents of peace, security, and development. When excluded and marginalised, they can be vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment by extremist groups. The choice is clear: invest in youth participation in community security governance, or continue to suffer the consequences of youth exclusion.

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