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KWARA STATE'S SECURITY CHALLENGES: AN ISLAMIC ANALYSIS OF CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

This study examines the persistent security challenges in Kwara State, Nigeria, through an Islamic analytical framework. It identifies the main causes of insecurity—including poverty, unemployment, corruption, weak governance, and interethnic tensions—and evaluates their socio-economic and moral implications. Drawing upon Qur'anic principles and Prophetic traditions, the paper argues that Islam provides a holistic and sustainable approach to peace and security, founded on justice ('adl*), unity (*wahdah*), and collective responsibility (*mas'uliyyah*). The research adopts a qualitative and descriptive method, utilising secondary data from scholarly works, government reports, and Islamic jurisprudential texts. Findings reveal that insecurity in Kwara State is deeply linked to socio-economic inequalities and moral decay, which can only be addressed through faith-driven leadership, community engagement, and economic empowerment guided by Islamic values. The study concludes that the effective implementation of* Zakāh, Sadaqah, *and* Waqf *can alleviate poverty and reduce crime, while Islamic education and interfaith dialogue can foster moral regeneration and peaceful coexistence. It recommends that policymakers and religious leaders adopt an integrated approach that aligns Islamic ethical teachings with contemporary governance practices. Such synergy, the paper contends, is vital for building a peaceful, just, and secure Kwara State.*

Keywords: Security challenges, Kwara State, Islamic perspective, governance, Social justice and peacebuilding

Introduction

Kwara State, located in Nigeria's North-Central zone, has traditionally enjoyed relative peace compared with neighbouring states. Recently, however, it has faced rising insecurity marked by rural banditry, kidnappings, and farmer–herder clashes. In September 2025, at least 15 forest guards and civilians were killed by armed bandits in Oke-Ode, Ifelodun Local Government Area, while communities across the State reported widespread attacks and abductions (ThisDay Live, 2025). Several factors drive this deterioration. The forested terrain offers cover for criminal groups, highways linking Kwara with other states have become kidnapping hotspots, and disputes over land and resources have turned violent (Truth Nigeria, 2025; Royal News, 2025). These crises disrupt farming, schooling, and healthcare. In Patigi, for instance, insecurity forced medical staff to abandon a hospital, leaving over 200,000 residents without services (Truth Nigeria, 2025). The central concern of this study is that Kwara's long-standing image of harmony is being eroded by growing insecurity, endangering social trust, livelihoods, and the presence of the state in rural areas. Beyond deaths and property loss, the effects include migration, agricultural decline, and the collapse of public services. Though government responses—such as military operations, curfews, and surveillance—are ongoing, persistent violence shows that underlying causes remain unresolved (Daily Post Nigeria, 2025; The Guardian, 2025).

This research therefore aims to:

1. Identify and analyse the main causes of insecurity in Kwara State;
2. Interpret these causes through Islamic teachings on justice, governance, peace, and welfare;
3. Assess the effectiveness of current security measures; and
4. Recommend Islamic-based strategies integrating moral, social, economic, and governance principles for lasting peace.

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The Islamic framework is adopted because Kwara's largely Muslim population upholds values that can guide conflict resolution. Principles such as *ʿadl* (justice), *shūrā* (consultation), *amānah* (trust), and *zakāh* (communal welfare) offer culturally grounded approaches often overlooked in Nigeria's security debates. Connecting these teachings with Kwara's realities may bridge the gap between Islamic ethics and practical policy responses, providing insights for scholars, faith leaders, and policymakers.

The study employs a qualitative and analytical approach. Primary sources include the Qur'an and Hadith on peacebuilding and governance, while secondary materials comprise official reports, verified media data, academic works on security and Islam, and recent news coverage from 2024–2025. Its scope is limited by reliance on media reports and possible under-reporting in rural areas.

Literature Review

Nature and Scope of Security Threats

Once known for peace, Kwara State has become increasingly exposed to Nigeria's wider insecurity crisis. Its location—bordering Kogi, Niger, Ekiti, Osun, Oyo, and parts of Benin Republic—makes it vulnerable to cross-border criminal activities (Afolabi, 2023). Major threats include armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, cultism, communal clashes, and farmer–herder conflicts (Odeyemi & Abdulraheem, 2022). Northern rural areas such as Baruten, Kaiama, and Patigi LGAs face incursions from bandits and armed herdsmen, displacing farming communities (Truth Nigeria, 2025). Urban centres like Ilorin, Offa, and Omu-Aran struggle with cult-related violence and rising youth crime (Olatunji, 2024). These problems weaken community cohesion and disrupt agriculture, education, and healthcare.

Several incidents highlight the growing instability across the state:

- **Offa Bank Robbery (2018):** Armed robbers attacked five banks and a police station, killing over 30 people and revealing major security lapses (Premium Times Nigeria, 2018).
- **Cult Clashes (2019–2024):** Rival confraternities such as Aiye and Eiye repeatedly clashed in Ilorin and Offa, causing multiple deaths and property damage (Kwara State Police Command, 2024).
- **Farmer–Herder Conflicts:** Persistent disputes over grazing routes in Patigi and Kaiama have led to killings and farmland destruction (Truth Nigeria, 2025).
- **Kidnappings and Highway Attacks:** Abductions along the Ilorin–Omu-Aran and Shao–Bode Saadu routes have targeted commuters, traders, and clerics (Royal News, 2025).
- **Communal Clashes:** Land and boundary disputes in Baruten and Edu LGAs occasionally escalate into violence requiring military intervention (Daily Post Nigeria, 2025).
- **Babanla"s Attack (Ifelodun LGA, Kwara State):** In Babanla, repeated bandit attacks have shattered everyday life, with a major armed invasion leaving deaths, damaged homes and markets, and forcing many residents to flee their community in fear (ThisDayLive, 2025).
- **Erukuku"Attack (Ekiti LGA, Kwara State):** Erukuku has faced traumatic insecurity after armed men attacked a church service, killing and abducting worshippers, a pattern that reflects ongoing kidnappings and deepened fear among residents (ThisDayLive, 2025).

Together, these reflect a decentralised insecurity pattern spanning both rural and urban areas.

Socio-Economic Consequences of **Security Threats**

The impact is widespread. Many farmers have abandoned farmlands, causing food shortages and inflation (Adewale, 2023). Schools in volatile zones close intermittently due to fear of abduction, while healthcare facilities—such as Patigi Hospital—have shut down over safety concerns (Truth Nigeria, 2025). Small businesses and transport operators face losses as night travel declines, and growing insecurity erodes public confidence in government.

To address the threats, several initiatives have been introduced:

- **Kwara State Security Council (2020):** Coordinates intelligence sharing among security agencies (Kwara State Government, 2023).
- **Operation Harmony:** A joint task force tackling banditry and cultism through patrols and surveillance (Daily Trust, 2024).
- **Community Policing:** Integration of local vigilante groups under police supervision.

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- **Youth Empowerment:** Programmes such as KWASSIP and the Kwara Youth Employment Scheme aim to reduce unemployment, a driver of insecurity (Kwara State Government, 2024).
- **Faith and Traditional Collaboration:** Regular peace dialogues with Imams, pastors, and traditional rulers to foster tolerance and early conflict resolution (The Guardian, 2025).

Despite these efforts, inadequate funding, political interference, poor intelligence, and weak rural infrastructure continue to hinder effectiveness (Adewale, 2023).

Causes of Security Challenges in Kwara State

Poverty and Economic Inequality: Poverty remains a major trigger of insecurity in Kwara State, especially among unemployed rural youth. The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports that about 38% of residents live below the poverty line, with rural communities most affected. Lack of jobs and basic amenities pushes many into kidnapping, robbery, and cultism (Adewale, 2023). From an Islamic lens, inequality is both a social and moral failure. The Qur'an condemns hoarding and urges wealth circulation through *zakāh* and *sadaqah* (Qur'an 59:7). The Prophet ﷺ said, "The son of Adam has no better right than that he would have a house to live in, clothing to cover his nakedness, and bread and water" (Tirmidhi, 2341). Neglecting such justice breeds unrest. In Kwara, the widening divide between urban elites in Ilorin and impoverished rural populations in Baruten and Kaiama has turned youth frustration into a security threat (Odeyemi & Abdulraheem, 2022).

Poor Governance and Corruption: Weak governance, corruption, and limited accountability also fuel insecurity. Mismanagement of security funds and nepotism have eroded public trust (Afolabi, 2023). Many rural areas lack effective policing and local governance, leaving citizens exposed to criminal exploitation. Islamic leadership principles prioritise *ʿadl* (justice), *amānah* (trust), and *shūrā* (consultation) as the foundation of legitimate authority (Qur'an 4:58; 42:38). The Prophet ﷺ cautioned, "When authority is given to those who do not deserve it, then wait for the Hour" (Bukhari, 59:324). The misuse of power and diversion of funds meant for infrastructure and youth empowerment worsen vulnerability. Promoting transparency and Islamic ethical governance could rebuild confidence in public institutions.

Ethnic and Religious Tensions: Kwara's diverse ethnic and religious composition, though historically harmonious, sometimes sparks friction over land, political appointments, or resources (Olatunji, 2024). Such tensions erode social cohesion and deepen distrust. Islam rejects discrimination based on race or lineage. Allah says: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another" (Qur'an 49:13). The Prophet ﷺ reaffirmed that no Arab is superior to a non-Arab except in piety (Musnad Ahmad, 22978). In Kwara, occasional disputes between Sunni and Sufi groups—often linked to preaching or mosque leadership—disturb communal harmony (Kwara State Interfaith Council, 2024).

External Factors: Banditry, Terrorism, and Regional Spillover: Kwara's proximity to Kogi and Niger States, both affected by banditry and extremism, exposes it to cross-border infiltration. Some displaced criminal groups reportedly use forest belts in Kaiama and Baruten as hideouts (Royal News, 2025). Weak border control and limited security personnel allow such spillover. Islamic teachings stress *farḍ kifāyah*—the collective duty to safeguard the community. The Qur'an commands: "Prepare against them whatever force you can" (Qur'an 8:60). The spread of insecurity into Kwara reflects gaps in regional coordination and the need for joint moral and institutional vigilance rooted in faith and justice.

Role of Islamic Principles in Promoting Security and Social Harmony in Kwara State

Qur'anic Foundations for Peace and Justice: Justice (*ʿadl*) stands at the heart of peace. The Qur'an commands fairness and forbids oppression (Qur'an 16:90; 4:135). In Kwara, where inequality and corruption fuel tension, this principle demands transparent leadership and equitable governance. Islam also values reconciliation (*ṣulḥ*) as a means to heal divisions and prevent violence (Qur'an 4:114).

Prophetic Traditions on Security and Communal Welfare: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) defined a true Muslim as one who causes no harm to others (Bukhari, 10). His *Madinan Constitution* exemplified coexistence among diverse groups—an approach relevant to Kwara's plural society. Removing harm (*daf*ʿ *al-ḍarar*) is a shared duty (Muslim, 2199), highlighting that peace begins with individual ethics and community vigilance.

Leadership and Governance in Islamic Thought: Leadership in Islam is a trust (*amānah*), not privilege. The Prophet said, "Every one of you is a shepherd…" (Bukhari, 893). Governance must embody accountability

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(*muḥāsabah*), consultation (*shūrā*), and justice (*ʿadl*). When leaders uphold trust and citizens engage constructively, social order strengthens. Community consultation can also prevent minor conflicts from escalating.

Social Justice and Economic Equity: Poverty and unemployment threaten Kwara's stability. Islam's system of *zakāh*, *ṣadaqah*, and *waqf* redistributes wealth to those in need (Qur'an 9:60). Effective zakāh management, as practised under Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, can complement state welfare schemes like KWASSIP and KWAYE. Wealth, viewed as a trust (Qur'an 102:1–8), must serve communal wellbeing, not greed.

Unity, Brotherhood, and Social Cohesion: The Qur'an urges believers to hold firmly to Allah's rope and avoid division (Qur'an 3:103). Values of *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) and *taʿāwun* (cooperation) foster harmony in Kwara's multi-ethnic communities. Mosques and study circles help build "moral capital" through sermons promoting compassion, tolerance, and justice (Abdalla, 2021).

Interfaith Dialogue and Coexistence: Islam promotes peaceful dialogue with other faiths (Qur'an 29:46). Institutions like the Kwara State Interfaith Council exemplify this through workshops on tolerance and mediation. Such initiatives reflect Islamic ideals of *ḥikmah* (wisdom) and *ṣabr* (patience) in resolving conflicts.

Islamic-Based Solutions to Security Challenges in Kwara State

Promoting Social Justice and Economic Empowerment: Islam places economic fairness at the heart of peace. Poverty and inequality often drive crime, but mechanisms like *zakāh* (obligatory almsgiving), *ṣadaqah* (voluntary charity), and *waqf* (endowment) redistribute wealth and uphold dignity. The Qur'an (9:60) mandates that *zakāh* support the poor, debtors, and those striving in Allah's cause. A transparent *zakāh* board in Kwara, working with local mosques, could fund youth enterprises, vocational training, and rehabilitation—echoing successful models from Malaysia and Sudan (Abdul Rahman, 2022). Islam also condemns hoarding (Qur'an 9:34) and demands honesty in trade (Qur'an 83:1–3), principles that can enhance state programmes like *Kwara State Social Investment Programme (*KWASSIP) and *Kwara State Youth Employment and Empowerment Scheme* (KWAYE).

Strengthening Moral and Civic Education: Moral decline feeds insecurity. Islam's *tarbiyah* (moral upbringing) system addresses this by shaping good character. The Prophet ﷺ said, "I was sent to perfect good character" (Muwatta Malik, 1614). Integrating Islamic ethics into Kwara's education—formal and informal—could nurture honesty, patience, and empathy. Sermons on responsible citizenship (*muwāṭanah*) and lawful livelihood (*ḥalāl kasb*) can reinforce civic duty, aligning spiritual growth with social discipline.

Enhancing Community Cohesion and Social Capital: Islam urges cooperation in goodness (Qur'an 5:2). Establishing Peace Committees at ward and local levels—comprising imams, youth, women, and security officers—could foster dialogue and early conflict resolution. The Ilorin Emirate Council and traditional leaders could coordinate such structures, modelled on *ṣulḥ* (reconciliation) practices that have proven effective in parts of Northern Nigeria (Aliyu & Usman, 2021).

Strengthening Religious and Interfaith Engagement: The Qur'an (49:13) calls for mutual understanding among diverse peoples. In Kwara's plural society, expanding interfaith dialogue remains essential. Joint forums by the Kwara State Interfaith Council and Council of Ulama can highlight shared values—justice, compassion, and sanctity of life—reducing mistrust. Concepts like *ʿahd* (covenant) and *dhimmah* (protection of non-Muslims) uphold peace and trust among faith groups.

Reforming Governance through Islamic Leadership Ethics: Islamic leadership is built on *amānah* (trust) and *shūrā* (consultation). The Prophet ﷺ said, "The leader of a people is their servant" (Ahmad, 23408). Public institutions in Kwara could apply the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*—the protection of life, religion, intellect, property, and dignity—as guiding principles. Anti-corruption efforts should integrate spiritual accountability through community feedback, transparent audits, and ethical training, in line with Qur'an 2:188.

Empowering Youth and Women through Islamic Institutions: Islamic tradition values inclusion. The Prophet empowered youth and honoured women's roles in society. In Kwara, partnerships between Islamic groups and state agencies could build mentorship schemes grounded in *ʿadl* (justice) and *iḥsān* (excellence). Training Peace Ambassadors through *ḥalaqāt* (study circles) and vocational *madāris* can merge moral and economic empowerment. Women's associations such as the Muslim Sisters' Organisation can lead in family education and conflict mediation.

Conclusion

This study examined the security challenges in Kwara State through an Islamic framework, linking them to economic hardship, weak governance, and moral decay. Insecurity, seen in banditry, cultism, and herder farmer

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conflicts, reflects deeper failures in justice, social welfare, and communal trust. The Qur'an and Sunnah provide a holistic guide to resolving these issues through the principles of justice (ʿadl), peace (salām), accountability (masʾūliyyah), and unity (waḥdah). Beyond government intervention, sustainable peace depends on community-driven efforts rooted in Islamic ethics. Instruments such as zakāh, ṣadaqah, and waqf can reduce poverty, while tarbiyah (moral education) and interfaith engagement foster social harmony. Integrating these spiritual and ethical values into governance and development policies can help rebuild trust and restore stability. Ultimately, the path to peace in Kwara lies in a balanced approach that combines Islamic moral guidance with practical socio-economic reforms, ensuring that peacebuilding efforts resonate with the state's cultural and spiritual fabric.

Suggestions

The followings suggestions were made in the study:

1. Integrate Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings on morality and civic duty into school and mosque curricula.
2. Strengthen zakāh, ṣadaqah, and waqf administration through transparent partnerships between the state and Islamic institutions. Promote leadership based on amānah (trust) and shūrā (consultation).
3. Foster collaboration between religious leaders, community groups, and security agencies for intelligence sharing and early conflict prevention.
4. Establish interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue forums to deepen mutual understanding. Expand vocational and entrepreneurship programmes targeting unemployed youth.
5. Encourage local Islamic community watch groups (Hisbah) to operate ethically alongside state security agencies. Support collaboration between universities, scholars, and policymakers to design Islamic ethics-based security and development policies.

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