VOL. 13 NO. 6,
AUGUST, 2026
E-ISSN 3027-1401
P-ISSN 3026-9148

African Scholar Publications & Research International
www.africanscholarpub.com

Journal of Arts and Sociological Research (JASR)

Implications of Gaslighting Insecurity Ahead of the 2027 General Elections in Nigeria

***Dr. Ejovi Austine; **Dr. Iweriebor, Ferdinand; & ***Ofotokun, Andy Ovoke**

*Department of Political Science, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria. Orchid: 0000-002-7790-4994. augustine.ejovi@unidel.edu.ng **Department of Political Science, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria. Orchid: 0009-0005-1915-176X. ferdinand.iweriebor@unidel.edu.ng ***Department of Political Science, Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State, Nigeria. andy.ofotokun@unidel.edu.ng

DOI: **https://doi.org/10.70382/ajasr.v13i6.0136**

Abstract

Nigeria's democratic journey toward the 2027 general elections is occurring amidst growing concerns regarding insecurity, governance and public trust in state institutions. The country continues to experience persistent security challenges including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal conflicts, politically motivated violence and mass killings across several regions. Beyond the physical manifestations of insecurity, concerns have emerged regarding the communication strategies employed by political actors and government institutions in presenting security realities to the public. This study examines the implications of gaslighting insecurity ahead of the 2027 general elections in Nigeria. Gaslighting insecurity refers to the deliberate minimization, distortion, denial or strategic reframing of security realities in ways that contradict the live experiences of citizens. Using qualitative content analysis and documentary research methods, the paper explores how narratives surrounding insecurity influence democratic participation, political trust, voter confidence, electoral legitimacy, and governance outcomes. Particular attention is given to recent developments such as mass killings in Benue and Plateau States, banditry in northwestern Nigeria, school kidnappings in Oyo State, the abduction and death in captivity of retired Major General Rabe Abubakar, and public reactions by activists and social crusaders such as VeryDarkMan (VDM) and Sowore, who have increasingly used digital platforms to demand accountability. Findings indicate that gaslighting insecurity undermines confidence in government institutions, fuels political cynicism, weakens democratic fabrics and legitimacy, that may discourage electoral participation ahead of the 2027 elections. The study concludes that transparent governance, credible security communication, institutional accountability, and comprehensive electoral security planning are essential for democratic consolidation. The paper recommends reforms aimed at strengthening public trust and improving electoral preparedness.

Keywords: Gaslighting Insecurity, Electoral Participation, Democratic Legitimacy, Political Communication

Introduction

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and one of the continent's most influential democracies. Since the return to civil rule in 1999, the country has conducted several electoral cycles that have contributed to democratic continuity and political development. Despite these achievements, democratic consolidation remains threatened by persistent insecurity, governance challenges, corruption, poverty and institutional weaknesses.

As the country prepares for the 2027 general elections, insecurity has become a central issue in political discourse. Security challenges have expanded significantly over the last decade, affecting virtually every geopolitical zone. Incidences of terrorism, kidnapping, armed banditry, communal violence, cultism, separatist agitations and organized criminality have contributed to growing public anxiety and concerns regarding national stability.

The issue of insecurity has become increasingly important because elections require an environment where citizens can participate freely without fear of intimidation, violence, molestations and coercion. Where insecurity persists, democratic participation becomes constrained and electoral legitimacy may be questioned.

Recent years have witnessed repeated reports of killings, kidnappings, and bandit attacks across Nigeria. States such as Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Benue, Plateau, Niger and Sokoto continue to experience significant security challenges. The expansion of criminal activities into previously less affected regions has further heightened concerns regarding national security.

The death of retired Major General Rabe Abubakar following his abduction by criminal elements generated widespread public concern and highlighted the vulnerability of even highly respected members of society. Similarly, the kidnapping of school children in Oyo State raises questions regarding the geographical spread of insecurity and the effectiveness of existing security arrangements.

Another notable development is the increasing role of social media activism in shaping public discourse on insecurity. Public commentators and activists such as VeryDarkMan (VDM) and Sowore have utilized digital platforms to challenge official narratives, demand accountability and mobilize public attention toward security-related issues.

Within this context, accusations of gaslighting insecurity have become increasingly common. Citizens frequently argue that official statements often appear inconsistent with realities experienced within communities affected by violence and criminality. Such perceptions have important implications for public trust, democratic participation, and electoral behavior.

Background to the Study

The Nigerian state has confronted multiple security challenges since independence in 1960. However, the nature and scale of insecurity have evolved considerably over time. During the First and Second Republics, political instability, military interventions, and communal tensions dominated security concerns. Following the transition to democratic governance in 1999, new security threats emerged, including militancy in the Niger Delta, ethno-religious conflicts and political violence.

The emergence of Boko Haram in the early 2000s transformed Nigeria's security environment by introducing large-scale insurgency and terrorism.

The insurgency resulted in thousands of deaths, displacement of populations, and destruction of critical infrastructure. Consequently, armed banditry emerged as another significant security threat, particularly in northwestern Nigeria. Criminal groups engaged in village raids, kidnapping, cattle rustling, and attacks on transportation routes.

Kidnapping-for-ransom has since become one of the most widespread forms of criminality in Nigeria. Educational institutions, religious centers, highways, and residential communities have increasingly become targets of criminal organizations. Farmer-herder conflicts have also intensified in parts of the Middle Belt, resulting in recurrent violence and population displacement. These security challenges have profound implications for governance, development, social cohesion, and democratic stability.

The Concept of Gaslighting

Gaslighting originated from psychological literature and refers to a form of manipulation in which an individual or group deliberately causes others to question their perceptions, memories, judgment and understanding of reality. The term emerged from the 1938 play *Gas Light* and later gained prominence in psychological studies. According to Stern (2007), gaslighting is a systematic pattern of emotional and psychological manipulation intended to create confusion and self-doubt in victims. In political communication, gaslighting occurs when political leaders, parties or institutions intentionally distort information, deny verifiable facts or reconstruct narratives to influence public opinion and maintain power. Abramson (2014) argues that political gaslighting undermines citizens' confidence in their ability to evaluate political realities, thereby weakening democratic accountability.

Within contemporary political environments, gaslighting may manifest through denial of observable facts, selective presentation of information, strategic framing of crises, delegitimization of critics and manipulation of statistical data. These tactics are often amplified through traditional and digital media platforms where repeated misinformation can shape public understanding. McKinnon (2017) notes that persistent denial of evidence by political actors can create epistemic confusion, making citizens uncertain about what is true. In Nigeria, political gaslighting may occur when government officials minimize security challenges despite widespread public experiences of violence and insecurity. Such communication strategies can affect public trust, voter behavior and perceptions of government performance. Consequently, gaslighting has become an important concept for understanding how political narratives influence democratic processes, public discourse, and citizens' responses to governance and security challenges.

The Concept of Insecurity

Insecurity refers to conditions that threaten the safety, well-being, stability, and survival of individuals, communities and states. It encompasses various forms of threats that undermine social order, economic development, political stability, and human security. According to Buzan (1991), insecurity arises when individuals or societies perceive threats to their values, existence, or way of life. Similarly, Achumba, Ighomereho, and Akpor-Robaro (2013) define insecurity as the absence of safety from danger, fear, uncertainty, and violence. Insecurity can be manifested through physical violence, economic deprivation, political instability, environmental threats, and social conflicts.

In Nigeria, insecurity has become one of the most significant challenges confronting national development. Contemporary manifestations of insecurity include terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, political violence, cultism, and organized crime. The activities of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram have resulted in loss of lives, displacement of populations, and destruction of property, particularly in the North-East region. According to Onuoha (2014), the

persistence of terrorism has significantly weakened public confidence in state institutions responsible for security. Similarly, widespread kidnapping and banditry have created fear among citizens and disrupted economic activities. Farmer-herder conflicts have intensified competition over land and resources, resulting in communal violence across several regions. Political violence during electoral periods also contributes to insecurity by threatening democratic participation and social cohesion. Therefore, insecurity represents not only a security challenge but also a developmental obstacle that affects governance, economic growth, and citizens' quality of life.

Concept of Electoral Security

Electoral security refers to the measures, strategies and institutional arrangements designed to ensure that elections are conducted in peaceful, safe, transparent and credible environments. Electoral security aims to protect the integrity of the electoral process by preventing violence, intimidation, fraud, and other threats that may undermine democratic participation. According to Fischer (2002), electoral security encompasses all efforts directed toward safeguarding electoral stakeholders, including voters, candidates, electoral officials, political parties, observers, and election materials. It is a critical component of democratic governance because free and fair elections can only occur where participants are able to exercise their rights without fear or coercion.

Electoral security encompasses protection of voters, protection of electoral officials, security of election materials, prevention of electoral violence, and safeguarding democratic participation. Höglund (2009) argues that electoral violence often emerges from intense political competition, weak institutions, and disputes over electoral outcomes. Iweriebor (2025) notes that electoral insecurity and violence are fast destroying the beauty of elections and masses participation are in the decline in Nigeria. Consequently, effective electoral security requires collaboration among electoral management bodies, security agencies, civil society organizations, and political actors. In Nigeria, electoral security has become increasingly important due to recurring incidents of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, attacks on election officials, and politically motivated violence. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) often works with security agencies to ensure the safety of election personnel and materials before, during, and after elections. Adejumobi (2000) notes that credible electoral security measures strengthen public confidence in democratic institutions and encourage greater citizen participation. Therefore, electoral security serves as a fundamental mechanism for protecting democratic values, ensuring electoral integrity, and promoting political stability within democratic societies.

Table 1: Major Security Challenges in Nigeria and Their Electoral Implications

Security Challenge	Nature of Threat	Electoral Implication
Armed Banditry	Attacks on communities	Voter displacement
Kidnapping	Abduction of citizens	Fear and low turnout
Terrorism	Insurgent violence	Election disruptions
Farmer-Herder Conflict	Communal violence	Political tensions
Political Violence	Election-related attacks	Reduced participation
Organized Crime	Criminal networks	Electoral insecurity

Source: Author's Compilation (2026)

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Agenda-Setting Theory, Framing Theory, and Political Trust Theory. These theories provide an analytical basis for

understanding how insecurity is communicated, interpreted, and politically utilized within democratic societies.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory was developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) to explain the influential role of the media in shaping public priorities and directing attention toward specific issues within society. The central proposition of the theory is that while the media may not necessarily determine what people think, it significantly influences what people think about by deciding which issues receive extensive coverage and prominence. Through repeated exposure to particular topics, the media establish an agenda that shapes public discussions, political debates, and policy concerns. Consequently, issues that receive sustained media attention are often perceived by the public as more important than those receiving limited coverage.

The theory is particularly relevant in understanding public perceptions of insecurity in Nigeria. Public awareness and concern about security challenges are largely influenced by government communication, media reporting, social media discussions, political campaigns, and advocacy efforts by civil society organizations. These actors play significant roles in determining the visibility and interpretation of security-related issues within the public sphere. According to McCombs (2004), the frequency and prominence of media coverage can significantly affect the salience of issues in the minds of citizens, thereby influencing political attitudes and behaviors.

As Nigeria approaches the 2027 general elections, insecurity has emerged as one of the most dominant issues on the national agenda. Continuous reports of killings, kidnappings, armed banditry, terrorism, and communal conflicts have kept security concerns at the forefront of public discourse. Media organizations consistently highlight incidents of violence and criminality across different regions of the country, reinforcing public perceptions that insecurity remains a critical national challenge. Political actors have also utilized security-related narratives to influence voter opinions, criticize opponents, and present themselves as capable providers of security and stability.

Agenda-Setting Theory helps explain how competing political interests attempt to define security realities and shape public perceptions regarding responsibility, government performance, and proposed solutions. Through strategic communication and media engagement, political actors seek to influence how citizens interpret insecurity and evaluate political leaders. In this context, the theory provides a useful framework for examining the relationship between media narratives, political communication, public perceptions of insecurity, and electoral behavior in Nigeria's evolving democratic environment.

Framing Theory

Framing Theory emerged as an extension of Agenda-Setting Theory and focuses on how issues are presented and interpreted rather than merely whether they receive public attention. The theory suggests that the way information is organized, emphasized, and communicated significantly influences how audiences understand and evaluate events and issues. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communication text in order to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, or policy recommendation. Thus, framing shapes not only what people think about but also how they think about specific issues.

In the context of insecurity, framing plays a critical role in influencing public perceptions and responses to security challenges. Security-related events may be presented as isolated incidents, national crises, governance failures, criminal activities, political conspiracies, or external threats. Each of these frames

provides a different interpretation of the same reality and can lead to different public reactions. For instance, when violent attacks are framed as isolated criminal incidents, citizens may perceive them as temporary and localized problems that do not reflect broader systemic weaknesses. However, when the same incidents are framed as evidence of widespread governance failure, they may generate public dissatisfaction with political leaders and increase demands for institutional reforms and political accountability.

Framing Theory is particularly relevant in understanding political communication and public discourse surrounding insecurity in Nigeria. Government officials, political parties, media organizations, and civil society groups often compete to define the meaning and implications of security challenges. Through strategic framing, these actors attempt to influence public understanding of the causes of insecurity, the effectiveness of government responses, and the appropriate solutions to security problems. According to Scheufele (1999), framing affects audience interpretations by highlighting certain considerations while minimizing others, thereby shaping attitudes, opinions, and political behavior.

As Nigeria approaches the 2027 general elections, the framing of insecurity is likely to remain a significant feature of political communication. Political actors may frame insecurity in ways that support their electoral objectives, either by emphasizing government achievements or highlighting perceived failures. This process becomes particularly important in discussions of gaslighting and insecurity because gaslighting often relies on strategic framing techniques that seek to redefine public understanding of security realities. By selectively emphasizing certain aspects of events while downplaying others, political actors may attempt to shape perceptions in ways that influence electoral choices and public trust. Consequently, Framing Theory provides a valuable framework for examining how narratives about insecurity are constructed, communicated, and utilized within Nigeria's political environment.

Political Trust Theory

Political Trust Theory examines the relationship between citizens' confidence in government institutions and the legitimacy of political authority. At its core, the theory defines political trust as the belief that public institutions, government officials, and political leaders will act competently, honestly, fairly, and in the best interests of the public. Political trust is considered a fundamental element of democratic governance because it shapes how citizens perceive and interact with political systems and institutions.

The theory suggests that levels of political trust have significant implications for various aspects of democratic life. High levels of trust encourage electoral participation, foster civic engagement, promote compliance with public policies, and contribute to political stability. Citizens who trust their governments are generally more willing to participate in elections, support government initiatives, and cooperate with public institutions. In contrast, low levels of trust can weaken democratic processes and reduce public confidence in governance.

Political trust is often influenced by citizens' perceptions of government performance, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. When governments are perceived as open, effective, and attentive to public concerns, trust tends to increase. Conversely, when official statements and policy narratives appear inconsistent with citizens' lived experiences, trust may decline. Such discrepancies can create doubts about the credibility of government institutions and raise questions regarding their ability or willingness to address pressing societal challenges.

This theory is particularly relevant to the present study because allegations of gaslighting insecurity directly affect perceptions of governmental credibility and trustworthiness. When citizens believe that

public officials are minimizing, misrepresenting, or dismissing security challenges despite evidence of widespread insecurity, confidence in government institutions may erode. As a result, public trust becomes an important factor in understanding how citizens interpret government responses to insecurity and how such interpretations influence political attitudes and behavior.

Declining political trust can have several consequences for democratic governance. These include voter apathy, political cynicism, democratic disengagement, and an increased reliance on alternative sources of information outside official channels. Citizens who lose confidence in government institutions may become less motivated to participate in electoral processes and more skeptical of official communications. At the same time, they may turn to social media, independent commentators, and other non-state actors for information and interpretation of public affairs.

Together with the other theoretical perspectives adopted in this study, Political Trust Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex relationship between insecurity, political communication, public confidence in government, and electoral outcomes. The integration of these theories offers a comprehensive basis for analyzing how perceptions of insecurity and governmental responses influence democratic participation and political behavior ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Insecurity and Democratic Governance

Recent scholarship indicates that insecurity has become one of the most significant obstacles to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Akindoyin and Obafemi (2025) argue that persistent insecurity undermines national development, weakens institutions, and reduces citizens' confidence in governance structures. Democratic governance thrives in an environment where citizens can freely exercise their rights, participate in political processes, and trust public institutions to protect lives and property. However, the persistence of terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts has increasingly challenged the capacity of the Nigerian state to fulfill these responsibilities.

Similarly, Onuoha (2024) contends that state legitimacy is closely linked to the ability of governments to provide security and maintain public order. When governments fail to effectively respond to security threats, citizens may perceive public institutions as ineffective or disconnected from their needs. This perception often contributes to declining trust in government and increased social dissatisfaction. According to Rotberg (2004), the provision of security is one of the primary responsibilities of the state, and failure in this regard can weaken state legitimacy and democratic stability.

Bello and Usman (2024) observe that insecurity creates governance challenges by diverting resources away from development initiatives and increasing pressure on public institutions. Funds that could be allocated to education, healthcare, infrastructure, and poverty reduction are often redirected toward military operations, intelligence gathering, and emergency interventions. Communities affected by violence frequently experience disruptions to economic activities, education, healthcare delivery, and political participation. Furthermore, insecurity contributes to population displacement, unemployment, and social fragmentation, all of which undermine democratic governance.

The relationship between insecurity and democratic governance is therefore multidimensional. Beyond its direct impact on public safety, insecurity weakens institutional effectiveness, reduces citizen engagement, and complicates policy implementation. As Diamond (1999) argues, democratic consolidation depends upon effective institutions, public trust, and political stability. Where insecurity persists, these foundations are weakened, creating significant challenges for democratic development and sustainable governance in Nigeria.

Electoral Participation under Conditions of Insecurity

Several studies have examined the effects of insecurity on electoral behavior and democratic participation. Yusuf and Danjuma (2024) found that insecurity contributes significantly to reduced voter turnout in conflict-affected communities. Their study revealed that citizens who fear violence are less likely to participate in electoral activities, including voter registration, political meetings, campaign events, and election-day voting. Fear of attacks, intimidation, and unrest often discourages individuals from engaging in democratic processes.

Similarly, Aliyu, Yusuf, and Mohammed (2025) argue that insecurity undermines electoral integrity by restricting political campaigns, displacing populations, and limiting voter access to polling locations. Electoral participation depends not only on the availability of voting opportunities but also on citizens' confidence that they can participate safely. In areas experiencing armed conflict or criminal violence, candidates may be unable to campaign effectively, while voters may be reluctant to attend political gatherings due to security concerns.

According to Bratton (2013), citizens are more likely to participate in elections when they perceive the political environment as stable and secure. Insecurity introduces uncertainty into the electoral process and may create conditions where electoral outcomes do not accurately reflect the preferences of the electorate. Displacement caused by violence can further complicate voter registration and reduce electoral inclusion.

Moreover, insecurity may contribute to political apathy and reduced trust in democratic institutions. Citizens who perceive that the state cannot guarantee their safety during elections may become disillusioned with the democratic process. Consequently, electoral participation tends to decline under conditions of insecurity, weakening democratic representation and reducing the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. Understanding this relationship is essential for developing policies aimed at strengthening electoral security and democratic engagement in Nigeria.

Armed Banditry and National Security

Armed banditry has emerged as one of the most prominent security challenges confronting Nigeria in recent years. Oluyemi (2025) describes banditry as a complex phenomenon involving criminal networks engaged in kidnapping, extortion, cattle rustling, illegal taxation, and attacks on rural communities. The author argues that banditry has evolved beyond conventional criminal activity into a major governance and national security challenge. The increasing sophistication of armed groups, coupled with their access to weapons and financial resources, has intensified concerns regarding public safety and state authority.

Similarly, Thaddaeus and Albert (2025) identify armed banditry as a major contributor to displacement, economic disruption, and social instability. Communities affected by bandit attacks often experience destruction of livelihoods, forced migration, and loss of access to essential services. Agricultural production is particularly affected because farmers may abandon their lands due to fear of attacks, thereby contributing to food insecurity and economic hardship.

According to International Crisis Group (2024), banditry thrives in environments characterized by weak state presence, poverty, unemployment, and inadequate law enforcement. The persistence of attacks has raised serious questions about the effectiveness of security institutions and the government's ability to protect vulnerable populations. In many cases, affected communities have resorted to self-help security arrangements, reflecting declining confidence in formal security mechanisms.

Beyond its immediate human and economic consequences, armed banditry has significant implications for governance and democratic stability. Persistent insecurity may weaken public trust in government

institutions, discourage investment, and hinder development initiatives. Consequently, addressing armed banditry requires comprehensive strategies that combine security interventions with socioeconomic development, institutional reforms, and community-based approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Kidnapping and Public Perception

Kidnapping has become one of the most visible and widely discussed indicators of insecurity in Nigeria. Research suggests that public anxiety regarding kidnapping is particularly high because victims often include students, professionals, religious leaders, security personnel, business owners, and ordinary community members. Unlike some forms of criminal activity that may be confined to specific regions or social groups, kidnapping affects a broad spectrum of society, contributing to widespread fear and uncertainty.

According to Okoli and Agada (2014), kidnapping has evolved from a localized criminal enterprise into a national security challenge with profound social and economic consequences. The increasing frequency of abductions has heightened public concerns regarding personal safety and the effectiveness of security institutions. Citizens often perceive kidnapping as evidence of broader governance failures, particularly where perpetrators operate with apparent impunity.

Studies indicate that kidnapping affects public perceptions of safety more directly than many other forms of criminality because of its widespread and unpredictable nature. Individuals may alter their daily routines, limit travel, avoid certain locations, and invest in private security measures due to fear of abduction. Such behavioral changes reflect the psychological impact of insecurity on society.

The expansion of kidnapping into educational institutions has further intensified concerns regarding public security and governance. High-profile abductions of students and schoolchildren have generated national and international attention, raising questions about the protection of vulnerable populations. According to Onuoha (2021), attacks on educational institutions undermine public confidence in the state's ability to guarantee basic security. Consequently, kidnapping not only threatens physical safety but also shapes public perceptions of governance, institutional effectiveness, and national stability.

Political Communication and Public Trust

Political communication plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of governance, security, and democratic accountability. Through official statements, press briefings, media engagements, and digital communication platforms, governments provide information that influences how citizens understand public issues and evaluate governmental performance. Eze (2024) argues that communication strategies significantly influence citizens' assessments of government effectiveness, particularly during periods of crisis and uncertainty.

The author emphasizes that credibility is central to effective communication. Citizens are more likely to trust information when they perceive communicators as transparent, consistent, and truthful. Conversely, where communication appears misleading or inconsistent with observable realities, institutional trust tends to decline. This is particularly relevant in contexts of insecurity, where citizens rely heavily on official information to assess risks and make decisions regarding personal safety.

Norris (2023) similarly argues that trust depends upon transparency, accountability, and verification. Effective political communication requires governments to provide accurate information while acknowledging challenges and uncertainties. Attempts to minimize security threats or present overly optimistic narratives may generate skepticism, especially when citizens' lived experiences contradict official accounts.

According to Habermas (1989), democratic legitimacy is strengthened when communication between governments and citizens is characterized by openness and rational dialogue. Public trust is particularly important during periods of insecurity because cooperation between citizens and state institutions often depends upon confidence in official communication. Where trust is weak, misinformation, rumors, and speculation may flourish, complicating crisis management efforts. Therefore, political communication serves not only as a mechanism for information dissemination but also as an essential component of democratic governance, public trust, and social stability.

Social Media Activism and Democratic Accountability

The rapid growth of social media has significantly transformed political communication in Nigeria, creating new avenues for interaction between citizens, government institutions, and the broader public sphere. Digital platforms have expanded opportunities for citizen engagement, enabling individuals to participate more actively in political discussions, share information, advocate for social and political causes, and demand accountability from public officials and institutions. As internet access continues to expand across Nigeria, social media has become an increasingly important tool for democratic participation and civic engagement.

According to Castells (2012), digital communication technologies have transformed the nature of political participation by enabling decentralized forms of communication and collective action. In recent years, digital activists and social commentators have gained considerable influence in shaping public debates on governance, security, and national development. Through platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, individuals and groups can rapidly disseminate information, mobilize public opinion, and draw attention to issues affecting citizens across the country.

Citizen-led campaigns have increasingly challenged official narratives by highlighting issues that many people believe are inadequately addressed by public institutions. Through online advocacy, investigative reporting, and public awareness campaigns, activists frequently draw attention to concerns such as insecurity, corruption, human rights violations, and governance failures. Shirky (2011) argues that social media enhances collective action by reducing barriers to participation and facilitating rapid information sharing among citizens.

The rise of digital activism reflects a broader transformation in the relationship between citizens, governments, and information systems. Social media has reduced traditional barriers to communication, allowing citizens to participate more directly in public discourse and hold leaders accountable in real time. Furthermore, digital platforms provide alternative channels for information dissemination, particularly when citizens question official narratives. As a result, social media has become an important arena for democratic expression, public scrutiny, political mobilization, and accountability. In the Nigerian context, digital activism continues to play a significant role in shaping governance debates, influencing public opinion, and strengthening demands for transparency and democratic accountability.

Table 2:Summary of Selected Empirical Studies on Insecurity and Democratic Governance

Author(s)	Year	Focus Area	Major Findings
Akindoyin & Obafemi	2025	Insecurity and Development	Negative impact on governance
Yusuf & Danjuma	2024	Electoral Participation	Lower voter turnout
Aliyu et al.	2025	Electoral Integrity	Disruptions to elections
Oluyemi	2025	Armed Banditry	Governance challenge
Onuoha	2024	State Legitimacy	Trust linked to security

Author(s)	Year	Focus Area	Major Findings
Sampson	2024	Democratic Accountability	Reduced institutional confidence
Madueke	2025	Political Mobilization	Increased polarization

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2026)

Contemporary Insecurity Trends Ahead of the 2027 Elections

Nigeria's contemporary security environment is characterized by the presence of multiple and overlapping threats that continue to challenge national stability and public confidence in government institutions. Between 2023 and 2026, the country experienced persistent incidents of mass killings, bandit attacks, school kidnappings, terrorist activities, communal violence, and increasing political tensions across various regions. These security challenges have remained a major concern for citizens and policymakers alike, highlighting the complexity of Nigeria's security landscape.

The continued occurrence of these threats has elevated insecurity to one of the most significant political issues ahead of the 2027 general elections. As communities grapple with violence and uncertainty, public expectations regarding the government's responsibility to protect lives and property have intensified. Citizens increasingly assess the performance of elected leaders and public institutions based on their ability to ensure safety, maintain order, and effectively respond to security challenges.

Consequently, issues relating to insecurity are expected to feature prominently in political campaigns, public debates, and electoral discourse leading up to the 2027 elections. Security narratives are likely to influence voter perceptions, shape political preferences, and affect electoral outcomes, as candidates and political parties seek to convince citizens of their capacity to address the country's security concerns. In this context, the management of insecurity has become not only a governance challenge but also a critical determinant of political legitimacy and democratic accountability.

Contemporary Case Studies of Insecurity and Public Perception Ahead of the 2027 Elections

One of the defining characteristics of Nigeria's contemporary security environment is the emergence of highly publicized incidents that capture national attention and significantly shape public perceptions of governance and state capacity. Although insecurity is frequently analyzed through statistical data, policy reports, and official assessments, citizens often interpret the country's security situation through symbolic events that carry strong emotional and political significance. Such incidents influence levels of public trust in government institutions, shape electoral attitudes, and affect democratic participation. As Nigeria approaches the 2027 general elections, several notable developments have become important reference points in public discussions about insecurity and governance. These events not only highlight the persistent challenges facing the country's security architecture but also reveal the growing relationship between insecurity, political communication, and democratic legitimacy.

Among the most significant cases are the abduction and subsequent death of retired Major General Rabe Abubakar, which raised concerns about the vulnerability of citizens regardless of status or position. Similarly, recurring school kidnappings in Oyo State have intensified fears regarding the safety of educational institutions and the protection of children. At the same time, escalating killings in states such as Benue, Plateau, Zamfara, Kaduna, and other parts of the country have reinforced public perceptions of a worsening security crisis and the inability of authorities to effectively contain violence. In addition to these security incidents, citizen activism has increasingly influenced public discourse on governance and accountability. The activities of social media activist VeryDarkMan (VDM) have demonstrated how digital platforms can amplify public concerns, challenge official narratives, and

shape national conversations on insecurity and government performance. Through online engagement and advocacy, such actors contribute to the formation of public opinion and political awareness, particularly among younger voters.

Collectively, these contemporary case studies provide valuable insights into how insecurity influences public perceptions of government effectiveness and democratic legitimacy. They also illustrate the ways in which security challenges can become politically significant issues that shape electoral behavior and public expectations ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Table 3 Selected Contemporary Security Incidents and Their Democratic Implications

Incident	Security Category	Democratic Implication
Death of Retired Major General Rabe Abubakar	Kidnapping/Banditry	Declining trust in state capacity
Oyo School Kidnapping	Educational Insecurity	Public anxiety and accountability demands
Benue Killings	Communal Violence	Population displacement and voter challenges
Plateau Attacks	Ethno-Communal Conflict	Political tensions and distrust
Zamfara Banditry	Organized Criminal Violence	Electoral disruptions
Kaduna Insecurity	Multiple Security Threats	Reduced confidence in governance

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2026)

Rise of Digital Advocacy

Digital media has significantly transformed political communication in Nigeria by creating new opportunities for citizen engagement and participation in public affairs. The rapid expansion of internet access and the growing popularity of social networking platforms have altered the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed. Citizens increasingly utilize platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to engage in discussions regarding governance, security, public policy, and national development. These platforms provide individuals with the ability to communicate directly with large audiences, reducing dependence on traditional media institutions as the primary source of political information.

Unlike traditional media environments, where information flow is often centralized and controlled by established organizations, digital platforms enable citizens to generate, share, and disseminate alternative narratives. According to Castells (2012), digital communication technologies have fundamentally transformed the structure of political communication by facilitating networked forms of interaction and participation. Through social media, citizens can share personal experiences, provide eyewitness accounts of events, challenge official statements, and contribute to public debates in real time.

The rise of digital advocacy has also increased the visibility of issues that may receive limited coverage in conventional media outlets. Social media campaigns frequently draw attention to concerns relating to insecurity, corruption, human rights, and governance failures. According to Shirky (2011), digital platforms reduce barriers to collective action by enabling citizens to organize and mobilize around

shared concerns. In the Nigerian context, digital advocacy has become an important mechanism through which citizens influence public discourse and demand greater responsiveness from political leaders.

The growth of digital advocacy reflects broader transformations in democratic participation and information consumption. Citizens are no longer passive recipients of information but active contributors to public discussions. Consequently, digital media has become a significant arena for political engagement, social mobilization, and the construction of alternative narratives regarding governance and security in contemporary Nigeria.

Public Demand for Accountability

Contemporary activism in Nigeria increasingly focuses on issues of transparency, accountability, good governance, and security-sector reform. Citizens have become more vocal in demanding that public officials and institutions explain their actions, justify policy decisions, and demonstrate effectiveness in addressing national challenges. According to Eze (2024), the growing demand for accountability reflects increasing public awareness of democratic rights and expectations regarding governmental performance.

The rise of digital communication has strengthened citizens' ability to monitor public institutions and scrutinize government actions. Through social media platforms and online advocacy campaigns, citizens can rapidly share information, expose perceived governance failures, and mobilize support for reform initiatives. This development has altered traditional relationships between governments and citizens by creating new channels for public engagement and oversight. According to Norris (2023), democratic accountability is strengthened when citizens have access to information and opportunities to evaluate governmental performance.

Public concerns regarding insecurity have further intensified demands for accountability. Citizens increasingly expect political leaders to provide clear explanations regarding security challenges and to demonstrate measurable progress in protecting lives and property. Where insecurity persists despite official assurances, public scrutiny often intensifies. This phenomenon reflects a growing expectation that democratic governance should be characterized by transparency, responsiveness, and effective problem-solving.

The growth of digital advocacy therefore represents more than a technological development; it reflects changing societal expectations regarding governance and political responsibility. Citizens are increasingly unwilling to accept passive roles in public affairs and instead seek active participation in shaping policy discussions and holding leaders accountable. Consequently, demands for transparency and accountability have become central features of contemporary democratic discourse in Nigeria.

VeryDarkMan (VDM) and Public Discourse on Insecurity

One of the most visible figures within Nigeria's contemporary digital activism landscape is VeryDarkMan (VDM). Although VDM engages with a wide range of social, political, and public-interest issues, his interventions frequently contribute to national debates regarding governance, justice, accountability, and insecurity. His growing popularity illustrates the increasing influence of digital personalities in shaping public opinion and facilitating political discussions outside traditional media structures.

One significant aspect of VDM's activism is the amplification of public concerns. Through his online platforms, he often highlights issues that resonate with large segments of the population, particularly matters involving perceived injustice, institutional failures, and governance challenges. According to Castells (2012), influential digital actors can play important roles in agenda formation by directing

public attention toward issues that citizens consider important. In this regard, VDM's content frequently reflects concerns that many Nigerians feel are insufficiently addressed by official institutions.

Another important dimension of his influence relates to alternative information flows. His activities demonstrate how citizens increasingly seek information and perspectives beyond official communication channels. In situations where public trust in institutional communication is limited, alternative voices often gain credibility among audiences seeking additional sources of information. According to Bennett and Segerberg (2013), digital communication environments encourage the emergence of decentralized information networks that challenge traditional gatekeeping structures.

VDM's activism also contributes to institutional accountability by increasing public pressure on government agencies and public officials to respond to emerging issues. Through widespread online engagement, digital advocacy can amplify citizen concerns and generate demands for action. Furthermore, his activities contribute to political awareness and civic engagement by encouraging public discussion regarding governance and public policy.

The significance of VDM lies not only in his personal influence but also in what his popularity represents. His prominence reflects broader transformations in public trust, media consumption patterns, and the relationship between citizens and information systems. Where citizens perceive official narratives as insufficient, incomplete, or unreliable, alternative voices often gain greater influence. This development is particularly relevant to understanding contemporary debates surrounding insecurity and political communication in Nigeria.

Gaslighting Insecurity and the Crisis of Credibility

The analysis of contemporary security challenges in Nigeria reveals a recurring and significant theme: credibility. Citizens do not merely evaluate security conditions based on incidents of violence or criminal activity. They also assess official explanations, government responses, political narratives, and institutional communication. According to Stern (2007), perceptions of credibility play a crucial role in determining whether audiences accept or reject information presented by authoritative sources. Consequently, public trust depends not only on governmental actions but also on the perceived accuracy and consistency of official communication.

The concept of gaslighting insecurity becomes particularly relevant where substantial discrepancies exist between public experiences and official statements. When citizens encounter realities that appear inconsistent with governmental narratives, accusations of misinformation, denial, or manipulation become more likely. According to Abramson (2014), political gaslighting occurs when political actors attempt to shape perceptions by minimizing, reframing, or denying observable realities. In contexts of insecurity, such communication strategies may undermine public confidence if citizens perceive them as inconsistent with lived experiences.

Several important consequences emerge from this credibility crisis. First, citizens may become increasingly skeptical of governmental claims and official assurances regarding security conditions. This skepticism can weaken cooperation between citizens and public institutions. Second, information fragmentation may occur as alternative narratives gain prominence through social media platforms, independent commentators, and citizen-generated content. According to McKinnon (2017), declining trust in authoritative sources often contributes to competing interpretations of reality.

Third, political polarization may intensify as different groups adopt competing narratives regarding the causes, severity, and solutions to insecurity. Such divisions can complicate policy discussions and reduce opportunities for consensus-building. Finally, democratic challenges emerge as trust in institutions declines. Norris (2023) argues that public trust is a critical component of democratic

legitimacy and governance effectiveness. Where institutional credibility is weakened, citizens may become less confident in government capacity, reducing political participation and increasing social tensions.

These dynamics have important implications for electoral politics. As elections approach, political actors are likely to compete over interpretations of security realities and governmental performance. Consequently, credibility, trust, and public perceptions of insecurity will remain central factors shaping political attitudes, electoral behavior, and democratic accountability in Nigeria.

Electoral Participation

One of the most significant implications of insecurity for the 2027 general elections is its potential impact on voter participation. Democratic elections depend on the willingness and ability of citizens to engage actively in the electoral process. However, when individuals perceive threats to their personal safety, their level of political participation often declines. According to Yusuf and Danjuma (2024), insecurity creates an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that discourages citizens from participating in democratic activities. Individuals who fear violence or criminal attacks may be less willing to register to vote, attend political rallies, travel to polling units, or engage in civic discussions related to elections.

The effects of insecurity on electoral participation extend beyond physical threats. Insecurity can create psychological barriers that reduce citizens' confidence in democratic processes. Where communities experience persistent violence, displacement, or criminal activity, residents may prioritize personal safety over political engagement. According to Bratton (2013), electoral participation is influenced not only by political interest but also by citizens' perceptions of security and institutional effectiveness. Consequently, insecurity functions as a structural obstacle to democratic participation by limiting opportunities for civic engagement and political expression.

The situation becomes even more complex when insecurity is accompanied by perceived communication gaps or accusations of gaslighting. Where citizens believe that official statements do not accurately reflect their lived experiences, feelings of political alienation may intensify. In such circumstances, individuals may feel both physically unsafe and politically marginalized, reducing their motivation to participate in electoral processes. As a result, insecurity poses a significant threat to inclusive democratic participation ahead of the 2027 elections.

Electoral Integrity and Logistics

Insecurity also has important implications for the operational and logistical dimensions of election administration. Conducting elections requires the safe movement of electoral personnel, voting materials, observers, and security officials across diverse geographical locations. However, security challenges can complicate these processes and undermine the efficiency of electoral operations. According to Aliyu, Yusuf, and Mohammed (2025), insecurity creates substantial obstacles to the effective organization and administration of elections, particularly in conflict-prone regions.

Several operational challenges may arise as a result of insecurity. Electoral authorities may encounter difficulties deploying election materials to remote or high-risk areas. Security threats can also place electoral officials at risk, affecting their ability to perform their duties effectively. In some cases, violent incidents may disrupt voting processes, leading to delays, cancellations, or reduced voter turnout. Rural communities often face particular challenges because inadequate infrastructure and security concerns may limit accessibility during elections.

Population displacement resulting from violence further complicates electoral administration. Internally displaced persons may experience difficulties registering to vote, updating voter information, or

accessing polling units. According to the International Organization for Migration (2024), displacement can significantly affect electoral inclusion and representation. These conditions may compromise electoral integrity, particularly in regions experiencing persistent insecurity, including parts of the Northwest and North-Central zones. Consequently, addressing security challenges is essential for ensuring credible, transparent, and inclusive elections in 2027.

Political Trust and Institutional Legitimacy

Trust in institutions is a fundamental requirement for democratic stability and effective governance. Citizens are more likely to participate in democratic processes when they have confidence in government institutions, security agencies, electoral bodies, and political leaders. However, the findings of this study suggest that perceived inconsistencies between official statements and lived realities can significantly weaken institutional trust. According to Norris (2023), trust is built through transparency, accountability, and consistent performance, particularly during periods of crisis.

Where citizens perceive that official narratives regarding insecurity differ substantially from their everyday experiences, skepticism toward public institutions often increases. This skepticism may extend to government agencies responsible for security, electoral management bodies, and political leadership. As trust declines, citizens may become more receptive to alternative sources of information and competing interpretations of events.

The rise of social media and digital activism has amplified this trend by providing alternative channels through which citizens can access information and engage in public discourse. Figures such as VeryDarkMan (VDM) and other digital commentators have gained prominence by highlighting issues relating to governance, accountability, and insecurity. According to Castells (2012), digital communication technologies have empowered citizens to challenge official narratives and participate more actively in political discussions. Consequently, political trust is increasingly shaped by interactions between official communication and alternative information networks.

Institutional legitimacy depends largely on public confidence that institutions are competent, responsive, and trustworthy. Therefore, maintaining credibility and transparency in communication will be critical for strengthening trust and ensuring democratic stability ahead of the 2027 elections.

Democratic Legitimacy

Insecurity poses a direct threat to democratic legitimacy because it can prevent citizens from participating freely in electoral activities. Fear of violence, intimidation, kidnapping, or attacks may discourage voter turnout and limit political engagement. Communities experiencing insecurity may face unequal opportunities to participate in elections compared to more secure regions. Such disparities can raise concerns regarding electoral fairness and representation.

The concept of gaslighting insecurity further complicates questions of democratic legitimacy. Where citizens believe that official narratives minimize or misrepresent security challenges, confidence in political institutions and electoral processes may decline. According to Stern (2007), perceptions of manipulation or denial can weaken trust and contribute to skepticism regarding institutional credibility. If voters conclude that political leaders are not providing accurate information about security conditions, they may become less willing to accept official claims regarding electoral integrity and governance performance.

Governance Accountability

The findings of this study indicate that insecurity has become one of the most important benchmarks through which citizens evaluate government performance. Across different regions of Nigeria, security

concerns increasingly influence public assessments of political leadership, institutional effectiveness, and governance quality. According to Akindoyin and Obafemi (2025), citizens often judge governments based on their ability to protect lives and property, maintain public order, and respond effectively to emerging security threats.

Citizens now place greater emphasis on security outcomes when evaluating political leaders. Rather than focusing solely on campaign promises or political rhetoric, many voters assess governments according to measurable improvements in public safety and stability. Responsiveness to crises has become another important indicator of governance effectiveness. Political leaders are increasingly expected to respond quickly and decisively to incidents of violence, kidnapping, and communal conflict.

Transparency in communication also plays a significant role in accountability. Citizens expect governments to provide accurate information regarding security developments and policy responses. According to Habermas (1989), democratic accountability is strengthened when public institutions engage in open and honest communication with citizens. Furthermore, the protection of vulnerable populations, including women, children, students, and displaced persons, has become an important measure of governmental responsibility.

As Nigeria approaches the 2027 general elections, security performance is likely to remain a central issue shaping voter attitudes and political competition. Governments that are perceived as effective in addressing insecurity and communicating transparently may enjoy greater public confidence, while perceived failures in these areas may generate electoral consequences. Therefore, governance accountability in contemporary Nigeria is increasingly linked to both security outcomes and the credibility of official communication.

Table 4
Summary of Key Findings and Electoral Implications

Key Finding	Explanation	Electoral Implication
Security dominance	Insecurity is a major political issue	Shapes voter priorities
Trust deficit	Declining trust in institutions	Reduced voter participation
Communication gap	Perceived inconsistency in narratives	Accusations of gaslighting
Digital activism rise	Increased role of online voices	Alternative information flows
Electoral vulnerability	Security risks affect elections	Lower turnout and access issues
Democratic stress	Weak legitimacy perceptions	Electoral contestation risk

Source: Author's Synthesis (2026)

Conclusion

Insecurity in Nigeria is both a physical and communicative challenge. While violence, kidnapping, banditry and communal conflict constitute the material dimension of insecurity, political communication shapes how citizens interpret these realities.

The concept of gaslighting insecurity captures the tension between official narratives and lived experiences. When citizens perceive inconsistencies between government statements and everyday realities, trust in institutions declines.

As Nigeria approaches the 2027 elections, the sustainability of democracy will depend not only on improving security conditions but also on strengthening credibility in public communication and institutional transparency.

Recommendations

1. Government should ensure transparent, accurate and timely communication on security issues.
2. Security agencies should strengthen intelligence coordination and rapid response systems.
3. INEC should implement comprehensive electoral security planning for high-risk areas.
4. Community policing structures should be expanded nationwide.
5. Civil society organizations should intensify civic education and voter awareness campaigns.
6. Media organizations should prioritize fact-checking and responsible reporting.
7. Government should engage digital influencers and online platforms to improve information dissemination.
8. Policies should be developed to support displaced populations in electoral participation.
9. Political actors should avoid exploiting insecurity narratives for partisan gain.
10. Institutional accountability mechanisms should be strengthened to rebuild public trust.

References

Akindoyin, D. I., & Obafemi, A. O. (2025). Evaluating the impact of insecurity on Nigeria's national development since the Fourth Republic. *African Journal of Stability and Development, 17*(1), 65–82.

Aliyu, I. H., Yusuf, A., & Mohammed, A. (2025). Electoral integrity and insecurity in Nigeria: Implications for governance. *International Journal of Social Sciences, 12*(3), 112–130.

Bello, M. A., & Usman, Y. A. (2024). Public trust and governance in fragile states. *African Governance Review, 12*(1), 33–51.

Campbell, J. (2023). *Nigeria: Dancing on the brink*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Eze, C. N. (2024). Political communication and insecurity perception in Nigeria. *Journal of African Media Studies, 16*(2), 88–105.

International Crisis Group. (2024). *Nigeria's security challenges and governance response*. Brussels.

Iweriebor, F.I. (2025). Challenges to Management of Election Processes in Nigeria: 2015-2023 Elections in perspective. *International Journal of Society and Development*

Madueke, O. (2025). State fragility and political mobilization in Nigeria. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 31*(1), 21–39.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2), 176–187.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Crime and insecurity perception survey*. Abuja.

National Democratic Institute. (2024). *Electoral security and democracy in West Africa*. Washington, DC.

Norris, P. (2023). *In praise of skepticism: Trust but verify*. Oxford University Press.

Obadare, E. (2024). Religion, governance, and security in Nigeria. University of Notre Dame Press.

Onuoha, F. C. (2024). Security governance and state legitimacy in Nigeria. *African Security Review, 33*(2), 101–122.

Oluyemi, O. A. (2025). Armed banditry and governance challenges in Nigeria. *SADI Journal of Social Sciences, 5*(2), 41–59.

Sampson, I. T. (2024). Counterinsurgency and democratic accountability in Nigeria. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 42*(1), 52–70.

Thaddaeus, A. O., & Albert, A. O. (2025). Banditry and farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Science Research, 9*(5), 2083–2090.

Transparency International. (2024). *Corruption perceptions index*. Berlin.

UNDP. (2024). *Human development report: Security and governance in Africa*. United Nations Development Programme.

Yusuf, H. A., & Danjuma, K. P. (2024). Electoral participation under insecurity in Nigeria. *Journal of Elections and Democracy, 15*(4), 201–223.