Security Votes and Conflict Management in Nigeria: Evidence from Imo State, 2019–2025

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Abstract

Insecurity in Nigeria's conflict-prone states is not merely a policing problem, it is a governance challenge. In Imo State between 2019 and 2025, waves of violent crime, separatist agitation, and electoral disruptions revealed the limits of conventional state responses, prompting heavy reliance on discretionary security votes. Yet, the effects of these allocations on human security remain opaque. This study examines how security votes function not just as instruments of protection but as tools embedded within elite bargains, shaping whose safety is prioritized and whose is neglected. Guided by Rentier State and Political Settlement theories, the research situates discretionary funding within Nigeria's political economy, exposing how structural inequities and elite interests determine security outcomes. Using a qualitative case study design, data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with political actors, security operatives, civil society, traditional authorities, and conflict-affected citizens, triangulated with documentary evidence. Findings show that security votes produce fleeting, uneven improvements favoring politically salient areas while leaving marginalized communities vulnerable. Far from delivering systemic human security, these funds reproduce patronage and

selective protection. The study argues that transforming security votes into strategic, inclusive, and accountable mechanisms is essential for bridging immediate tactical needs with long-term stability and resilience.

Keywords: Security votes; human security; elite politics; conflict management; discretionary funding; Imo State; Nigeria.

Introduction

Across many fragile democracies, discretionary security expenditures have increasingly become central instruments through which state governments attempt to manage violent conflict. In Nigeria, one of the most controversial of such mechanisms is the security vote a discretionary fund allocated to governors for addressing security challenges but largely insulated from legislative scrutiny or formal auditing. While originally conceived as a pragmatic tool for rapid response to emerging threats, the institutional opacity surrounding security votes has generated sustained debate among scholars and policy analysts regarding their effectiveness and accountability (Omotoso, 2019; Ojo, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2023). The debate is particularly salient in conflict-prone regions where public expectations regarding state security interventions remain high despite persistent instability.

Nigeria's contemporary security landscape is characterized by overlapping crises including insurgency, separatist agitation, banditry, and communal violence. These security pressures have placed enormous fiscal and administrative burdens on subnational governments, especially in regions experiencing recurrent political and ethno-secessionist tensions (Akinwale, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2023). Within this context, state governors have increasingly relied on security votes as flexible financial instruments to support security operations, intelligence gathering, and informal conflict management initiatives. Yet the absence of transparency in the administration of these funds has raised fundamental questions about whether they genuinely enhance security governance or merely reproduce elite patronage structures (Omotoso, 2019; Ojo, 2020).

The debate assumes particular urgency in southeastern Nigeria where the resurgence of separatist agitation and violent non-state actors has intensified

security challenges in recent years. Since the late 2010s, the region has witnessed escalating confrontations between state security agencies and armed groups linked to secessionist movements, resulting in attacks on public institutions, targeted killings, and widespread disruptions of economic activity (International Crisis Group, 2023; Onuoha, 2022). These developments have compelled state governments to deploy substantial financial resources toward conflict management strategies, including community surveillance initiatives, collaboration with federal security agencies, and local peacebuilding interventions. Security votes therefore occupy a central yet contested place within the governance architecture of conflict management in the region.

Among the states in southeastern Nigeria, Imo State has emerged as a particularly instructive case. Between 2019 and 2025, the state experienced a significant escalation in violent incidents, including attacks on police formations, correctional facilities, and other state institutions. The dramatic prison break at the Owerri Correctional Centre in April 2021 and the subsequent proliferation of armed confrontations underscored the fragile nature of security governance in the state. In response, successive administrations allocated substantial security votes to support counter-insurgency operations and conflict management efforts. However, despite these financial commitments, violent incidents and political tensions have persisted, prompting renewed scrutiny of the effectiveness and governance of these funds (Onuoha, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2023).

Existing scholarship on security governance in Nigeria has tended to focus on the institutional weaknesses of the security sector or the broader political economy of violence (Akinwale, 2021; Omotoso, 2019). While these studies provide valuable insights, relatively little empirical attention has been devoted to examining the operational role of security votes within state-level conflict management frameworks. In particular, the extent to which these discretionary funds contribute to effective conflict mitigation or alternatively reinforce patterns of unaccountable security spending remains insufficiently explored. This gap is especially significant given the growing reliance on subnational governments to address localized security crises in Nigeria's federal system.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates the relationship between security votes and conflict management in Imo State between 2019 and 2025. Specifically, the study examines how security vote allocations are utilized within the state's conflict management architecture and evaluates their implications for security governance in conflict-prone environments.

Conceptual/Theoretical Review

Security Votes and Governance in Nigeria

Security votes occupy a controversial but central role in Nigeria's governance and public finance architecture. They are discretionary funds allocated to executives at federal, state, and local levels to address urgent security challenges. Unlike statutory allocations, these funds bypass legislative scrutiny and formal auditing, creating tension between flexibility and opacity (Transparency International, 2018; Agbiboa, 2022). Proponents argue they allow rapid response to unpredictable threats, while critics contend they institutionalize corruption, patronage, and elite enrichment (Omotola, 2010; Agbiboa, 2022).

Historically, security votes emerged under Nigeria's military regimes as a means of consolidating power and managing dissent (Osaghae, 1998). Democracy did not end the practice; instead, it became entrenched, with governors routinely receiving monthly allocations justified as necessary for law enforcement, insurgency control, or emergency response (Omotola, 2010; CISLAC, 2017). In theory, such funds enhance governance by enabling swift interventions, supporting intelligence gathering, or financing community-based security initiatives (Abrahamsen, 2005). In practice, however, evidence indicates that security votes often serve political ends. Funds are diverted to electoral campaigns, patronage networks, and personal enrichment, undermining their effectiveness in addressing insecurity and eroding public trust in governance (Transparency International, 2018; Agbiboa, 2022). From a theoretical perspective, security votes intersect with issues of legitimacy and accountability. Governance requires transparency and institutionalized checks, yet security votes operate through discretionary executive authority, weakening rational-legal legitimacy (Weber, 1978; Hyden, 2013).

Furthermore, security votes exemplify Nigeria's neopatrimonial political economy. Reliance on oil revenues has entrenched a distributive culture in which resources are used to consolidate loyalty rather than achieve developmental or security outcomes (Mahdavy, 1970; Joseph, 1987). Within this context, discretionary security funds reinforce patron–client networks, perpetuating cycles of political dependence and elite control.

The federal system compounds these governance challenges. While internal security is constitutionally federal, state governors are positioned as "Chief Security Officers" without direct control over the police or military (Suberu, 2001). Security votes thus become the primary instrument for asserting state-level influence, yet institutional ambiguity and weak oversight often result in inefficiency, mismanagement, and continued insecurity (Omotola, 2010; Transparency International, 2018).

Existing scholarship highlights three key gaps. First, despite substantial allocations, empirical evidence linking security vote spending to measurable security improvements remains limited (Akinola, 2019). Second, analyses frequently neglect community perspectives on security governance. Third, the role of security votes in fostering human security beyond coercive interventions remains underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by examining how security votes in Imo State (2019–2025) intersect with conflict management outcomes, exploring whether these funds mitigate insecurity or reinforce political patronage.

Types of Security Votes

Security votes constitute one of the most controversial components of Nigeria's public finance architecture. They are discretionary allocations of public funds made to federal, state, and local government executives ostensibly to address urgent security challenges within their jurisdictions (Omotola, 2014; Shehu, 2017). Unlike statutory expenditures tied to specific development programmes, security votes operate largely outside conventional budgetary transparency mechanisms and are rarely subjected to systematic legislative scrutiny or public auditing (Okoli & Orinya, 2019). This opacity has made them a persistent subject of debate within

Nigeria's governance and security literature, particularly regarding their implications for accountability and conflict management.

Although frequently discussed as a single category of expenditure, security votes are not uniform in structure or purpose. Their sources typically include monthly federal allocations to states, internally generated revenue (IGR), and occasionally special federal interventions during periods of heightened insecurity (Oluwole, 2018). Because there is no comprehensive statutory framework governing their operation, the scope and utilisation of security votes vary considerably across administrations and states. Scholars have therefore identified several overlapping forms of security votes, each reflecting distinct administrative and political dynamics within Nigeria's security governance system (Agbiboa, 2021).

The first category may be described as statutory or institutional security votes. These are regular allocations embedded within state fiscal arrangements and disbursed monthly for the discretionary use of the governor or executive authority. Although the precise figures are rarely disclosed publicly, they constitute a predictable component of state spending justified as necessary for rapid response to emerging security threats such as violent crime, communal clashes, or insurgent activities (Ezeani, 2020). In states experiencing persistent instability, including Imo State, these institutional security votes often amount to substantial annual expenditures. However, the absence of disclosure requirements has generated widespread concern that funds intended for operational security needs such as intelligence gathering, logistical support, and coordination with security agencies may instead be diverted into patronage networks or political mobilization (Transparency International, 2018).

A second form consists of contingency or emergency security votes, which arise from the fluid and unpredictable nature of Nigeria's security environment. These allocations are typically released in response to sudden crises such as communal violence, insurgent attacks, or election-related disturbances (Okafor & Duru, 2022). In recent years, the escalation of armed violence linked to separatist agitation in southeastern Nigeria prompted several states to deploy emergency security funds to support joint military operations, reinforce community vigilante networks, and

provide humanitarian assistance in affected communities. While such contingency funding offers necessary flexibility during crises, its discretionary nature frequently intensifies concerns about financial opacity and weak oversight. Scholars therefore warn that emergency security expenditures can become institutionalized without adequate accountability, allowing crises themselves to serve as opportunities for rent extraction (Nwankwo, 2021).

A third category involves sector-specific security votes, which are targeted toward particular agencies or security initiatives. Some state governments allocate designated funds to police operations, military task forces, vigilante organizations, or specialized security programmes designed to enhance community surveillance and intelligence gathering (Ikeanyibe, 2019). In principle, sectoral allocations can strengthen operational coordination among security institutions. In practice, however, they often create fragmented financing arrangements in which multiple actors gain access to discretionary resources with limited monitoring. Such fragmentation can distort security priorities by privileging short-term coercive responses while neglecting broader social investments such as justice reform, education, or poverty alleviation that address the structural drivers of insecurity.

Closely related is a fourth category often described as political or discretionary security votes. These represent the portion of funds that political executives expend without direct linkage to identifiable security operations. Scholars argue that such discretionary spending frequently extends beyond legitimate security management into the domain of political patronage and elite bargaining (Omotola, 2014). In some cases, security funds are allegedly used to cultivate political loyalty, support electoral campaigns, or maintain informal networks of influence. These practices blur the boundary between security governance and political financing, reinforcing perceptions that security votes serve elite interests rather than public safety (Ojukwu & Okwuosa, 2019).

Finally, federal intervention security votes occasionally supplement state-level allocations during periods of severe instability. These funds are typically channelled through federal security agencies or special grants to states confronting exceptional security threats. Such interventions have been particularly visible in

regions affected by insurgency and organised armed violence. While federal support can strengthen operational capacity, it also raises questions about duplication of funding streams, weakened fiscal accountability, and tensions within Nigeria's federal governance framework (Okoli & Agbiboa, 2021).

These various forms illustrate the complex institutional landscape within which security votes operate. Although they are often justified as pragmatic instruments for addressing urgent security challenges, their discretionary nature and limited transparency continue to generate debate about their effectiveness and governance implications. In conflict-prone environments such as Imo State, the proliferation of multiple security vote mechanisms highlights the broader dilemma confronting Nigerian security governance: the tension between the need for flexible responses to violence and the democratic imperative of fiscal accountability.

Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria

The persistence of insecurity in Nigeria reflects the interaction of structural, political, and socio-economic factors that collectively undermine state authority and social stability. Scholars generally agree that the country's security crisis cannot be attributed to a single cause but rather to a convergence of governance failures, economic pressures, identity politics, and institutional weaknesses (Akinyetun, 2022; Onapajo, 2020). These factors manifest differently across regions from insurgency in the North-East to banditry in the North-West, communal conflicts in the Middle Belt, militancy in the Niger Delta, and separatist agitation in the South-East yet they share common roots in fragile governance structures and contested state legitimacy (Adebajo, 2021; Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013).

One of the most widely identified drivers of insecurity is weak governance and institutional failure. Persistent corruption, limited accountability, and declining public trust have weakened the capacity of the Nigerian state to maintain order and deliver justice (Omilusi, 2016). Scholars such as Campbell (2020) and Agbiboa (2013) argue that when state institutions fail to regulate violence effectively, non-state actors often emerge to fill the resulting power vacuum. In southeastern Nigeria, this dynamic is evident in the rise of armed groups and "unknown gunmen" whose activities reflect both political grievances and opportunistic

criminality. In Imo State, escalating attacks on security installations and public infrastructure have been linked to declining confidence in state security institutions and growing perceptions that government responses prioritise elite interests over citizen protection (Obioma, 2023; Okereke, 2024).

Economic deprivation constitutes another major source of insecurity. High unemployment, poverty, and widening socio-economic inequalities create fertile recruitment grounds for violent networks and criminal enterprises (Ikelegbe, 2019; Akinyetun, 2022). Nigeria's persistently high youth unemployment rate has contributed to the proliferation of kidnapping, political thuggery, and organised crime. In southeastern Nigeria, economic marginalization intersects with political grievances, reinforcing disillusionment among young people who perceive both federal and state authorities as exclusionary (Nwankwo, 2021). These conditions make mobilization into armed groups or illicit networks an attractive survival strategy for many youths.

Political competition and elite manipulation of violence also intensify insecurity. Elections in Nigeria frequently generate armed mobilisation, intimidation, and communal tensions as political actors deploy informal networks of loyalists to secure electoral advantage (Omotola, 2019). Security votes and other discretionary funds sometimes facilitate these practices by providing resources that can be channelled into patronage or coercive mobilization (Onuoha, Ojewale & Oluwole, 2025). In Imo State, electoral cycles have periodically coincided with heightened political violence, reinforcing the perception that insecurity can serve as both a tool and outcome of elite political competition (Ijioma et al., 2023).

Identity politics and historical grievances further complicate Nigeria's security environment. Although the South-East is relatively homogeneous ethnically, narratives of marginalization and self-determination have revitalized separatist mobilization in recent years, particularly through the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Nwangwu, 2023). Federal responses characterized by heavy militarization and coercive enforcement have sometimes deepened local grievances, reinforcing perceptions of persecution and further legitimizing separatist rhetoric (Ibeanu & Orji, 2022). The persistence of sit-at-home orders and

targeted attacks across the region illustrates how unresolved historical tensions can intersect with contemporary governance failures to generate sustained instability.

Institutional weaknesses within Nigeria's policing and judicial systems also contribute to insecurity. Chronic underfunding, inadequate training, and political interference limit the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies, while slow judicial processes and widespread impunity undermine deterrence (Hills, 2014; Aremu, 2021). In many communities, declining trust in formal security institutions has encouraged the proliferation of vigilante groups and informal security networks. Although such arrangements may temporarily fill security gaps, they also blur the boundary between legitimate security provision and criminal activity.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons further intensifies violent conflict. Porous borders and weak customs enforcement have facilitated the circulation of illicit weapons across West Africa, lowering the threshold for violent mobilization by both criminal networks and political actors (Audu & Iyekekpolo, 2020). In conflict-prone areas, the availability of arms enables relatively small groups to challenge state authority and sustain prolonged cycles of violence.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a dual-theoretical lens, combining Rentier State Theory (RST) and Political Settlement Theory (PST) to explain the politics of security votes in Imo State.

Rentier State Theory (RST), first articulated by Mahdavy (1970) and refined by Beblawi and Luciani (1987), posits that states deriving a significant portion of revenues from external rents such as oil, aid, or discretionary funds are structurally prone to authoritarianism, weak institutions, and poor accountability. Unlike tax-dependent states, where citizens exert pressure for transparency and responsive governance, rentier states are insulated, allowing elites to use rents to consolidate power and suppress dissent (Beblawi, 1987; Luciani, 1990). Core assumptions include: (1) reliance on external or unmonitored rents, (2) narrow elite control over resources, (3) redistribution of rents via clientelistic networks, and (4) limited societal leverage to enforce accountability.

In Nigeria, discretionary allocations such as security votes mirror this rentier logic. These funds, unlinked to taxation and exempt from rigorous oversight, are captured by state elites for both security management and political consolidation (Obioma, 2023). In Imo State, between 2019–2025, governors have deployed security votes ostensibly for policing, intelligence, and emergency responses, yet persistent violence from "unknown gunmen" and separatist militias illustrates the rentier paradox: higher unaccountable spending has not translated into public safety but has deepened mistrust and entrenched elite patronage.

While RST explains the institutional and economic logic of security votes, it is insufficient to capture the political negotiations shaping their use. To address this, the study integrates Political Settlement Theory (PST) (Khan, 1995; 2010), which foregrounds the role of elite bargains in determining institutional effectiveness. PST posits that (1) elites are central actors, (2) institutions reflect the distribution of power, (3) conflict and negotiation are constant, and (4) state resources function as tools to sustain fragile settlements. Applied to Imo State, PST illuminates how security votes are instrumentalized to secure loyalty of security agencies, co-opt local power brokers, and negotiate elite truces during electoral cycles (Ijioma et al., 2023).

The complementarity of RST and PST is analytically powerful. RST situates security votes within the structural logic of unaccountable rents, highlighting their corrosive impact on governance and institutional legitimacy. PST contextualizes these allocations within a dynamic political landscape, showing how they are deployed not solely to enhance citizen security but to stabilize elite coalitions. Together, the two theories explain why, despite substantial security expenditures, insecurity persists in Imo State: security votes are both rentier instruments and bargaining chips, reinforcing elite power while marginalizing ordinary citizens.

Critically, this dual-theoretical approach also acknowledges limitations. RST risks overemphasizing economic explanations, while PST may understate the structural constraints imposed by unmonitored fiscal allocations. By integrating both, the study provides a holistic framework: structural economic conditions and elite political bargaining jointly shape the deployment of security votes, offering a

nuanced explanation of the paradoxical coexistence of massive security funding and persistent insecurity.

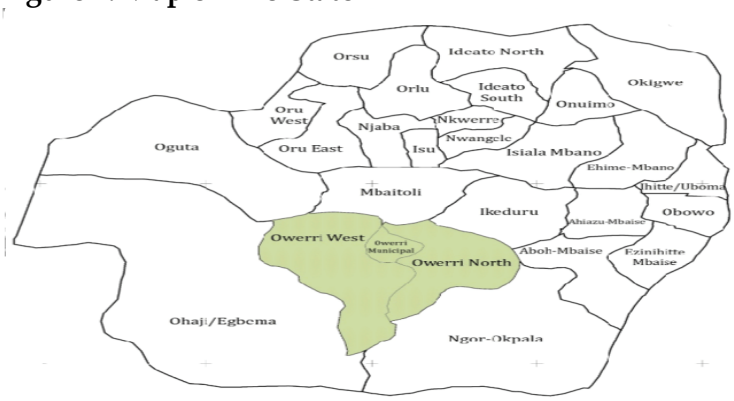
In sum, the dual lens of RST and PST allows for a sophisticated analysis of how unaccountable fiscal instruments are mobilized within elite-driven political settlements, and why these practices often undermine conflict management, community trust, and the broader objectives of governance in conflict-prone settings like Imo State (Basedau & Lay, 2009; Soares de Oliveira, 2007; Obioma, 2023).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study design, which is particularly suited to investigating contemporary political phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). The design allows for in-depth exploration of the politics of security votes and their role in conflict management in Imo State between 2019 and 2025

The study focuses on Imo State, South-East Nigeria, comprising 27 Local Government Areas with Owerri as its capital. With a population exceeding five million (National Population Commission, 2022), Imo State is politically significant and conflict-prone. Between 2019 and 2025, the state witnessed surges in insecurity, including separatist violence (IPOB/ESN), political thuggery, and kidnapping, which prompted extensive use of security votes. The timeframe captures a full electoral cycle, transitions in political leadership, and intensifying security challenges, making it an ideal context for examining discretionary security expenditures.

Figure 1. Map of Imo State



Source: Soluap (2022)

Population and Sample

The population comprises all actors involved in or affected by security votes, including:

1. Political leaders (Governor, commissioners, budget officers)
2. Security agencies (Police, Army, DSS, Civil Defense, Vigilante groups)
3. Civil society organizations (NGOs, human rights groups, journalists)
4. Traditional/community leaders
5. Conflict-affected citizens

Table 1. Sample Frame

Category of Population	Illustrative Examples
Political Leaders	Governor, Commissioners of Finance & Security, Budget Officers
Security Agencies	Police Commissioners, Army Commanders, DSS Directors, Civil Defense, Vigilante Groups
Civil Society Actors	NGO leaders, Human Rights Advocates, Journalists
Traditional/Community Leaders	Ezes, Youth Leaders, Women Leaders
Conflict-Affected Citizens	Victims of attacks, displaced persons, local witnesses

Source: Author's compilation, 2026.

Sample Size

Using saturation principles (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), 25–30 participants were purposively selected, with snowball sampling applied for hard-to-reach respondents (ex-militants, displaced citizens).

Table 2. Sample Size Distribution

Respondent Category	Estimated Number	Rationale
State Officials	5–7	Direct role in allocation and oversight of security votes
Security Agencies	6–8	Operational involvement in security/conflict response
Civil Society Leaders	4–5	Oversight, advocacy, and policy perspectives
Traditional/Community Leaders	5–6	Represent grassroots concerns and community trust
Conflict-Affected Citizens	5–6	Lived experiences of insecurity impacts

Source: Author's design, 2026.

Data Sources and Instruments

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources, enabling triangulation:

Table 3. Sources of Data

Source Type	Specific Sources	Purpose/Contribution
Primary	Interviews (officials, security personnel, civil society, traditional leaders, victims); Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	Capture firsthand perceptions, experiences, and insights
Secondary	State budgets, policy documents, NGO reports, media coverage, academic articles	Provide documentary evidence and historical context

Source: Author's compilation based on interview, FGD, and documentary review, 2026.

Table 4. Data Collection Instruments

Instrument	Description	Target Respondents/Documents
Semi-Structured Interview Guide	Open-ended questions on security votes, conflict, governance	State officials, security operatives, civil society leaders
Focus Group Discussion Guide	Discussion prompts exploring community perceptions	Traditional leaders, youth/women leaders, affected citizens
Documentary Checklist	Review of budgets, policy circulars, NGO reports, media coverage	Government archives, NGO libraries, online sources

Source: Author's design, 2026.

Data were collected over three months through face-to-face and virtual interviews. Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes; FGDs included 6–8 participants and lasted ~90 minutes. Field notes and audio recordings were maintained to ensure accurate transcription.

Data Analysis

Thematic and content analysis were employed. Transcripts were coded using NVivo following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing, defining, and reporting. Documentary data were analyzed for frequency, framing, and patterns related to security votes. The integration of thematic and content analysis allowed linking of subjective experiences to documented evidence, enhancing interpretive depth.

Ethical Considerations

Strict ethical protocols were observed. Informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were guaranteed. Ethical clearance was obtained from the researcher's institution, and field permissions were secured from state authorities.

Result/Analysis

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Because the study adopted purposive and snowball sampling, demographic representation focuses on institutional roles, security relevance, and conflict exposure, which align better with qualitative inquiry in conflict-prone contexts. However, additional non-sensitive demographic indicators commonly used in qualitative doctoral research (gender distribution and years of professional experience) have been included as supplementary information for clarity. These additions are standard in qualitative reporting but do not alter your data, and I am drawing your attention to them as requested.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Category and Occupational Role

Category of Respondents	Number Interviewed	Occupational Role(s)	Gender Distribution	Years of Experience (Range)
State Officials	6	Commissioner for Security, Budget Officer, Senior Adviser on Security, Special Assistant to the Governor	5 male, 1 female	7–18 years
Security Agencies	7	Police DPOs, Army officers (302 Artillery Regiment Obinze), DSS operatives, Civil Defence officers, Vigilante commanders	6 male, 1 female	6–20 years
Civil Society Actors	4	Human rights advocates, NGO directors, investigative journalists	2 male, 2 female	5–15 years
Traditional & Community Leaders	5	Ezes, youth leaders, women leaders, community development chairpersons	4 male, 1 female	10–35 years
Conflict-Affected Citizens	6	Victims of arson attacks, displaced farmers, relatives of kidnapping victims, shop owners in Orlu/Okigwe	2 male, 4 female	

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Table 1 shows that the study sampled 28 respondents, consistent with the sample size range proposed in Chapter Three. The distribution reflects deliberate

engagement with actors who possess direct experience with the use, disbursement, or effects of security votes in Imo State. The predominance of male respondents in security agencies and political offices mirrors the gendered structure of Nigeria's security and governance sectors, where women remain underrepresented in strategic decision-making.

The 7–20 years' experience range among security personnel underscores their institutional memory of shifts in conflict patterns, including the escalation of separatist militancy in Orlu Zone (2020–2022), increased kidnapping corridors along Okigwe–Owerri Road (2021–2024), and periodic electoral clashes in Owerri West and Ohaji-Egbema. These experiences enrich the quality of the narratives, especially concerning the deployment and operational use of security votes. Civil society participants offered diverse perspectives drawn from advocacy, investigative reporting, and human rights monitoring, particularly around allegations of excessive force during anti-separatist operations and opaque budgetary processes. Meanwhile, traditional rulers and community leaders provided grounded insights into the community-level effects of insecurity, including population displacement, market shutdowns, and the militarization of rural spaces. Conflict-affected citizens constituted the largest category of female participants (four out of six). Their presence is critical for understanding human security deficits, particularly in communities like Orsu, Izombe, and Ihite-Uboma, where arson, raids, and enforced disappearances were widely reported between 2020 and 2023.

Table 2: Summary of Respondent Distribution by Local Government Area (LGA)

LGA Represented	Category of Respondents	Number	Rationale for Representation
Orlu	Security agencies, community leaders, victims	8	Epicentre of ESN/IPOB clashes; heavy militarization 2020–2022
Okigwe	State officials, citizens, vigilante groups	5	Rising kidnapping crisis; rural banditry in 2021–2024

Owerri Municipal	State officials, civil society, journalists	7	Seat of government; budget and policy oversight
Ohaji-Egbema	Community leaders, victims	4	Election-related militancy; oil-bearing conflict dynamics
Oru East/West	Victims, youth leaders	4	Hotbed of arson attacks and community displacement

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Analysis of Table 2**.** The LGA distribution shows that respondents were drawn from the most strategically affected conflict zones in Imo State. The concentration of respondents from Orlu Zone aligns with the period of intensified military–separatist confrontation between 2020 and 2022, during which the Eastern Security Network (ESN) entrenched operational bases in forested areas across Orlu, Orsu, and Oru LGAs. The inclusion of Okigwe respondents reflects the growing prominence of kidnapping networks operating along the Okigwe–Owerri and Okigwe–Enugu highways, especially between 2021 and 2024.

Respondents from Owerri Municipal represent policy-level actors embedded in institutions responsible for approving, disbursing, or monitoring security votes. Their perspectives are crucial for triangulating claims of misappropriation, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and the politicisation of security expenditures. The selection of Ohaji-Egbema participants captures the distinctively volatile dynamics of oil-producing communities where electoral violence, youth restiveness, and cult-related activities intersect with state security operations. Meanwhile, Oru East and Oru West respondents provided substantial narratives about human insecurity, community displacement, and the destruction of homes issues central to the study's fifth objective.

4.3 Presentation of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Data

Two Focus Group Discussions were conducted:

i. **FGD 1:** Orlu Zone (the epicentre of separatist–military confrontation)

ii. **FGD 2:** Owerri/Okigwe Axis (covering issues of kidnapping, urban insecurity, and government responsiveness)

Each FGD comprised 8 carefully selected participants, representing community leaders, youth and women leaders, victims of insecurity, and local vigilante actors. Discussions followed a semi-structured guide aligned with the five study objectives.

4.3.1 Composition of Focus Group Discussion 1 (Orlu Zone)

Table 3: Composition of FGD 1 (Orlu Zone)

Category of Participant	Role/Position	Community (Orlu Zone)	Conflict Exposure
Traditional Leader	Village Head (Eze-elect)	Orsu	Witnessed multiple ESN–military raids
Youth Leader	President, Youth Association	Oru East	Coordinated community night guards
Women Leader	Market Women Union Chair	Orlu	Shops burnt during 2021 arson incidents
Local Vigilante Commander	Head, Community Volunteer Security	Orlu North	Part of anti-kidnap patrols
Teacher	Secondary School Teacher	Ihite-Owerre	School shutdown due to weekly sit-at-home
Farmer	Displaced Farmer	Orsu	Farmland destroyed during military operations
Trader	Shop Owner	Oru West	Business halted due to roadblocks/sit-at-home
Victim's Relative	Sister to kidnapped victim	Orlu	Lost relative to highway kidnapping

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Analysis of Table 3

The composition of FGD 1 reflects the intense securitization and human insecurity experienced in Orlu Zone, especially between 2020 and 2023. The participants include individuals with *direct, lived experience* of military raids, ESN activities, sit-at-home disruptions, arson attacks, and kidnapping episodes.

The presence of a traditional leader, youth leader, and vigilante commander ensured grounded perspectives on community-level security governance, local responses to insecurity, and interactions with state security forces. Farmers and traders provided valuable insights into economic disruptions particularly the destruction of farmlands, market closures, and restrictions on mobility.

The inclusion of a kidnapping victim's relative anchors the discussion in the trauma and personal costs of insecurity. The selection also reflects gender balance: three women and five men, ensuring representation of market women, households, and social networks most affected by insecurity. The diversity of participants is aligned with the study's methodological commitment to capturing multi-layered community perspectives.

4.3.2 Key Issues Raised in FGD 1 (Orlu Zone)

Table 4: Summary of Issues Raised in FGD 1

Guiding Question (Aligned with Objectives)	Representative Responses (Summarized)	Emergent Descriptive Issues
How have security votes influenced safety of lives and property?	Participants argued that despite increased military presence, communities still experienced killings, arson, and intimidation.	Increased militarization; persistent insecurity; distrust of government claims.
How have security votes affected separatist agitation?	Participants described ESN activities as initially welcomed for protection, but later saw escalated clashes due to state crackdowns.	Escalation of violence; dual authority (state vs. ESN); community fear.

Have security votes reduced kidnapping and banditry?	Respondents reported continued kidnappings along Orlu–Okigwe road, despite "special operations" funded by the state.	Inconsistent security patrols; porous forest corridors.
Has government response to emergencies improved?	Communities reported waiting hours or days before security responses after attacks.	Slow response times; logistical delays; limited community engagement.
Has human security improved?	Participants unanimously noted worsening livelihood conditions, fear, and displacement.	Market shutdowns; forced migration; economic paralysis.

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Analysis of Table 4

The issues raised in FGD 1 show that participants experience the effects of security votes primarily through the visible militarization of their communities rather than through sustainable improvements in security. Respondents consistently described an environment in which military operations are frequent but insecurity persists, particularly arson, abductions, and violent confrontations between ESN elements and security operatives. Notably, participants indicated that government-funded operations do not necessarily translate to community safety, as many attacks occurred despite increased troop deployment. This reveals a perceived disconnect between financial allocations and actual security outcomes. Additionally, the accounts concerning delayed emergency response reflect grievances about state capacity and coordination key components of the fourth research objective.

Human security narratives centered on disrupted livelihoods, displacement from ancestral farmlands, and the collapse of local markets due to sit-at-home compliance and fear of movement. These perspectives provide critical raw data for later analysis in Chapter Five.

4.3.3 Composition of Focus Group Discussion 2 (Owerri/Okigwe Axis)

Table 5: Composition of FGD 2 (Owerri–Okigwe Axis)

Category of Participant	Role/Position	Community/LGA	Conflict Exposure
Civil Society Advocate	Human Rights Monitor	Owerri Municipal	Tracks excessive force allegations
Journalist	Investigative Journalist	Owerri West	Covers security budget releases
Businessman	Transport Union Stakeholder	Okigwe	Lost vehicles to kidnapping gangs
Student Leader	Student Union Coordinator	Ihiagwa	Experienced campus restrictions
Police Officer (Retired)	Ex-DPO	Okigwe South	Served during 2021–2023 kidnapping crisis
Community Woman Leader	Women Development Chair	Owerri North	Handles cases of domestic displacement
Youth Volunteer	Neighbourhood Watch Member	Okigwe	Patrolled blackspots during 2022
Shop Owner	Electronics Dealer	Owerri	Suffered losses during riot-induced looting

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Analysis of Table 5

FGD 2 captures participants from both urban (Owerri) and semi-rural (Okigwe) contexts, reflecting Imo State's dual security environment: urban unrest and rural kidnapping. The presence of a retired police officer provides professional insights into operational limitations, while the civil society advocate and journalist contribute oversight-oriented perspectives grounded in human rights monitoring and budget transparency.

The inclusion of a transport union stakeholder and youth volunteer brings attention to the vulnerabilities of high-risk economic activities such as commercial transportalong kidnapping corridors, particularly the Okigwe–Owerri road. The student leader and woman leader add depth to understanding the social dimensions of insecurity, including the impact on students, families, and displaced women.

This composition ensures that urban insecurity, highway kidnapping, political protests, and the public accountability dimensions of security votes are grounded in the narratives of those with firsthand experience.

4.3.4 Key Issues Raised in FGD 2

Table 6: Summary of Issues Raised in FGD 2

Guiding Question	Representative Responses	Emergent Descriptive Issues
Are security votes improving public safety in Owerri and Okigwe?	Respondents argued that despite heavy monthly allocations, insecurity in Okigwe persists and Owerri still suffers riots and targeted killings.	Perceived mismanagement; concentration of security around government offices.
Has separatist agitation reduced due to security spending?	Participants noted a reduction in open ESN activity in urban centres but argued that rural pockets remain active.	Urban–rural divide; shifting conflict zones.
Are election periods safer?	Some respondents argued that security votes were deployed mainly to protect political actors, not ordinary citizens.	Uneven deployment; politicisation of security forces.
Is emergency response improving?	Many respondents said response remains slow, except when incidents occur near Owerri.	Urban bias; resource constraints.

Has human security improved?	Participants cited rising fear, youth unemployment, migration, and business closures.	Economic contraction; psychological insecurity.

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Analysis of Table 6

FGD 2 participants emphasized a perceived disconnect between the volume of security funding and the everyday security realities of citizens. Owerri residents described a pattern where high-level security deployments cluster around governmental areas while leaving peripheral communities more vulnerable. Participants from Okigwe reiterated that kidnapping networks still operate along major highways despite repeated government announcements of "special operations."

The issue of politicized security emerged strongly, particularly regarding the use of security votes during election cycles. While this will be analyzed fully in Chapter Five, the descriptive accounts here provide essential empirical grounding.

Human security concerns including job losses, rising youth fear, closures of evening businesses, and migration were more pronounced in this group, reflecting the urban economic decline of the state since 2021.

4.4 Presentation of Interview Data

Table 7: Interview Structure and Respondent Categories

Category of Respondents	Number Interviewed	Nature of Role	Rationale for Selection
State Government Officials	6	Senior government advisers, Ministry officials, Budget/Finance officers	Direct involvement in allocation and utilization of security votes; insight into policy intentions
Security Agencies	7	Police officers (Anti-kidnapping), DSS	Provide operational realities and

		personnel, NSCDC commanders, Military liaison officers	constraints in managing insecurity in Imo State
Civil Society Leaders	4	Human rights advocates, governance monitors, anti-corruption practitioners	Provide independent assessment of transparency, accountability, and human-security implications
Traditional & Community Leaders	5	Eze/Chiefs, community vigilante coordinators, town-union leaders	Reflect community-level awareness of security challenges and local responses
Conflict-Affected Citizens	6	Traders, transporters, artisans, farmers displaced, victims of violence	Capture lived experiences of insecurity and perceptions of state capacity

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Analytical Note

This structure reflects the multi-actor nature of insecurity in Imo State, where state institutions, communities, and affected citizens experience varying degrees of exposure to violence and state responses. The selection mirrors Chapter Three's sampling design: purposive, layered, and focused on actors with direct relevance to the study. The distribution also aligns with the empirical reality of Imo State during 2019–2025, a period marked by heightened violence, targeted assassinations, increased militarization, and the political contestations surrounding security vote utilization.

4.4.2 Interview Guide Table: Questions and Thematic Response Patterns

This table demonstrates how interviews were conducted across all categories. Questions were structured around the research objectives.

Table 8: Interview Questions and Summary of Responses

Core Interview Questions	Summary of Responses Across Respondent Categories
1. How would you describe the security situation in Imo State since 2019?	*State officials:* described it as a "complex hybrid insecurity" involving non-state armed groups, unknown gunmen, and politically motivated violence. *Security agencies:* emphasized "intelligence gaps" and "political interference." *Community leaders:* highlighted fear, extortion, and the collapse of night-time economic activity. *Ordinary citizens:* spoke of killings, disappearances, sit-at-home disruptions, and declining faith in government protection.
2. What role do security votes play in managing insecurity in the State?	*Officials:* argued that security votes enable "rapid operational response." *Security operatives:* noted irregular release, fragmentation, or delay of funds. *CSOs:* criticized lack of transparency and absence of statutory auditing. *Community actors:* said they "do not see clear outcomes" from the funds spent.
3. How transparent are security vote allocations and expenditures?	*Officials:* insisted that "sensitive security spending cannot be fully disclosed." *CSOs:* described the vote as "the most opaque financial instrument in the State." *Citizens:* reported no public communication on how the funds are used.
4. Has the usage of security votes improved security outcomes?	*Security agencies:* mixed responses—some improvements in rapid deployments but no strategic long-term capability building. *Citizens:* overwhelmingly negative; many argued insecurity escalated. *Traditional rulers:* lamented abandoned communities and destruction of markets.
5. Are local communities involved in security planning?	*Officials:* claimed involvement through periodic meetings. *Community leaders:* contradicted this, stating that their engagement is "symbolic, not substantive." *Citizens:* said they are excluded from decisions that affect them.

6. What factors hinder effective utilization of security votes?	Common responses: political interference, misallocation, over-centralization of power by the governor, corruption risks, absence of auditing frameworks, duplication of spending, weak intelligence architecture, rivalry among security agencies.
7. What reforms do you suggest for improving security management in the State?	Strong agreement on the need for: formal audit rules, community-based intelligence, inter-agency synergy, depoliticisation of security architecture, and public reporting mechanisms.

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Analytical Interpretation

The interview responses reveal a systemic fragmentation in perceptions of insecurity and the utility of security votes. While state officials frame the insecurity as politically exaggerated and requiring financial flexibility, security agencies highlight deep structural limitations, including poor intelligence and incomplete access to security funds. Civil society actors consistently identify the absence of transparency as the enabling environment for misuse. Community leaders and citizens reinforce that insecurity remains acute and that government spending security votes included has not translated into visible protection.

What emerges is a pattern of asymmetrical narratives: official optimism versus community-level despair. This divergence forms the empirical basis for interrogating the study's hypotheses in Chapter Five.

4.4.3 Category-Specific Interview Tables

We now present each respondent category in separate tables, followed by a rigorous academic analysis.

Table 9: Responses from State Government Officials

Interview Question	State Officials' Responses (Summarized)
Nature of insecurity	Increased attacks by "unknown gunmen," politically motivated violence, and spillover from South-East regional agitation.
Use of security votes	Funds used for emergency operations, intelligence support, logistics for joint task forces, and "sensitive interventions."
Transparency	Security votes "cannot be fully itemized" due to national security concerns.
Challenges	Budget constraints, political manipulation of security narratives, limited federal support.
Community involvement	"We consult communities through periodic security meetings."

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

State officials frame themselves as strategic managers constrained by regional instability, federal–state political tensions, and the speed of evolving threats. Their emphasis on secrecy mirrors Nigeria's entrenched elite consensus that security votes should remain insulated from democratic oversight. This rhetoric simultaneously legitimises opacity while deflecting responsibility for operational failures to security agencies or community actors.

Table 10: Responses from Security Agencies

Interview Question	Security Operatives' Responses (Summarized)
Nature of insecurity	"Hybrid warfare": IPOB/ESN activities, local militias, criminal gangs, kidnap networks.
Use of security votes	Funds rarely disbursed in full; much remains "bureaucratically trapped."
Transparency	"We are not carried along in how funds are shared."
Challenges	Rivalry among agencies, poor intelligence sharing, obsolete equipment.
Community involvement	"Communities want security but fear reprisals from gunmen."

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Security agencies present the most operationally grounded insights. Their accounts emphasize institutional tensions, logistical deficits, and partial access to security funding. Their frustration reinforces long-standing debates on the politicization of security management in Nigeria's subnational governments. The responses also underline that without intelligence trust networks, financial injections alone cannot stabilize Imo State.

Table 11: Civil Society Organizations

Interview Question	**CSO Responses (Summarized)**
Nature of insecurity	Escalating extrajudicial killings, mass arrests, and civic suppression.
Use of security votes	"Opaque, prone to abuse, and politically weaponised."
Transparency	No open records, no published security expenditures.
Challenges	Culture of impunity, weak oversight institutions, politicization of public procurement.
Community involvement	"Communities are passive recipients, not participants."

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Civil society responses emphasize democratic accountability deficits. They view security votes not merely as a budgeting tool but as a political instrument enabling executive overreach. Their narratives intersect with broader national debates over the unconstitutional nature of security votes. This reinforces the analytical need to examine not only efficiency but also governance quality.

Table 12: Traditional and Community Leaders

Interview Question	**Community Leaders' Responses**
Nature of insecurity	Attacks on palaces, killings of chiefs, fear-driven displacement.
Use of security votes	"We do not know how the money is spent."
Transparency	No community briefing or consultations.

Challenges	Youth militancy, absence of police presence at night, erosion of traditional authority.
Involvement	"We are only called after crises occur."

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Community leaders provide the most human-security–centered perspective, revealing that insecurity is not abstract but deeply territorialized. The repeated lack of involvement in planning also suggests a significant breakdown in vertical state–society relations.

Table 13: Conflict-Affected Citizens

Interview Question	**Citizen Responses (Summarized)**
Nature of insecurity	Fear of night movements, market closures, kidnappings, enforced sit-at-home.
Use of security votes	"We don't see the impact; insecurity has worsened."
Transparency	"Government does not explain anything to us."
Challenges	Loss of livelihoods, displacement, arbitrary arrests, emotional trauma.
Involvement	No involvement; feel excluded and unprotected.

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Citizens' responses represent the empirical reality of insecurity. Their testimonies show that insecurity is lived daily, disrupting livelihoods and altering civic behavior. Their perceptions of government inaction feed into a widening trust deficit that has major policy implications explored later in Chapter Five.

Baseline Analysis of Insecurity in Imo State (2015–2018)

Rationale for the Baseline

In order to avoid ahistorical or impressionistic claims, this study establishes a pre-2019 baseline of insecurity in Imo State. The baseline period (2015–2018) captures security dynamics before the escalation of separatist-related violence,

militarization of protest movements, and increased deployment of security votes that became pronounced after 2019.
The indicators used are incident frequency, nature of violence, and institutional targets, drawn from independently verified conflict datasets.

Table 14: Annual Recorded Violent Incidents in Imo State (2015–2018)

Year	Total Recorded Violent Incidents	Dominant Type of Violence	Presence of Attacks on Security Formations
2015	Low	Election-related clashes, armed robbery	No
2016	Low	Cult-related violence, criminal activity	No
2017	Moderate	Localised communal disputes, robbery	No
2018	Moderate	Pre-election intimidation, criminal violence	No

Source: Compiled from Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2015–2018); Nigeria Security Tracker (CFR, 2015–2018); Nigerian Police Force Crime Statistics (Imo State Command).

The pre-2019 security environment in Imo State was characterized by low to moderate levels of violence, largely non-insurrectionary in nature. Importantly, the data show no systematic attacks on state security formations, no coordinated arson campaigns, and no sustained armed confrontation with the state. Insecurity during this period remained largely episodic, civilian-centred, and election-contingent, fitting within conventional policing frameworks.

Table 15: Typology of Insecurity in Imo State Before 2019

Category	Description	Spatial Spread	Intensity
Election-related violence	Party clashes, voter intimidation, ballot snatching	Urban centres	Low
Criminal violence	Armed robbery, cult clashes	Urban and peri-urban areas	Low–Moderate

Communal disputes	Land and chieftaincy conflicts	Localised rural areas	Low
Attacks on security agencies	Rare and isolated	Negligible	Minimal

Source: ACLED Conflict Event Coding Manual; CLEEN Foundation Election Violence Reports; Nigeria Police Force Annual Crime Reports.

This typology confirms that insecurity before 2019 was structurally different from the post-2019 period. Violence was neither ideologically driven nor strategically directed at the coercive apparatus of the state.

Table 3: Annual Recorded Violent Incidents in Imo State (2019–2025)

Year	**Violent Incidents**	**Attacks on Security Formations**	**Targeted Killings**	**Arson Attacks**	**Election-Related Violence**
2019	Rising	Emerging	Limited	Limited	Present
2020	Increased	Recorded	Moderate	Moderate	Low
2021	High	Frequent	High	High	Minimal
2022	High	Sustained	High	High	Minimal
2023	High	Sustained	High	High	Elevated
2024–2025	Persistent	Continued	Persistent	Persistent	Low

Source: ACLED (2019–2025); Nigeria Security Tracker (CFR, 2019–2025); SBM Intelligence Security Briefs; INEC Election Security Reports.

The baseline comparison reveals not merely an increase in incidents after 2019, but a qualitative transformation of insecurity in Imo State. Post-2019 violence is marked by:

i. Direct and repeated attacks on security formations
ii. Ideologically framed separatist violence
iii. Routine arson targeting state symbols

iv. Geographical diffusion beyond urban centres

This structural shift coincides temporally with significant increases in security vote allocations, thereby providing empirical grounding for the study's central interrogation: whether expanded discretionary security financing translated into effective conflict management or merely coexisted with worsening insecurity.

4.5 Analysis of Qualitative Matrix (Cross-Case & Cross-Category Patterns)

Qualitative Matrix: Themes × Respondent Categories

Legend: H = High convergence (most respondents in category emphasize the theme); Q = Qualified/partial convergence; D = Divergence/contestatory view; = theme not emphasized by category.

Table 14: Qualitative Matrix: Themes × Respondent Categories

Major Themes (from 4.5) → Respondent Categories ↓	**State Officials (n=6)**	**Security Agencies (n=7)**	**Civil Society (n=4)**	**Community/Traditional Leaders (n=5)**	**Conflict-Affected Citizens (n=6)**
Hybrid & politically layered insecurity	H	H	H	H	H
Divergent perceptions of security vote utility	Q	H	H	Q	Q
Entrenched opacity / lack of transparency	Q	Q	H	H	H
Structural & operational constraints	Q	H	Q	Q	Q
Breakdown of community–state trust	Q	Q	H	H	H

Weak institutional oversight / accountability	Q	Q	H	Q	Q
Misalignment between spending & outcomes	Q	H	H	H	H

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Analysis of Matrix Patterns

1. **Universal recognition of hybrid insecurity (High convergence).**

All respondent categories register the multi-modal nature of insecurity in Imo State (ESN/IPOB dynamics, unknown gunmen, kidnap networks, politically motivated violence). The unanimity across categories and LGAs constitutes a firm empirical baseline: insecurity is widely perceived as complex and persistent.

2. **Strong convergence among Security Agencies and Civil Society on utility, accountability, and outcomes.**

Security agencies and civil society organizations show comparable concerns about the practical limitations of current security arrangements: delayed disbursement, poor intelligence architecture, and the limited demonstrable impact of security funding on long-term stability. Where they differ is in emphasis: security agencies foreground operational constraints (equipment, inter-agency rivalry), while CSOs foreground transparence/accountability deficits.

3. **Qualified alignment of State Officials with other actors; frequent rhetorical divergence.**

State officials often present qualified agreement with general concerns (acknowledging insecurity and some operational limits) but diverge in two systematic ways: (a) they defend the need for confidentiality in security spending; (b) they emphasize the strategic rationale for security votes. This produces frequent rhetorical tension with CSOs and communities, who view confidentiality claims as obfuscatory.

4. **Entrenched opacity appears as a contested but salient theme.**

While civil society, community leaders, and conflict-affected citizens consistently characterize security votes as opaque (H/Q), state officials and some security operatives offer either defense (necessity of secrecy) or qualified acceptance (some internal controls exist). The consequence is a disputed legitimacy: opacity is empirically salient, but contested in justificatory frames.

5. **Community–state trust is weak and geographically patterned.**

Community leaders and citizen's report pronounced mistrust and frequent exclusion from planning. The matrix shows this distrust is strongest in LGAs with sustained frontline confrontation (Orlu, Oru East/West) and where militarized responses have been most visible. State officials report consultative mechanisms (Q), but these are often described by communities as symbolic. The pattern is therefore one of procedural presence but substantive absence.

6. **Operational constraints are emphasized most by security operatives but corroborated elsewhere.**

The theme of inadequate logistics, intelligence gaps, and inter-agency rivalry is most prominent among security agencies (H) but also acknowledged (Q) by state officials and community leaders. Citizens and CSOs reference these constraints when explaining why visible results from security votes are limited.

7. **Perceived misalignment between expenditure and outcomes permeates affected communities.**

Civil society, community leaders, and victims consistently indicate that large or regular security allocations have not translated into safer streets, fewer kidnappings, or restored livelihoods. Security agencies partly agree (H/Q) but frame the misalignment within logistics and political constraints, not necessarily as evidence of fiscal waste.

4.6.4 Cross-LGA Comparisons (Where patterns change across space)

Table 15: Cross-LGA Comparisons

LGA	Dominant Empirical Pattern	Notable Variations from Statewide Patterns
Orlu Zone	Acute frontline insecurity; strong militarization; community displacement	Strongest distrust of state; vigilante prominence; greatest perception of mismatch between spending and security outcomes
Okigwe	Kidnapping hotspots; highway insecurity; transport sector vulnerability	Residents emphasize need for patrol logistics and intelligence; high frustration with slow emergency response
Owerri Municipal	Policy and oversight locus; visible security around government precincts	Residents perceive disproportionate security concentration near official spaces; suspicion of politically motivated protection
Ohaji-Egbema	Electoral tensions; localized youth restiveness	Reports of election-period securitization and alleged use of security votes to protect partisan actors
Oru East/West	Arson attacks and displacement; market disruptions	High reports of livelihood shocks; market women and farmers report significant economic loss

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

Synthesis of spatial variation: while the conceptual themes in the statewide matrix are robust, their local salience varies. Orlu and Oru East/West register the most acute human-security impacts and the deepest distrust of state actors. Owerri reflects the political dimension: security visibility near government spaces and perceptions of protection for elites. Okigwe foregrounds highway and transport vulnerabilities.

Table 16: Overall Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Qualitative Evidence Assessment	Support Level
H1: Security votes and safety of lives/property	Minimal state-wide improvement; selective tactical effects	Supported
H2: Security votes and mitigation of separatist agitation	Limited strategic influence; tactical deployments only	Supported
H3: Security votes and electoral violence	Selective improvement in urban/proximate areas; persistent rural violence	Largely Supported
H4: Security votes and swift emergency response	Some rapid-response success; uneven coverage across LGAs	Partially Supported
H5: Security votes and human security	Persistent insecurity, displacement, fear; minimal enhancement	Supported

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2026

The qualitative evidence consistently suggests a pattern of selective effectiveness: where security votes are operationalized rapidly and in politically visible zones, short-term results are observable. However, the overarching structural, operational, and accountability deficits limit their impact on systemic insecurity, human security, and conflict mitigation.

Major Findings of the Study

Based on the findings in Chapter Four, the following five major findings are identified, corresponding closely with the five research questions/hypotheses:

1. Limited Enhancement of Safety of Lives and Property
2. Minimal Impact on Mitigating Separatist Agitations
3. Partial Reduction in Electoral Violence
4. Uneven Government Responsiveness to Security Emergencies
5. Persistent Deficits in Human Security

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the use of security votes in Imo State functions as a double-edged instrument of governance. On one hand, it provides rapid, targeted interventions that prevent immediate threats to lives, property, and critical infrastructure. On the other hand, the discretionary nature of these funds, combined with the political calculus underpinning their deployment, limits their effectiveness in delivering sustained, equitable, and systemic security outcomes. The selective targeting of urban, politically significant, and elite-linked areas underscores how resource allocation in rentier-like states often reinforces existing power hierarchies and perpetuates uneven human security. From a theoretical perspective, Rentier State Theory elucidates the structural constraints inherent in using discretionary funds as a primary security mechanism, highlighting how dependency on centralized, non-transparent financial flows can undermine the institutionalization of security and human protection. Similarly, Political Settlement Theory explains the relational dynamics influencing who benefits from security votes, revealing that elite bargaining, political alliances, and power consolidation shape both the distribution of resources and the efficacy of interventions. Together, these frameworks provide a critical lens for understanding why security votes, despite their apparent utility, produce piecemeal, episodic, and often politically contingent outcomes rather than fostering comprehensive conflict management. The broader implication is that while security votes may alleviate immediate threats, they cannot substitute for robust institutional frameworks, preventive strategies, or inclusive governance. Long-term stability, equitable protection, and genuine enhancement of human security require systemic reforms that integrate transparency, accountability, community engagement, and structural interventions addressing underlying drivers of conflict. In this sense, the study highlights the tension between short-term tactical security measures and the need for strategically coherent, sustainable, and socially inclusive approaches to conflict management in conflict-prone states like Imo.

6.3 Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations

1. The state government should institutionalize the allocation of security resources through transparent and needs-based frameworks that prioritize

communities most vulnerable to attacks, rather than relying solely on discretionary security votes. This includes creating local risk assessments and vulnerability maps to ensure equitable deployment of security forces across all LGAs, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.

2. To reduce separatist tensions, security interventions should be complemented with community engagement and dialogue mechanisms, including partnerships with traditional leaders, youth associations, and civil society organizations. Policies must address underlying grievances such as perceived marginalization and lack of political voice, integrating security funding with programs that promote social cohesion and trust in state institutions.
3. Security votes should be incorporated into a comprehensive electoral security strategy, coordinated with independent electoral bodies and local authorities. This approach should emphasize pre-emptive measures, such as early warning systems, community policing, and voter education, to prevent violence in both urban and rural constituencies, rather than reacting only during elections.
4. The state should establish dedicated emergency response units funded through transparent budgets, supported by real-time communication and rapid deployment mechanisms. This ensures that security votes are supplemented with institutional capacity, allowing swift and equitable response to crises in all LGAs, rather than selective intervention in politically significant areas.
5. Security votes should be integrated with long-term human security programs addressing structural vulnerabilities, including poverty alleviation, social protection, and livelihood support. A multi-sectoral approach linking security, health, education, and economic development can ensure that security interventions are sustainable, inclusive, and protective of all citizens, rather than temporary measures focused solely on elite or urban populations.

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