

Why the Police and Immigration Budgets Need to Be Higher Than the Military Budget

Najib Waziri, Oghenerume Igbereyivwe, Amade Seidu, Glory Oladunni, Tobechi Uzoigwe

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's 2025 budget of 54.99 trillion naira allocates about 6.5 trillion naira to the security sector, with 3.1 trillion directed to defence, 1.31 trillion to the police, and 1.11 trillion to immigration and border management under the Interior Ministry. This distribution reflects a long-standing emphasis on military readiness for external threats, while agencies responsible for internal security receive comparatively limited resources. Evidence shows that states with larger landmasses and multiple international borders experience higher crime rates and ransom payments, underscoring the need for effective border governance. At the same time, the Nigerian Immigration Service remains underfunded and less integrated into the broader security framework. The persistence of insecurity despite a substantial military presence demonstrates the limitations of relying mainly on the armed forces for domestic policing. Military deployments have at times marginalised the police, eroded community trust, and created tensions with local inhabitants. The gap between strategic defence priorities and the everyday security challenges faced by citizens' calls for a more balanced allocation of resources. International experiences provide instructive lessons. South Africa prioritised police funding over military expansion to address domestic crime. In contrast, countries in the Sahel that focused on military spending have seen rising insecurity. For Nigeria, a rebalanced strategy is essential. This includes focusing on aligning resources with internal security priorities, expanding police and immigration personnel to ensure adequate per capita, modernising border management systems, establishing predictable budgetary processes. Expanding police recruitment, equipping officers with modern investigative and forensic technology. Moreover, domestic deployment of the military should be temporal and limited to constitutionally defined circumstances.

Keywords: Internal Security, Border Governance, Immigration Management, Security Sector Budgeting, Military Overreliance, Resource Allocation, Security Sector Reform

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's 2025 budget of ₦54.99 trillion allocates about ₦6.5 trillion (11.8%) to the security sector, with ₦3.1 trillion (5.6%) directed to Defence, ₦1.31 trillion (2.4%) to the Police, and ₦1.11 trillion (2.0%) to the Interior Ministry, which oversees immigration and civil defence services.¹ This allocation pattern demonstrates a strong prioritisation of military expenditure compared to internal security agencies like the police and immigration services. This significant tilt suggests that the government views conventional military threats as more urgent than the everyday security challenges faced by citizens. Such a distribution raises questions about whether the budgetary focus adequately reflects the realities of insecurity on the ground.

While large-scale territorial conflicts between Nigeria and its neighbours have declined in recent years, the country's security landscape remains deeply fragile. Infiltration of foreign fighters from the Sahel region and the growing militant activities in adjoining states pose persistent spill-over risks.² Weak border management further fuels these problems by enabling illicit arms trafficking and the cross-movement of criminal actors. The current security situation shows that banditry has developed into a complex, organised crime system that destabilises

¹ BudgIT Foundation. (2025). 2025 security and defense budget breakdown. https://budgit.org/post_infographics/security-and-defense/

² Center for Preventive Action. (2025, September 4). Violent extremism in the Sahel. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>

rural economies, displaces communities, and erodes public trust in government. Kidnapping for ransom and political leverage has spread across regions, imposing both economic and psychological costs.

This raises an important question: how should Nigeria balance investment between external defence and internal security? While significant resources are currently directed toward military expansion, the country's most immediate security pressures are largely internal. On one hand, the military requires steady investment to maintain readiness, deter external aggression, and manage high-intensity threats such as terrorism and piracy. On the other hand, the police and immigration services remain central to addressing the daily realities of banditry, kidnapping, arms trafficking, and cross-border criminal networks, yet operate with limited resources. The challenge, therefore, is the development of a more balanced security investment strategy focused on prioritising policing and border control for immediate threats while sustaining a capable military to deter and respond to external aggression.

Objectives

The Objectives of this Paper are

- Examine budget changes across military, police, and border agencies.
- To examine the relationship between the extent of international borders, landmass size, and the frequency of criminal incidents across different regions
- Assess police budget trends, identifying cuts, delays, and persistent shortfalls.
- Examine international practices showing trends in investment between police, border security, and the military.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a desk-based review of Nigeria's official federal budget documents, security policy papers, and agency reports published between 2015 and 2025. The selected timeframe reflects the availability of data needed to capture recent budget cycles and major security initiatives, enabling an assessment of current spending priorities in relation to evolving security threats. Media sources were limited to nationally recognised outlets with a consistent record of factual reporting on security and public finance. Opinion pieces and unverified online sources were explicitly excluded. Data obtained from media reports were cross-checked against official government releases, legislative records, or multiple independent media sources. Where discrepancies were identified, figures from official documents were prioritized, and any inconsistencies were documented and discussed as part of the analysis. Data analysis involved descriptive trend analysis to examine changes in budgetary allocations over time. The study also uses comparative ratio analysis to examine 2024 budgetary allocations for the Defence, Police, and Immigration sectors in relation to personnel strength, in order to assess relative funding intensity across services. It calculates budget-per-personnel ratios by dividing total sectoral allocations by reported personnel counts.

Comparative Roles of the Police, Military, and Immigration in Nigeria's Security Architecture

Nigeria's internal and external security framework rests on various key institutions including the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), the Armed Forces of Nigeria, and the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS). Each institution has distinct constitutional or statutory mandates, yet their functions often intersect in addressing the country's complex security landscape. Clear delineation of responsibilities, coupled with effective coordination, is essential to avoid duplication, ensure accountability, and optimise resource use.

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is the primary civilian law enforcement agency established under Sections 214 to 216 of the 1999 Constitution.³ It carries the core responsibility for internal security, which includes maintaining law and order, protecting lives and property, preventing and investigating crime, and enforcing

³ Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Sections 214–216. Retrieved from <https://nigerian-constitution.com/chapter-6-part-3-section-214-establishment-of-nigeria-police-force>

criminal laws throughout the country. The NPF manages a wide range of security challenges, from conventional crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, assault, murder, fraud, burglary, and sexual offences to emerging threats, including cybercrime and terrorism related activities. It is also central to the management of public order during protests, communal clashes, and electoral violence, all of which directly affect national stability.

The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), established under the Immigration Act, has a complementary but distinct mandate centred on border security and migration management.⁴ Its responsibilities include regulating the entry and exit of persons, issuing passports and travel documents, conducting border patrols, and enforcing immigration laws. The NIS is particularly vital in combating crimes such as human trafficking, migrant smuggling, irregular migration, document forgery, and other cross-border offences. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria makes no explicit mention of the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) as the lead agency for border management. This silence has real consequences. It blurs the NIS's authority, weakens its visibility within the security architecture, and often leaves it struggling to coordinate effectively with other institutions.

The Armed Forces of Nigeria, comprising the Army, Navy, and Air Force, are established under Sections 217 to 220 of the Constitution.⁵ Their constitutional mandate is centred on defending the nation from external aggression, safeguarding territorial integrity, and deterring hostile actions from state and non-state actors. The military's operational focus encompasses strategic threats of national consequence, including terrorism with foreign sponsorship, cross-border insurgency, armed insurrection, treason, sabotage, and maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. In this capacity, the Armed Forces serve as the guarantor of Nigeria's sovereignty, projecting deterrence against regional instability and hostile encroachment.

Some security threats do not fall within the mandate of a single institution. They require a coordinated response that brings together multiple agencies and areas of expertise. Terrorism, for example, is not just a military issue or a law enforcement challenge. Responding effectively often involves military operations to confront armed groups, police investigations to identify and dismantle domestic networks, and immigration and customs enforcement to disrupt cross border movement of fighters, weapons, and financing. As a result, Section 217(2) (c) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria permits the deployment of the Armed Forces for internal security operations, when authorized by the President.⁶ This constitutional provision is particularly relevant when police resources are overstretched. This authority has been used with increasing frequency, in response to insurgency in the Northeast, banditry in the Northwest, and communal violence in the Middle Belt.⁷ Military resources diverted to internal policing duties risk undermining readiness for external threats. Further, soldiers are not primarily trained in law enforcement, increasing the risk of rights violations and erosion of civilian oversight.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory originates from von Neumann and Morgenstern's 1944 work on expected utility in game theory and was later extended by Becker to models of resource allocation. The theory posits that decision makers allocate limited resources in ways that maximize social benefit by weighing the costs and consequences of alternative options. Applied to public spending, this implies that funding should be directed toward areas where

⁴ Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2015). Immigration Act, Cap I71, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria.

⁵ Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Sections 214–216. Retrieved from <https://nigerian-constitution.com>

⁶ Nigerian Constitution. (2014). Chapter 6, Part 3, and Section 217: Establishment and composition of the armed force of the Federation. Retrieved from https://www.constitution.org/ng/ng_const.htm

⁷ Sunday, O. (2025, May 1). Military arrests 34,500 terrorists, neutralises 5,000 in operations. The Guardian Nigeria. <https://guardian.ng/news/military-arrests-34500-terrorists-neutralises-5000-in-operations>

the potential impact is greatest.⁸ The theory assumes that decision makers act rationally, that resources are limited, and that higher-risk areas deserve more support.⁹

Under this framework, decision makers are assumed to act rationally, resources are inherently scarce, and higher-risk areas warrant greater investment. These assumptions make rational choice theory particularly useful for analyzing security funding, as it offers a systematic and evidence-based approach to aligning resources with threats. Empirical research supports this logic. For example, Levitt found that a ten per cent increase in police staffing reduced violent crime by thirteen per cent¹⁰. This implies that investments in high-need areas deliver measurable social returns. This supports the RCT idea that rational resource allocation maximizes utility. In addition, Braga, Weisburd, and Turchan showed that targeted policing in high crime areas could reduce violent crime by up to twenty-five percent¹¹, and Chalfin and McCrary demonstrated that each dollar spent on police generated one dollar and sixty cents in reduced victimisation costs.¹² These findings suggest that funding internal security delivers significant social returns. However, these studies suggest that rational decision-making may depend on the availability of accurate threat assessments, demonstrating a limitation of RCT in practice.

Rational choice theory offers a lens to examine how security budgets align with relative threat levels. The study compares spending across police, immigration, and military institutions and analyzes variables such as crime frequency, border length, and land area to determine whether decision makers allocate resources to maximize social benefit. Applying this to Nigeria, one would expect security budgets to reflect relative threat levels, thereby maximizing societal utility. If allocations align with areas of greatest risk, this supports the theory; if not, deviations may signal political constraints, informational gaps, or institutional inefficiencies that limit fully rational decision-making. In doing so, the theory moves beyond description, providing a framework to interpret observed budget patterns and evaluate whether Nigerian decision makers act according to rational, evidence-based principles.

Crime Disparities across Nigerian Zones

The urgency of reform is reinforced by empirical evidence, as recent crime and security surveys reveal significant regional disparities in the incidence of crime. The 2024 Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey (CESPS), conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics, reveals that the South East, comprising Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States, recorded the lowest number of incidents with about 6.2 million reported cases. By contrast, the North West, including Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa States, registered the highest levels with an estimated 14.4 million incidents. The other zones fell in between, with the South West reporting 6.9 million incidents, the South South 7.7 million, the North East 7.9 million, and the North Central 8.8 million. Government data confirm that the North West and North Central now account for the majority of crime nationwide, reflecting persistent insecurity in those areas.¹³

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Nigeria's Geopolitical Zones: Landmass, Border States, Crime Incidents, and Kidnapping Trends

⁸ Ezeani, E. O., Oligie, C. N., & Okoye, K. E. (2022). Protraction of Syrian conflict: Interrogating Russia's veto on peace resolutions of UN Security Council members. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy*, 12(1), 98–123. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6987241>

⁹ Ezeani, E. O., Oligie, C. N., & Okoye, K. E. (2022). Protraction of Syrian conflict: Interrogating Russia's veto on peace resolutions of UN Security Council members. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy*, 12(1), 98–123. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6987241>

¹⁰ Levitt, S. D. (1997). Using electoral cycles in police hiring to estimate the effect of police on crime. *American Economic Review*, 87(3), 270–290. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.87.3.270>

¹¹ Braga, A. A., Turchan, B., Papachristos, A. V., & Hureau, D. M. (2019). Hot spots policing of small geographic areas effects on crime. *Campbell systematic reviews*, 15(3), e1046. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1046>

¹² Chalfin, A., & McCrary, J. (2012). The effect of police on crime: New evidence from U.S. cities, 1960–2010. *Working Paper*. UC Berkeley. https://eml.berkeley.edu/~jmccrary/chalfin_mccrary2012.pdf

¹³ Punch. (2025, September 24). FG survey rates S'East lowest in crime rate. Punch Nigeria Limited. <https://punchng.com/fg-survey-rates-seast-lowest-in-crime-rate/>

Geopolitical Zone	Landmass (km ²)	No of States with International Boarder	Crime Incidents (2024)	Kidnapping Victims	Ransom Demanded (₦ Billion)	Ransom Paid (₦ Million)
South-West	79,665	3	6.9 million	144	1.56	115.55
South-South	84,587	2	7.7 million	199	32.30	259.30
South-East	29,525	0	6.2 million	257	1.01	157.55
North-East	272,451	4	7.9 million	331	0.97	792.80
North-Central	231,425	2	8.8 million	853	4.93	547.45
North-West	216,088	5	14.4 million	294	7.25	694.00

The North-West stands out as Nigeria's most volatile region, with the highest incidence of both crime and kidnappings, cementing its position as the country's most insecure zone. In the North-East, kidnappings are frequent, but the more striking pattern is that actual ransoms paid are disproportionately high relative to initial demands, reflecting systemic security breakdowns and a heightened willingness to concede under duress. The South-East, despite being landlocked and lacking international borders, paradoxically records elevated kidnapping cases, likely fuelled by separatist agitations and governance frictions. By contrast, the South-West demonstrates low kidnapping incidents and minimal ransom payments. The South-South exhibits a distinct trend of moderate kidnapping figures paired with exorbitant ransom demands, suggesting opportunistic pricing behaviour and low victim compliance. Meanwhile, the North-Central continues to grapple with persistently high levels of crime across multiple dimensions,

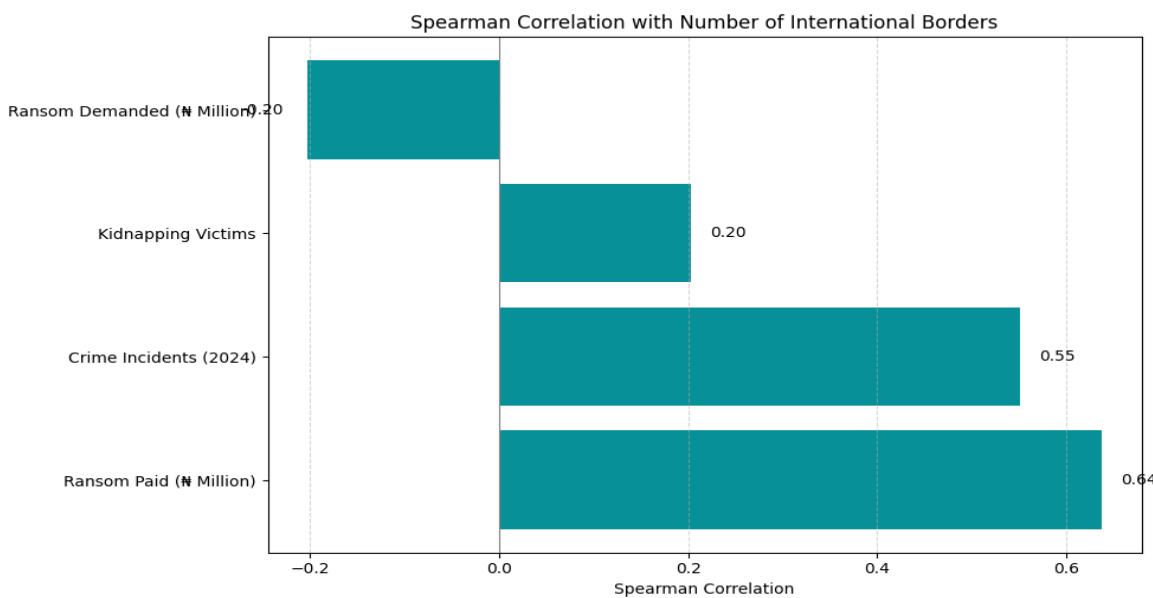


Figure 1: Spearman Correlation of no. of States Sharing International Borders with Crime Indicators

Based on the horizontal bar graph, the number of international borders a state has shows a moderately strong positive correlation with ransom paid ($r = 0.64$) and crime incidents ($r = 0.55$), indicating that states with more international borders tend to have higher ransom payments and more crime. The correlation with kidnapping victims is weaker but still positive ($r = 0.20$), suggesting a slight association between regions with more international borders and a higher number of kidnapping victims. Interestingly, there is a weak negative correlation between ransom demanded and no. of States Sharing International Borders ($r = -0.20$).

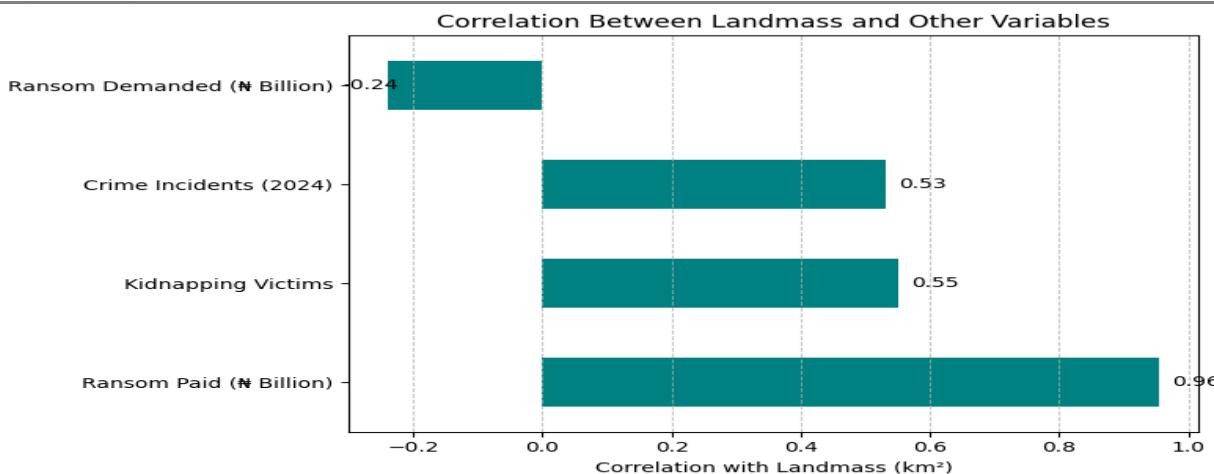


Figure 2: Spearman Correlation of number of Land Mass with Other Crime Indicators

The chart shows how landmass size relates to crime patterns across states. Ransom paid in billions of naira has a very strong positive correlation of 0.96 with landmass, suggesting that larger states tend to pay higher total ransom amounts. Kidnapping victims and crime incidents also show moderate positive correlations of 0.55 and 0.53, indicating that wider areas often face more security challenges due to weaker law enforcement coverage. However, the ransom demanded has a weak negative correlation of -0.24, meaning kidnappers in larger states may demand less per case, but total ransom payments remain high because incidents occur more frequently.

This suggests that larger zones like the North-East and North-West frequently rank higher in crime statistics because their vast landmass and extensive international borders create more opportunities for criminal activities such as smuggling, cross-border kidnappings, and insurgency spill overs. In contrast, smaller, zones like the South-East have fewer entry and exit points, limiting international border movements, which contributes to their consistently lower crime levels. Therefore, the combination of large geographic size and international borders in the North-East and North-West inherently increases vulnerability to crime. At the same time, the South-East's enclosed geography helps contain such incidents.

Porous Borders as a Threat Multiplier to National Security

Nigeria's land borders extend roughly 4,477 kilometres, adjoining Niger (approximately 1,500 km), Cameroon (1,975 km), Chad (85 km) and Benin (809 km). Despite this extensive frontier, the country operates only 84 authorized entry points while an estimated 1,400 informal crossing routes remain in use¹⁴. The number of unregulated border routes exceeds approved entry points by 1316. This imbalance allows transnational crimes to thrive. For instance, in Adamawa State alone, about 25 illegal routes are exploited by terrorists and smugglers to infiltrate small arms and light weapons into the country¹⁵. The porous borders make it easier for criminals to evade law enforcement by crossing into neighboring countries, complicating security efforts.

The consequences of these porous borders are evident in the alarming inflow of illicit weapons that fuel insecurity nationwide. For instance approximately 70 percent of the eight million illicit firearms circulating across West Africa are believed to have entered Nigeria through its neighbouring states.¹⁶ This steady inflow of arms amplifies local insecurity and overwhelms existing security structures. Effective crime control in these regions requires substantial patrolling, infrastructure, and resources. In the absence of proportional resource allocation, maintaining security becomes increasingly difficult, allowing crime to proliferate. Strengthening policing capacity and immigration enforcement in these regions is therefore imperative. Targeted deployment of additional personnel, infrastructure, and technological surveillance will improve monitoring, reduce response

¹⁴ Oguntuase, T. A. (2024). Nigeria's border porosity and implications for national and international security. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 8(6), 2937-2975. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.806225>

¹⁵ Oguntuase, T. A. (2024). Nigeria's border porosity and implications for national and international security. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 8(6), 2937-2975. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.806225>

¹⁶ Onuoha, F. C. (2011). Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Human Security in Nigeria, Conflict Trends, 1, pp. 50-56.

times, and mitigate crime proliferation, particularly in border-adjacent zones where security gaps are most pronounced.

A recalibrated strategy that pairs enhanced enforcement with digital systems, intelligence-led operations, and institutional reforms offers a more strategic pathway to securing Nigeria's borders in both the short and long term. Recent reforms, such as the revised Visa Policy,¹⁷ have digitised visa applications reducing approval times to 48 hours and cutting opportunities for document fraud.¹⁸ Moreover, immigration is not only a governance function but also a significant source of national revenue. Between 2017 and 2022, the Nigeria Immigration Service generated ₦438.78 billion through passport issuance and related services,¹⁹ creating a financial stream that can be reinvested into border modernization, personnel development, and intelligence systems. Such earnings demonstrate how immigration services can simultaneously address security imperatives and contribute to fiscal sustainability. Strengthening immigration and border management in this way not only curbs crime more efficiently than expanding the military but also creates a sustainable financial model for long-term national security.

Persistent Northern Insecurity despite Military Presence

In Nigeria, economic hardship and limited employment opportunities make military service an attractive livelihood, yet recruitment patterns remain uneven across regions. Northern states have historically supplied a disproportionate share of recruits, reflecting long-standing cultural acceptance of military service. By contrast, enlistment levels in parts of the South-East, including Enugu and Abia, remain comparatively low, shaped by enduring mistrust rooted in the legacy of the Nigerian Civil War. These historical grievances continue to influence attitudes toward the armed forces and reinforce perceptions of exclusion, which in turn affect recruitment and public trust²⁰. This mistrust also makes allegations of favouritism more resonant among affected groups. Many Christians believe that the military favours Muslim communities, even though Muslims themselves do not generally share this view.²¹

This disparity is further emphasised by the geographic siting of Nigeria's military backbone, which overwhelmingly favours the North. Core training and command facilities such as the Nigerian Defence Academy, the Armed Forces Command and Staff College, the Nigerian Army Infantry Corps Centre, the Nigerian Army School of Artillery, the Army Depot, and major Air Force bases are all located in Kaduna and the North Central region. Abuja, the political and administrative capital, also houses the Defence Headquarters, the Ministry of Defence, and the National Defence College, consolidating strategic decision-making power in the North. By comparison, Southern military facilities such as the Western Naval Command and the Naval Doctrine Command in Lagos, the Eastern Naval Command in Calabar, and the Naval Training Command in Rivers are more focused on maritime as a result of the region coastal proximity

The paradox is striking. The North dominates military recruitment and hosts the majority of command and training institutions, yet it also suffers the highest levels of insecurity. The persistence of insecurity suggests that military dominance alone cannot secure an environment. Evidence shows that military presence frequently undermines security outcomes rather than improving them. The military operates within a rigid, combat-driven command structure that prioritizes obedience and force, while civilian communities prefer dialogue, mediation, and legal mechanisms to address disputes²². The clash of these cultures deepens mistrust and alienation. Citizens

¹⁷ <https://kpmg.com/ng/en/home/insights/2025/04/federal-ministry-of-interior-announces-major-reforms-in-expatriate-administration-and-visa-policy.html?>

¹⁸ <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria-launches-e-visa-digital-systems-to-streamline-immigration-process>

¹⁹ <https://punchng.com/immigration-rakes-in-n438bn-from-passport-issuance-others/>

²⁰ Ahmad, T. (2025, May 21). Why are southern youths abandoning the army? PRNigeria. <https://prnigeria.com/2025/05/21/why-southern-youths-abandoning/>

²¹ Musa, S. Y. (2018). Military internal security operations in Plateau State, North Central Nigeria: Ameliorating or exacerbating insecurity? (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University). <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/104931>

²² Musa, S. Y. (2018). Military internal security operations in Plateau State, North Central Nigeria: Ameliorating or exacerbating insecurity? (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University). <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/104931>

respond in different ways, ranging from compliance with illegitimate orders to non-cooperation, silent resistance, or in some cases violent opposition.

For instance, a study²³ across six local government areas in Plateau State found that civilians view the military as intensifying insecurity, largely because of restrictions on movement, frequent states of emergency, and the erosion of civil authority. Soldiers are often reported to intimidate civilians, engage in extortion, and subject people to psychological, emotional, and sometimes sexual abuse²⁴. In some areas, the problem extends further, with soldiers openly intimidating and even physically assaulting police officers²⁵. This practice has silenced the police in regions of heavy military presence and weakened their authority to such an extent that communities are left without effective law enforcement. The marginalisation and at times humiliation of the police in these regions has further hollowed out police security creating a dangerous dependency on military deployments that often worsen the situation. Although Nigerian law places the military under civilian authority and parliamentary oversight, in practice this framework is weakly enforced. Civilian supremacy has not been fully institutionalised, which allows military abuses to persist unchecked.

Reliance on the military to address law-and-order challenges only perpetuates this imbalance. The greater the reliance on the military to cover policing gaps, the weaker the incentive to build resilient civilian institutions. Moreover, long-term reliance on the military for domestic policing risks weakening its external defence posture and blurring the separation between military and civilian security roles. These unintended consequences of prolonged reliance on force include the erosion of local governance capacity, the marginalisation of community-based security mechanisms, and the creation of dependency dynamics that ultimately weaken resilience.

Breaking this cycle will require a deliberate rebalancing of Nigeria's security architecture. Strengthening the police, restoring their authority in communities, and institutionalising effective civilian oversight of the military are essential if the armed forces are to focus on their constitutional mandate without undermining the very security they are meant to provide. Such rebalancing is critical because the current over-militarisation has eroded institutional trust and sidelined the police, leaving communities both overexposed and underprotected. A coherent architecture must reassign frontline responsibilities to the police while repositioning the military for its core defence functions.

This reality demonstrates that the region requires a stronger orientation toward civilian-led policing, particularly through the capacities of police and immigration institutions. The priority for policymakers should therefore be investment in policing, intelligence, inter-agency coordination, and stronger border management. Such measures will deliver greater stability, reduce the operational burden on the Armed Forces, and allow the military to concentrate on its constitutional role of safeguarding Nigeria's external security. Strengthening Nigeria's security framework requires (1) reinforcing the police as the primary agency for internal security, (2) limiting military deployment to constitutionally authorized temporary interventions, and (3) enhancing the capacity of immigration services to secure borders and combat transnational crime.

Understanding Government Priorities in the Security Sector: Budget Trends in the Ministries of Defence, Police, and Interior

Before advancing any argument, it is prudent to first examine the status quo through the lens of Year-on-Year Percentage allocation in Nigeria's security budgets. This assessment provides not only a snapshot of current spending levels but also a balanced view of how government priorities have shifted over time

²³ Musa, S. Y. (2018). Military internal security operations in Plateau State, North Central Nigeria: Ameliorating or exacerbating insecurity? (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University). <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/104931>

²⁴ Musa, S. Y. (2018). Military internal security operations in Plateau State, North Central Nigeria: Ameliorating or exacerbating insecurity? (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University). <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/104931>

²⁵ <https://punchng.com/soldiers-killed-three-cops-freed-kidnap-kingpin-police/>

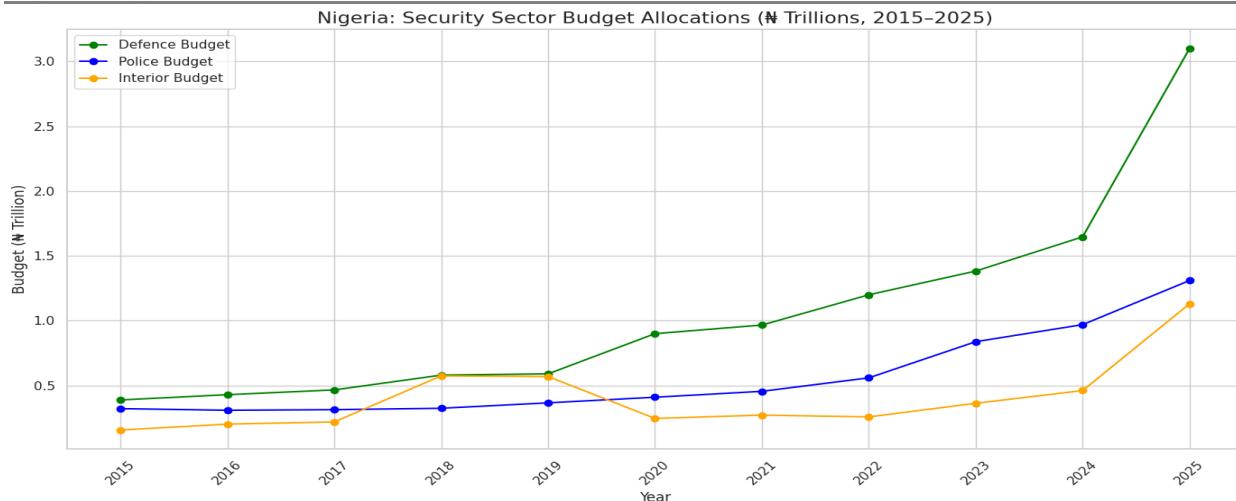


Figure 3: Security Allocation Share (2015–2025)

The chart presents Nigeria's security sector budget allocations between 2015 and 2025, focusing on Defense, Police, and Interior ministries^{26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33}. The data reveals a strong upward trend across all three, with Defense consistently receiving the highest share and fastest growth, while Police and Interior follow with more gradual increases. In 2015, Defence spending stood at approximately ₦0.4 trillion, already higher than the combined budgets of the Police and Interior. By 2025, it soared past ₦3 trillion, showing a strong focus on military operations. In contrast, the Police budget started near ₦0.3 trillion and reached about ₦1.3 trillion in 2025, indicating improvement but still lagging behind Defence. The Interior Ministry recorded the lowest and most uneven funding, peaking briefly in 2018 and then recovering to around ₦1.1 trillion by 2025.

Defence expansion demonstrates priority on national sovereignty and external threats, yet the limited rise in Police and Interior budgets signals underinvestment in community policing, internal stability, and correctional services. The data suggests that Nigeria's security funding remains military-heavy. Without adjustment, this could weaken Nigeria's ability to confront persistent domestic threats such as terrorism, banditry, and organised crime. A more balanced and forward looking budgetary strategy is required, one that strengthens internal security institutions while sustaining credible external defence.

Smart Security Spending: Closing Nigeria's Internal Safety Gap

Nigeria's defence and internal security system draws strength from its military forces, police units, and immigration service, each tasked with specialized responsibilities. Personnel strength across these institutions reflects the country's preparedness to respond to various challenges. As of 2025, Global Firepower estimates Nigeria's total military personnel, including paramilitary and reserves, at around 280,000³⁴. While the Nigeria Police Force had a staff strength of about 371,800³⁵. The NIS as a strategic paramilitary organization comprises 25,303 (twenty five thousand three hundred and three) personnel³⁶.

²⁶ <https://budgit.org/>

²⁷ <https://punchng.com/buharis-defence-allocations-hit-n5tn-over-11420-nigerians-killed-in-six-years>.

²⁸ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/07/security-fg-spends-n6trn-on-defence-in-11-years>

²⁹ <https://businessday.ng/business-economy/article/nigerias-spend-on-defence-rises-but-security-elusive/>

³⁰ <https://placng.org/Legist/security-budget-rises-yet-insecurity-worsens>

³¹ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/saraki-others-get-n23-678n-as-severance-package-in-2019-budget/>

³² <https://punchng.com/reps-pass-n10-6tn-2020-budget/>

³³ <https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Senate-votes-and-proceedings-1-Wednesday-22nd-December-2021.pdf>

³⁴ Global Firepower. (2025). Nigeria military strength data. https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=nigeriaglobalfirepower

³⁵ Shehu, I. (2023, August 30). Egbetokun: 190,000 additional police personnel needed to secure Nigeria. TheCable. Retrieved July 4, 2024, from <https://www.thecable.ng/egbetokun-190000-additional-police-personnel-needed-to-secure-nigeria>

³⁶ Action against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants in Nigeria. (2019). Logo Nigeria Immigration Service. Retrieved from

Table 2: 2024 Budget vs. Personnel Strength in Nigeria's Defence, Police, and Immigration Services

Sector	2024 Budget (₦)	Personnel Count	Budget Per Personnel (₦/Personnel)
Defence	1.65 trillion	280,000	5.89 million
Police	970 billion	371,800	2.61 million
Immigration	52.5 billion	25,303	2.08 million

Effective national security requires not just strategy, but smart and equitable resource deployment. A review of per capita budget allocations in 2024 uncovers structural disparities. From the table, defence receives ₦1.65 trillion for an estimated 280,000 personnel, translating to approximately ₦5.89 million per officer. This figure is more than double the per capita allocation for the Police, which stands at ₦2.61 million for 371,800 personnel under a ₦970 billion budget. Immigration records the lowest relative allocation, with ₦2.08 million per staff member across 25,303 personnel under a ₦52.5 billion budget³⁷.

The disparity reveals a structural tilt toward Defence, where resource intensity per individual is considerably higher than in agencies responsible for day to day internal security and border management. While Defence funding may reflect strategic concerns around external defence and military readiness, the relatively lower allocations to the Police and Immigration could constrain operational effectiveness in law enforcement, border security, and public safety.

Nigeria's most immediate security challenges are not foreign invasions but internal issues such as armed robbery, kidnapping, cult activity, banditry, and herder-farmer clashes. These problems are primarily matters of law enforcement, social order, and justice delivery, which fall within the mandate of the police rather than the military. At the same time, the country cannot discount the need for a capable military, given ongoing counterinsurgency operations and the importance of regional deterrence. The Nigeria Police Force faces persistent capacity gaps. With around 370,000 officers serving over 220 million citizens, the ratio of one officer to 594 citizens falls short of the international benchmark of one to 400³⁸. This chronic capacity gap has left the force unable to generate reliable evidence and pursue complex investigations effectively. Consequently, criminal networks often operate with impunity, knowing the likelihood of forensic detection remains minimal.

As of 2016, the Nigeria Police maintained only two forensic laboratories. The first, established in Lagos in 1986, had been left largely non-functional and while the second was commissioned at police headquarters in Abuja in 2016. The force lacked the personnel to operate these facilities effectively, with only one trained forensic pathologist available by 2007 and no specialists in ballistics or DNA analysis. Even basic investigative practices such as fingerprint collection and crime scene photography were rarely applied due to the absence of adequately trained officers³⁹. This shortage of both infrastructure and skilled personnel has fuelled investigative failures, left countless cases unresolved, and entrenched a reactive model of policing that erodes public trust.

In contrast, the Armed Forces are relatively better funded and equipped, though the frequency of direct external threats remains low. Nigeria has not faced a foreign invasion in recent decades, and border frictions with neighbouring states have largely been managed through diplomacy. The military therefore spends significant time on internal operations, including counterinsurgency and joint deployments against criminal networks. This dual role, while sometimes necessary, stretches the armed forces beyond their core constitutional mandate.

[https://atipsom.com/nis/#:~:text=Staff&text=hundred%20and%20three%20\(25%2C303\)%20personnel,in%20migration%20and%20border%20management](https://atipsom.com/nis/#:~:text=Staff&text=hundred%20and%20three%20(25%2C303)%20personnel,in%20migration%20and%20border%20management)

³⁷ <https://budgit.org/>

³⁸ Salisu, S. (2025). The role of the Nigeria Police Force on internal national security and law enforcement in Nigeria. *Journal of Law and Global Policy*, 10(2), 9-15. <https://doi.org/10.56201/JLGP.vol.10.no2.2025.pg9.15>

³⁹ Sarki, Z. M., Saat, G. A. M., Lalu, A. U., & Saleh, M. (2020). The Nigeria police reform and utilisation of forensic science: Has the latter been part of the former? *ResearchGate*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.335411109>

The continued reliance on the military to address internal insecurity has proven counterproductive, as evidence shows that deployment often results in intimidation of civilians, corruption, extortion, and human rights violations that deepen instability rather than resolve it⁴⁰. The inherent misalignment between military command structures and civilian governance norms further undermines trust.

The central policy challenge is how to balance investment across security institutions. Heavy emphasis on conventional military capability delivers strategic deterrence but limited impact on daily public safety, while underinvestment in policing leaves communities vulnerable to crime and erodes trust in government. A more balanced allocation of resources that strengthens police and immigration services, while preserving military readiness, would align security spending more closely with Nigeria's evolving threat profile.

Cuts and Delays Hit Police Funding in Nigeria

The funding trajectory of the Nigeria Police shows that fiscal underperformance is not an isolated event but a recurring pattern. Persistent gaps between approved appropriations and actual disbursements have entrenched structural uncertainty, undermining both strategic planning and effective service delivery.

Table 3: Capital Appropriations and Releases (2012–2020)^{41 42}

Year	Amount Appropriated (₦ Billion)	Amount Released (₦ Billion)	Shortfall (₦ Billion)	% Released
2012	9.6	7.0	2.6	72.9%
2013	14.0	11.0	3.0	78.6%
2014	7.3	3.4	3.9	46.6%
2015	17.8	8.9	8.9	50.0%
2016	16.1	10.0	6.1	62.81%
2017	20.1	9.1	11.0	45.2%
2018	25.1	11.9	13.2	47.4%
2019	22.1	6.3	15.8	28.6%
2020	14.2	12.0	2.2	84.5%

The sharpest underperformance occurred in 2017 and 2019, when less than half of approved allocations were disbursed at 45.2 percent and 28.6 per cent, respectively. This pattern of fiscal unpredictability carried forward into later budget cycles. In 2022, the capital vote was cut from ₦28 billion to ₦18 billion, despite prior augmentation by the National Assembly, raising concerns about the predictability of budgetary commitments⁴³. This sharp reduction at the national level translates into acute funding shortages on the ground, where divisional offices struggle to function with meagre allocations. At the frontline, the resource crisis is stark: Divisional

⁴⁰ Musa, S. Y. (2019). How using the military in Nigeria is causing, not solving problems. The Conversation. <https://doi.org/10.64628/AAJ.tk7su6rtg>

⁴¹ Nigeria Police Force. (2017). A paper presented by IGP Ibrahim Kpotun Idris, NPM, MNI, at the public hearing on a bill for an act to establish the Nigeria Police Reform Trust Fund and for other related matters. Nigeria Police Force. <https://www.npf.gov.ng/news/details/245?utm>

⁴² Opinion Nigeria. (2025, June 6). Abundance of commissioning for the Nigeria police (A. Kehinde). <https://www.opinionnigeria.com/abundance-of-commissioning-for-the-nigeria-police-by-adewole-kehinde/>

⁴³ Tribune Online. (2022, February 10). 2023: NASS decries cut in police budget from N28bn to N18bn. <https://tribuneonlineng.com/2023-nass-decries-cut-in-police-budget-from-n28bn-to-n18bn/>

Police Offices across the country reportedly function on quarterly allocations as low as ₦15,000 to ₦30,000, while many divisions receive no allocation whatsoever⁴⁴. Such extreme underfunding at the divisional tier translates into systemic fragility, where the Force is unable to sustain even routine operation.

This chronic underfunding has now reached a critical point. As of June 2025, senior officers confirmed that no funds had been released for routine operations across commands and departments⁴⁵. The immediate consequences of this funding collapse are most evident at the operational level. Officers unable to fuel patrol vehicles and sustain routine activities face severe resource gaps, creating perverse incentives that drive some to illicit practices, including extortion from motorists, to cover basic operational costs. What begins as a survival response to budgetary gaps gradually evolves into an entrenched parallel revenue system which distort the professional culture of policing, and deepens the perception among citizens that law enforcement functions less as a public service and more as a transactional enterprise.

Beyond the delay, however, the deeper constraint lies in the structural rigidity of the budgeting process itself. The restrictive envelope budgeting system compounds these challenges, failing to reflect the Force's expanding mandate while subjecting it to erratic cash releases⁴⁶. Such shortfalls disrupt strategic planning, weaken operational preparedness, and constrain the Force's ability to respond effectively to Nigeria's escalating internal security threats. There is therefore a need to institute a more predictable, needs-based financing framework that aligns resources with mandate.

Comparing other countries' budgets for police, border security, and the military.

Whereas some countries achieve stronger, more sustainable security outcomes by investing in policing and border management, several Sahelian states under military rule have prioritised defence spending. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, following coups between 2021 and 2023, collectively spent \$2.4 billion on their armed forces last year. Over the 2020–2024 period, Mali's military budget rose by 38%, Burkina Faso's by 108%, and Niger's by 56%. Chad, also facing security challenges, increased its military spending by 43% to \$558 million⁴⁷. This upward trend in the Sahel contrasts sharply with declines elsewhere. South America's defence budgets dropped 4.1% from 2015, totaling \$56 billion in 2024, while Central Asia saw a 25% reduction between 2015 and 2025, reaching \$1.9 billion⁴⁸. These figures shows clear divergence in global defence priorities and spending patterns. The massive increases in military spending in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger directly correlate with a severe decline in their peace rankings, driven by armed conflicts, political instability, and internal violence.

Several democratic and ethnically diverse countries have shifted security spending toward civilian agencies rather than military expansion. In 2024, Ghana allocated more funding to the police and border management (GHC5.9 billion combined) than to the Ministry of Defence (GHC3.89 billion), signalling a strategic emphasis on law enforcement and border control. Costa Rica offers a more extreme case, having abolished its military entirely and relied on civilian security institutions for decades^{49 50}.

⁴⁴ Sahara Reporters. (2024, October 21). Exclusive: Nigerian Divisional Police Officer exposes corruption, shocking lack of funds, says divisions allocated N15,000 to run stations for 3 months. <https://saharareporters.com/2024/10/21/exclusive-nigerian-divisional-police-officer-exposes-corruption-shocking-lack-funds-says>

⁴⁵ Sahara Reporters. (2025, July 10). Breaking: Nigerian Police IG Egbetokun deploys 1,000 Ondo officers to Lagos for LG election, demands N39,000 from DPOs for transport. <https://saharareporters.com/2025/07/10/breaking-nigerian-police-ig-egbetokun-deploys-1000-ondo-officers-lagos-lg-election>

⁴⁶ Sharang, N. (2025, January 16). IGP Egbetokun reveals 3 key challenges facing Nigerian Police Force. PM News. <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2025/01/16/igp-egbetokun-reveals-3-key-challenges-facing-nigerian-police-force/>

⁴⁷ Ecofin Agency. (2025, April 29). Africa's military spending hit \$52.1bn in 2024 as North Africa arms race intensifies. Ecofin Agency. <https://www.agencecofin.com>

⁴⁸ Ecofin Agency. (2025, April 29). Africa's military spending hit \$52.1bn in 2024 as North Africa arms race intensifies. Ecofin Agency. <https://www.agencecofin.com>

⁴⁹ https://mofep.gov.gh/sites/default/files/budget-estimates/2024/2024-Budget-by-Sub-Prog_034_MoD.pdf

⁵⁰ <https://www.unesco.org/en/memory-world/abolition-army-costa-rica>

South Africa similarly prioritizes internal security, with the South African Police Service receiving more than twice the budget of the armed forces in 2025 (R120.8 billion versus R55.9 billion)⁵¹⁵². These cases illustrate how democracies facing primarily internal threats align security spending with policing, crime prevention, and border management rather than military capacity, reinforcing the argument that civilian security institutions are often better suited to address everyday insecurity. By channelling additional resources into policing rather than military expansion, South Africa has aligned its security strategy with the nature of its domestic threats, which are driven by violent crime and organized networks. The gradual improvement in its Global Peace Index ranking from 132nd in 2021 to 127th in 2024⁵³ suggests that this strategy is delivering dividends in stability and peace.

International peace assessments provide further context for evaluating civilian-focused security models. In the 2024 Global Peace Index, Ghana scored 1.938 and ranked 55th, while Costa Rica scored 1.950 and ranked slightly lower⁵⁴. Nigeria, by contrast, scored 2.907 and ranked 147th, reflecting significantly higher levels of insecurity⁵⁵. While peace outcomes are shaped by multiple factors, this gap suggests an association between stronger civilian security institutions and more stable security environments. Similar dynamics can be seen in other regions where strategic investments in civilian security have yielded steady improvements in peace indicators. South America countries have shown a general improvement in peacefulness⁵⁶ despite a drop in military spending. Central Asia's performed slightly better than the global average. The region's average rank of 70 puts it in the upper-middle tier of global peace, meaning the region performs better than many parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America⁵⁷.

This relative success offers valuable insights, yet translating these lessons to other countries requires attention to institutional capacity and contextual differences to ensure effectiveness. This is because Policies succeed under specific political, economic, and cultural conditions. Institutional capacity and governance shape implementation, so strategies cannot transfer directly without careful adaptation⁵⁸. For instance, the Africa Country Instability Risk Index ranks South Africa and Ghana 9th and 10th among the most politically and economically stable African countries⁵⁹, reflecting their long-standing democratic governance and strong institutions. Nigeria does not rank among the most stable countries, underscoring the need to carefully tailor lessons from other contexts to local realities. Therefore simply increasing police and immigration budgets does not ensure effective use or desired outcomes. Without strong oversight, funds may be misallocated or lost to corruption. Budget increases alone cannot address gaps in strategic planning, personnel training, infrastructure, or intelligence systems. Unless these weaknesses are corrected, higher allocations may fail to reduce crime or improve border security.

Key Takeaways.

- Nigeria's vast landmass and extensive borders, particularly across the North West and North East, present structural vulnerabilities that facilitate cross-border crime, kidnapping, and other forms of insecurity.
- Per capita budget allocations show significant imbalances, with defense personnel receiving disproportionately higher resources than police and immigration officers

⁵¹ Joint Standing Committee on Defence. (2023). Midterm strategic review of the South African National Defence Force (ATC230331). Parliament of South Africa. <https://pmg.org.za/tabled-committee-report/5267/?utm>

⁵² National Treasury. (2024). Estimates of national expenditure: Vote 28 – Police (Budget summary). <https://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2024/ene/Vote%202028%20Police.pdf>

⁵³ [GPI-2024-web.pdf](https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf)

⁵⁴ <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf>

⁵⁵ <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf>

⁵⁶ Institute for Economics & Peace. (2024). Global Peace Index 2024: Economic impact, results & trends. [https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf?](https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf)

⁵⁷ Institute for Economics & Peace. (2024). Global Peace Index 2024: Economic impact, results & trends. [https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf?](https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf)

⁵⁸ https://www.numberanalytics.com/blog/policy-transfer-101?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁵⁹ <https://thenationonlineng.net/top-10-best-governed-african-countries-in-2025/>

- Irregular funding and budget shortfalls in the police force have created operational gaps, forcing officers to rely on survival strategies that damage professionalism.
- The police and immigration services remain underfunded and overstretched, weakening their ability to address everyday insecurity.
- Heavy reliance on the military for internal security undermines both civilian institutions and public trust.
- Comparative evidence from Ghana and South Africa shows that investing in policing and border management delivers stronger long term security outcomes

RECOMMENDATION

- Redirect resources to align more effectively with Nigeria's internal security priorities, while preserving the core capacity of the military for external defence.
- Expand the strength of police and immigration services, and correct disparities in budget-personnel ratios to enhance efficiency and service delivery.
- Deploy modern digital systems, advanced surveillance technologies, and intelligence-driven operations to strengthen border management and limit cross-border crime.
- Establish a sustainable and predictable funding framework that reduces delays and ensures the police can function with consistency and operational effectiveness.
- Reinforce the leadership role of the police in managing internal security, with the military engaged only under constitutionally defined and temporary circumstances.
- Incorporate international best practices, including Japan's model of community policing and its approach to effective border management, to guide Nigeria's security strategy

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's current budgetary priorities favor external defence, leaving police and immigration services under-resourced despite their central role in addressing everyday security threats such as banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, and porous borders. Reliance on the military for internal security has yielded limited results, undermining trust in civilian institutions. Experiences from countries such as Ghana and South Africa demonstrate that greater investment in policing, community safety, and border management produces more durable improvements in public security than military expansion alone.

A more balanced allocation of resources is therefore essential. Expanding police recruitment, upgrading investigative and forensic capacity, modernizing border control, and ensuring predictable funding will strengthen the institutions best positioned to confront daily threats. Meanwhile, enabling the military to focus on external defence safeguards sovereignty without unnecessarily involving it in internal crises. By aligning budget priorities with the realities of internal threats, Nigeria can achieve more effective, sustainable security outcomes for its citizens