

POLICY BRIEF

The response of the Kano State Government to violent conflict since 2009: lessons learned and policy implications

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As the economic and political hub for the north of Nigeria, Kano has been a flashpoint for conflict in the past and has suffered attacks by the insurgent Islamist group **Jama’atu Ahli Sunnah Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad (JAS), also known as **Boko Haram**.**

Government responses have focused on security measures and a patchwork of economic and social programmes, some of which have a tenuous relationship to the conflict or its underlying causes.

This brief advocates a more coherent framework for promoting social trust, reducing violence and improving civil–military relations, including: a deeper engagement with civil society and religious leaders; ensuring that the informal conflict resolution mechanisms supported by the state (notably Hisbah and local vigilante groups) act in a legal and socially constructive manner; improving the fairness and effectiveness of youth employment programmes; and continuing to work with Almajiri and other children and youth consigned to the streets.

BACKGROUND

Kano State, created in 1967, is the most populous state in Nigeria, with 9.4 million inhabitants, as recorded in the 2006 census. Its capital, Kano City, is an ancient commercial and religious hub, and the commercial, industrial and political centre of the north.

Islam was introduced to Kano in the 14th century by Wangara traders from Mali, and consolidated in the following century (Ibrahim, 2012). Today, the two main Sufi brotherhoods, Qadiriyya and Tijjaniyya, have a strong base in Kano (Paden, 2008: 28). Alongside these identities, Kano has one of the largest concentrations of the Izala movement, which grew up in the 1970s in reaction to the Sufi brotherhoods, as well as a growing number of Shia Muslims. As in other northern cities, immigrants to Kano, especially those from the south of Nigeria, tend to live segregated in *Sabon Gari* – ‘new towns’ or ‘strangers’ quarters’ – a traditional arrangement institutionalised by colonial law.

Culturally, Kano State is relatively homogenous and there has been little inter-ethnic strife. However, Kano City and its environs have been a flashpoint for episodic bouts of violence that have often followed religious lines, or have been in reaction to national political developments.

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In the Kano riot of 1953, northerners and southerners clashed for four days, mainly in and around the *Sabon Gari* over the issue of self-government, resulting in 36 deaths.¹ In 1966, the widespread rioting that followed the January coup, in which several northern leaders were killed, led to the deaths of 73 people in Kano alone – the highest of any part of northern Nigeria.²

The first major religious violence in Nigeria was associated with the Maitatsine sect, which drew mass support across major towns and cities in northern Nigeria. The sect turned violent in 1980, culminating in riots in several northern towns in which over 5,000 Nigerians, including Muhammadu Marwa, the sect’s founder, and members of the security forces were killed. In 1991, a religious riot was triggered by the reported decision of Kano State Government to grant approval for a preaching event by a German Christian evangelist after allegedly turning down the request of a Muslim preacher to organise a public preaching event. The bloody riots left over 500 people dead.³ In 1999 and 2004, southerners and northern Christians in Kano were attacked in reprisal for the killing of northern Muslims in some southern cities.



1. Northern Regional Government (1953) *Report on the Kano Disturbances: 16th, 17th and 19th May, 1953*. Government Printers, Lagos. p. 21.

2. Muffet, DJM (1982) *Let the Truth Be Told: The Coups d'État of 1966*. Hudahuda Publishing Company, Zaria, p. 18.

3. *Daily Champion*, 23 October 1991; *Newswatch*, 28 October 1991; Albert (1993) *Inter-ethnic Relations in a Nigerian City: a historical perspective of the Hausa-Igbo conflicts in Kano, 1953–1991*. Occasional Publication No. 2, Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique (IFRA), Ibadan, pp. 15–16.

In 2007, a group of armed men and women known as the Taliban, who were believed to have originated in Niger or Chad, engaged the state's security personnel in a fierce gun battle in Challawa outside of Kano City and 'disappeared'.

In 2011, three days of rioting across northern Nigeria followed the announcement of the results of the presidential election; eight killings and 22 injuries occurred in Kano.⁴ Kano was one of the centres of this violence, which was directed at non-Muslims, politicians of the winning party and their supporters. In January 2012, the federal government announced the removal of petroleum subsidies and there was an angry popular reaction across Nigeria, including in Kano. At least 42 protesters were injured as the police attempted to disperse these demonstrations by force. The petroleum subsidy removal protest led to the formation of the Kano Civil Society Forum (KCSF), which cuts across religious divisions and has come to serve as an umbrella network for civil society organisations (CSOs) who wish to establish peace in the state.

The most recent scourge of Kano has been the actions of the JAS insurgent group, which originated in the northeast, but has been active in Kano since January 2012 with bombing and shooting attacks on civilian targets.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE AND THEIR IMPACT

The capacity of the state to respond to security matters is circumscribed by the fact that the power to deploy security forces, including the police, is vested at the federal level. However, in recent years, Kano's various administrations have taken a number of measures to address security. Often these policies are related to broader social and political programmes.

REFORM OF THE QUR'ANIC EDUCATION SYSTEM AND REGULATION OF ALMAJIRANCI

Almajiri (pl. *Almajirai*) is a term originally referring to Qur'anic students attached to a teacher (*mallam*), who during their period of learning rely on begging for their survival. Economic stress has pushed increasing numbers of mendicant/vagrant children on to the streets and since the 1970s successive governments in Kano, along with other observers, have laid the responsibility for much of the city's violence at their door. The Anigolu Report on the Maitatsine riots underlined the role of the *Almajiranci* system, which Muhammadu Marwa used to recruit followers, in the violence. The government also held that the *Almajirai* and the *Yandaba* (criminal gangs of urban youth operating in certain wards of Kano) were to blame for the 1991 riot over the attempted visit of the Christian evangelist Reinhardt Bonnke. In most of the violent



conflicts in the state, both adult and teenage *Almajirai* were said to have been at the frontline of the destruction of property and the killing of innocent people (Falola, 2004).

Thus, successive governments in Kano State have seen the issue of the *Almajiranci* as a critical one and have made efforts to address it, though with little effect. On 23 October 2003, an ambitious 'Action Plan on Qur'anic, *Ilmi* and *Islamiyya* Schools' was launched by the state government as part of its efforts to further implement *Shari'a*, the Islamic legal system. With the action plan, the state government declared its commitment to provide the same level of support to the Islamic system as is given to the conventional or 'formal' system.

The plan included a state-wide census of Qur'anic schools, *Almajirai* and *mallams* with a view to paying them allowances. The plan would also supply meals to the *Almajirai* of the Tsangaya schools and sensitise the *mallams* and the community through seminars and weekly radio and television programmes. However, apart from evacuating some beggars from the streets of Kano in the early years of the administrations of Governor Ibrahim Shekarau (2003–07 and 2007–11) and Governor Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso (2011–15), as well as an integration of Western standards in the curriculum of *Islamiyya* schools, not much was achieved in the area of reforming the *Almajiri* system.

Reform of the *Almajiranci* system has proved difficult because it is embedded in the traditional and religious life of the state and attracts sympathy from a wide range of groups, in particular the conservative elements of the *Ulama* – Muslim teachers who are strongly opposed to government involvement in Qur'anic schools. By 2011, it had become clear that the government could not control the teeming numbers of *Almajirai* in the streets.

4. Of a total of 938 killings and 735 injuries recorded across northern Nigeria. Report of the Federal Government Panel on Investigation of Post-Election Violence (Lemu Report), October 2011.

An executive bill to ban all street begging and enable the state government to evacuate *Almajirai* from the streets was sent to the House of Assembly in 2013, though this has yet to be passed into law.⁵ The legislation would make any *Almajirai* found begging and their *mallams* 'guilty of an offence and liable to a fine or imprisonment, or both'.⁶

In addition, it could be argued that the state has given too much prominence to *Almajirai* as a source of conflict, deliberately diverting attention from other social and political issues. In short, this group has, to a degree, been made a scapegoat for the violence. Factors such as high youth unemployment, an overburdened infrastructure and overcrowding all contribute to outbreaks of unrest in Kano (Kawu, 2010) and have been paid scant attention.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES

Various programmes have been initiated by successive Kano State governments with the objective of providing young people with employment opportunities, to make them self-employed and to eradicate poverty. One of the flagship interventions under the current government is the Lafiya Jari Initiative, which offers training, empowerment and micro-loans to graduates of health institutes to set up health service centres. Other programmes include the Kano Poultry Initiative and the State Informatics Institute. There are over 25 institutions geared towards youth education and training in the state. The challenges faced by these programmes include a politicised beneficiary selection system and the failure to take account of the priorities and needs of beneficiaries in programme design.

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MORE INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

Another strategy towards conflict reduction adopted by state governments, at least since the return to democracy in 1999, has been the attempt to build **inclusive and participatory** governance through the inclusion of non-indigenous ethnic and cultural groups in the government. Three special advisers on inter-community relations representing south-eastern, south-western and northern minority communities were appointed under the Shekarau administration (2003–07,

2007–11), as well as three special assistants from Nigeria's south-south and north-east. While these measures have had some effect in dampening the grievances of non-indigenes, they are perhaps more appreciated by the elites than the wider civil society, some of whom dismiss it as a token move aimed to secure the votes of minorities. Governor Shekarau himself put it as follows:

We knew the risks posed by destructive politics exploited by bigots who tried to brand us. Even recently some used our attendance to a Christian gathering in their attempt to cause social disaffection, but they were enlightened on the inclusiveness of the Shari'ah through social re-orientation programme. Because of these reforms, for the first time there are now Christians in Kano State Government as special advisers and special assistants. (2008: 109)

The state government's Social Re-orientation Policy (SRP), referred to by the governor above, was another important element of the attempt to reduce violence. Known in Hausa as *Adaidaita Sahu*, the policy was launched on 11 September 2004 and implemented vigorously during the tenure of the Shekarau administration. It consisted of a massive programme of public enlightenment across the state's 44 Local Government Areas (LGA), preaching peace and harmonious relations as well as change in people's attitude through the fear of God.

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One of the central institutions in implementing the SRP was the Hisbah, which was established under the Kano State Hisbah Board Law No. 4 of 2003 and No. 6 of 2005. Hisbah literally means 'guarding against infringements' (Al-Munajjid, 2013) and the Kano Hisbah board recruited over 9,000 men and women to guard against infringements of its Shari'ah code. These operate as a community police force and are paid allowances by the state. The Hisbah's director-general has identified both direct and indirect contributions of the board's interventions to conflict resolution. The *Zauren Sulhu* (mediation centres) established in each ward of the state mediate conflict and provide a viable alternative form of adjudication, settling hundreds of disputes for people who prefer them to conventional courts. Even some police stations refer cases to the Hisbah board because of its quick and satisfactory approach to conflict resolution through mediation.

5. The Bill, when it comes into operation, is expected to be cited as the 'Koranic Schools (Registration and Movement) Amendment Bill 2013'. The principal law is contained in an edict (1991) Gazette No. 1, Vol. 27, 21 January 1993 – Supplement Part 'A' entitled 'Koranic Schools (Registration and Movement) Edict, 1991'.

6. See Kano State House of Assembly (2013), 'A Bill to Provide for Amendments to the Koranic Schools (Registration and Movement) Law No. 1 of 1993'.

Hisbah board activities also have an indirect role in the area of conflict resolution through the SRP. One of these has been the posting of Islamic scholars to Friday mosque services to enlighten the public during the pre-sermon or post-sermon periods by drawing on the Qur'an (revelations) and *Sunnah* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad). The legitimacy gained by the state through the implementation of Shari'a law during its first term gave such interventions appeal and leverage (Mohammed, 2010). However, with subsequent allegations that officials and members of the administration were using public resources designated for Shari'a implementation for personal enrichment, and that the Hisbah was being used to suppress political opposition, their credibility waned.

Under Governor Kwankwaso, who replaced Shekarau in 2011, the SRP is no longer a government policy per se, although its dispute settlement mechanisms are still utilised. In addition to identifying broken families as the source of youth restiveness and violence in Kano, the state government tasked the Hisbah with developing social measures that would address the problem. Among other measures, the Hisbah Board arranged a mass wedding for couples at the Kano Central Mosque, in which the government paid ₦10,000 dowry for each bride. Several of these events have taken place, with some 1,350 couples married, and more are planned. It is yet to be seen how this measure has helped curb violence in Kano.

RESPONSES TO RECENT CRISES

The government's response to the petroleum subsidy protests was less inclusive. When the fence around Government House was pulled down during the protests, a new bullet-proof fence and gates were constructed at the cost of ₦655 million. The protests brought Muslims and Christians together in their opposition to the government policy (which was subsequently substantially reversed), and peace was maintained until protesters clashed with a police contingent deployed to protect public property.

The first JAS attack in Kano occurred on 20 January 2012, and many more have followed. Some observers have claimed that these attacks were the result of the lapsing of a secret 'money for peace' deal which followed the change in state administration in late 2011. Others have related the attacks to the detention of JAS members in the state by the State Security Services (SSS). Whatever the reason, the Kano State Commissioner of Police stated that, in the first five months of 2012 alone, the police defused 600 Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and 17 high-calibre bombs.

The onset of the JAS insurgency dramatically changed the nature of the security challenges in Kano State. The government responded to the attacks by convening diverse groups of stakeholders across social and religious groups, which focused on the alleged foreign origins of some of the insurgents, among other things. This has led to the massive repatriation of illegal immigrants from Kano. In June 2013 alone, over 400 immigrants were apprehended.

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The presence of the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) in Kano State in response to the JAS insurgency has considerable fiscal implications. The state has been shouldering the allowances of the combined military, mobile police and other security personnel under the JTF's command, which is reported to amount to about ₦50 million per month. The state has also drawn vigilante groups into its security operations to complement the work of the security services. In 2012, the State House of Assembly passed the Neighbourhood Watch (Vigilante Society) Bill, which recognises the activities of vigilante groups and places them within a framework of control under an elaborate committee structure, intended to screen and select recruits. The government has provided cars and logistical support for such groups, but Nigerian law does not permit vigilantes to carry arms, and thus a number of vigilante group members have lost their lives in confrontations with armed criminals or insurgents and the government has been required to pay compensation to their families. Though they tend to be more accepted in rural than urban areas, these vigilante groups face a number of other challenges, including their lack of training and professionalism and uneven levels of public support.

Some of the government's other security measures have also had unintended negative consequences. A curfew was imposed in the wake of the first JAS attack, along with house-to-house searches and security checkpoints. There were allegations of harassment, extortion and the killing of innocent civilians by the security forces. A measure that caused particular outcry was the state legislature's ban on commercial motorcycle riders (known as *Achaba*). The rationale for the ban was that motorcycles had been used in insurgent attacks. However, the ban rendered many young men unemployed. With no alternative sources of income, they are potentially more open to engaging in anti-social behaviour and violence.

LESSONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Peace is a condition for development in Kano as elsewhere. The government's responses to violence in the state have been characterised by a combination of security measures and indirect social programmes, which are not always effective.

A more coherent and elaborated framework for promoting social trust, reducing violence and improving civil–military relations could be developed.

- Deeper government engagement with a wider range of stakeholders, including faith-based organisations, as well as community leaders, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organisations (CSOs) and international development partners could bear dividends in building trust and reducing conflict.
- Inter-faith dialogue could be supported, Christians and Muslims could enter into mutual compromise and build bridges for peace and, when there is mutual tolerance and understanding, find a common solution to national issues – as the experience of the 2012 fuel subsidy protest in Kano has shown.
- The issue of the *Almajirai* remains to be addressed, though this may best be done in the context of addressing the forces that lead to such a large number of children and young people living on the streets.
- The role and activities of Hisbah in the areas of conflict mediation, self-help and public orientation need to be appropriate and consistent with the laws of Nigeria.
- Care needs to be taken to ensure that sanctioned vigilante groups operate within the scope of the law and remain forces for the public good.
- The effectiveness, fairness and transparency of youth programmes should be assessed and improved. Local councils could meet periodically to review Muslim–Christian relations with a view to fostering civic education on mutual tolerance, unity and understanding.
- Access to mediation centres could be broadened so that disputes are dealt with effectively at a local level.
- The state should consider working with NGOs and community leaders in devising or identifying an 'early warning system' to spot and resolve potential sources of conflict. This might be an initiative for which the support of international development agencies would be appropriate.



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20 Mississippi Street, Maitama, Abuja, Nigeria

nsrp.comms@ng.britishcouncil.org

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This brief is based on a paper prepared for NSRP by Professor Habu Mohammed, Department of Political Science, Bayero University, Kano. The paper also drew on interviews with academics, present and former government officials and NGO leaders in the state, as well as secondary literature.

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