

ATHENA NOTES

Opinion Articles of Athena Centre Staff and Guest Writers

No. 7 | 9 February 2026

Kaduna's Security Crisis: Denial, Delay and the Erosion of State Authority

By Uchenna Victor Mgbечи

Since the rise of insurgency in north-western Nigeria, Kaduna State has experienced persistent killings and abductions, raising enduring questions about the credibility of officially reported figures. State government data put fatalities at approximately 1,192 killings and 3,348 kidnappings in 2021. By the end of the first quarter of 2023, officials reported 214 deaths and 746 kidnappings linked to insecurity.

Despite repeated assurances of government efforts to protect lives and counter insurgency, insecurity has remained entrenched. Data published by Sahara Reporters, citing SBM Intelligence, indicate that 629 people were kidnapped in Kaduna between July 2024 and June 2025, although these figures were disputed by the state government.

A particularly alarming incident occurred weeks after the presidency's 2026 New Year security message, when 177 Christian worshippers were abducted from churches in Kurmin Wale, Kaduna. The initial response was marked not by coordination but by denial. No immediate security deployment followed, and early reports from the Kaduna State Police dismissed the incident outright.

This pattern is not isolated. In mid-2025, reports emerged that approximately 200 commuters were



abducted along the Abuja-Kaduna highway. The Kaduna State Police described the claims as "entirely fabricated" and threatened legal action against media organisations and individuals disseminating the reports.

In the Kurmin Wale case, sustained public pressure, independent reporting, and corroborating digital evidence eventually compelled the police command to retract its denial and confirm the abduction of 177 individuals.

Taken together, these incidents point to a troubling governance pattern: delayed acknowledgement, contested narratives, and weakened responsiveness. Such a pattern does

not merely reflect operational strain; it erodes public confidence and weakens the state's credibility as guarantor of security. When official communication becomes reactive rather than transparent, trust in institutions inevitably deteriorates.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, requires governance anchored in transparency, responsiveness, and institutional accountability. Yet insecurity in Kaduna—and across the country—continues to undermine socio-economic stability, deter investment, and weaken national confidence.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has called for greater professionalism and empathy in security management. Political voices, including former presidential candidate Peter Obi, have drawn attention to the persistence of abductions and the inadequacy of official responses.

International concern has also been expressed: U.S. Congressman Riley Moore described the abductions as "horrific" and called for stronger protection of vulnerable communities, while U.S. Under Secretary of State Allison Hooker noted the persistence of threats despite ongoing security operations.

The consequences extend beyond immediate loss of life. Abductions and killings have displaced thousands, expanded the internally displaced persons' population, and inflicted long-term psychological trauma on survivors. Agricultural disruption, particularly the loss of farming communities, has contributed to rising food prices and growing pressure on national food security.

The economic and diplomatic consequences are equally significant. Nigeria's security challenges have shaped external perceptions, including its designation by the United States as a Country of Particular Concern in November 2025 over religious freedom concerns. Subsequent travel restrictions on Nigerian citizens further underscore the international costs of domestic insecurity.

The persistence of kidnappings, combined with official denial and inconsistent responses, reflects a governance deficit in security management. Addressing it requires more than reactive operations. It demands transparency in communication, consistency in response, and strengthened coordination across security institutions.

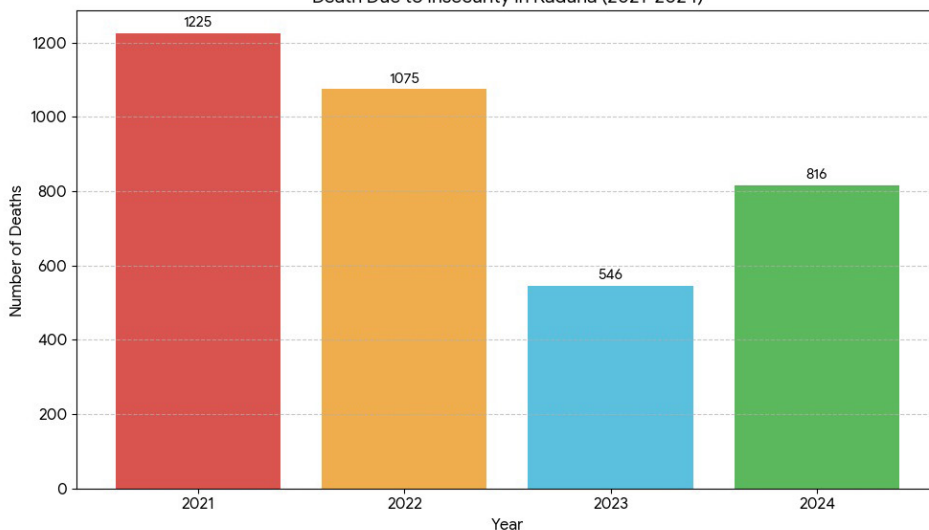
Conclusion

Kaduna State's recurring abductions and killings, compounded by delayed responses and contested official narratives, reveal a sustained weakness in security governance rather than isolated failures. The costs are cumulative: displacement, trauma, economic disruption, and reputational damage. The moment for denial has passed. What is required is institutional discipline—anchored in transparency, rapid response, and accountability—to restore public trust and arrest further decline.



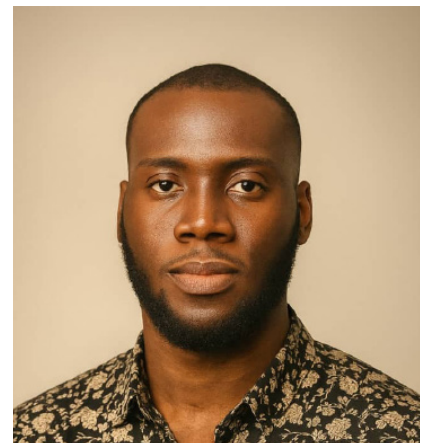
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Death Due to Insecurity in Kaduna (2021-2024)



Key Insights

1. Kaduna's insecurity reflects a sustained pattern of killings and abductions that continues despite repeated official assurances.
2. Disputed statistics and competing narratives between government and independent sources undermine public confidence in reported security data.
3. A recurring pattern of initial official denial, followed by later confirmation, signals weaknesses in crisis communication and response.
4. Delayed or absent security responses to major abductions erode trust in the state's capacity as guarantor of public safety.



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Onitsha Main Market, Sit-at-Home Orders and the Erosion of State Authority

By Dr Izuchukwu Christianus Anyanwu



Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, Governor of Anambra State

The reopening of Onitsha Main Market after years of repeated closure enforced through sit-at-home directives by non-state actors offers a revealing case of subnational governance under sustained strain. While the immediate decision restored a measure of economic normalcy, its significance is institutional rather than symbolic. It exposes the limits of state authority where security coordination is weak, enforcement credibility is inconsistent, and intergovernmental alignment is fragmented. The central insight is not the reopening itself, but what both the prolonged closure and its reversal reveal about the state's capacity to sustain routine governance under coercive pressure.

For over five years, parts of Nigeria's South-East experienced a gradual normalisation of economic disruption. Weekly market closures enforced through intimidation and episodic violence shifted from exception to routine. In Anambra State, the Monday closure of Onitsha Main Market imposed heavy costs on traders, transporters, consumers, and public revenue. Estimates cited by state

authorities and market associations place weekly losses at about N8 billion, or roughly N32 billion monthly, with cumulative regional losses exceeding N7.6 trillion over four years. While the precision of these figures is debatable, their significance lies in the scale of institutional failure they suggest: the inability to guarantee continuous lawful economic activity.

The core issue is not the existence of sit-at-home directives as a tactic but the state's inability to neutralise their enforcement. This reflects a breakdown in the interface between political authority and security provision. Over time, effective control over economic rhythm and public space was ceded to non-state actors—not through formal concession, but through enforcement paralysis. As closures persisted without a decisive response, authority effectively inverted: compliance became a rational response to risk rather than a reflection of legitimacy.

The decision by the Anambra State Government to reopen the market, therefore, represents executive assertion against a backdrop of

accumulated erosion. It confirms that political authority remains formally intact and capable of intervention. Yet its significance depends on whether it is followed by institutional consolidation. Without this, reopening risks becoming episodic rather than corrective. The key question is whether the conditions required to sustain enforcement have been structurally addressed.

A central constraint lies in the coordination gap between state political authority and federally controlled security institutions. Governors are designated as chief security officers of their states, yet operational control of policing remains centralised. This produces ambiguity in responsibility, delays in response, and diluted accountability during crises. In the case of sustained sit-at-home enforcement, this gap allowed abnormal conditions to persist without triggering a coherent intergovernmental response. What should have been treated as an extended public order emergency was absorbed into routine administration.

This weakness was reinforced by a failure of deterrence. Predictable market closures signalled that coercive enforcement would not be systematically challenged. Over time, compliance became a survival strategy rather than a political expression. This shift is corrosive: it reorients public expectations away from the state as guarantor of order. Once this occurs, restoring authority requires more than isolated interventions; it demands the rebuilding of institutional credibility through consistency and consequence.

Responsibility for this breakdown is distributed but identifiable. State

executives bear primary responsibility for coordination, signalling, and sustained political engagement. Federal security agencies carry operational responsibility for enforcement, while the federal government retains responsibility for ensuring that constitutional arrangements do not obstruct effective responses to sustained public order threats. The deeper failure lies not in institutional absence but in the lack of clear ownership of coordination when governance is under stress.

The reopening of Onitsha Main Market should therefore be read as an inflection point. It presents a choice between episodic assertion and institutional consolidation. If treated as the former, it risks reversal under renewed disruption. If treated as the latter, it can anchor enforcement credibility through structured coordination, predictable deployment, and visible consequences for coercive interference with lawful activity. This requires defined coordination protocols, clear accountability lines between political and security leadership, and escalation mechanisms when enforcement is challenged.

The implications extend beyond Anambra State. Repeated disruption of economic life weakens subnational revenue, distorts regional trade, and undermines investor confidence. More fundamentally, it erodes democratic legitimacy by signalling that authority is conditional. When non-state actors dictate civic rhythm, the state shifts from regulator to observer. If replicated, this pattern carries systemic risks for national cohesion and internal security.

The cost of inaction is cumulative. Each unchallenged disruption reinforces expectations of state withdrawal and

raises the eventual cost of restoration. Over time, governance adapts downward, normalising decline rather than reversing it. In such conditions,

Conclusion

The Onitsha Main Market case demonstrates that governance failure often appears not as collapse but as sustained abnormality. Weekly closures without a decisive response signal a gradual erosion of authority rather than a sudden breakdown. Correcting this trajectory requires more than political will; it requires institutional design that aligns authority with capacity. The reopening confirms that intervention remains possible. Whether it becomes a turning point or a temporary interruption depends on whether coordination and enforcement failures are addressed at their root. If not, governance risks becoming episodic, authority contested, and public order conditional—with lasting consequences for state legitimacy and economic stability.



When non-state actors dictate civic rhythm, the state shifts from regulator to observer. If replicated, this pattern carries systemic risks for national cohesion and internal security.

Key Insights

1. Repeated sit-at-home enforcement in Anambra reveals how prolonged non-state coercion can gradually displace formal state authority in regulating economic life.
2. Weekly closures of Onitsha Main Market became routine, imposing severe cumulative losses and embedding abnormality into everyday commercial activity.
3. Weak alignment between state and federal security institutions created enforcement gaps, allowing coercive actors to operate without a decisive institutional response.
4. Predictable inaction by the state transformed compliance into a survival strategy, weakening the state's role as guarantor of order.
5. The market reopening is a symbolic assertion of authority, but without sustained coordination, enforcement credibility, and escalation mechanisms, disruption risks will recur.



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NB: *The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the position of Athena Centre on the issues canvassed.*

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