

**Leadership for Human Security: Bridging the Gap  
between State-Centric Security and Community  
Resilience**

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**Abstract**

This study critically examines how leadership can integrate the human security paradigm into Africa's predominantly state-centric security governance frameworks. While traditional approaches continue to prioritise territorial integrity and regime stability, they often overlook the everyday insecurities faced by communities from violent conflict and terrorism to

climate-related and socio-economic threats. Drawing on the Human Security Framework and Participatory Governance Theory, the study uses a documentary approach based on secondary data and thematic analysis to explore local security initiatives, including community policing and vigilante groups, and the tensions they create when poorly aligned with formal structures. The findings highlight the importance of leadership that balances top-down institutional authority with bottom-up community resilience. The study recommends practical policy pathways for African leaders and regional bodies to mainstream people-centred security, strengthen participatory practices, and institutionalise community ownership without undermining formal accountability. By bridging the gap between state security and community needs, the research argues that human security can become a realistic governance priority across diverse African contexts.

*Keywords:* Human Security, Participatory Governance, Community Resilience, Security Governance, Leadership in Africa

## **1. Introduction**

The ongoing and changing threats to human security in Africa, such as violent conflicts, terrorism, climate-related disruptions, and chronic social and economic exclusion, have shown that traditional, state-centered approaches to security are not enough (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). In many African countries, traditional security governance is still mostly about protecting

national sovereignty and keeping the regime stable, often by using militarised responses and concentrating power. This narrow view misses the many different and interconnected threats that affect people's daily lives, like food insecurity, forced displacement, environmental degradation, and the erosion of livelihood. The idea of human security, on the other hand, was first put forward by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994). It makes the safety of individuals and communities the most important part of security policy, covering economic, environmental, health, personal, and political aspects of safety.

Given Africa's complicated security situation, this wider human-centered view is becoming more and more important. For example, in the Sahel, long-lasting insurgencies led by armed non-state actors do well in places where the government is not very strong and people's basic needs are not being met. At the same time, unpredictable weather and climate shocks keep hurting agricultural productivity, making competition for scarce resources worse, and causing violence between communities, especially in pastoral and agricultural areas (Aning & Atta-Asamoah, 2011). Also, widespread failures in governance, such as corruption, weak rule of law, and political systems that exclude certain groups, make community-level complaints worse, lower people's trust in state institutions, and make state-led security interventions less legitimate.

There is a growing agreement on the need to change how security is managed so that it is more responsive, inclusive, and in touch with local realities (Abrahamsen, 2013). More than just

talking about policy is needed to close the gap between rigid state-centric frameworks and the fluid, lived experiences of insecurity at the grassroots level. It takes strong leadership to not only change the way institutions work, but also work with civil society, traditional leaders, and local communities. This kind of leadership needs to put dialogue, openness, participatory decision-making, and building long-term resilience ahead of short-term containment strategies (Olonisakin, 2011). Even though more and more people are interested in the idea of human security, not much real-world research has looked at how African leaders are actually using and institutionalising these ideas at both the national and sub-national levels. Because of this, there are still important questions about how leaders can put human security principles into action in a way that makes sense in different African settings.

This study, therefore, critically examined *Leadership for Human Security: Bridging the Gap between State-Centric Security and Community Resilience*, guided by the following research questions:

1. How can African leadership integrate human security into the broader security governance framework?
2. What leadership practices and structures best foster community resilience alongside state security priorities?

3. How can regional and national policy frameworks be reformed to institutionalise people-centred security practices?

By interrogating these questions, the research contributes to the discourse on rethinking security governance in ways that protect both the state and its citizens more sustainably.

## **2. Literature Review**

Empirical evidence across Africa highlights the growing reliance on local security initiatives, particularly community policing models and vigilante groups, as communities respond to gaps in state security provision. For instance, in Nigeria's Middle Belt and North-East regions, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) emerged as a grassroots vigilante response to Boko Haram insurgency, supporting the military with local intelligence and surveillance (Akinola, 2019). The CJTF has been credited with improving local security in some areas by leveraging community trust and local knowledge that formal security agencies often lack (Pérouse de Montclos, 2016).

Similarly, community policing initiatives have gained traction in Kenya and South Africa. In Kenya, Community Policing Forums (CPFs) were institutionalised to foster partnerships between the police and residents, aiming to build trust, share intelligence, and co-produce safety strategies (Ruteere & Pommerolle, 2003). Evidence suggests that where CPFs function well supported by clear guidelines and accountability

structures they can reduce crime and strengthen citizen-state relations (Kyed, 2018). In South Africa, the South African Police Service (SAPS) has integrated community policing into its national strategy, with varying levels of success. While some local forums enhance crime prevention, others struggle with community apathy, political capture, or lack of resources (Brogden & Shearing, 2005).

These examples demonstrate that localised security actors can fill critical gaps where state capacity is weak, acting as an important complement to formal policing structures and increasing community resilience.

However, the proliferation of community-led security initiatives is not without challenges. One recurring issue is the risk that such groups operate outside the law, lack oversight, or become co-opted by political or criminal interests (Harnischfeger, 2003). In Nigeria, some CJTF factions have been implicated in human rights abuses, extortion, and the perpetuation of local conflicts, raising questions about accountability and the potential for vigilantism to entrench cycles of violence (Akinola, 2019).

In Kenya, research has shown that informal policing groups such as the sungusungu in Kisii and Kuria communities can blur the line between community justice and mob violence (Anderson, 2002). While initially established to combat cattle rustling and petty theft, some vigilante groups have evolved into informal power structures, challenging the legitimacy of

state policing institutions and, in some cases, engaging in extrajudicial punishment (Ruteere & Pommerolle, 2003).

Moreover, the coexistence of community-led security initiatives and formal security agencies can generate tensions over roles, jurisdiction, and legitimacy. In many instances, poorly defined mandates and weak communication channels between state security forces and community actors exacerbate distrust and can undermine the coherence of broader security governance (Baker, 2008). These findings highlight the need for effective leadership and institutional frameworks that balance the benefits of local participation with robust oversight and integration into formal security systems.

### **3. Theoretical Anchorage**

This study is anchored on the human security theory and participatory governance theory. The human security paradigm emerged in the early 1990s as a critical response to the limitations of traditional, state-centric security frameworks. Whereas conventional security studies focus primarily on safeguarding state sovereignty and territorial integrity through military capabilities and strategic alliances (Buzan & Hansen, 2009), the human security perspective shifts attention to the protection and empowerment of individuals and communities (UNDP, 1994). Human security broadens the definition of security to include freedom from fear and freedom from want, encompassing economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security (Commission on

Human Security, 2003). This approach acknowledges that threats to security often stem from non-military sources such as poverty, environmental degradation, infectious diseases, and structural violence factors that are frequently overlooked in traditional security calculations (Paris, 2001).

The tension between these two paradigms is particularly evident in African contexts where persistent conflicts, state fragility, and governance deficits challenge the effectiveness of state-centric security models (Abrahamsen, 2013).

Critics argue that heavy investments in military responses without addressing the underlying human insecurities only perpetuate cycles of violence and marginalisation (Olonisakin, 2011). In contrast, a human security approach prioritises people-centred strategies that tackle root causes and promote resilience at the community level. This shift implies a rethinking of leadership roles in security governance, emphasising the need for more inclusive and responsive systems.

Linked to the human security paradigm is the concept of participatory governance and local ownership. Scholars argue that top-down security interventions often fail because they neglect the agency, knowledge, and priorities of affected communities (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Participatory governance calls for the meaningful involvement of local actors from civil society organisations and traditional leaders to community-based groups in the design, implementation, and

monitoring of security and development initiatives (Brock, Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001). Local ownership not only enhances the legitimacy and sustainability of interventions but also builds trust between state institutions and citizens, which is vital for long-term stability (Donais, 2009). In the African context, where many societies have rich traditions of community-based conflict resolution and social accountability, integrating participatory practices into security governance frameworks can bridge the gap between state policy and grassroots resilience (Olowu, 2003).

The human security approach argues that people face threats that are not purely military but also economic, food-related, health-related, environmental, personal, community-based, and political (Commission on Human Security, 2003). It promotes a dual strategy: 'protection' against critical and pervasive threats, and 'empowerment' to enhance the capacities of individuals and communities to respond to risks themselves (Gasper, 2005). Unlike traditional realist perspectives that emphasise national sovereignty and military strength (Buzan & Hansen, 2009), the Human Security Framework views security as fundamentally multi-dimensional and people-centred.

Key to this perspective is the recognition that sustainable security cannot be imposed top-down; it must involve participatory governance, in which communities are active agents in diagnosing threats, setting priorities, and co-producing solutions (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013).

Participatory Governance Theory complements the human security approach by emphasising local ownership, inclusivity, and shared decision-making. As Brock, Cornwall, and Gaventa (2001) note, participatory approaches create 'political spaces' where marginalised voices can influence governance outcomes, thereby enhancing legitimacy and effectiveness.

Applied to this study, the Human Security Framework and Participatory Governance Theory together offer an analytical lens for exploring how African leadership can bridge the gap between state-centred security and community resilience. For example, the proliferation of local security initiatives such as vigilante groups and community policing demonstrate communities' agency in responding to insecurities that the state alone struggles to address (Akinola, 2019). However, without inclusive leadership and clear institutional linkages, these bottom-up efforts can undermine formal security structures, leading to abuses or parallel power centres (Harnischfeger, 2003).

By adopting a human security perspective, this study assessed how leadership can prioritise both protection and empowerment: protecting citizens from direct threats while enabling them to participate meaningfully in security governance. Integrating Participatory Governance Theory will further illuminate what structures, processes, and leadership qualities are needed to balance state authority with community ownership ensuring that security interventions are not only effective but also legitimate and sustainable (Donais, 2009).

### **Materials and Methods**

This study adopted a documentary research design to explore how leadership can bridge the gap between state-centric security frameworks and community resilience within the African context. Documentary approaches are well-suited for unpacking complex social phenomena like security governance, community participation, and leadership practices because they emphasise depth, context, and interpretive understanding rather than numerical generalisation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data for this study were collected exclusively from secondary sources. These included peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, books, institutional reports, and relevant grey literature that examine human security, participatory governance, and community-based security initiatives across Africa. Using multiple secondary sources allowed for triangulation of perspectives and helped to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the evolving debates and empirical trends (Bowen, 2009).

To analyse the data, the study employed thematic analysis, which is widely used in documentary research for identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns of meaning within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, the analysis involved a systematic process of familiarisation with the data, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, and finally interpreting how these themes

answer the research questions. Key themes included the limitations of state-centric security, the role of local security initiatives, the tensions between formal and informal security structures, and policy pathways for integrating community resilience.

## **5. Integrating Community Resilience**

### **a. Policy Pathways for Leaders to Align State and Community Security Efforts**

Integrating community resilience into broader security governance requires deliberate policy choices and leadership that recognises communities as active stakeholders rather than passive beneficiaries of security provision. One practical pathway is for leaders to institutionalise multi-level security frameworks that formally connect community-led initiatives — such as neighbourhood watch groups or traditional conflict resolution councils — with national and local government security structures (Baker, 2008). This can be achieved through clear legal mandates, shared reporting channels, and standard operating procedures that define the roles, limits, and oversight of community actors (Donais, 2009).

Another important policy pathway is to embed participatory mechanisms within security planning and decision-making processes. This includes establishing community safety forums, joint security task forces, and periodic dialogue platforms where community members, civil society, and

security agencies can jointly assess risks, share intelligence, and co-design prevention strategies (Kyed, 2018). Such arrangements build trust and social cohesion, which are critical elements of resilience, particularly in contexts of protracted insecurity.

Capacity-building policies are also essential. Leaders need to invest in training and equipping community security actors, while ensuring they understand and uphold human rights standards (Hills, 2014). Without this, community-led groups risk becoming sources of abuse and conflict themselves. Finally, policy pathways must include sustainable funding models and accountability mechanisms to avoid elite capture or politicisation of local security structures (Abrahamsen, 2013).

### **b. Examples of Best Practices**

Several African contexts offer practical insights into what works when aligning state security and community resilience. In Sierra Leone, the post-war Local Policing Partnership Boards (LPPBs) have been highlighted as a promising practice in bridging the gap between formal policing and community needs. These boards facilitate regular interactions between the police and community members, enabling joint problem-solving and local oversight (Horn, Olonisakin & Peake, 2006). Evidence suggests they have contributed to improved trust and information-sharing, which are key for early warning and conflict prevention.

In Kenya, the Nyumba Kumi (“Ten Houses”) initiative is another example of integrating community resilience within formal security frameworks. The approach clusters households into neighbourhood units responsible for mutual surveillance and support, in collaboration with local administration and police (Ruteere & Pommerolle, 2003). While implementation has faced challenges especially where community trust in the police is low — the model demonstrates the potential of community-based structures to complement state efforts in crime prevention and counter-terrorism.

South Africa’s Community Policing Forums (CPFs) illustrate another best practice. When well-functioning, CPFs provide a formalised space for residents to engage with local police, voice concerns, and hold officers accountable for performance (Brogden & Shearing, 2005). Research shows that CPFs have helped reduce petty crime and improve perceptions of safety in some urban and peri-urban areas, although their impact varies significantly depending on leadership commitment and community buy-in (Marks & Fleming, 2006).

These examples demonstrate that with supportive policies, clear institutional frameworks, and genuine community participation, African leaders can foster a more resilient and integrated security architecture that protects both the state and its citizens.

### **c. How Regional Bodies Can Mainstream Human Security**

Regional bodies in Africa, such as the African Union (AU) and regional economic communities (RECs) like ECOWAS and IGAD, play a pivotal role in shaping the continent's evolving security architecture. To mainstream human security effectively, these bodies need to move beyond frameworks that still largely prioritise state sovereignty and military responses (Williams, 2016). Mainstreaming human security requires integrating people-centred indicators – such as food security, environmental sustainability, and human rights protections – into early warning systems, conflict prevention mechanisms, and peacebuilding mandates (Tadjbakhsh, 2014).

For example, the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) could expand its mandate to systematically monitor and address non-traditional threats, including the socio-economic and environmental drivers of conflict. Regional bodies should also promote minimum standards and policy guidelines that encourage member states to embed human security principles into their national security strategies and accountability frameworks (Abrahamsen, 2013).

Moreover, regional institutions can act as conveners for sharing best practices, funding capacity-building initiatives, and coordinating cross-border community resilience programmes. For instance, IGAD's support for cross-border peace committees among pastoral communities in the Horn of Africa illustrates how regional bodies can facilitate local ownership within a broader security framework (Mutu, 2016).

#### **d. The Leadership Role in Balancing Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches**

Effective leadership is essential to reconcile the tensions that often arise between top-down state security imperatives and bottom-up community resilience efforts. A recurring finding across empirical studies is that when leaders neglect local perspectives or fail to include community voices in security governance, interventions often lack legitimacy and sustainability (Donais, 2009).

Leadership for human security must therefore operate at multiple levels. At the national level, leaders need to build inclusive institutions that recognise and integrate local security actors — such as community policing forums, vigilante groups, and traditional conflict resolution bodies — into the formal security architecture (Baker, 2008). This demands policy clarity, well-defined mandates, and accountability mechanisms that prevent abuse and ensure complementarity rather than competition between formal and informal actors.

At the same time, leaders should champion participatory processes that allow communities to shape priorities, monitor implementation, and co-produce solutions (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Doing so requires strong facilitative leadership skills, a commitment to power-sharing, and the ability to mediate competing interests among state institutions, civil society, and local communities.

Regional bodies also have a leadership role to play here, by incentivising and supporting member states to adopt governance models that blend top-down capacity with bottom-up resilience, ensuring that the everyday insecurities faced by ordinary people are addressed alongside national security priorities.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study examine how leadership in Africa can effectively integrate the human security paradigm into broader security governance frameworks, with a focus on bridging the enduring gap between state-centric approaches and community resilience. Drawing on the Human Security Framework and Participatory Governance Theory, the research underscores that genuine security goes beyond protecting borders — it must also protect people’s lives, livelihoods, and dignity in the face of threats ranging from violent conflict to climate stress and socio-economic exclusion.

The empirical evidence shows that local security initiatives, such as community policing and vigilante groups, can play a vital role in addressing everyday insecurities where the state’s capacity is limited or uneven. However, these same initiatives can sometimes undermine formal security structures when they lack clear mandates, oversight, or are politicised. This tension highlights the need for adaptive, responsive leadership that balances top-down authority with bottom-up participation.

Policy pathways for integrating community resilience include formalising partnerships between state and community actors, embedding participatory mechanisms in security planning, and investing in the capacity and accountability of local structures. Best practices from contexts like Sierra Leone, Kenya, and South Africa demonstrate that where communities have a genuine stake and channels for engagement, security efforts are more legitimate and sustainable.

At the regional level, bodies such as the African Union and RECs can mainstream human security by expanding their mandates to cover non-traditional threats, strengthening cross-border community initiatives, and setting minimum standards for people-centred security governance. Ultimately, the leadership challenge is to create enabling environments that harness local knowledge and agency while ensuring coherence and accountability within the wider security architecture.

By drawing these lessons together, the study contributes to the growing discourse on rethinking security governance in Africa one that recognises that resilient communities are not an alternative to strong states but an essential foundation for truly sustainable peace and security.

## **8. Recommendations**

### **1. Integrating Human Security into Broader Security Governance Frameworks**

National political leaders, security policymakers, and heads of defence, interior, social development, environmental, and local government ministries in Africa should integrate human security into existing security governance, by adopting multi-dimensional security strategies that extend beyond military and territorial concerns. Explicitly include human security indicators such as access to basic services, livelihood protection, and environmental risk management into routine threat assessments and response plans.

National security policies should explicitly include human security indicators such as access to basic services, livelihood protection, and environmental risk management as part of routine threat assessments and response planning.

Leadership should also promote cross-sectoral coordination by creating inter-ministerial committees that bring together defence, interior, social development, environment, and local government portfolios. This ensures that security decisions address the root causes of insecurity and reflect the diverse risks communities face.

## **2. Leadership Practices and Structures to Foster Community Resilience**

African Leaders at national and sub-national levels should institutionalise participatory mechanisms that empower communities as active partners in co-producing security. This includes formalising community policing forums, local

security committees, and neighbourhood watch schemes with clear mandates, legal backing, and accountability measures.

Training and capacity-building for both state security actors and community groups should emphasise human rights standards, conflict sensitivity, and inclusive decision-making. Leadership should also prioritise transparent communication channels and regular dialogue between security agencies and communities to build trust and share local knowledge that can strengthen early warning and response systems.

### **3. Reforming Regional and National Policy Frameworks for People-Centred Security**

Regional bodies such as the African Union and RECs should embed human security into their core mandates by updating policy frameworks, early warning systems, and peacekeeping doctrines to include socio-economic, environmental, and governance-related indicators of insecurity.

At the national level, leaders should enact legal and policy reforms that clarify how community-led security initiatives are linked to formal security structures, including funding models, oversight, and grievance mechanisms to prevent misuse or abuse of power.

Finally, both regional and national actors should invest in knowledge-sharing platforms to document and scale best practices in integrating human security, especially successful

local-state partnerships that have improved resilience in conflict-affected or fragile settings.

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