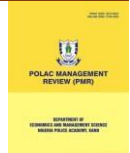




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STATE POLICE AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN NIGERIA: ASSESSING THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF DECENTRALIZED POLICING

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Abstract

Rising insecurity in the country is evidenced by the proliferation of terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, ethnic conflict, cybercrime, and other forms of violent crime. This trend has illuminated the failure of Nigeria's centralized policing system and intensified the debate over the need for state police forces. The study analyzes the potential benefits and challenges of implementing state policing within the current framework of security sector reform and Nigeria's federal system. It further examines the role that state policing could play in enhancing internal security while also reflecting on its constitutional, political, administrative, and financial dimensions. Using a qualitative research design, the study relies on secondary data from scholarly publications, government reports, policy documents, constitutional provisions, and credible media sources, analyzed through content analysis. It is anchored on Federalism Theory and Security Governance Theory, which explain the relationship between decentralized authority, multi-level governance, and effective security management. The findings indicate that state police could enhance intelligence gathering, strengthen community engagement, improve rapid response to security threats, and promote local accountability. However, significant concerns remain regarding political interference, abuse of power by state governments, disparities in states' fiscal capacity, intergovernmental conflicts, and possible violations of civil liberties. The study concludes that state police could strengthen Nigeria's internal security architecture only if supported by effective legal, institutional, and accountability frameworks. It recommends constitutional amendments to define the powers and operational scope of state police, the establishment of independent oversight mechanisms, merit-based recruitment and training, and sustainable funding arrangements. The study contributes to knowledge by providing a balanced assessment of decentralized policing as a critical component of security sector reform in Nigeria's federal system.

Keywords: State Police, Security Sector Reform, Federalism, Internal Security, Decentralized Policing, Security Governance, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Policing plays a key role in state security, public order and the management of democratic governance globally. The rise of terrorism, organized crime, cybercrime, violent extremism and communal conflicts, among others has, of late forced many states to reform their police systems so as to enhance their effectiveness. Federal states like United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, India, Brazil, and Mexico employ

decentralised policing systems whereby non-central governments play a central role in the exercise of powers related to law enforcement. This is based on the general consensus that, local actors know their communities better and, can, therefore address their local security challenges better (Bayley, 2006).

Africa has equally been confronted with heightened demands for police reform as a consequence of its deteriorating security and governance situation. Several

states like South Africa, Kenya, and Ethiopia have resorted to one or more variants of decentralised policing in their quest for improved service delivery, accountability, and community participation in security governance. At the continental level, security sector reform (SSR) is strongly promoted by the African Union as a mechanism for creating accountable, effective and citizen centred security sector institutions. Throughout West Africa, continued threats including the ones posed by terrorism, banditry, piracy, farmers' and herdsmen conflicts and transnational organised crime have demonstrated the incapacity of the current security systems. In addition, the relentless activities of Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP) have exposed the limitation of conventional policing models in countering current and future threats. Nigeria, the most populous country in the continent with about 230 million people in 2025 has continued to experience persistent and widespread insecurity, which is more than the capacity of the central policing system; the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, Nigeria has faced persistent terrorism, kidnapping, robbery, banditry, ethno-sectarian, and separatist agitations, among other forms of violence in all the geo-political regions of the country. Indeed, notwithstanding sustained efforts by the military to confront various security challenges, Nigeria continues to be the worst affected state globally by the menace of terrorism. The repeated mass abductions of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014, Kaduna, Zamfara, Niger States in the last seven years, and sustained onslaughts in the North-West and North- Central regions between 2015 and 2025 have thus propelled discussions for the total overhauling of the security sector.

A major aspect of this debate is the proposal to establish state police. Proponents argue that decentralised policing would improve intelligence gathering, strengthen community engagement, ensure quicker responses to security threats and enhance accountability through closer interaction with local communities. The increasing reliance on hybrid security organisations such as Amotekun, Ebube Agu, Yan Sa Kai, Yan Banga, the Lagos Neighborhood Safety Corps, Kaduna State

Vigilance Service, Kano State Hisbah Board, the Nigerian Hunter and Forest Security Service, and the Civilian Joint Task Force illustrates the growing importance of subnational and community-based security arrangements. These organisations have emerged largely to fill gaps left by conventional policing by utilising local knowledge and intelligence to combat rural crime, banditry and insurgency. However, opponents caution that state police could be vulnerable to political interference, abuse by state governments, conflicts between federal and state authorities, and unequal operational capacities arising from disparities in state resources.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the prospects and challenges of state police within Nigeria's broader security sector reform agenda. It assesses the potential contributions of decentralised policing to internal security, analyses the constitutional and institutional obstacles to its adoption, and evaluates its implications for Nigerian federalism and democratic governance. The study contributes to ongoing policy debates on police reform by providing evidence-based insights for policymakers, security practitioners, scholars and civil society organisations. Focusing on developments between 1999 and 2026, the study relies primarily on secondary sources and is therefore constrained by the availability and reliability of existing literature and official data. It is organised into five sections: introduction, literature review and theoretical framework, methodology, discussion of findings, and conclusion with recommendations.

One key feature of this debate is the proposition of a state police in Nigeria. Proponents assert that the decentralisation of police services would improve the effectiveness of intelligence-gathering, reinforce community policing mechanisms, hasten the deployment of police response to security breaches and foster greater accountability from closer links with local communities. The rise of hybrid security institutions like the Amotekun, Ebube Agu, Yan Sa Kai, Yan Banga, the Lagos Neighborhood Safety Corps, Kaduna State Vigilance Service, Kano State Hisbah Board, the

Nigerian Hunter and Forest Security Service and the Civilian Joint Task Force indicates the increasing significance of community and sub-national-based security arrangements.

These institutions have largely emerged in response to the incapacities of formal policing to fill gaps left behind by local communities through their utilisation of local knowledge and information to combat rural crime, banditry and insurgency.

In opposition to the concept, it is argued that state police could become politicized and may be used as tools of repression by the governments at the states, there may also be conflict between federal and state government personnel and disparate capacities based on resources between state governments.

Against this context, this paper sets out to analyze the potential opportunities and challenges associated with a decentralisation of the Nigerian police to a state level within Nigeria's wider process of security sector reform. This analysis is premised on a systematic examination of the potential contribution of subnational policing structures to Nigerian internal security; a review of existing constitutional and legal constraints to the operationalisation of sub-national policing, and a critical assessment of the implications of establishing sub-national police units for Nigerian federalism and democratic governance. This paper is a contribution to the ongoing debate regarding police reform in Nigeria by providing an empirical base for informed discussion and decision making for politicians, security managers, academics and civil society organizations. It covers the period between 1999-2026, utilizing mostly secondary sources for which limited documentation exists in Nigerian security studies hence relies heavily on the available literature.

2. Conceptualization

Any objective discussion on the issue of state police in Nigeria cannot be fully comprehended without an initial exploration of the core concepts and theoretical frame that guides the investigation. Precisely put, while a conceptual analysis entails the definitions of basic and

essential concepts under research in order to determine the scope and boundaries of the inquiry; it goes without saying that a theoretical overview provides the lenses through which a research is approached, including in this context the inquiry into policing, security governance, federalism and the decentralisation of law enforcement. Henceforth, the conceptual underpinnings of this research will be explicated, and this is to be followed by a consideration of theoretical lenses that can help to explain the connection between the Nigeria federal set-up, security predicaments, and the prevailing calls for a decentralised state policing as a strategy towards achieving a secure and accountable public service and good security governance.

State Police

The idea of a state police is not new, and has elicited much scholarly, and policy debate, especially in federal societies where the issue of distribution of power concerning security matters is a subject matter between the Federal and State (Regional) levels of Government. The notion of state police usually refers to the police organisation owned, funded and controlled by a state (Regional) government, the jurisdiction of which usually confined to the borders of that particular state (Regional). This conceptual understanding of state police is underpinned on the principle that local authorities or representatives, better, understand the dynamics of local security issues. Bayley (2006: 4), a leading academic in the study of policing; defines the state police as “an organisation at the subnational level of government, which is accountable to that government and whose responsibility it is to keep the peace in that level of government”. In a more nuanced way, “State Police can be defined as decentralised law-enforcement organisations that operate under the authority of the state and state government” (Walker and Archbold, 2019: 43). Similarly, in the Nigerian context, Alemika and Suberu (2013) and Suberu (2001) conceptualises state police as “a constitutional expression of federalism that enables the individual state (constituent units of the Federation) to conduct and manage their own affairs including internal security” respectively. In fact, to Goldsmith

(2005: 323), state police is concerned “about increasing accountability and citizen responsiveness of local authorities that provide public services”.

The conceptualisation of state police has revolved round the notion of territorial jurisdiction, administrative control and local accountability. The major argument for the institution of state police centres around the fact that local police forces often have a greater ability to collect intelligence, to establish rapport with the community and to respond quickly and effectively to crime and security incidents compared to the federal police (Verma, 2012). However, some commentators are concerned that, in countries where institutions of democratic accountability are weak, “state police are at risk of co-option into partisan politics, election interference and the harassment of opposition voters and political activities, particularly when the institutions designed to oversee the police have inadequate independent resources and political influence” (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2018). The controversial history of the regional police in Nigeria during the First Republic is a case in point in this regard (Tamuno, 1970). In effect, state police can be best defined, at this point of this discussion, as constitutionally recognised subnational policing structure established to respond effectively to local security threats and the needs of local residents and governed with adequate mechanisms to hold them accountable.

Security Sector Reform

The concept of Security Sector Reform (SSR) is largely viewed as a governance tool and approach that emerged after the end of the Cold War aimed at developing new forms of security institutions into efficient, accountable, democratic and responsive security institutions (OECD, 2007; Hendrickson & Karkoszka, 2002; Bryden & Hnggi, 2005; Nathan, 2007; Ebo, 2007). For OECD (2007), Security sector reform is the process by which security institutions are reoriented to the principles of democratic governance, the rule of law and human rights. According to Hendrickson and Karkoszka (2002),

reform means institution building, institutional restructures, professionalization and citizen Oversight.

To Bryden and Hnggi (2005), SSR is a Governance-centric process designed to improve the effectiveness of security providers, their accountability and legitimacy in the eye of the citizens. In view of the Nathan (2007) and Ebo (2007), SSR reforms are the efforts aimed at conforming to the dictates of democracy, the constitution, rule of law, and human security and sustainable peace. These notions suggest effectiveness, accountability, transparency and democratic control to be the cardinal principles that underline security sector reform, and that it aims at enhancing human security, individual civil liberties and citizens –oriented governance, a phenomenon that was effectively demonstrated in post- apartheid South Africa to improve the confidence of people on the security agencies and give confidence to the society in particular (IDSN, 2003).

Thus, SSR is the continuum of developing new or adapting security institutions towards more professionalism, democratic management and citizen’s participation and security (OECD, 2007).

Federalism

According to Wheare (1963), the essence of a federal constitution lies in the fact that it establishes relationships of a central government to the governments of the constituent political units, not one by means of relation to their individual members or the country’s’ citizens, but in the form of the relationships of the one central government to the other several other governments and to the country’s government taken as a whole. Federalism has therefore been seen by many scholars as a constitutional division of powers between the central government and the component units or constituent units and an institutional separation of governmental powers to include other components of separation (Wheare, 1963; Riker, 1964; Elazar, 1987). Riker (1964) refers to it as a process that requires a

federal arrangement that combines shared rule and regional self-government.

Federalism as seen by Elazar (1987) is best explained as a covenant where two sides engage in political coordination for a specific purpose, sharing their governing power, as a form of union that balances two objectives: national and regional autonomy. According to Watts (2008), federalism is the organization of the state by and large the relationship between the levels of government and their citizens; it organizes and systematizes diversity, helps to maintain national identity and territorial integrity as a whole. Based on this concept, it is understandable why Suberu (2001) argues that Federalism as a political structure that manages ethnic, cultural, territorial and class-based cleavages through its arrangement of power-sharing formula in federal states, such as, Canada, Germany, Australia and the United States of America and so on.

Hence, federalism is viewed as a constitutional system that permits the sharing of powers between the federal and state governments in order to promote effective national governance while preserving regional autonomy. Therefore, the central goal of Federalism is to allow for diversity, balance national integration and decentralisation and local self-governance.

Decentralised Policing

According to Jones and Newburn (2006) police decentralization refers to the transfer of authority, responsibility, and accountability for policing from the central government to regional or local governments, thereby enhancing responsiveness to local communities and improving democratic accountability. In decentralised policing, police power is not vested exclusively in national government but rather distributed across the federal, state and local levels of government to ensure better local ownership and participation, and thus enhancing the ability of local level institutions to address local safety and security issues through greater local responsiveness, accountability and a system that

brings policing much closer to the people (Bayley, 2006).

Decentralised policing has numerous benefits amongst which is ensuring operational flexibility and responsiveness to community needs. Also, it improves the ability of local level institutions to adapt better to local circumstances and gain valuable intelligence through their local networks and to build trust and good relationships with local populations. In spite of these benefits, it faces various problems, such as competitions, the absence of effective co-ordination between the agencies, which leads to fragmentation of authority, duplication of functions and an unequal distribution of resources. More often in new democracies, politicization of security agencies and their capturing by local elites as well as protection of minority rights will become problematic with a system of decentralised policing. Decentralised policing should therefore be conceived as a multi-tier approach to policing to enhance efficient service delivery, accountability, local responsiveness, community participation, and good governance.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Federalism Theory and Security Governance Theory. The choice of these theories is informed by their capacity to explain the relationship between decentralised authority, multi-level governance, and effective security management in federal political systems. The contemporary debate on state police in Nigeria is fundamentally linked to questions of power sharing, institutional autonomy, accountability, and the effectiveness of security provision across different levels of government.

Federalism Theory

The theory of Federalism seeks to analyze the allocation of political power in a constitutional framework across a state which is characterized by diversity, both cultural and territorial. The origins of the theory date back to Montesquieu (1748) and to the authors of the Federalists Papers-Hamilton, Madison and Jay-who advocated dividing political power to prevent tyranny and to allow

efficient functioning of the state. The modern version is considered to have originated from Wheare (1963) who describes federalism as a constitutional arrangement by which the powers of the government are divided between a central government and the regional governments which are in other respects independent within their own respective spheres. Riker (1964) also defined federalism as a political organization in which the activities of government are divided between regional and central government in such a way that each kind of government has some activities on which it makes final decisions. Other scholars associated with this concept include Elazar (1987), Watts (2008) and Suberu (2001).

The underlying assumption of the theory is that political powers should be shared by a national government and various regional governments, in order to accommodate national unity and diversity. Furthermore, the theory claims that the division of powers or decentralisation results in increased efficiency, increased citizen participation, increased government accountability, better representation of ethnic, cultural, regional and social interests (Watts, 2008) and allows the subnational governments to better address the localized problems of security more than the distant central authorities. For instance, the federal states of United States (where there are more than 18,000 police organizations), India (where policing functions are constitutionally delegated to states) and Germany and Canada (where their units enjoy large measures of policing power) have effectively decentralized security management (Walker & Archbold, 2019; Verma, 2012).

Security Governance Theory

Security Governance Theory emerged during the post-Cold War era to explain the evolving nature of security management in response to increasingly complex threats such as terrorism, transnational crime, cybercrime, violent extremism, environmental insecurity, and humanitarian crises. These challenges exposed the limitations of traditional state-centric security models, which relied primarily on the central government for security provision. Associated with scholars such as

Krahmann (2003), Hänggi (2005), Duffield (2001), and Bryden and Hänggi (2005), the theory defines security governance as the coordination of formal and informal institutions, public and private actors, and governance mechanisms involved in security provision. It argues that effective security depends on cooperation, information sharing, accountability, democratic oversight, professionalism, transparency, and citizen participation rather than relying exclusively on central governments for security provision.

These principles have been reflected in a number of security governance reforms across different jurisdictions. South Africa's post-apartheid security sector reforms strengthened civilian oversight and institutional accountability (Nathan, 2007), while the United Kingdom's neighbourhood policing and community safety partnerships enhanced collaboration between police, local authorities, and communities. In Nigeria, initiatives such as the Western Nigeria Security Network (Amotekun) and community-based vigilante groups illustrate the growing role of non-state and subnational actors in security governance.

The theory's major strength is its recognition that contemporary security challenges require collaborative, accountable, and participatory governance across multiple institutions. However, critics argue that involving numerous actors may produce coordination problems, overlapping responsibilities, blurred accountability, and conflicts of authority, while weak institutions may encourage corruption, elite capture, and fragmented security responses (Krahmann, 2003). Despite these limitations, the theory is highly relevant to Nigeria's state police debate because it provides a framework for analysing how decentralised policing can enhance security sector reform while maintaining accountability and coordination.

Combined with Federalism Theory, Security Governance Theory offers a comprehensive analytical framework. Federalism Theory explains the constitutional rationale for decentralising policing authority, whereas Security Governance Theory

identifies the governance mechanisms needed to ensure decentralised policing remains effective, accountable, and citizen-centred, thereby providing a robust basis for assessing the prospects and challenges of state police as part of Nigeria's security sector reform.

4. Evolution of Policing and Security Sector Reform in Nigeria

The evolution of policing and security sector reform in Nigeria has been shaped by colonial legacies, military rule, democratic transitions, and evolving domestic and international security threats. Nigeria's security institutions have developed from indigenous systems of social control and colonial coercive structures into modern organisations confronting challenges such as terrorism, banditry, cybercrime, separatist agitations, piracy, and transnational organised crime. However, reforms have remained uneven, reflecting the country's wider political, constitutional, and socio-economic transformations since the nineteenth century.

Pre-Colonial Security Systems and Indigenous Policing

The development of Nigeria's security apparatus and the direction its sector reforms took are tied to a rather tangled mix of colonial history, long stretches of military rule, and the still ongoing movement toward democracy. Nigeria's security institutions, in particular, moved from decentralized indigenous approaches for regulating society and colonial tools of coercion into present day organizations expected to handle a wide range of dangers. These include terrorism, banditry, cybercrime, and transnational organized crime. Even so, the reform attempts have been uneven, basically showing the wider political, constitutional and socio-economic swings that have taken place since the nineteenth century and not only then.

Before the British stepped in, the communities that now make up Nigeria relied on arrangements for law and order that were embedded in their own social and political realities. In the Hausa-Fulani emirates, *Dogarai* were the core actors. They were used to enforce court

decisions, manage taxation, and keep public order steady (Crowder, 1968). In Yoruba settings, the Eso cavalry alongside the *Ogboni* society carried out different but related duties around policing and mediating disputes. Meanwhile, for the more fragmented setups found among the Igbo, Tiv, and Ijaw, customary law was sustained through age-grade groups, village assemblies, and certain secret societies like *Ekpe* and *Okonko* (Meek, 1937). The strength of these systems, so to speak, came from the fact that they were seen as legitimate by the community, and because they answered directly to traditional authorities (Tamuno, 1970). Today's regional security measures and community-based policing approaches still seem to draw on, or at least adapt, these indigenous foundations in a more modern form.

Colonial Foundations of Modern Policing (1861–1960) 26%

Modern policing in Nigeria started during the British colonial domination and administration in the nineteenth century. After the annexation of Lagos in 1861, the colonial administration set up the Consular Guard, to guard commercial interests and also keep British authority stable (Tamuno, 1970). Later, that arrangement got reorganized into the Hausa Constabulary around 1879, and at the same time other units, like the Royal Niger Constabulary and the Niger Coast Constabulary were brought in during 1888 and 1894 respectively (Braj, 2010). In practice, these groups acted more like paramilitary organisations, and they were mainly aimed at quelling local resistance, collecting taxation, and securing in the colonial administration (Ahire, 1991). Then in 1914, when Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated, Lord Frederick Lugard leaned into a more centralized model of policing, and this shift culminated in the 1930 merger that produced the Nigeria Police Force. Even with the institutional makeover, the force stayed strongly authoritarian, it leaned toward state management rather than public safety, and it often relied on coercive methods.

This was witnessed in the 1929 Aba Women's Protest, where police and military personnel killed, more than

fifty participants (Van Allen, 1972). It was also mirrored by how nationalist movements were contained during the 1940s and 1950s, with suppression being the norm. So overall, this history basically laid down a base of public doubt about security agencies, and that doubt still shapes how policing is viewed in Nigeria today.

Policing during the First Republic (1960–1966)

Upon her independence on October 1, 1960 Nigeria established three police bodies, i.e. Federal police, regional police, local police that mirrored the federal system which allowed regions to tackle the problems arising within their communities (Rotimi, 2001). Nevertheless, due to fierce political rivalry, particularly in the aftermath of the Western Region crisis of 1964–1965 ethnic-based discrimination against rivals characterized the functioning of the regional police, thereby fueling political crisis (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi through a military coup of January 1966 terminated all regional police in Decree No 34 of 1966 by creating a monolithic National Police structure which the 1999 Constitution upheld in Section 214.

Militarisation and Security Sector Development during Military Rule (1966–1999)

Police in Nigeria were to be highly centralised and increasingly militarised throughout the military regime (1966–1979; 1983–1999). All military regimes utilised the Nigeria Police Force for such purposes as: maintenance of public order, suppression of political opposition, and enforcement of military decrees. The dismantling of the regional police in 1966 led to increased control over policing at the federal level, and an increased coordination and co-operation between police and the army (especially during unrests).

Some attempts at professionalism were made, such as the establishment of the Nigeria Police Academy and specialised police formations; however, the regime was marred by abuses of human rights, political interference, corruption and the lack of a viable mechanism of accountability. In the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa, an environmental activist and eight Ogoni activists, a public

hanging occurred in November 1995 under General Abacha which attracted significant international attention, proving the critical need for democratic reforms of the security apparatus (HRW, 1999; Myers, 2021). This meant that the trust was lost and some of the structural defects would persist in the democratic period.

Democratic Transition and the Emergence of Security Sector Reform (1999–2007)

Nigeria, upon its return to democratic governance in 1999, have embarked on several reforms aimed at transforming its security system and the Nigeria Police Force in particular to ensure a more professionalised (Nwabufu, 2023), and more accountable and responsive police in terms of services delivered. Between 2006 and 2012, the Federal Government established three major Presidential Committees on Police Reform, chaired respectively by retired Deputy Inspector-General of Police (DIG) Muhammad Dan Madami (2006), retired Inspector-General of Police (IG), Mohammed Dikko Yusuf (2008), and retired Deputy Inspector-General of Police (DIG) Parry B. O. Osayande (2012). While they all diagnosed continuing deficiencies within the Nigeria Police Force such as funding, welfare, training, operational performance, corruption, and trust among the populace, these reports primarily focused on reforming the federal institution, rather than on supporting constitutional devolution through the creation of state police. Prior to the intensified constitutional discourse of the 2020s, therefore, the primary response to Nigeria's security problems has always focused on improving and professionalizing the federal police rather than restructuring the country's policing system. The policy approach that emerged is further underscored by the Police Act 2020 that was promulgated to replace the largely defunct 2004 legislation with a robust and modern legal framework for policing in the country. The Police Act 2020 aimed to improve the operational efficiency and accountability of the Nigeria Police Force by strengthening its institutional capacity, enhancing its professional efficiency, and facilitating community policing in its operations, in addition to better promoting the protection of fundamental human rights.

Nonetheless, even with the far-reaching institutional reforms encapsulated by the Police Act 2020, it did not in any way move towards dismantling the decentralized policing established by Section 214 of the Constitution and creating a state police service. Thus, the reform policy embarked upon under the administration of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, and Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and expressed by the Police Act 2020 continued to reflect the same policy logic, which has been to make the federal police work better, but not to de-centralize its operations (Chukwuma, Ed., 2010; Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN], 2008; FGN, 2012).

In spite of all these efforts, challenges persist within the Nigerian Police Force such as endemic corruption and cases of human rights abuses which led to EndSARS protests in October 2020. This protest has played a significant role in the Nigerian security reform discourse. Following allegations of human rights abuses such as torture, extortion and extrajudicial killing, particularly targeting the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), it sparked a mass anti-police protest that involved millions of young Nigerians and caught the attention of the international community, and judicial panels were set up to examine alleged human rights violations, some of which resulted in awards of compensation to victims. That is to say the protest highlighted the need for an urgent reformation of the police and regaining the public's trust (Oyeleke, 2020). With the election of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu into office in May 2023, there has been resurgence of discussions around the need for restructuring the nation's security apparatus and the creation of state police. As the issue of banditry, kidnapping and armed robbery increases, calls for the decentralisation of the Nigerian Police have continued. Hence the current situation whereby the debate for the decentralization of the Nigeria police has become very popular across the country.

5. The State Police Debate in Nigeria

The Nigerian debate around the merits and drawbacks of police decentralisation – specifically its effects on police

efficiency and national security in the long run term– is currently at fever pitch. This section examines the principal arguments advanced by both proponents and opponents of police decentralisation and analyses how these competing perspectives frame the broader discourse.

Arguments in Favour of State Police

Nigeria's ongoing debate for the establishment of state police forces has gathered traction over recent years against a background of rising insecurity, demands for decentralization, and dissatisfaction with the performance of the centralized Nigeria Police Force (NPF), which was established in line with the provisions of section 214 of the Constitution 1999 (as amended). Nigeria's security experience demonstrates that the existing centralised policing structure has struggled to address complex security threats such as terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, secessionist agitations, piracy, and organised crime. Nigeria, with approximately 236 million citizens and estimated 371,800 police officers, has a police to population ratio of 1:636, significantly lower than the United Nations (UN) standard of 1:450 (Hassan, 2026). The issue is further compounded by the fact that more than 100,000 Nigerian policemen are deployed to provide personal protection to politicians and VIPs.

The result is that the few number of police officers remaining at the federal and state levels to discharge their statutory responsibilities in public policing are far from being adequate. As a matter of fact, the Nigerian police chief, has recently estimated that the nation requires an additional 190,000 additional police officers to meet international policing standards (Shehu, 2023). Supporters contend that state policing conforms to the principle of federalism where power is shared by the central government with regional governments (Elazar, 1987; Watts, 2008). They also argue that security problems are local in nature and therefore requires local responses and that governors, despite being recognised as the chief security officers of their respective states, are unable to influence the conduct of Commissioners of Police as their ultimate loyalty is to the inspector general

of police (IGP) and the federal government, hence creating disconnects that undermine an effective and quick response to security issues (Suberu, 2001; Elaigwu, 2007).

They assert that state police would enhance the gathering of intelligence and boost community policing because local officers are more aware of local languages, cultures, terrains and social connections thus facilitate efficient crime detection and prevention (Alemika, 2013). Also, the former inspector general of police, Solomon Arase (2017), argued that effective policing can only achieve success through community engagement and local ownership.

Supporters also point to the creation of regional security organisations, such as *Amotekun* in the South-West, *Ebube Agu* in the South-East and the Hisbah Corps in numerous northern states as proof that people across Nigeria are dissatisfied with a centralised policing system and believe they require decentralised policing (ICG, 2022). They also draw upon the experience of countries like the USA, Canada, India, Germany and Australia that run successful federal states where state and federal police operate alongside each other with better accountability and a lesser burden on federal policing institutions (Watts, 2008). This has been reinforced by the proposal to establish state police at the 2014 National Conference (Pearse, 2017). The arguments for state police can also be framed in terms of improved accountability and service delivery, through the development of state funded and state run police forces, where the resources and training of personnel, officer well-being, operating methods and public perception would all be more easily addressed and managed by subnational level police institutions than the currently over stretched federal system (Abuja Times, 2026, April 27).

Arguments Against State Police

While the tide of opinion may be turning towards the decentralisation of policing in the country, it is important to acknowledge that the arguments against state police remain potent. Many who are sceptical of state police

would cite the precedent set by Nigeria's First Republic (1960-1966), when regional and local policing structures were present. It has been argued that during the 1964-1965 Western Region crisis, state police was deployed to intimidate opposition members and stifle protest, which led to the dissolution of all regional police services by the military regime of General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi with Decree No. 34 of 1966 (Rotimi, 2001). Similar to this situation, it is feared that the governors of the states could use state police to suppress dissenting voices and partisan political opponents; for political campaign purposes; manipulate electoral outcomes; and harass political rivals.

This has been acknowledged by, among others, the immediate past President Muhammadu Buhari, who warned of potential political abuse by state police governors (Ayitogo, 2022). Also, concerns have been raised that the diverse ethnic and religious configuration of the Nigerian state would be exploited by the dominant ethnic or religious group in a particular state to capture the police and create further conflict between communal groups and even between the state and the federal government (Osaghae, 1998). Another considerable factor is the financial viability of state police systems in Nigeria. Despite Nigeria's projected N3.63 trillion in Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) in 2025, numerous states in Nigeria still depend on federal allocations for majority of their revenue streams and can't meet financial obligations such as paying their workers' salaries and pensions (National Bureau of Statistics Nigeria, 2025).

Given the cost of equipping a state-level police agency-including recruiting, training, acquiring equipment, providing intelligence, setting up forensic services, and ensuring the welfare of officers-it's likely many state governments wouldn't be able to afford adequate staffing or resources to create and maintain a functioning police force that could effectively combat the diverse range of crimes affecting their respective areas (TVC News Nigeria, 2025; Broadscope Network, 2026).

In addition to this, having 36 state police institutions to complement the federal police is bound to raise problems

with coordination, intelligence gathering, information sharing and jurisdictions when it comes to crimes like terrorism, kidnapping, cyber-criminality and organized crimes that often transcend state boundaries (Bouderhem, 2022; News Central TV, 2026). Based on the aforementioned, they conclude that the primary problem with the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) lies not in its structural arrangement but in the lack of sufficient funding, corrupt practices, poor training, lack of effective oversight and accountability and politically induced appointments. Therefore, what is needed is structural reform rather than decentralization of policing (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000).

Stakeholders' Positions

The establishment of state police has generated a lot of debate, with a broad spectrum of political, traditional and civic stakeholders airing different views. Nigeria Governors' Forum and the Southern and Northern Governors' Forums have expressed strong support for constitutional reforms to allow the creation of state police. The rationale behind the establishment of state police is the need for the decentralisation of police power as a means of containing widespread insecurity (kidnapping, banditry, terrorism and separatist movements), thereby using local intelligence to strengthen police response and command structures (CGTN Africa, 2026; Africa Independent Television, 2026).

Local community policing has also been welcomed by traditional rulers such as Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III (Sultan of Sokoto) and Adeyeye Ogunwusi (Ooni of Ife). In the security sphere, two former IGs of police (Mike Okiro and Solomon Arase) are in support of state police, while some retired soldiers and politicians have caution against politicization. Civil Society Organisations, like CLEEN Foundation and Centre for Democracy and Development are in support of state police with adequate constitutional safeguards, effective oversight and functional procedures to ensure efficiency (CLEEN Foundation, 2026).

National Assembly Deliberations

One of the persistent arguments for and against constitutional amendment has been on the issue of state police, especially since Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999. Indeed, previous National Assemblies, in both lower and upper chambers, took the decision to introduce decentralised policing as proposed and strengthened with constitutional provision by the 2014 National Conference (Musa, 2026). But due to worries concerning political hijack of the system by the political office holders, its financial burden and Command and Control structure (Chapi-Odekina, 2026), it was abandoned by the 7th, 8th, and 9th assemblies.

Following worsening insecurity and pressure by state governors across Nigeria, the 10th National Assembly decided to raise the tempo through constitution wide consultation across the country to canvass support and provide guidelines on recruitment process, funding, accountability mechanism, inter-governmental collaboration, and ways of preventing political hijack.

Although the reform is still ongoing at the time of writing this paper, the sustained debate and the strong commitment demonstrated by political leaders at both the national and state levels underscore the growing consensus that decentralised security governance is no longer merely a policy option but an emerging necessity for addressing Nigeria's security challenges.

6. Policy Options and Recommendations

While state police may offer possibilities of improved security governance and community participation, both international experience and Nigeria's history suggest that decentralisation without adequate safeguards could create new challenges. Therefore, the success of state police depends not only on constitutional amendments but also on robust policy frameworks that balance local autonomy with accountability, professionalism, and national cohesion.

Constitutional Safeguards and Oversight

The establishment of state police must be accompanied by strong constitutional safeguards against political corruption and abuses of democratic governance. Nigerian history has had a negative precedent: In the First Republic, the regional police was manipulated by party leaders to suppress political opponents. The experience culminated in the centralisation of policing through Decree No. 34 of 1966 and the present provision of section 214 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria (Rotimi, 2001).

Any amendment of the constitution to establish state police should clearly outline the functions, the operational limits, and the chain of command for state police as well as a constitutional protection of state commissioners of police against undue pressure from the state governor (Basu, 2016) and specific conditions in which the federal government would step in where terrorism and inter-state criminal activities, insurrections and pervasive human rights violations is at stake, which could be emulated from Germany's federal cooperative police system (Schneider, 2005) .

The constitution should make a prohibition against discriminate practices based on tribal and religious beliefs as well as political party affiliation to protect minorities and secure the confidence of the public. The establishment of state police, like any form of deconcentration policing must be matched with stringent measures to ensure accountability and safeguard the public from police abuse, particularly considering the numerous police brutality, corruption and human rights abuses in Nigeria documented through the 2020 EndSARS protests (Amnesty International, 2021, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2022). An independent body for oversight should exist in the form of State Police Service Commissions which would monitor personnel management: hiring, promotion, dismissal, discipline and the handling of complaints by the public. State Houses of Assembly, the judiciary and civilian review bodies will provide additional oversight functions.

A range of technologies such as body worn camera, digital reporting systems and electronic crime tracking systems will boost accountability and reduce opportunities for corruption (Walker & Archbold, 2018; Ariel et al., 2015).

Funding and Professional Standards

The viability of state police depends on financial viability. Because most states still rely on federation allocation, a hybrid funding model would have federal, state and local government contributed the security, in addition, create a national policing equalisation fund which will assist less viable states provide baseline standards in operating, much like what happens in countries like Australia and Canada (Watts, 2008). States also must enhance Internally generated revenues, expand their existing security trust funds and foster more public private security partnership. Beyond this, constitutional protection is vital on the adequacy of salaries, life and health insurance, accommodation, pensions and other fringe benefits which must promote professional conduct and eradicate corrupt practices (Bayley, 2006).

The state police will not only enhance its credibility through its ability to be a professionally competent institution, but also a transparent one where selection is merit-based and thorough training is in place. Selection process would aim to achieve demographic mix within a state with provisions to include women and minorities in security institutions, while the training programme for police must cover such as; crime investigation, Forensic science, cyber security, intelligence analysis, anti-terrorism, conflict management and Human rights based on the internationally approved standards. It is very essential to also promote regular training, periodic re-certification of officers, with the severe sanctions and punitive actions taken against officers accused of corruption, torture and others (Alemika, 2013; Goldsmith, 2005).

Intergovernmental Coordination

The operations of the state police can only be effective in a system of collaborative federalism. As with other areas of national policy that have cross-border effects like national security against terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, cybercrime, and criminal organizations, coordination and cooperation among state and federal security forces would be important (Watts, 2008). As in other federations such as the United States, Canada, Germany, and India, Nigeria would continue to need a federal agency dedicated to national security, terrorism, cybercrime and crimes affecting multiple states, while state police primarily addressed local concerns (Watts, 2008).

Coordination through mechanisms such as joint operational centres, systematic intelligence sharing and a National Crime Information Database would also enhance efficient crime-fighting.

State police operations should benefit from the utilization of advanced digital and IT based systems, including digital evidence collection technologies, biometric identification systems, and the deployment of artificial intelligence in analyzing information and forecasting criminal patterns.

7. Conclusion

The discourse on the creation of state police has now morphed into one of the most significant constitutional and security reform issues of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In essence, whereas the initially centralized system of policing was established in an effort to unify the nation and avoid the political exploitation that was possible under the First Republic's regional police arrangements, Nigeria's persistent struggle against insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, cybercrime, organised crime, and the ever-growing range of new security challenges, have exposed the limitations of an excessively centralized approach to localised security threats. In essence, the study demonstrated the fundamental arguments for the state police, which revolve around improving local intelligence gathering,

enhancing community engagement, enhancing timely response to security threats and bringing policing closer to the people in line with the Nigerian federal framework.

The study acknowledges the genuine fears about political influence, ethnic bias, violations of human rights, institutional disintegration, and disparate capacities of state governments to adequately resource and manage police forces, however, these concerns call for appropriate and rigorous constitutional and institutional arrangements and should not constitute an excuse to outright reject the decentralisation of policing.

More particularly, a comparison with the decentralised models of policing in other federations like the United States, Canada, Germany, India, and Australia, indicates that when appropriately and effectively governed by constitutional provisions, professional standards, oversight bodies, a robust, equitable funding mechanism, and sound co-ordination between different levels of government, they lead to effective security governance. The question that now faces Nigeria therefore is not necessarily whether state police should be created, but rather how to design and institutionalise one that will enhance security without sacrificing democratic accountability, national cohesion and the rule of law. This study asserts therefore that any constitutional amendment authorising state police must therefore provide stringent safeguards against its political hijacking such as independent Police Service Commissions (PSCs), merit-based recruitment and promotions, civilian oversight over police operations, sound intelligence sharing mechanisms, secure, sustainable financing mechanisms and co-ordination frameworks. Furthermore, beyond the issue of police structure, police reform needs to be understood as part of a larger security sector reform programme.

State police have moved from the realms of theoretical/academic discussions to an active constitutional reform process; with consistent advocacy from President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, support of the National Economic Council (NEC), endorsement from the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF), and the ongoing

constitutional review of the National Assembly, an unprecedented consensus has emerged to introduce decentralised policing.

Though constitutional amendments are still underway at the time of this research report's writing, sustained support from the Presidency and broader inter-governmental consensus, indicates that the creation of decentralized policing has become an indelible part of Nigeria's evolving security architecture. In the end, state police neither represent a magic bullet for all Nigeria's security woes, nor is it a looming existential threat to its

nascent democracy. It will be effective or not, depending on the rigour of constitutional and institutional mechanisms instituted to guide its operations, the professionalism and incorruptibility of its members, and the political commitment of federal and state elites to the constitution, accountability, rule of law and respect for human rights.

If these conditions are met, state police could offer not just enhanced public security, but also the opportunity to deepen Nigeria's federalism by offering an accountable, locally-oriented, and more effective system of policing.

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