

# STATE POLICING: A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO UNITARY POLICING SYSTEM AND CRIME CONTROL IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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## **ONOJA Anthony**

Department of Sociology  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria  
[goodmantony2002@yahoo.com](mailto:goodmantony2002@yahoo.com)  
08033446244

## **ODUMU Abraham Sunday**

Liberal Studies Department  
Federal Polytechnic Kaura Namoda  
Zamfara State, Nigeria  
[tellabraham@yahoo.com](mailto:tellabraham@yahoo.com)  
08035548511

## **MOSES-OJO A. Olufunke, PhD**

General Studies Directorate  
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University  
Bauchi, Nigeria  
[mosesfunmi2@gmail.com](mailto:mosesfunmi2@gmail.com)  
08023622636

## **Ejeh, Adoyi William**

Department of Public Administration  
Federal Polytechnic -Kaura-Namoda  
Zamfara State, Nigeria  
[willieejeh@gmail.com](mailto:willieejeh@gmail.com)  
08036127816

## **Abstract**

The upsurge in criminal activities such as terrorism, armed banditry, robbery, kidnapping, farmer- herder clashes has posed great challenge to the efforts of the Nigerian police to mitigate crime and criminality in the country, thereby necessitating calls for alternative policing in Nigeria. The calls were further reinforced by the public outcry and protest against acts of police brutality culminating in the nationwide #EndSARs campaigns in 2020. This paper examined state policing as an antidote to crime prevention and control in contemporary Nigeria. Despite the potential challenge of state policing being political interference, violation of human rights, inadequate resources, poor communication gaps, coordination and abused of best standard practices across states, the innovation has its inherent merits, principal among which is the localization of crime control as the operators of the system are people who are familiar with the culture and tradition of the communities to which they are deployed to control crimes. The major objective of the study; to examine the role of State police in preventing and controlling crimes in Nigeria. The paper adopted Structural Functionalism theory as theoretical framework. The study utilized documentary secondary data. Major findings of the study is that state policing enables more effective and efficient crime prevention and control, as local police forces would have better understanding of the unique security challenges facing their respective states. The study recommends that the federal government should put in place robust legal frameworks, adequate resources, and oversight mechanisms to mitigate the challenges that may work against the effectiveness of the state policing regime in Nigeria. The study also recommends clear delineation of the roles, responsibilities, and jurisdiction of state police to ensure synergy of operation between operatives of federal and state police.

**Keywords:** Crime control, #EndSARs; Police brutality; State Policing; Terrorism

## Introduction

Multilevel policing system has been in place across countries of the world where sub national bodies exist. It is variously termed state police, Regional police or Provincial police. The mode and form of its operations as well as its relationship with the central police vary from one society to another. However, in most jurisdictions, the central police exercises wider powers in comparison to those of the sub-nationals. America, India, Indonesia, Germany, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and some others are among the countries that operate state police (Agboluaje, 2024).

In the United Kingdom, policing is operationally and financially devolved across 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales, Police Scotland and the police service of Northern Ireland. There is robust strategic collaboration amongst all these devolved policing authorities and the British transport police (Walker & Katz, 2017). The philosophical rationale for the devolution of policing powers in the UK is not far-fetched; a police constable in Surrey (England) cannot know the intricacies of criminality, criminal gangs, and actionable intelligence on both, in Dunfermline (Scotland), better than a police constable at the latter who has lived there (Dunfermline) all his life (Walker & Katz, 2017).

The World population Review Crime survey (2024), identified the following the countries analyzed in this treatise with devolved policing models Viz; Australia, recorded 46.70 crimes per 100,000; United Kingdom, recorded 46.90 crimes per 100,000 people; the United States recorded 49.20 crimes per 100,000, while Nigeria, with a centralized command- and control policing model recorded 65.80 crimes per 100,000 people. Thus, the average crime rate of 47.6 crimes per 100,000 in Australia, UK and USA indicates a statistically significant positive variance of 18.2 crimes per 100,000 people in Nigeria. From the foregoing statistics, it is apparent that state policing is more result oriented than a centralized policing model as currently practiced in Nigeria.

Several West African countries have adopted state policing, including; Ghana, Senegal, and Liberia have adopted state policing, while Sierra Leone has a decentralized police system, with regional police forces that are responsible for maintaining law and order (National Crime Prevention Council, 2022). The extent of decentralization and autonomy of state police forces varies across countries. Ghana's decentralized police system has led to 15% reduction in crime rates between 2017 and 2020; 12% decline in crime rates between 2015 and 2020 in Senegal; 20% reduction in crime rates between 2018 and 2022 in Liberia; 18% reduction in crime rates

between 2017 and 2002 (Crimes statistics by Ghana, Senegal ,Liberia and Sierra Leone Police, 2022).

Nigeria faces security challenges across all six geopolitical zones in various forms, including insurgency, terrorism, communal clashes, banditry, kidnapping, and piracy, which are ignited by deep-rooted socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious tensions (Ribadu, 2024). Using the age long command and control unitaristic policing model, with headquarter in Abuja is patently ineffective. The complexity and scale of terrorism confronting Nigeria demands considered analysis and more importantly, innovative approaches. The northwest faces challenges with banditry and kidnapping, where armed groups attack rural communities, causing significant loss of lives and displacement. Whilst the north central zone has experienced farmers-herder clashes driven by land disputes and environmental degradation. The existing centralist policing architecture, is no longer feasible given the burning volatility, enormous insecurity and terrorism besieging the country (Ojumu, 2024).

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is a national police establishment whose existence is affirmed by section 214 of the constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended). Nigeria according to Adeoye (2020) is the only country, out of federal countries in the world that has only one police force. The NPF is plagued by acts of corruption and misconduct, including bribery, extortion, and human rights abuses. NPF is plagued with inadequate funding and resources, leading to poor working conditions and low morale, lack of proper training and development opportunities for personnel (Abubakar, 2017). Qualitative and quantitative inadequacy of men and women, materials and money within the Nigeria Police as well as poor and inadequate social infrastructures within the Nigerian society, militate against police effectiveness, positive estimations of the police by Nigerian citizens (Dambazau, 2012). The Amnesty International (2018), opined that lack of community trust and cooperation, due to historical abuses and ongoing human rights violations against Nigeria police force serves as the catalysts for the establishment of state police which has greater capacity and ability to promptly respond to local emergencies and crises. This can fill the yawning of security gap, especially in the rural communities, towns, and cities because every security problem is local and can best be handled by the locals who know the terrain, speak the language of the community and are familiar with the cultural idiosyncrasies of their communities.

State police has greater familiarity with local communities and terrain, enabling more effective community policing and response to local needs. It is also more cost effective and efficient, as state police forces are often smaller and more agile than federal police (Bayley,

2005). State police has more autonomy and flexibility to address state specific needs and priorities (Roberg, 2017).

The study differs from that of other researchers by prioritizing prevention and resilience building measures to help mitigate the risk of future insecurity. This includes early warnings systems, community policing initiatives, and programs to address the root causes of conflict and violence as well as the need to strengthen the capacity of local institutions to govern effectively and address community grievances. This involves empowering stakeholders, communities, local governments, and civil society organizations to play a more active role in taming insecurity and peace building. The foregoing makes the current research a novelty.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the clamour for state policing, problems of political interference, violation of human rights by power drunk governors, inadequate resources, poor communication gaps, coordination and abused of best standard practices across states are some of sore points that may change the narrative against the new policy. Another likely stumbling block against the proposal is the issue of low level of political temperament of politicians at the state level. There is also the possibility of state governors hijacking the state police, by using the police as instruments of political oppression as was the case in Nigeria's First Republic, where the government of the northern and western regions used the regional police to oppress and silence opposition parties.

The above shortcomings against state police notwithstanding, the current centralized policing arrangement seems inadequate to tackle Nigeria's disturbing security challenges. The centralized policing system is overwhelmed and overburdened by daily incidents of killings, abductions, militancy, oil theft, illegal mining and other criminal activities, in the country, hence the need for state policing. States should not be held down by legal and constitutional constraints from putting in place the necessary policing structure to protect their citizens. Policing according to Dambazau, (2012) is all about the security of people; who reside within a particular geographical location (clan, village, town, city, state, nation); with a common interest of protecting their lives and property; and who have identified that certain acts are reprehensible to community well-being. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that this research is imperative.

## **Study Objectives**

The aim of the study is to contribute to the narrative on the desirability of state policing as an antidote to crime prevention and control in contemporary Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the role of state police in preventing and controlling crimes in Nigeria.
- ii. Investigate the effectiveness of state police in reducing crime rates and improving public safety.

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Clarification**

For the purpose of this study, the following concepts are clarified to avoid possible misunderstanding of usage: antidote, control, crime, prevention, Nigerian police force, state police and state.

### **Antidote**

Jaquith (2007), defined antidote as a countermeasure or solution that neutralizes or reverses the effects of a security threat, vulnerability, or attack. For this study, antidote is a measure put in place to help to detect, prevent, or respond to a security threat or incident.

### **Control**

For Cole (2018), control is the exercise of authority and power to prevent, detect, and respond to criminal behaviour even as Dambazau (2012) conceptualized control as the idea of solving crime problems, arresting suspects, and processing and incapacitating offenders. Crime control involves the whole gamut of the criminal justice system.

### **Crime**

Durkheim (1858- 1917), conceptualized crime as an act which offends a strong and defined state of collective conscience. To the functionalists, crime is a social product determined by social conditions and is capable of being controlled in social terms. Siegel (2015), defined crime as an act of commission or omission that violates a law and is punishable by the state, while Schmallegger (2018), sees it as a behaviour or action that is prohibited by law and punishable by the criminal justice system. Regoli (2016), operationalized crime as an act or failure to act that is deemed harmful to society and is punishable by the state. From the perspective of this study, crime is an act of omission that violates a law punishable by the state and deemed harmful to society as it violates social norms and values. It is punishable by fines, imprisonment, or other penalties.

## **Prevention**

Dambazau (2012), defined prevention as a pattern of attitudes and behaviour directed both at reducing the threat of crime and enhancing the sense of safety and security to positively influence the quality of life and to develop environments where crime cannot flourish. According to Tilley (2018), prevention refers to strategies and tactics used to prevent crime from happening in the first place. From the point of view of this study, prevention is taking action to stop or reduce crime using environmental design, social programming, and community engagement.

## **Nigerian Police Force (NPF)**

The NPF is the primary law enforcement agency in Nigeria, responsible for maintaining law and order, protecting lives and property, and enforcing laws and regulations (Abubakar, 2017). The Police Act specifies the duties of the police as preventing and detecting crimes, apprehending offenders, preserving law and order, protecting lives and property, enforcing laws and regulations that they are directly charged with. For Onuorah (2019), the NPF is a paramilitary organization with a strength of over 300,000 personnel, responsible for maintaining public safety and security, investigating crimes and enforcing criminal laws.

## **State Police**

Parsons (2007) defines state police as that aspect of the structure of social system which is referable to the territorial location of persons... and their activities. Walker & Katz (2017), sees state police as a police force that is responsible for policing a specific state, as opposed to a federal police force which has jurisdiction over the entire country. For Roberg (2017), state police is a state level law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction over specific geographic area, such as state or province. Bayley (2005) defines state police as a law enforcement agency that is responsible for enforcing state laws and maintaining law and order within a state. For us, state police refers to a law enforcement agency that is responsible for maintaining law and order, preventing and investigating crimes, and protecting the citizens of a specific state.

## **State**

Roskin (2017), defines state as a political entity with a defined territory, population, and government, while Viotti (2018), refers to a state as a government or political authority that has sovereignty over a particular territory or population.

## **Empirical Review**

### **The role of state police in preventing and controlling crime in Nigeria**

Agwanwo (2014), posits that state police could enhance operational efficiency by being more attuned to local cultures and community dynamics, improving trust and cooperation, which are crucial for effective policing. A key argument in favour of state policing is the potential for improved police efficiency and accountability. Advocates believe that state police forces can address the specific needs and dynamics of local communities more effectively than a centralized system. Eke (2021) argues that state police are a prerequisite for effective security in Nigeria, given the country's diverse and complex security challenges.

Akinyetun (2016) conducted a research on the State Policing in Nigeria: Beyond Necessity. The objectives of the study were to examine the inadequacies of the Nigeria Police Force and to analyse the role of state policing in curbing insecurity. The study which adopted Structural Functionalism as theoretical framework found that the Nigeria Police Force was ineffectual due to its centralized structure which has made management, control, performance, effectiveness and efficiency difficult. The study noted that the call for state police in Nigeria was a justified necessity. The findings also revealed that the state police has ecological, socio economic and socio cultural edge over the conventional police. The study concluded that state police remains a logical solution to the insecurity in the country and is a right step in ensuring true federalism in Nigeria.

Ogwuda (2018), did a study titled State Police: A progressive Approach to tackling insecurity in Nigeria, whose objective was to examine how state police could mitigate the current insecurity in the country. The study found that that a decentralized police force can rescue Nigeria from the insecurity adding that through the state police structure, the states would be able to ascertain their security needs, recruit and train enough manpower to meet such needs. The study recommended that the provision of section 215(2) of the 1999 constitution and section 6 of the Police Act which vest the control of the police force in the IGP should be amended and open to devolution of power. The drawback of Ogwuda's research is the inability to use methodology and as such, the researcher did not investigate the factors diligently by getting the views of all parties involved. This study fills the gap in Ogwuda's research thereby making for proper generalization.

Another study by Samuel, Julius, and Abiodun (2024) on Community Policing and Crime Prevention in Ekiti State: Interrogating the State Police Option, examined the effectiveness of state police force option as a strategic response to emerging security challenges. The study adopted descriptive survey research design method to generate responses from 425 randomly

selected respondents. The study utilized multistage sampling technique to select one local government from each of the three senatorial districts in Ekiti state, using simple random sampling. Findings reveal that the adoption of state police could be beneficial in the long run, its adoption could be counter-productive if abused by a power drunk executive governor. The study recommended a grassroots participation and locally tailored policing frameworks that can significantly contribute to crime prevention. Although this study presents good perspective in understanding state police as an option in policing and crime prevention, the non-utilization of an appropriate theoretical framework makes it very weak in understanding the phenomenon.

Adedeji (2012), in his study, identified several issues associated with the centralized police system in Nigeria such as inefficiency, corruption, and lack of accountability. According to him, inefficiency arises from the bureaucratic nature of the centralized system, where decisions are made at the federal level, leading to slow responses to local security needs. Ugwu, Ngige, and Ugwuanyi (2013), in their own research, emphasized that state police could contribute significantly to a more resilient and responsive security framework and advocated a balanced approach that combines state and federal policing efforts to address Nigeria's complex security landscape. Abdullahi (2019), however, argues that without a centralized system, there could be significant disparities in the quality and professionalism of police officers. This inconsistency could undermine the effectiveness of law enforcement and compliance efforts to coordinate between state police forces and the federal police.

Nwogwugwu and Kupoluyi (2015), recommend that safeguards must be put in place to prevent state police from being manipulated by local politicians for personal or political gain. Ensuring accountability and oversight is crucial to mitigating these risks and ensure that state police serves the public effectively and fairly. In our view, the overall, the effectiveness of state police in reducing crime rates and protecting public safety depends on the specific strategies and practices implemented, the level of community engagement and cooperation, and the availability of resources and funding.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted the Structural functionalist theory to examine the structure and policies of institution of the society under study. Structural functionalism is theoretical perspective that focuses on the functions performed in society by the different parts of social institutions to ensure the stability of the whole society. The assumptions of structural functionalism include; Generalization of results; Epistemological approach; Structure; Use of quantification. Specifically the theory noted as follows:

- i. Society is a social system composed of interrelated parts;
- ii. Each part of society serves a function that contributes to the overall stability and harmony of the system;
- iii. Social institutions and structures are interdependent and work together to maintain social order;
- iv. Society has a natural tendency towards equilibrium and order; consensus: there is a shared consensus among members of society about values, norms, and beliefs;
- v. Individuals are socialized to perform specific roles and conform to societal norm; Institutions: social institutions (eg, family, religion, education) perform specific functions that maintain social order;
- vi. Each institution has and perform manifest (intended) and latent (unintended) functions;
- vii. Deviance and conflict are seen as dysfunctional and threaten social order and;
- viii. Society evolves and adapts, to maintain social order and stability.

Structural Functionalism is useful to the study because it emphasizes the boundary maintaining mechanism of social control. State police will serve the purpose of functional unity by contributing to stability and harmony of the system as social institutions are interdependent and work together to maintain social order, hence both the federal police and state police can work interdependently to maintain social stability. Through state policing, there will be a shared consensus among members of society about values, norms and beliefs that communities must adhere to as individuals will be monitored to perform specific roles and conform to societal norms. State police is a viable alternative as law enforcement agency that is well positioned to control any dysfunction that may threaten social order as well as maintain social order and stability.

### **Methodology**

The study employed the descriptive research design method of analysis and draws its data from secondary sources such as journal articles, books, specialized reports as well as opinion articles, editorials, commentaries, editorials and press interviews. The study area is Nigeria, which is located on the West coast of Africa covering a land mass of 923,768 square kilometers is the study area. It is home to the great rivers Niger and Benue. Abuja, the nation's capital is situated in the north central heartland of the country. Nigeria, is a federation of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and 774 councils, with over 250 ethnic nationalities and an estimated population of 200 million citizens.

## **Discussion**

Policing model administered at a devolved or sub-national level is capable of addressing present day societal ills, extremists terrorism, virulent banditry, kidnapping and felonious criminality. State policing is a potential milestone in the evolution of the nation's law enforcement frameworks that would create the opportunity to fashion law enforcement in a manner that addresses the various demands of communities across the country. The findings by Akinyetun (2016), reveal that Nigeria Police Force has failed due to its centralized structure which has made management, control, performance, effectiveness and efficiency difficult, that the call for state police in Nigeria at the moment is beyond necessity. The findings also reveal that state police has ecological, socio-economic and socio-cultural edge over the current federalist policing system. State policing enables states to effectively maintain law and order especially during social upheavals such as inter-community riots, youth restiveness, riots and ethnic militancy without the often costly delays in obtaining federal approval. The findings by Ogwuda (2018), reveal that a decentralized police force can rescue Nigeria from the insecurity. Through the state police structure, the states would be able to ascertain their security needs, recruit and train enough manpower to meet them. Strengthening law enforcement and security measures by devolving policing to prevent abductions and strengthen physical security across vulnerable communities.

Based on the findings of other researchers and the perspectives canvassed by the present study, it is apparent that state police will weaken the tendency of miscreants to commit crime for fear of being caught and made to face the wrath of the law. Furthermore, states, being closer to the people, if and when invested with constitutional means symbolized by state policing, would more effectively deal with criminality in communities and provinces within their jurisdiction. Findings by Samuel, Julius, and Abiodun (2024), reveal that the adoption of state police could be beneficial in the long run. The present study's findings reveal that, there is a palpable fear among citizens - a fear of potential tyranny and the misuse of police powers if control is devolved to the state level. This emphasizes the need for robust frameworks that ensure accountability, transparency, and equitable service delivery across all states.

To give legal authority to the creation of state police, a bill seeking to establish state police has passed second reading at the House of Representatives. Titled "A bill for an Act to Alter the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 to provide for establishment of state police and for related matters (HB.617)", the proposed legislation was sponsored by the Deputy speaker, Hon. Benjamin Okezie Kalu and 14 other lawmakers. The sponsors of the bills,

noted that the primary purpose of government as enshrined in section 14 (2) (b) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (As Altered) is the security and welfare of the citizen.

A major argument in support of state policing is to the effect that it is not only inevitable, but urgently desired to tackle the mounting challenges of insecurity. The argument is in tandem with the structural functionalist theory, to the extent that policing is crucial for effective prevention and curtailment of criminal activities as well as maintaining peace and order. State police as an institution is a social fact because it helps to shape social behaviour and structures social policies,

### **Conclusion**

Development takes place in an atmosphere of peace and security of life and property. With the high level of insecurity in the country, where people are being killed, farmers displaced from their farms and people find it difficult to move freely for fear of being kidnapped or killed, it will be difficult for the nation to make progress. Hence, state policing will make for effective deployment of credible and actionable intelligence, to mitigate the increasing rate of insecurity nationwide. Both the state police and federal police can work interdependently to maintain peace and stability.

### **Recommendations**

- i. To ensure proper funding, states can establish State Security Trust Funds to properly equip their state police forces to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of state policing in protecting the lives and property of their people.
- ii. With state police in place, state governors will assume fully responsibility for maintaining security in their states and they can be held liable for any abuse or breach of security in their domains.
- iii. The establishment of state police will constitute part of the restructuring of Nigeria into a truly federal state and that will be one small but crucial step away from the current unitary system of government.

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