



Security Challenges and the Imperative of a Restructured Policing System in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Nigerian security system has in recent times displayed unmitigated helplessness in the handling of the country's security challenges. This is among other things the result of the over concentration of the security system in the hands of the central government. The centralized security architecture lacks the dynamism needed to secure a large and ethnically diverse country like Nigeria, thus the grim and worrisome security situation that the country has found itself in. The Nigerian security system must undergo a thorough overhauling and restructuring so as to be able to take the country out of its present security quagmire. In the decentralization, there must be provisions for state and community policing to give them the leverage to fully participate in securing their peculiar environments in the face of the prevailing security threats. This study is based on the thematic and analytic approach.

Keywords: Security, System, Centralized, Restructuring, Policing.

Citation of article: Ikechukwu, O. O., *et al.* (2022). Security Challenges and the Imperative of a Restructured Policing System in Nigeria. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies (AJPAS)*, 15(2):178-193.

Date Submitted: 12/10/2022 **Date Accepted:** 18/11/2022 **Date Published:** December, 2022



Introduction

The insecurity problem in Nigeria is at an alarming stage. Almost on daily basis, merciless and barbaric butchery of human beings are witnessed in several parts of the country. Hardly does any moment pass without being inundated with one gory tale or another of a senseless slaughter of people somewhere in Nigeria. In the words of Ishiaku (2018:33-34) “Our countryside has been turned into a veritable graveyard with body counts of the dead steadily rising every new day from attacks by armed herdsmen, highway robbers, kidnappers and sundry illicit non-state actors! The question on the mind of all progressive Nigerians is: Where is the Nigerian state in all these?”

The Nigerian Security situation has been on a steady decline since the return to civilian rule in 1999 and has clearly overwhelmed the operational capabilities of the Nigeria Police. The frequency and intensity of deadly attacks cut across cities, towns and rural areas to the effect that literally nowhere in the country can one run to and feel shielded from the menace. The unrestrained series of security breaches have manifested in varied forms of kidnappings, abductions, human trafficking, armed robberies, assassinations, bombings and mayhems of all sorts. Of all the security challenges, the most vicious have been the activities of the misguided Islamist terrorist group- Boko Haram, and the merciless massacre of human beings in various Nigerian villages by fiendish AK47- wielding Fulani herdsmen (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013:285-291). Television, newspapers and social media images of lifeless and mutilated bodies of victims of these attacks have been the sources of great trauma and psychological anguish of many Nigerians. People now live in everyday worry and trepidation not knowing what next will happen or where next will be struck. The Boko Haram has mostly carried out its horrendous exploits in the northeastern part of the country while the herdsmen have engulfed the entire Middle Belt region and making inroads into the southern states such as Edo, Ekiti , Enugu, Imo, Ondo, etc.

Apart from the damage to human lives, the security breakdown in Nigeria has taken great toll on the country’s quest for economic recovery. It is a truism that no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere of insecurity. Nwanegbo and Odigbo(2013) submit that security is



the pillar upon which every meaningful development could be achieved and sustained. The ugly security situation therefore has overlapped on Nigeria's drive for economic stability. Both domestic and foreign investors are scared stiff and are wary of doing business in the country notwithstanding government rhetoric to sway them (Okonkwo et al, 2015:157-168). Since no meaningful development can be guaranteed in an atmosphere of insecurity, Nigeria's overall national development has continued to suffer gross incapacitation.

Adopting the functionalist paradigm, this study explores the values of cooperation among various groups in the society to combat insecurity. The functionalist theory believes that the society is an organism with many parts or institutions and for there to be order and progress the various parts or institutions must cooperate and complement one another (Durkheim, as cited in Onuoha, 2018:15-16)

Police Inefficiency

The Nigeria Police Force, the only body legally vested with the power and responsibility of maintaining internal security has continually manifested debilitating institutional handicap and thus inspiring much querying of the basis of its continued existence in its present form. The lacklustre performance of the Nigeria Police Force leaves so much to be desired. Due to a myriad of factors, the over-centralized Police Force repeatedly finds itself overwhelmed by the spate of insecurity across the overarching Nigerian space. The centralized command arrangement of the Force weakens it and has robbed it of the institutional and professional maneuverability required to secure a large and diverse country like Nigeria. This is in addition to other widespread problems of the police like corruption and dishonesty, inadequate manpower, ethno-political influence on recruitment and promotion, lack of adequate training and crime-fighting equipment and low level public confidence (Oladipo 2013). The result of this is all too clear to see. While the country has a body maintained to protect the lives and property of her citizens, she is everyday left gapping in disappointment with the daily returns in human and property damage. Irrespective of the huge budgetary allocations to security in the country, the downward spiral



continues unabated. Nigeria has consistently ranked low on the global peace index (GPI) with many asserting that more Nigerian blood has been lost to insecurity than was the case during the Nigerian Civil War (Aluko 2018). In view of this, there must be a decentralization and restructuring of the Nigerian policing system to make it more goal-oriented by establishing state and community police commands who should work in synergy with the central police to give the country the needed security coverage.

Origin and Development of the Nigeria Police Force

The need for policing in Nigeria arose from the earliest days of colonial administration of the area. As an invading power occupying a foreign land, the British overlords who annexed Lagos in 1861, realized the inevitability of a coercive force for the control of the people and the maintenance of law and order. Thus in that same year, permission was sought and obtained from London for the establishment of a consular guard of 30 Hausa men, later known as the Hausa Constabulary (Oladipo, 2013). In 1862, their number increased to 100. In 1863, the number again increased to 600 and in 1879 further upgraded to a paramilitary Hausa constabulary of 1200 men. As recorded by the Nigerian Army Education Corps and School (1992. 11-13), this later culminated in the formation of the Lagos Police in 1896. In 1888, a similar force was created in Lokoja by the Royal Niger Company for the control of the northern territories and it was named the Royal Niger Constabulary.

Another force, the Niger Coast Constabulary was formed in 1894 following the proclamation in 1893 of the Niger Coast Protectorate over the areas comprising the present day Cross River, Delta and Rivers States. (NAECS.20-24) Along the line, with the creations of the Southern and Northern Protectorates, the Niger Coast Constabulary and the Royal Niger Constabulary transmuted into the Southern Nigeria Police and the Northern Nigeria Police respectively, while the Lagos Police continued to take charge of the Lagos Colony. (NAECS.27-28) However, when in 1906 the Lagos Colony was merged to Southern Nigeria Protectorate, the Lagos Police became subsumed under the Southern Nigeria Police, thus reducing the number of police



formations in Nigeria from three to two (NAECS.28-30). This would remain the case until April 1, 1930 when the Southern Nigeria Police and the Northern Nigeria Police were conflated to form the Nigeria Police, a centralized command structure answerable to a single Inspector-General.

Command Structure of the Police Force.

According to Section 215(2) of the 1999 Constitution and Section 6 of the Police Act, 1990, “the Police Force shall be commanded by the Inspector-General of Police”. That is, orders, directives and instructions for the performance of police duties originate from the Inspector-General of Police, down the command chain, to any officer positioned to carry out such order. Refusal or failure to implement such instruction, directive or order, earns the offender punitive actions.

According to Section 7 (1) of the Police Act, the next in the line to the Inspector General of Police, is the Deputy Inspector General of Police. Though this rank is not specially mentioned in the Constitution, it has legal backing, because the Police Act is a law made by the National Assembly in accordance with the constitution. According to section 7(1) of the Police Act, the Deputy Inspector General of Police is the second in Command of the Force and shall so act for him in the Inspector-General’s absence. Section 5 of the Act makes room for as many DIGs as the Nigeria Police Council considers appropriate. Every other rank below the IG, takes order of Command from him, in the performance of their lawful duties.

The Office of the Assistant Inspector-General of Police is provided for by section 5 and 8 of the Police Act. He shall act for the Inspector-General of Police in the event of the absence of the Inspector-General of Police and Deputy Inspector-General of Police. Section 5 of the Police Act, in line with the provisions of section 215 (2) of the Nigeria Constitution, provides for the Office of a Commissioner of Police who shall oversee the personnel of the Force posted to a particular state. He is nevertheless subject to the control of the Inspector-General of Police or in the case of his absence, whoever acts on his behalf.



The Nigeria Police and the Nigerian State

The Nigeria Police Force is an institution of the Federal Government of Nigeria and thus it is ultimately under the control of the central government. On top of the command pyramid highlighted above is the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to whom the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) ultimately defers as enshrined in the 1999 constitution. In Section 215 sub-Section 4 of the same constitution, the State Governors are empowered to give lawful orders to the State Commissioners of Police in their states for the maintenance of security. But while the Inspector General is answerable to the President and under his control, the State Commissioners of Police are not under the control of the governors but rather answerable to the Zonal Assistant Inspector-Generals of Police (AIGs) who answer to the Inspector-General. This creates a worrying command gap which leaves the governors powerless before the Police Commissioners who in fact reign over them, while the President reigns supreme over all. The Nigerian Governors are munificently referred to as the chief security officers of their states but this is only so in principle since the powers to enforce or ensure security do not lie with them.(Adedeji,2012:10)

The effect of the foregoing is that the Nigeria Police has hitherto been subjected to the manipulation and political control of the central government. Owing to the immaturity of African, nay, Nigerian politics, whereby the political leadership converts state resources and institutions to personal use and also as a result of ethnic polarization, the Nigeria Police has in much of its history served the interest of the person or ethnic group which controls the central government. The Nigeria Police has at various times been deployed to shore up the chances of the Presidents' political parties or interests. In the words of the Rivers State Governor, Nyesom Wike (2018), the Nigeria Police has been turned into a political party and does not answer to any security situation unless permitted by the party in power to do so. In other words, irrespective of how dire a security situation is, the Nigeria Police considers first the disposition of the political leadership at the centre before it could make any move. In 2017, the Governor of Enugu State, Hon. Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi literally cried over the herdsmen massacre of innocent citizens in the Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of his state because he was handicapped to combat the



menace (Nwosu, 2017). He simply had no control of the police and only relied on a seemingly unwilling federal government to protect his people. Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State has equally lamented what many view as a deliberate manipulation of the security situation in his state. When the anti-open grazing law was passed in the state, an unrestrained series of mayhem was visited on the Benue people by Fulani herdsmen (Gyang, 2018:7-16). It is not yet known that the Hausa/Fulani-controlled Federal Government of Nigeria has done anything tangible to stem the tide or bring perpetrators to book. During the 2018 gubernatorial election in Ekiti State, Governor Ayodele Fayoshe faced a battery of the federally controlled police who allegedly took over the election conduct in the state. The Governor cried publicly alleging police manhandling of the election and himself which eventually led to the ouster of his party out of office (Ogunje, 2018). The Nigeria Police is indeed a massive rigging machine in the hands of their payers and controllers.

On 15 June, 2018, Zamfara State Governor Abdulaziz Yari blurted out his frustrations in the hands of the centrally controlled police and other security agencies when he announced his resignation as the Chief Security Officer of his state. As reported by Thisdaylive of 16 June, 2018, the governor while addressing journalists in the Talata-Mafara area of the state lamented that the killing of people in the state had continued unabatedly, without him being able to do anything since the security outfits were not answerable to him. According to him, "We have been facing serious security challenges over the years, but in spite of being governor and Chief Security Officer of the state, I cannot direct security officers on what to do nor sanction them when they err. As Chief Security Officer, the nomenclature is just a name". The governor further grieved that although the state was spending hugely on security, there was no positive result.

In Section 215 sub-Section 3 of the 1999 constitution, the President is empowered to give lawful directives to the Inspector General of Police with respect to the maintenance of law and order. This particular constitutional provision has been subjected to abuse by successive presidents in Nigeria's history to emasculate the opposition using the Nigeria Police. This is worsened by the fact that the police leadership is appointed by the President (although theoretically on the advice of the Nigeria Police Council) and the police leadership repeatedly goes out of its way to please



the one at whose pleasure they hold office. This does not augur well for Nigeria's security need. Security of lives and property should never be dependent on any other consideration other than the need for peoples' safety.

The Need for State Police

In order to contain the oddity that allows Nigerian state governors crying in the face of security challenges instead of combating them, the centralized policing system must be decentralized to make room for state police. The creation of state police will be a good way of ensuring that the central government does not lord it over the states in a supposedly federal system like Nigeria. In a federal system of government which Nigeria pretends to be practicing, both the central government and the component units share equal powers with non subservient to the other. But this assumption will remain a mirage in Nigeria if the component states do not have coercive powers to enforce their laws and ensure the security and integrity of their states. If they would only rely on the goodwill of the central government to police their environments, State Governors will be nothing more than toothless bulldogs that could only bark at security lapses in their domains but would not be able to do anything; this would be especially desperate for those states ruled by opposition political parties. It is often argued that the Nigerian state governors would abuse the state police by using them to fight their political opponents. As reasonable as this may sound, it is not enough reason to throw out the entire advantage derivable from the state police on the strength of the fear of its abuse alone, especially as the central government is equally guilty of that, and at present among the greatest drawbacks of the Nigeria Police Force. There is nothing yet seen in the conduct of the central political leadership in Nigeria to accord them more political maturity than those ruling the states. However, having said that, appropriate laws should be put in place to check any propensity to abuse.

Another reason for the appropriateness of state police in Nigeria is the country's ethnic configuration. There is no love lost amongst Nigeria's ethnic nationalities. The various groups are engaged in the struggle for the control of the political and economic soul of the country. Therefore leaving the police in the hands of a single tier of government will be tantamount to



arming the ethnic group controlling that tier of government with the weapons to pound the others. As long as the security breach is in the interest of the group in control, no serious thing could be done to check it. If on the other hand, the various states are armed with their own police force, the onus and the power would be on them to secure their people. Nigeria's ethnic division is so cemented that no one group can be trusted with the monopoly of such enormous power as the police.

Nigeria's largeness is another rationale for the aptness of state police. A country as unwieldy as Nigeria cannot be adequately policed from a single centre. In a summit organized by the National Assembly to brainstorm on Nigeria's security challenges, Nigeria's vice president, Professor Yomi Osinbajo, acknowledged as follows: "We cannot realistically police a country the size of Nigeria centrally from Abuja...the nature of our security challenges is complex and known. Securing Nigeria's over 900,000 square kilometres and its 180 million people requires far more men and material than we have at present" (Ojo, 2018). The truth is that the Federal Capital Territory is far removed from the theatres of trouble in the various states and localities where the presence of the police is mostly needed. The fact on ground is that in most cases during incidences of attacks and killings, the security personnel are nowhere to be found, and when they eventually show up, they arrive late. It is plainly unfeasible for a commanding officer resident in Abuja to be able to coordinate the security personnel to adequately cater for the security needs of all 36 states of the federation and their innumerable localities. The task of securing the federal capital alone is daunting enough to take all the attention of the command. As it is now, large stretches of Nigerian communities are ungoverned and without security presence.

Decentralizing the Police Force will unburden the federal government and put the security of the various states squarely in the hands of the governors who are the chief security officers of their states and, because they would have no other excuses to give, the governors will take seriously the security of their peoples. Because they alone would be held responsible for any security breakdown, the state chief executives will be resolute in combating security cracks in their areas.



Community Policing

In order to drastically curb the deluge of security breakdown in the country, there is also the need for community policing. On this, Wroblewski and Hess(2000) comment:

The essence of community policing is to return to the day when safety and security are participatory in nature and everyone assumes responsibility for the general health of the community- not a select few, not just the local government and administration, not just the safety forces, but absolutely everyone in the community.(p.134)

Here lies the beauty of the functionalist paradigm in combating the security menace in Nigeria. The functionalist perspective advances the view that for society to work optimally, each segment must play its own role. For the Nigeria police to deliver on its statutory responsibilities of providing adequate security to the people there must be a system of engagement that should involve the citizenry in its work. Community policing is a model of policing which enables the statutory police to partner the members of the community in providing security. The imperative of police-citizens partnership lies in the fact that the citizens are the ones who have the information on the perpetrators of crime and other security breaches in the society. Beyond their professional training, the police needs the cooperation and confidence of members of the public to achieve more in their fight against crime (Dogo, 2006:254). The citizens are the ones who have the information on the incidences of disorder and other criminal activities in their communities. Therefore, in order to build the intelligence and synergy required to effectively curtail the activities of criminals and combat other subversive elements in society, the police must arm themselves with the information that the citizens can give. As observed by a former Metropolitan Police Commissioner in London, “Every lesson of every police enquiry is that, not only the issues that give rise to anti-social behavior, but also those that give rise to criminal activity and to terrorism begin at the most local level.” (Dogo.2006:34) Thus, the local level of society must not be avoided if a people would get their security needs right. Community policing if properly harnessed could put the death knell on criminal activities. Since local residents are more acquainted with their areas and thus know those with doubtful characters, they can help the police to place a tab on the criminals to prevent crimes and, if the crimes do occur, they can help



the police to locate the criminals' hideouts in the communities. Sharing police duties with locals would also help in monitoring the movements of people in and out of particular neighborhoods. That would help to detect the influx of criminal elements and nip in the bud their activities.

Another importance of community policing is that it can help mitigate the problem of inadequate police personnel. The Nigeria police suffers gross manpower deficit where according to IGP Ibrahim Idris, an additional 155,000 personnel are needed to adequately secure the country and attain the United Nations benchmark of one police officer to 400 citizens of a country, as against the present Nigerian ratio of one police officer to 600 citizens. Deploying citizens' services in police duties will go a long way in helping the country out in this area.

The problem however is that there appears to be strong aversion of the Nigeria Police to sharing its powers with the citizenry. They are reluctant to experiment with other models apart from the traditional method they inherited from the erstwhile colonial masters. They view ideas like community policing as a means to undermine their powers and authority (Arase, 2013:9). However, in our present circumstances, the police needs to be dynamic in order to adapt to the challenges and demands of the times. The colonial masters created a commanding force whose duty was to protect an occupying power from a deprived people. Such force could be excused if it were centralized and callous. It may have been necessary for them to centralize and/or monopolize the forces of coercion in order to achieve their aim of depriving the people. As Tamuno (1971) corroborated, "An examination of the origins, development and role of the British-inspired police force in Nigeria reveals that they were shaped by the nature of European interest in the country and the reaction of the indigenous people to their activities. One of such longstanding European interest in West Africa is commerce" The postcolonial police operate in a different environment and circumstance where its prime duty is to protect their own fellow citizens and not any other interest; they must therefore cooperate with the people for whom they are working. Community policing which involves the devolution of police powers in order to accommodate the input of non-state community actors has become necessary in our case.



Important Non-Police Actors in Community Policing

Several key individuals and groups are necessary for effective crime fighting and prevention. Police cooperation with these individuals is essential to achieving their security aim. The individuals include the traditional rulers, community leaders, religious leaders, youth groups, etc.

Traditional Rulers and Institutions

Before the advent of colonialism, the various Nigerian communities had their ways of maintaining the security of lives and property in their areas. The traditional rulers functioned as the chief executives and the chief security officers of their domains and had well organized structures of managing their affairs including the issues of law and order. In many of those domains there were the district heads, the village heads, the ward heads, and other key community leaders through whom the traditional rulers gathered information and intelligence for the prevention and control of crimes (Yohanna, 2013:175).

The traditional rulers are still very influential today and can provide invaluable assistance to crime management in their localities if approached. They have seamless methods of information gathering and dissemination that can be of immense help to the police in crime detection and control. This position is strengthened by the fact that the traditional rulers as the custodians of the people's laws and mores have the confidence of the indigenes more than the DPO or DCO, and can better get information on the situation more than any security agent of government.

Community Leaders

Apart from the traditional rulers, other community leaders command respect in their localities. These people's influence can be harnessed by the police to manage crime. These community leaders can be reputable and illustrious sons of the community who have the confidence of their people. Through these individuals the police can lay hold on valuable information that could aid their work. Because of the trust people have on these individuals, they can be the recipients and custodians of privileged information which the citizens would not freely share with the police. If



the police partner these personalities, such information can be given to them for effective crime control. The police can also, through them, encourage citizens' participation in crime watch and vigilance. They can as well help to launder the image of the police before members of the public if so recognized and engaged.

Religious Leaders

Religious leaders are also very important agents of community policing that should be recognized and partnered in crime control. Religious leaders are influential members of the society who command enormous respect among their members. This position of trust can make them privy to intelligence information that the police can use. Because of the sheer number of people under their control, they can assess information that even the police cannot have. Apart from that, the importance of religious leaders stems more from their position as society's moral agents and watchdogs. Linda Woolf and Michael Hulsizer(2005:101-112) observed that the process of dehumanization and the path of violence could not be taken without the underlying process of moral exclusion. This is to say, in other words that, crime is a function of moral failure. In order to rid society of the moral decadence which is the underlying cause of crime, the police should engage and partner the religious leaders in the dissemination and preaching of society's moral standards. When religious leaders preach against religious intolerance and the likes, they help the security agencies in securing the community and forestalling the breakdown of law and order. Government leaders and the heads of security agencies should partner and request the religious leaders and institutions to preach against criminal activities especially when situations become desperate.(Yohanna.2013:178)If religious leaders are made official collaborators in the fight against insecurity, enormous dividends would accrue.

Youth Groups

Another important group of people in community policing would be the youth. Young people are always full of energy and highly mobile. These qualities can be channeled to productive use in crime prevention and management. Youths are known to be able to organize and provide security in areas where none exists. In many Nigerian communities today, the only existing security



arrangements are those provided by youth groups. If the youth are partnered or engaged by the statutory police and the government, it can go a long way to curtail security breakdown.

Local Government Authorities

Local government authorities should also not be ignored in security matters by the federal police. Local governments in Nigeria are known to contribute immensely in the security of the local areas. They organize vigilante groups which complement police effort in forestalling and arresting the activities of criminals in their local government areas.

Conclusion

The security challenges in Nigeria have overwhelmed the centralized Nigeria Police. To curb the state of insecurity in the land, the policing arrangement as it is presently must be tinkered with to accommodate new hands and inputs. The police must be restructured to make room for the participation and input of other constituent units and the Nigerian communities in the prevention and management of insecurity. For security to be better managed in Nigeria there must be state cum community police commands. This will enable all hands to be on the deck in the fight and prevention of insecurity in Nigeria. If the centralized policing system is allowed to continue in Nigeria, it will simply give strength to the belief that the Police force is needed for other purposes besides the protection of lives and property of Nigerians.

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