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Ihekwoaba Onwudiwe

Texas Southern University, declan.onwudiwe@tsu.edu

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EDITORIAL

THE FUTURE OF STATE POLICE IN NIGERIA: A FOCUS ON THE SOUTHEAST

IHEKWOABA DECLAN ONWUDIWE, PH.D.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Abstract

Using the Routine Activity Theory (RAT), in combination with the Copenhagen School's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), it is underscored that the prevailing security challenges in Nigeria, particularly in the southeastern states, demand an immediate overhaul of the Nigerian Police Force. It is crucial to establish a state police system that empowers each region to address security concerns in collaboration with neighboring regions. This article highlights the benefits of police devolution and stresses the vital role of community engagement in ensuring public safety. By integrating community policing into local police forces and drawing inspiration from successful policing practices in other federal systems, Nigeria can significantly enhance its security framework. Stakeholders must recognize the urgency and potential for positive change in this endeavor.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, as everyone is aware, the southeastern states of Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi, and Abia have been besieged by wholesale terror and retail violence, making it impossible for the citizens to conduct their daily peaceful activities. These are states throughout Nigerian history that quiet people have occupied peacefully. Except for the Civil War period, the southeast has not experienced the mayhem it is engulfed in today. To control insecurity, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) has, in some cases, adopted the use of lethal force against civilians. Today, the southeast region has faced issues of insurgency, unrest, and kidnapping for ransom. This ranges from the

killing of notable civilians involved in politics (Ugwu, 2023) to official killings of over 700 civilians (Sahara Reporters, 2023), the burning down of civilian communities, civilian violence on residents, and the beheading of government personnel in the performance of their duties (Amnesty International, 2024). Different attacks have been launched on the southeast region by unknown (invincible) gunmen, killing law enforcement officers and the members of the military, as well as civilians (Asadu, 2023; Reuters, 2023).

This article argues that there is great wisdom in the aphorism that a crisis the southeast region and Nigeria are experiencing allows an opportunity for a historical resolution, rethinking, and legacy. The dilemma in policing today should be used as an opportunity for a comprehensive review of the structure of the Nigerian police in a federated state, which must be done because the police are the people, and the people are the police. A change in the current structure of the police would benefit the police and the communities they serve. Therefore, this article focuses only on three issues: (i) make a case for the establishment of state police formations by identifying the merits and demerits of the new structure, (ii) examine the essential benefits of community policing as a globally acceptable component style of best policing, and (iii) point out some policy recommendations drawing from knowledge and experiences of best practices in policing from countries that have a similar federal governmental system like Nigeria.

THE FUTURE OF STATE POLICE IN NIGERIA

Establishing state police forces in Nigeria is essential for addressing the country's security challenges, enhancing governance, and fostering democratic accountability. By decentralizing law enforcement, Nigeria can improve security responsiveness, strengthen community policing, enhance accountability, and allocate resources more effectively, ultimately leading to safer and more secure communities across the country. Each state ought to be allowed to develop its police under the leadership of its governors, who would appoint the chiefs of police, individual leaders who are knowledgeable about their culture, customs, language, theology, rules, and principles, to serve the communities and their local security concerns. It must be underscored that all policing is local in countries that practice democratic federalism. The police and the communities must be understood as co-producers of justice. While the role of the police is to control crime, most of the police work today should focus on community safety, which includes the protection of vulnerable

people and addressing issues of quality of life in the neighborhoods. The police working with the people they serve helps maintain collective efficacy and avoid broken windows. No governor would like to govern a state characterized by insecurity and preserving life and property should be their focal concern.

The governors know their states and understand their security challenges better than the colossal police force headquartered in Abuja under the command of the Inspector General of Police. State police certainly allow the governors to emphasize that patrol should be the lifeblood of every police service while at the same time working with the other agencies of social control and the federal police authorities, sharing information and intelligence. The police devolution would encourage, sustain, and maintain an understanding that policing should be based on the consent of the communities served. Centralized policing is handicapped and cannot possibly understand that local people and their consent are essential to good policing. After all, community or localized police departments differ dramatically from the national agency that derives a mandate from a central authority. State and local police in a new policing structure would get their mandate from their communities.

This practice and understanding would improve trust between police and citizens. It would help eliminate the "us and them" belief that leads to the community's view of police as the enemy or vice versa. When the police lose trust among the people they serve, there is a risk of losing their legitimacy, compounded with failing in their duties of maintaining safety and controlling crime. Every state should have a role to play in determining its local policing arrangements. The police are not the enemy of the people and should not be seen as defenders of the central government. Restructuring the police with constitutional and legislative mandates for the states and their communities to develop their policing styles would lead to the citizens seeing their police as upholders of the law. State police mandate should emphasize providing intelligence on offenders such as kidnappers and other forms of domestic violent actors to the Nigerian Police Force, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), and other security agencies like the State Security Service (SSS) without much fragmentation.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The Nigerian constitution guarantees every citizen the right to be secure in their homes and the right to life. As amended, these fundamental principles are enumerated in Chapter 2, Section 14, (2a) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution. This provision declares that "the fundamental aim of Federal and State governments will be the security and welfare of the people." The structural nature of the Nigerian police today makes it difficult for citizens to breathe and live peacefully in their respective regions. Indeed, politicians and everyone in Nigeria, regardless of their social, political, religious, and socioeconomic status, are afraid of freely moving about in the nation. The inability of citizens to go about their daily lives means that there must be a rethinking of the current police structure in Nigeria. It calls for urgent security surgery since securing the public from harm is not only the federal government's responsibility. Methodologically, this article relies on literature knowledge gathered from different academic websites such as Google Scholar, government records and documents, published reports, and scholarships from the library databases to support the theoretical arguments deduced below.

In criminological postulations and conceptualizations, the Routine Activity Theory (RCT) "examines how the spatiotemporal organization of social activities helps people to translate their criminal inclination into action" (Cohen and Felson, 1979, p. 589). Cohen and Felson illustrate that the drive to engage in criminality and succeed is ingrained in a likely offender, a suitable target, and a capable guardian (Chamard, 2010). In so doing, the reasons for insecurity in Nigeria today can be attributed to the presence of motivated offenders with an implanted rationale to attack, kidnap, and slaughter. On the other hand, based on the theory, suitable targets epitomize vulnerable citizens who are likely to be attacked and victimized. Most importantly, in crime control phraseology, the capable guardians are the police, other security agents of the government, and the local citizens willing to stop or prevent violent attacks (Crawford & Evans: p. 775).

As capable protectors, the police must collaborate and coalesce with citizens (the community) to thwart attacks. State governments, being closer to their communities, understand the security needs of their people better than the national police. This argument alone underscores the potential benefits of a new structural arrangement in policing that allows local police devolution to securitize the Nigerian nation properly, as practiced in other federated democratic nations. Applying the RAT

to Nigeria's present security needs suggests that amalgamating all the parameters of the theory's constructs may help Nigeria become safe again. As Sherman et al. (1989: p. 46) observed, separating a "criminogenic generator" and an "attractive receptor of crime" in crime prevention is blurred. Nevertheless, an understanding of the theory's primary thesis and application to police devolution certainly will help in the fight against attacks from below and above in all the geographic regions of Nigeria, instilling a sense of hope and optimism in the hearts of Nigerians.

However, while the RAT of Cohen and Felson is a cogent framework for understanding and preventing the insecurity dilemma in Nigeria, the Copenhagen School's RSCT is also pertinent for regional security configurations. While the RSCT is designed for insecurity issues internationally and among nations, Nigeria is large enough to benefit from the theory's conceptualizations. Adherents of the theory (see Buzan et al., 1998) hypothesize that the issue of security should focus on regional perspectives as well as relationships and collaborations among states that inhabit a complex geographic vastness. Applying their thesis to Nigeria, as the authors sustained, shows that maintaining security in Nigeria should not be a monopoly of the federal police alone. Believing that only the Nigerian police can solve the problem of insecurity is like claiming that maintaining law and order in the nation is easy and a given in a complex society. In order to preserve security in Nigeria, there must be social, cultural, religious, economic, and political discourse among and between states and the federal government's security agencies. There must be a willingness by the stakeholders, those with political and economic power, to admit and change the police structure for the maximum happiness and welfare of the citizens. It emphasizes the importance of stakeholder involvement, making them feel included and valued in the change process.

Like the RAT above, Buzan and Waever's (2003) paradigmatic approach to regional security recognizes that capable guardianship interlinked with different regions can be an effective countermeasure against various retail attacks in Nigeria. These regions in Nigeria are connected and have similar security threats and patterns. There must be a broad gamut of common securitization ideas, including regions exchanging intelligence, information, resources, and support for each other to maintain peace and order in the various zones of the federation. What affects one region regarding security threats in Nigeria directly and indirectly affects other regions. Therefore, Buzan and Waever (2003) asserted that the interregional pattern of security threats would make it impossible to understand the monopolistic nature of control command in a country

characterized by complex regional security concerns. Such a construct demands a selection of perspectives that agree or disagree with forming state police systems in Nigeria.

SOME ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST STATE POLICE FORMATIONS

Indeed, predicting the future of state policing in Nigeria involves considering various factors, including ongoing debates, proposed reforms, and societal needs. While there is no definitive roadmap, several trends and possibilities can be identified based on current discussions, initiatives, and scholarly engagements. Some scholars (Ojo, 2019; Onwudiwe, 2000; 2009) have persistently proposed the establishment of state police forces in Nigeria to address security challenges more effectively. These academics and other proponents argue that decentralizing law enforcement would provide more excellent responsiveness to local needs and enhance community policing efforts. Others (Ogunlesi, 2019) insist that achieving state policing requires constitutional amendments to redefine the structure and responsibilities of law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. Amending the constitution is complex and requires broad consensus among stakeholders at the federal and state levels. Ojo (2019) insists that implementing state policing hinges on political will and federal and state leadership. He argued that strong leadership and commitment to reform are necessary to navigate the complexities of decentralization and overcome potential resistance from vested interests.

Further, (Ogunlesi, 2019) discussed that establishing state police forces would require significant infrastructure, training, and equipment investments. Adequate funding and resource allocation are essential to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of state policing initiatives. Regarding capacity building (Ojo, 2019), noted that state governments would need to invest in capacity building and professional development programs to equip their police forces with the skills and capabilities needed to maintain law and order effectively. Training initiatives should focus on enhancing investigative techniques, community engagement, and adherence to human rights standards. While decentralization aims to empower state governments with greater autonomy in law enforcement, collaboration and coordination with federal security agencies remain crucial, Ogunlesi (2019) maintained that mechanisms for information sharing, joint operations, and strategic planning should be established to address cross-border crime, terrorism, and other complex security threats. Scholars (Ogunlesi, 2019; Ojo 2019; Onwudiwe 2000) also pointed out

the need for public oversight and accountability if Nigeria elects to develop a state police system. They argue that state police forces must operate transparently and be accountable to the communities they serve. Robust oversight mechanisms, including civilian review boards and internal affairs units, should be established to prevent corruption, the abuse of power, and human rights violations.

Additionally, Onwudiwe (2000; 2009) recommended hiring more police officers in Nigeria. He also emphasized the need to pay Nigerian police handsomely to help control appetites for corruption. The decentralization of the Nigerian Police Force is necessary to address the unique security challenges faced by different regions of the country; be better equipped to understand and respond to the specific needs and dynamics of their communities; and improve accountability and responsiveness by bringing law enforcement closer to the residents. This would lead to increased trust and cooperation between the police and the people. Overall, the future of state policing in Nigeria depends on various factors, including legal frameworks, political dynamics, resource availability, and societal demands. While the road to implementing state policing may be challenging, it holds the potential to enhance security, promote good governance, and strengthen the rule of law in Nigeria.

Despite the support for police decentralization, some scholars and public commentators have reservations about establishing state police. Collectively, the chief argument against police devolution in Nigeria is that decentralizing the police force could lead to fragmentation, with different local units operating independently and potentially conflicting with each other. Police decentralization, they argue, could undermine the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts (Aluko, 2019). They strongly suggest that centralized control allows for standardized training, procedures, and equipment across the police force, ensuring consistency in law enforcement practices. Decentralization may result in varying standards of professionalism and capability among different local police units (Aluko, 2019). Also, decentralization could exacerbate resource disparities between regions, with wealthier areas having better-funded, better-equipped police forces than poorer regions; this could widen the gap in law enforcement capabilities and contribute to social inequalities.

In 2001, Alemika and Chukwuma, renowned Nigerian police researchers, claimed that local politicians and officials may exert undue influence over decentralized police units and police activities, leading to politicization of law and undermining the impartiality and neutrality of the police force. These authors posit that decentralization may hinder coordination and cooperation between local police units and national security agencies, making it challenging to address transnational crime, terrorism, and other complex security threats that require a unified response. Finally, Alemika and Chukwuma (2001) assert that police devolution could increase the risk of corruption within local police units, as officers may be more susceptible to bribery, extortion, and other forms of misconduct without stringent oversight and accountability mechanisms. While these are legitimate concerns, it must be noted that other federated states, such as the United States, India, and Brazil, historically have experienced a lack of police accountability, increased corruption, employment favoritism, and inefficiencies. However, these countries are doing well today with local police formations.

COMPARATIVE LESSONS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

As Nigeria considers the establishment of state police, it is instructive to examine the experiences of other countries with decentralized police systems (Wisler & Onwudiwe, 2008). This article explores comparative perspectives on state police, drawing insights from examples such as the United States, India, and Brazil. By analyzing the strengths and challenges of decentralized policing models in diverse contexts, key lessons can be identified, and recommendations can be made for Nigeria's reform efforts.

The United States, for example, has a decentralized policing system with separate police forces at the federal, state, and local levels. Each state typically has its police force alongside numerous local law enforcement agencies. The local police system in America allows for greater local autonomy and flexibility in law enforcement. State police agencies in the U.S. are responsible for various functions, including highway patrol, criminal investigations, and emergency response (Rosenbaum, 2019). In India, the policing system is structured around federal oversight and coordination, with state police forces responsible for maintaining law and order within their respective states. The Indian Police Service (IPS) provides leadership and coordination at the national level. India's system emphasizes a need for strong federal oversight and coordination to

ensure consistency, interoperability, and accountability across the country. Brazil's decentralized policing system empowers municipalities to establish their own guards and police forces. These local agencies work closely with community members to address crime and maintain public order (Karki, 2018). The decentralized police system in Brazil can promote community engagement and citizen participation in crime prevention efforts. Local police forces in Brazil prioritize community policing and proactive crime prevention strategies (Oliveira, 2017).

Indeed, comparative perspectives on state police systems highlight the diverse approaches to decentralization in different countries. Drawing on lessons from the United States, India, Brazil, and other examples, Nigeria can develop a state police model that balances local autonomy with federal oversight, promotes community engagement, and enhances accountability in law enforcement. By learning from international best practices, Nigeria can strengthen its security infrastructure and improve policing outcomes for all citizens by integrating community policing philosophy and training as essential components of local police formations (Onyeozili et al., 2001)

COMMUNITY POLICING

In Nigeria, like it or not, citizens, patriotic or not, operate in a divided society. Nigerians are divided in areas of health facilities, inequalities between ethnic groups, education, housing, agriculture, religion, employment opportunities, and, more so, politics. The police have been used as a "political or economic football," operating under challenging situations even though they put their lives on the line of duty. This author has argued elsewhere that the police do not have Solomon's wisdom, Job's patience, or David's strength (Onwudiwe, 2000). Police officers are also citizens of this country. They are husbands, fathers, mothers, uncles, nephews, cousins, and friends. Policing in the southeastern states of Nigeria has become more complex and riskier. The police forces have become distant from the communities they are serving.

State policing will encourage the integration of community policing in the performance of police responsibilities, making the police work in partnership and collaboration with the people for crime prevention, maintenance of law and order, apprehension of criminals, and providing services to the communities. These are the essential principles of policing articulated by Sir Robert Peel in 1829. They were true then, and they are still the focus of policing and problem-solving with lesser

emphasis on knee-jerk reactions to law violations. Understanding and incorporating Peel's principles illustrates that the police exist to prevent crime and solve problems. The state police system should focus on crime prevention and community-oriented and problem-oriented policing. Crime prevention should primarily become the focal concern, along with the activity of state police in the southeastern states of Nigeria.

However, what is community policing as conceptualized by criminologists? Briefly stated, community policing, like the definition of terrorism (Onwudiwe, 2001), has no single universally acceptable definition. Generally, however, most scholars, researchers, and police chiefs agree with the characterization by Trojonowicz et al. (1998, p. 3). They state that community policing is "based on the concept that police officers and private citizens working together in creative ways can help solve contemporary community problems related to crime, fear of crime, social and physical disorder, and neighborhood conditions." Similarly, Skolnick and Bailey (1988) included community-based crime prevention, reorganization of patrol activities, increased accountability to the public, and decentralization of police command as essential components of community policing philosophy.

The whole goal of state police in the southeast would be to bring the police closer to the people that they police. The states should hire more police officers and develop Japanese koban-style mini police posts in the communities. It would be a good idea to have palace, village, local government, campus, and hospitality police and other forms of local police systems. The insecurity crisis in the southeast demands rethinking and the adoption of community policing principles, which would help the state manage its insecurity concerns.

Local police formations can assuredly play a crucial role in the fight against insecurities by contributing to intelligence gathering, prevention efforts, and response capabilities. As such, there are a few ways that local police formations can help combat unrest in the southeast. For example, local police officers are often the first to observe suspicious activities or individuals within their communities. They can gather valuable intelligence on potential threats, such as the activities of indivisible or so-called unknown strangers (gunmen). Such surveillance can be done through interactions with residents, routine patrols, and community engagement programs. This information can then be shared with national security agencies to identify and disrupt potential

fanatical activities. Moreover, building solid relationships with local communities is essential for gathering intelligence and preventing radicalization. Local police formations can engage with community leaders, religious organizations, and youth groups to raise awareness about the dangers of wholesale and retail terrorism. They can also encourage the reporting of suspicious behavior. Furthermore, community policing initiatives can foster trust and cooperation between the police and the public to make identifying and addressing security threats easier.

Meanwhile, if police devolution becomes a reality in Nigeria, state police officers in the southeast, under the leadership of their respective governors, need to be adequately trained and equipped to respond to domestic and external threats effectively. Training programs can include counterterrorism tactics, crisis response procedures, and the handling of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Additionally, local police units can collaborate with national security agencies to enhance their capabilities in intelligence analysis, surveillance techniques, and forensic investigations. Notably, local state police formations play a critical role in maintaining security and vigilance in their respective jurisdictions. Regular patrols and reasonable checkpoints can deter terrorist activities and disrupt their operations. Police officers can also conduct proactive sweeps and searches in high-risk areas to identify and apprehend suspected terrorists or their external and internal funding collaborators and sponsors.

In 2000, in a paper entitled "the decentralization of the Nigerian police force," it was argued that police devolution does not mean the demise of the federal police. Instead, state police collaboration and information-sharing between local police formations and national security agencies are essential for a coordinated and effective response to national and local terrorist threats. Local police units can provide valuable insights and ground-level intelligence to complement the efforts of specialized counterterrorism units. Establishing formal mechanisms for communication and cooperation, such as joint task forces or intelligence fusion centers, can enhance coordination and facilitate timely responses to fanatical threats. Finally, state police systems or formations can educate the public about the signs of radicalism and guide how to respond to security threats. Public awareness campaigns, emergency drills, and community workshops or commissions can help civilians recognize and report suspicious activities and prepare them to react effectively during a terrorist attack. Furthermore, by leveraging their proximity to communities, local police formations can play a proactive role in identifying, preventing, and responding to security threats,

thereby contributing to national efforts to combat terrorism and ensure the safety and security of citizens.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The crisis of insecurity in the country today creates an opportunity and momentum to reform the Nigerian police and for the various regions to collaborate in security management. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria vested police powers in the federal government with the appointment of the Inspector General of Police, who derives his mandates from the center. While the governors of states are the chief security officers of their states, police commanders in the states derive their powers from the epicenter. It is recommended that states develop their police systems to manage their security concerns.

It is significant and vital to realize that policing today in Nigeria, and the southeast in particular, needs serious reform that will entrench a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. The governors of the southeast, if Nigeria reforms the current police structure, must be encouraged to develop a clear police mandate and culture that includes training and police academies focusing on police accountability and professionalism, characterized by modern police technologies and efficient organization. As the chief security officers of their respective states, governors possess constitutional powers to develop their security arrangements while waiting for Nigeria to reform the laws to create state police. As indicated earlier, any future design of state police in the southeast must be based on the consent of the community and local jurisdictions.

It is further recommended that efforts to have local police systems must include the views of the police, other security and social control agencies, the people, civil societies, members of the academy, the traditional rulers, clergy, traders, and other interested groups since the problem the southeast encounters concerns everyone. Consultation with the development of state police must not be limited to the views of politicians, and dialogue must include the ideas of consultants, NGOs, activists, and even youths.

Finally, it is proposed that state actors must know and embrace the tenets of community policing (Onyezili et al., 2021; Onwudiwe 2017) as integral parts of policing, not as something distinct and separate. States must also embrace comparative lessons and integrate what works internationally

into their local police formations. Most importantly, the police must be well funded, officers must be handsomely paid, and states must be willing to recruit youths into their police systems, thereby creating employment opportunities. In a situation where youths are massively unemployed, they have lost their “metaphor of hope.” They would have a proclivity for radicalization, further threatening the security of the southeastern states. The governors must, therefore, work with their state legislatures to create their official or regional security networks for the preservation of the life and property of the citizens, which is the essence of the social contract between the state and the people.

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