

State Policing as a Constitutional Reform in Nigeria: Prospects, Challenges, and Policy Implications.

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Abstract

Nigeria's persistent insecurity, marked by insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and urban crime, has intensified debates on whether the country's centralized policing structure remains adequate for a federal state of over 200 million people. Recent political momentum, especially with the introduction of the Constitution Alteration Bill (HB 617) in the 10th National Assembly and its progress to second reading in 2024–2025, has brought state policing to the forefront of constitutional reform. This paper investigates state policing as an institutional innovation designed to rebalance Nigeria's security governance, improve local responsiveness, and strengthen federalism. Drawing on a qualitative analysis of legislative documents, executive pronouncements, policy briefs, and scholarly contributions, the study situates current debates within theories of multi-level governance, federalism, and principal–agent relations. Findings reveal a growing elite consensus—between the presidency, governors, and civil society organizations—that decentralizing policing could enhance effectiveness, reduce response time, and build citizen trust. However, risks such as elite capture, political misuse, uneven state capacity, and potential human-rights violations remain significant. Comparative insights from other federations demonstrate that decentralization succeeds only when accompanied by minimum national policing standards, strong oversight institutions, and sustainable fiscal arrangements. This paper argues that state policing in Nigeria should be implemented through a phased, standards-led approach, anchored on independent oversight mechanisms, inter-operability frameworks, and fiscal equalization schemes. The study contributes to both academic debates and practical policy design by outlining conditions under which state policing can address Nigeria's chronic insecurity without undermining democratic accountability or national cohesion.

Keywords: State Policing, Constitutional Reform, Security Governance, Federalism and Decentralization

Introduction

Nigeria's security landscape has, over the past two decades, become increasingly complex and fragile. From the protracted insurgency in the North-East to the rise of rural banditry in the North-West, the escalation of farmer–herder conflicts in the Middle Belt, and persistent incidents of kidnapping and armed robbery in the South, insecurity has emerged as the most pressing governance challenge in the country. Despite the existence of a centralized Nigeria Police Force (NPF), insecurity has continued to grow in scope and intensity, raising fundamental questions about the adequacy of the current security architecture. Scholars, policymakers, and civil society actors have argued that the centralization of policing is incompatible with

Nigeria's federal character, especially given its vast population, ethnic diversity, and the varying security contexts across its 36 states.

The call for the establishment of state police is not entirely new; it has featured prominently in constitutional conferences, reform panels, and political debates since the return to democracy in 1999. However, what distinguishes the current moment is the convergence of political will across key stakeholders. In February 2024, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, alongside state governors, agreed on the necessity of creating state police as part of wider constitutional reform. This decision gave renewed impetus to legislative efforts, with the Constitution Alteration Bill (HB 617) and related proposals scaling second readings in the House of Representatives by March 2025. The bill seeks to amend the 1999 Constitution by transferring policing from the Exclusive Legislative List to the Concurrent List, thereby empowering states to establish their own police forces alongside the federal police.

The discourse on state policing is anchored on both opportunities and risks. Proponents argue that localized police forces will enhance proximity to communities, allow for context-specific strategies, improve intelligence gathering, and strengthen trust between citizens and law enforcement. Civil society groups such as CLEEN Foundation have further emphasized that decentralization can foster community policing models that prioritize accountability and human rights. On the other hand, critics caution that state policing could become an instrument of political repression in the hands of governors, exacerbate inter-state disparities due to unequal fiscal capacity, and worsen human rights violations if adequate oversight is not guaranteed.

This paper, therefore, seeks to interrogate the current push for state policing within the broader framework of constitutional reform in Nigeria. It examines the legislative trajectory of the reform, the positions of key stakeholders, and the comparative lessons from other federal systems such as the United States, Germany, and India. The study employs theories of multi-level governance and fiscal federalism to assess how decentralization of policing can be structured to maximize benefits while minimizing risks. It further explores the conditions under which state policing can be successfully implemented in Nigeria, focusing on oversight, fiscal sustainability, and inter-operability with federal institutions.

By critically analyzing the ongoing reform efforts, this paper aims to contribute to the academic discourse on security governance in federal states and to offer policy-relevant recommendations for ensuring that state policing strengthens, rather than undermines, Nigeria's democratic federalism.

Literature Review

The literature on policing reform in Nigeria and comparative federal contexts is vast and multifaceted. It spans legal analyses, security studies, public policy debates, and governance research. For clarity, this review is organized into three broad strands: (1) Security federalism and decentralization, (2) Nigeria-specific debates on state policing, and (3) Contemporary policy processes and civil society perspectives. Each strand reveals both opportunities and tensions that shape the discourse on state policing as a constitutional reform.

1. Security Federalism and Decentralization

A central feature of federalism is the distribution of powers across multiple levels of government, and policing is often a litmus test for how much autonomy sub-national units enjoy. Comparative studies show that most federations operate multi-level policing systems, combining federal, state, and in some cases local police services. Watts (2008) and Yimenu (2024) emphasize that the logic of federalism demands shared responsibility in security governance, as sub-national units are often better positioned to respond to local threats while federal forces address national security concerns.

In the United States, for instance, the coexistence of federal agencies such as the FBI with state and local police demonstrates how decentralization can promote both efficiency and responsiveness. Germany provides another model, where the *Länder* maintain their own police services, coordinated by federal standards. Similarly, India's Constitution places "police" in the State List, while allowing the central

government to intervene during crises. These arrangements highlight the principle that policing structures should mirror constitutional allocation of powers, enabling responsiveness while preserving national cohesion.

Yet, comparative research also cautions that decentralization without safeguards can deepen inequalities, encourage abuses, or undermine coordination. The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF, 2011) identifies three success factors for federal policing systems: (a) clear constitutional allocation of authority, (b) national minimum standards for training and human rights compliance, and (c) effective mechanisms for inter-jurisdictional cooperation. These insights are critical in contextualizing Nigeria's debates.

2. Nigeria-Specific Debates on State Policing

The debate on state policing in Nigeria is long-standing and contentious. The 1999 Constitution (as amended) currently places policing exclusively under federal control (Section 214), thereby creating a unitary police system in a formally federal state. Scholars such as Onwudiwe (2024) and Aluko (2019) argue that this arrangement has contributed to inefficiency, slow response to crime, and alienation of local communities from security agencies. Critics contend that the Nigeria Police Force, though constitutionally charged with maintaining law and order across the federation, is overstretched, underfunded, and lacks the contextual awareness required for effective policing in diverse environments.

Proponents of state policing highlight several advantages. First, proximity to the community enhances intelligence gathering and responsiveness. Second, state police can be tailored to local socio-cultural contexts, improving legitimacy and trust. Third, decentralization could reduce the burden on the federal police, enabling it to focus on cross-border and national-level crimes. Civil society groups, including CLEEN Foundation, argue that well-designed state police structures could institutionalize community policing principles that are currently underdeveloped in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, strong counterarguments exist. Opponents worry that state governors, given their existing dominance in political and electoral processes, may weaponize state police against opponents. Human rights advocates also fear that sub-national forces, if poorly regulated, could reproduce or even exacerbate patterns of abuse already prevalent in the federal force. Fiscal constraints pose another challenge, as some states struggle to pay salaries regularly; extending responsibility to policing might create uneven capacity and deepen regional disparities in security provision.

Scholarly contributions thus converge on one insight: state policing could potentially improve Nigeria's security governance, but the design of oversight mechanisms, funding arrangements, and rights protections will determine its outcome.

3. Contemporary Policy Processes and Civil Society Perspectives

The most recent literature and policy developments indicate a significant shift in Nigeria's political landscape. In early 2024, President Bola Tinubu and state governors publicly endorsed the establishment of state police, signaling unprecedented elite consensus. The National Assembly responded by advancing HB 617, a Constitution Alteration Bill seeking to transfer policing from the Exclusive Legislative List to the Concurrent List. By March 2025, HB 617 and related bills on state and local government policing had passed second readings in the House of Representatives. This legislative progress represents a concrete step beyond prior rhetorical support.

Civil society organizations have been equally vocal. CLEEN Foundation (2024) supports decentralization but stresses the need for accountability safeguards. They propose the creation of independent oversight

authorities, transparent recruitment processes, and community engagement structures to prevent abuses. The Nigerian Bar Association, human rights organizations, and several think tanks have echoed these concerns, emphasizing that constitutional reform must be accompanied by enabling legislation that embeds checks and balances.

Media reports and policy briefs also highlight public sentiment. While citizens broadly support reforms aimed at improving security, surveys suggest skepticism about whether governors can resist politicizing new police forces. As such, scholars like Onwudiwe (2024) argue for sequenced implementation, beginning with pilot states and accompanied by strong federal oversight, before nationwide adoption.

4. Synthesis of Debates

Synthesizing across strands, the literature presents a nuanced picture. Comparative scholarship underscores that decentralized policing can succeed in federal systems, but only under conditions of inter-operability, fiscal sustainability, and rights-centered oversight. Nigerian-specific debates stress the tension between the need for local responsiveness and the danger of political capture. The contemporary policy process demonstrates growing elite and legislative momentum, but also exposes gaps in institutional design and fiscal readiness.

Overall, the literature suggests that Nigeria's current reform moment offers both an opportunity and a risk. The opportunity lies in aligning policing structures with the federal constitution, enhancing effectiveness, and building citizen trust. The risk lies in creating fragmented, politicized, and uneven systems that may reproduce insecurity at the state level. The research task, therefore, is not merely to assess whether Nigeria should adopt state police, but how such a transition can be designed to maximize benefits and minimize risks.

Theoretical Framework

The debate on state policing in Nigeria can be best understood through the lenses of multi-level governance, fiscal federalism, and principal-agent theory. These theoretical perspectives provide a structured way of analyzing how authority, resources, and accountability mechanisms are distributed across levels of government, and how such arrangements affect policing outcomes.

1. Multi-Level Governance (MLG)

The concept of multi-level governance, developed within European integration studies and later applied to federal states, describes how decision-making authority is increasingly dispersed across different tiers of government—national, sub-national, and supranational. In federations, policing often exemplifies multi-level governance, with overlapping responsibilities between federal and state agencies.

From this perspective, the centralization of policing in Nigeria creates a vertical imbalance: although Nigeria is formally federal, security governance is disproportionately located at the center. This imbalance undermines responsiveness, as federal agencies often lack the capacity to tailor solutions to diverse local contexts. Introducing state police would therefore “rebalance” Nigeria's federal design by dispersing authority to the states, aligning with the MLG principle that effective governance requires coordination between multiple levels.

However, MLG also emphasizes the risk of fragmentation if institutional coordination is weak. Without interoperable systems—such as shared crime databases, joint training standards, and cooperative protocols—state policing could create silos that weaken collective security. Thus, MLG theory highlights both the promise of decentralization and the necessity of coordination mechanisms.

2. Fiscal Federalism

The theory of fiscal federalism examines how expenditure responsibilities and revenue-raising powers are allocated in multi-tiered governments. Applied to policing, fiscal federalism raises critical questions: Who

pays for state police? How are resources distributed across richer and poorer states? And what mechanisms can ensure equitable and sustainable financing?

In Nigeria, wide disparities in fiscal capacity exist across states. Wealthier states such as Lagos may fund sophisticated police forces, while poorer states may struggle even to pay salaries. Without corrective mechanisms, decentralization could deepen security inequalities, creating zones of safety in some regions and insecurity in others.

Fiscal federalism thus suggests that the success of state policing depends on a fiscal equalization scheme—a federal grant or subsidy system that ensures minimum policing standards nationwide. Furthermore, the theory advocates for expenditure–responsibility alignment: states must not be given policing powers without corresponding fiscal autonomy and predictable revenue streams. Otherwise, reforms could result in underfunded, ineffective state police units, undermining public confidence.

3. Principal–Agent Theory

Principal–agent theory provides another useful lens. It conceptualizes governance as a contractual relationship where principals (citizens) delegate authority to agents (governments and their security forces). Problems arise when agents pursue their own interests rather than those of the principals—a phenomenon known as “agency slack.”

In the current centralized system, Nigerian citizens are principals, while the federal police act as agents. Distance between citizens and federal policing authorities creates an information asymmetry: local security concerns are often poorly communicated upward, while accountability mechanisms remain weak. State policing could reduce this asymmetry by bringing agents (state police) closer to principals (local citizens), thereby improving responsiveness and trust.

Yet, principal–agent theory also warns of elite capture. State governors, as intermediaries, may become dominant principals, effectively subordinating state police to their political agendas rather than to citizens’ welfare. This risk underscores the importance of independent oversight institutions that can realign the agent’s incentives toward serving citizens rather than political elites. Mechanisms such as external complaints authorities, judicial review of police actions, and transparent appointment processes for police chiefs become critical tools to mitigate agency slack.

4. Integrative Application to Nigeria

When integrated, these three frameworks illuminate the Nigerian case in powerful ways:

- **From MLG:** State policing promises more responsive, locally attuned governance, but requires intergovernmental coordination to prevent fragmentation.
- **From Fiscal Federalism:** Without redistributive financing and fiscal responsibility, decentralization could deepen inequalities across states.
- **From Principal–Agent Theory:** Bringing policing closer to citizens may improve accountability, but safeguards are needed to prevent capture by governors.

Taken together, these theories highlight that constitutional reform alone is insufficient. The design of institutions, financing mechanisms, and accountability structures will determine whether state policing succeeds or fails. A well-crafted reform must therefore:

1. Embed coordination mechanisms (MLG),
2. Establish sustainable funding models (Fiscal Federalism), and
3. Secure independent oversight against elite misuse (Principal–Agent).

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically document analysis, to examine state policing as a constitutional reform in Nigeria. The focus is on understanding the current legislative and policy processes, identifying stakeholder positions, and assessing the implications of proposed reforms within the framework of federalism. Document analysis is appropriate for this study because it enables the systematic review of legal texts, policy documents, academic publications, and media reports, which collectively capture the evolving debate on state policing.

Data Sources

The primary sources include constitutional amendment bills (e.g., HB 617), proceedings of the National Assembly, and communiqués from the Presidency and Nigeria Governors’ Forum (NGF). Secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed journal articles, policy briefs by civil society organizations (e.g., CLEEN Foundation, PLAC), and media reports from reputable outlets. Comparative insights are drawn from international case studies in federal systems such as the United States, Germany, and India.

Table 1: Data Sources for the Study

Source Type	Examples / Specific Documents	Purpose in Study
Legislative Texts	HB 617 (Constitution Alteration Bill, 2023); House debates (2024–2025)	Analyze legal provisions and legislative trajectory
Executive Communications	Presidency communiqués, NGF resolutions, NEC reports	Identify elite consensus and political framing
Civil Society Publications	CLEEN Foundation briefs; Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) reports	Capture advocacy, accountability demands, and reform proposals
Media Reports	Punch, NAN, The Guardian (2024–2025 coverage)	Track public discourse, policy signaling, and societal reactions
Academic Literature	Aluko (2019); Onwudiwe (2024); DCAF (2011); Watts (2008)	Provide theoretical grounding and comparative perspectives

Data Collection

Documents were collected through systematic searches of online repositories (PLAC, CLEEN, National Assembly websites), academic databases (JSTOR, Google Scholar), and media archives. Selection criteria included recency (2019–2025), relevance (direct reference to state policing, federalism, or constitutional reform), and credibility (peer-reviewed or from established institutions).

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic coding, guided by both deductive categories derived from the theoretical framework and inductive categories emerging from the data. Coding was conducted manually and organized around three key analytical dimensions:

Table 2: Coding Categories for Document Analysis

Dimension of Analysis	Coding Categories	Description of Indicators
Institutional Design	Constitutional allocation, command structure, oversight	How bills define powers, authority, and accountability
Fiscal Arrangements	Funding models, grants, resource disparities	Provisions for financing state police; fiscal capacity gaps
Accountability	Oversight mechanisms, citizen complaints, HR safeguards	Civil society and legal proposals for preventing abuses
Stakeholder Positions	Federal executive, governors, legislators, civil society	Mapping alignments and divergences in positions
Comparative Insights	U.S., Germany, India, Switzerland	Lessons on standards, inter-operability, fiscal equalization

The coding process allowed identification of recurring themes such as elite consensus, risks of elite capture, funding inequalities, and calls for independent oversight. These themes were then compared with insights from international experiences in federal policing systems.

Validity and Reliability

To enhance validity, triangulation was used by cross-verifying findings across different source types (e.g., legislative text vs. media reporting vs. academic analysis). Reliability was strengthened by maintaining a transparent coding framework (see Table 2), which can be replicated in future studies.

Ethical Considerations

Since the research is based on publicly available documents, there was no direct engagement with human participants. However, care was taken to cite sources accurately and to avoid selective interpretation that could bias the analysis.

Limitations

Several limitations are acknowledged. First, the legislative process is still ongoing, and the final shape of the constitutional amendment may differ from current proposals. Second, fiscal data on state capacities are incomplete and vary in quality across states. Third, the analysis does not incorporate direct interviews with policymakers or security practitioners, which could have enriched insights into practical implementation challenges. Despite these limitations, document analysis provides a robust foundation for assessing the dynamics of state policing reform at this stage.

Findings

The analysis of legislative texts, policy documents, civil society briefs, and scholarly works reveals five major findings regarding the current push for state policing in Nigeria. These findings concern (1) the legislative trajectory of state policing reform, (2) the emerging elite consensus, (3) civil society positions, (4) anticipated benefits, and (5) risks and challenges.

1. Legislative Content and Trajectory

The legislative process has moved further in 2024–2025 than in previous cycles of reform. HB 617, a constitutional alteration bill, proposes relocating “police” from the Exclusive Legislative List to the Concurrent List. This amendment would empower states to establish their own police forces while retaining the federal police as a national body.

Key provisions of the bill include:

- Authorization for states to create and fund police commands.
- Provisions for inter-jurisdictional cooperation and joint task forces.
- Recognition of federal oversight in matters of national security.
- Anticipated harmonization through enabling legislation.

By March 2025, HB 617 and related bills had scaled second reading in the House of Representatives, indicating momentum toward committee review.

Table 3: Legislative Trajectory of State Policing Reform

Stage of Process	Status (as of March 2025)	Key Features / Implications
Bill Drafting	HB 617 introduced in 2023	Explicit shift of police to Concurrent List
First Reading	Completed in House of Representatives	Formal introduction, limited debate
Second Reading	Passed (Feb 2024; reaffirmed Mar 2025 for related bills)	Broad debate; committed to constitutional review committee
Committee Stage	Ongoing	Detailed scrutiny, possible revisions
Senate Consideration	Pending	Bicameral approval required
State Assembly Ratification	Pending	Requires approval by 24 of 36 states

2. Elite Consensus and Political Signaling

The most notable development is the emerging elite consensus across executive and legislative branches, as well as among state governors. In February 2024, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu publicly endorsed the creation of state police, a position echoed by the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF). By April 2024, at least 20 governors had prepared proposals for presentation to the National Economic Council (NEC).

This consensus contrasts with earlier reform attempts where federal executives resisted decentralization due to concerns about national unity. The shift suggests recognition that insecurity has reached levels that federal policing alone cannot manage effectively.

3. Civil Society and Professional Perspectives

Civil society organizations generally support state policing but stress conditionalities. CLEEN Foundation, for example, advocates for strong accountability mechanisms, independent complaints authorities, and safeguards for human rights. Professional bodies like the Nigerian Bar Association echo these concerns, warning that without checks, governors could misuse state police for partisan purposes.

Table 4: Civil Society Positions on State Policing

Organization	Position	Core Recommendations
CLEEN Foundation	Supports reform with safeguards	Independent oversight, citizen complaints boards
Nigerian Bar Association	Conditional support	Legal frameworks for accountability
Human Rights NGOs	Cautiously supportive	Rights training, protection from political abuse
Media / Analysts	Mixed support	Calls for pilot implementation, public awareness

4. Anticipated Benefits

Proponents of state policing argue that decentralization offers several practical benefits:

1. **Proximity and Responsiveness:** State police would be closer to communities, improving response times and contextual understanding of local crime dynamics.
2. **Intelligence and Trust:** Locally recruited officers are better positioned to gather intelligence and build trust.
3. **Burden Sharing:** Federal police could focus on national security threats (terrorism, cybercrime, inter-state crimes), while states handle everyday law enforcement.
4. **Federalism Alignment:** Reform would harmonize Nigeria's security architecture with its federal constitutional design.

Table 5: Anticipated Benefits of State Policing

Benefit Area	Expected Outcome	Evidence / Comparative Example
Community Responsiveness	Faster response to crime, local knowledge	U.S. local police responsiveness
Intelligence Gathering	Improved surveillance, insider knowledge	India's state police effectiveness
Federal Burden Reduction	Federal police focus on terrorism, organized crime	Germany's dual policing model
Federalism Consistency	Stronger constitutional balance	Common in federations globally

5. Risks and Challenges

Despite the promise, multiple risks accompany state policing reforms.

1. **Elite Capture and Politicization:** Governors may misuse state police to intimidate opponents, particularly during elections.
2. **Unequal Fiscal Capacity:** States vary in revenue capacity; poorer states may be unable to adequately fund police services.
3. **Human Rights Concerns:** Without oversight, abuses such as extrajudicial killings and unlawful detentions could increase.
4. **Coordination Failures:** Fragmentation may occur if interoperability mechanisms are weak.

5. **Legal and Constitutional Complexity:** Ratification requires approval by two-thirds of state assemblies, creating political hurdles.

Table 6: Risks and Challenges of State Policing

Risk Category	Description / Manifestation	Mitigation Strategies Proposed
Political Capture	Use of state police to repress opposition	Independent oversight authorities
Fiscal Disparities	Poor states underfund police, creating insecurity gaps	Federal equalization grants
Human Rights Violations	Potential for abuse, unlawful detentions	Training, HR commissions, judicial review
Coordination Failures	Weak data-sharing, duplication of efforts	Interoperable databases, federal standards
Legislative Hurdles	Difficulty securing 24-state ratification	Broad elite consensus-building, advocacy

6. Overall Pattern

The findings suggest that Nigeria has entered a critical window of reform. Legislative momentum, elite consensus, and civil society engagement create favorable conditions for decentralization. Yet, the anticipated benefits will only materialize if risks are addressed through constitutional guardrails, fiscal equalization, and credible accountability mechanisms.

Discussion of Findings

The findings highlight a transformative moment in Nigeria’s security governance reform. While the legislative and political momentum suggests an unprecedented opportunity for decentralization, the risks of elite capture, fiscal inequality, and human rights abuses remain acute. This section discusses these findings through the lens of the study’s theoretical framework—multi-level governance, fiscal federalism, and securitization theory—and evaluates their implications for democratic consolidation and national security.

1. Multi-Level Governance and Decentralization

The move to establish state police aligns with the logic of multi-level governance, which emphasizes layered authority and shared responsibility across national and sub-national units. In federations like the U.S., Germany, and India, policing is not the sole responsibility of the central government but distributed across multiple levels.

The Nigerian reform reflects recognition that the centralization of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) has proven inadequate in addressing localized insecurities such as kidnapping, banditry, and communal clashes. State policing can therefore be understood as an effort to restructure the vertical division of power and allow states greater agency in governance.

Table 7: Multi-Level Governance Lens

Key Dimension	Federal Policing (Status Quo)	Proposed State Policing (Reform Path)
Authority Location	Concentrated at federal level	Shared between federal and state authorities
Responsiveness	Limited (slow, centralized command structure)	Enhanced (localized command, quicker response)
Accountability	Difficult to enforce locally	Greater proximity, but risk of local capture
Inter-governmental Relations	Weak coordination between federal & states	Stronger if supported by interoperability

Interpretation: State policing represents a movement toward multi-level governance. However, without clear rules of coordination and oversight, decentralization risks fragmentation and inefficiency.

2. Fiscal Federalism and Resource Disparities

Fiscal capacity is a crucial determinant of whether states can successfully fund and sustain their police forces. Nigeria's revenue distribution system is heavily centralized, with the federal government controlling more than 50% of national revenues. Many states rely heavily on monthly allocations from the Federation Account, leaving limited fiscal autonomy.

If policing responsibilities are devolved without addressing fiscal disparities, wealthier states such as Lagos and Rivers may build robust police forces, while poorer states in the North-East and North-West lag behind, widening regional inequality in security provision.

Table 8: Fiscal Federalism and State Policing

Fiscal Dimension	Current Situation	Implications for State Policing
Revenue Centralization	Federal government controls majority of revenues	States lack financial autonomy
State Dependency	25+ states rely on >80% federal allocations	Limits capacity to independently fund police
Fiscal Disparities	Lagos ≈ ₦400bn IGR vs Yobe ≈ ₦10bn IGR annually	Creates unequal policing standards
Mitigation Strategy	Federal equalization grants, cost-sharing schemes	Ensures uniform security baseline

Interpretation: State policing reform must be accompanied by fiscal reforms, including equalization mechanisms or shared federal-state funding models, to avoid deepening Nigeria's security inequalities.

3. Securitization Theory and Elite Capture

The discourse on state policing also resonates with securitization theory, which emphasizes how political actors construct security threats to justify extraordinary measures. While decentralization is framed as a solution to insecurity, there is concern that governors may securitize political opposition by labeling them as threats and deploying state police for partisan purposes.

Table 9: Risks of Elite Capture through Securitization

Dimension	Potential Practice	Risk Implication
Electoral Politics	Opponents harassed as “security threats”	Weakens democracy, entrenches incumbency
Civil Protests	Peaceful protests framed as public disorder	Shrinks civic space
Media & Dissent	Journalists, critics targeted for intimidation	Violates freedom of speech
Inter-state Conflicts	Disputes securitized as external aggression	Fuels instability between states

Interpretation: Without independent oversight and judicial checks, the securitization of dissent by governors could transform state police into tools of authoritarian consolidation rather than community safety.

4. Democratic Federalism and Security Governance

The reform sits at the intersection of democratic federalism and security governance. On one hand, it promises to restore balance by aligning Nigeria’s federal character with its security institutions, enhancing democratic accountability. On the other, risks of political misuse threaten Nigeria’s fragile democracy.

The debate thus reflects a classic federal dilemma: how to decentralize power without weakening the integrity of the state.

5. Inter-Operability and National Security Strategy

Effective policing in a federation requires strong inter-operability between federal and state agencies. Current findings suggest that without shared databases, standardized training, and joint task forces, decentralization could result in duplication, inefficiency, and rivalries.

Table 10: Inter-Operability Needs for State Policing

Requirement	Function	Risk if Absent
Shared Criminal Database	Prevents criminals exploiting jurisdictional gaps	Criminal mobility between states
Joint Training Programs	Standardizes procedures, ethics, and operations	Fragmented professionalism
Federal Oversight Boards	Ensures minimum standards across states	Weak accountability, rights abuses
Inter-State Task Forces	Facilitates joint response to cross-border crime	Jurisdictional conflict, inefficiency

Interpretation: For state policing to succeed, the reform must be embedded in a national security strategy that emphasizes collaboration rather than competition between levels of government.

6. Policy Implications in Theoretical Context

- **Multi-Level Governance:** State policing aligns Nigeria with global federal practice but requires structured inter-governmental relations to prevent fragmentation.

- Fiscal Federalism: Without fiscal reforms, decentralization will entrench inequalities; federal equalization grants are essential.
- Securitization Theory: Political elites could manipulate state police to consolidate power; safeguards such as independent complaints commissions are critical.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The move toward establishing state police in Nigeria carries profound implications for governance, democracy, and national security. While the findings reveal strong momentum for decentralization, they also underscore the risks of elite capture, fiscal inequality, and institutional fragmentation. This section outlines the policy implications of these findings and offers recommendations to guide constitutional reform, fiscal policy, institutional design, and accountability frameworks.

1. Constitutional Implications

Policy Implications

The amendment of the 1999 Constitution to place policing on the Concurrent Legislative List will significantly alter Nigeria's federal structure. This shift will enhance the autonomy of states, aligning the constitution more closely with the federal principle. However, constitutional ambiguity could generate jurisdictional disputes between federal and state police, particularly in areas of overlapping authority such as counter-terrorism, financial crimes, and election security.

Recommendations

- Clearly define jurisdictional boundaries: Federal police should retain authority over cross-border crimes, terrorism, organized crime, and election security, while state police focus on community policing, internal security, and local crime.
- Establish a National Policing Council (NPC), chaired by the President, with governors, security chiefs, and civil society representatives to coordinate policies.
- Include a sunset clause mandating a constitutional review of state policing after ten years to evaluate its effectiveness.

Table 11: Constitutional Framework for State Policing

Area of Reform	Policy Action	Expected Outcome
Jurisdictional Boundaries	Define roles of federal vs. state police	Minimize conflict, improve coordination
National Policing Council	Create intergovernmental platform	Enhance cooperation, policy alignment
Sunset Clause	Mandatory constitutional review after 10 yrs	Continuous improvement and accountability

2. Fiscal Implications

Policy Implications

The fiscal feasibility of state policing is uncertain. While wealthier states like Lagos and Rivers can sustain robust police forces, weaker states like Yobe and Ekiti may lack sufficient revenue to maintain personnel, logistics, and training. Without fiscal equalization, decentralization could entrench inequality and create “two-tier security” in Nigeria.

Recommendations

- Introduce Federal Equalization Grants (FEGs) to subsidize police funding in weaker states.
- Require states to dedicate a minimum of 15% of Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) to policing and security.
- Allow for federal–state co-funding of specialized units such as cybercrime and counter-terrorism.
- Establish a Security Trust Fund in each state, jointly managed by government and private sector, to diversify funding sources.

Table 12: Fiscal Reforms for Sustainable State Policing

Fiscal Strategy	Implementation Mechanism	Impact on Security Equity
Federal Equalization Grants	Allocations from Federation Account to weaker states	Reduce disparities, ensure baseline security
Minimum IGR Allocation	Mandate 15% of IGR dedicated to policing	Guarantee sustainable funding
Co-Funding of Special Units	Joint funding between federal and state governments	Prevent duplication, build expertise
Security Trust Funds	Multi-stakeholder funding mechanism	Diversify revenue, enhance accountability

3. Institutional Implications

Policy Implications

The success of state policing depends not only on funding but also on institutional design. Poorly trained, politicized, or fragmented state police forces could undermine professionalism and exacerbate human rights abuses. Coordination with federal police is also essential to avoid jurisdictional rivalries.

Recommendations

- Establish minimum recruitment and training standards set by the Police Service Commission (PSC).
- Mandate inter-operability protocols (shared databases, standardized training, joint task forces).
- Create Regional Policing Forums (e.g., North-East, South-West) to coordinate responses to inter-state crimes.
- Institutionalize civilian oversight boards in each state to review complaints and monitor compliance with human rights.

Table 13: Institutional Design for Effective State Policing

Institutional Area	Reform Strategy	Expected Impact
Recruitment & Training	National standards by PSC	Professional, depoliticized state police
Inter-Operability Protocols	Shared databases & joint task forces	Seamless coordination, reduced duplication
Regional Forums	Inter-state cooperation platforms	Stronger regional security collaboration
Civilian Oversight Boards	Citizen-led monitoring of police conduct	Greater accountability, protection of rights

4. Political Implications

Policy Implications

State policing raises significant concerns about political misuse. Governors, as chief security officers of their states, may use police forces to intimidate opponents, suppress protests, or influence elections. This risk is particularly acute in Nigeria's fragile democracy where electoral integrity is often contested.

Recommendations

- Establish Independent State Police Commissions (ISPCs) insulated from gubernatorial control.
- Mandate that the appointment of state police commissioners requires two-thirds approval of the State Assembly.
- Criminalize and sanction the use of state police for partisan political purposes, with oversight from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).
- Require federal monitoring of state police performance during election periods, coordinated by INEC and civil society observers.

Table 14: Safeguards Against Political Capture

Political Risk	Safeguard Mechanism	Democratic Impact
Governors' Overreach	Independent State Police Commissions (ISPCs)	Prevents partisan abuse of police powers
Politicized Appointments	Legislative approval of police commissioners	Ensures merit-based leadership
Electoral Misuse	NHRC oversight, sanctions for violations	Protects electoral integrity
Protest Suppression	Civil society monitoring & judicial remedies	Preserves civic freedoms

5. Human Rights Implications

Policy Implications

Nigeria's security agencies have a history of human rights abuses, from unlawful detention to extrajudicial killings. Decentralization risks reproducing these abuses at state level if safeguards are absent. Community trust is essential for effective policing.

Recommendations

- Integrate human rights training into police academies and continuous professional development.
- Establish Independent Complaints Commissions (ICCs) in each state with investigative powers.
- Create a national annual report on policing and human rights, presented to the National Assembly.
- Encourage partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) to monitor compliance with international human rights standards.

Table 15: Human Rights Safeguards

Risk of Abuse	Safeguard Policy	Outcome
Arbitrary Arrests	Mandatory rights training, ICC oversight	Improved rule of law
Excessive Force	Independent Complaints Commissions	Deterrence of abuses, citizen trust
Lack of Transparency	National annual report on policing	Accountability, policy responsiveness
Weak Civil Engagement	CSO partnerships for monitoring	Inclusive policing, stronger legitimacy

6. Long-Term Strategic Implications

Policy Implications

The reform must not be treated as a short-term response to insecurity but as part of a long-term national security strategy. Fragmentation of policing without overarching strategy risks weakening the state's monopoly on violence.

Recommendations

- Integrate state policing within the National Security Strategy (NSS).
- Encourage regional security initiatives (e.g., Amotekun in South-West, Ebube Agu in South-East) under a constitutional umbrella.
- Invest in technology-driven policing (forensics, surveillance, data analytics) across both state and federal levels.
- Promote security sector reforms (SSR) that integrate policing with justice system reforms.

Conclusion

The question of state policing as a constitutional reform in Nigeria reflects one of the most critical debates in the country's federal and democratic trajectory. As shown in this study, the intensifying insecurity across the federation—ranging from terrorism in the North-East, banditry and kidnapping in the North-West, farmer–herder conflicts in the Middle Belt, and urban crime in the South—has made evident the inadequacy of Nigeria's centralized police structure. The persistence of a single, federally controlled force in a vast and diverse country of over 200 million people undermines both responsiveness and accountability. This

research has demonstrated that state policing, if carefully designed and implemented, offers an opportunity to reconcile the principles of federalism with the urgent demands of security governance.

The findings highlight a growing consensus among political elites, civil society actors, and citizens that decentralizing policing is no longer optional but necessary. However, decentralization carries inherent risks: governors could manipulate state police for partisan purposes, poor states may struggle to finance effective forces, and human rights abuses could proliferate if oversight is weak. Comparative insights from other federations, such as the United States, Canada, and India, show that decentralization is most effective when accompanied by strong accountability structures, inter-operability mechanisms, and fiscal equalization frameworks.

This paper argues that state policing must be treated not as a short-term political concession but as a long-term security reform embedded in Nigeria's constitutional order. Effective decentralization requires five pillars: (i) a clear constitutional framework defining federal and state jurisdictions, (ii) equitable and sustainable fiscal arrangements, (iii) robust institutional safeguards against politicization, (iv) human rights accountability mechanisms, and (v) integration within the national security strategy. If these pillars are neglected, state policing could fragment Nigeria's security architecture, deepen inequalities, and endanger democratic freedoms.

The implications for governance are profound. State policing has the potential to rebuild citizen trust in the state by making security locally responsive and participatory. It could reduce crime by cutting response times, empower communities through inclusion, and strengthen Nigeria's federal bargain by devolving real powers to subnational units. Yet, it also compels Nigeria to confront hard questions about political will, state capacity, and democratic maturity. Policymakers must therefore avoid simplistic narratives that present state policing as a cure-all. Instead, it should be understood as one component of broader security sector reform that includes justice reform, community policing, and technology-driven security solutions.

In conclusion, Nigeria stands at a historic crossroad. The constitutional reform to introduce state policing can either be a turning point toward greater security, accountability, and federal stability, or a pathway to deeper insecurity and authoritarian abuse. The outcome will depend on how well policymakers heed the lessons from comparative practice, civil society advocacy, and the cautionary voices of history. If implemented with foresight, transparency, and inclusiveness, state policing could become one of the most significant constitutional reforms in Nigeria since independence—anchoring both democratic consolidation and national cohesion in an era of unprecedented insecurity.

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