



State Policing and Internal Security in Nigeria: Prospects, Challenges and Policy Options

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nigeria's persistent insecurity has intensified debate over the effectiveness of centralised policing and the need for the establishment of state police. Although existing studies examine policing challenges and decentralisation, limited research integrates comparative federal experiences with Nigeria's security realities.

Objective: This study examined the prospects, challenges, and policy options for state policing in strengthening internal security in Nigeria.

Method: The study adopted a qualitative comparative design based exclusively on secondary data from academic literature, policy documents, legal materials, and institutional reports. Comparative evidence is drawn from the United States, Germany, and India.

Result: Findings indicate that state policing could strengthen grassroots intelligence, locally responsive community policing, operational responsiveness, rural security, and intergovernmental collaboration. However, political interference, fiscal disparities, constitutional conflicts, ethnic and political bias, weak accountability, and poor inter-agency coordination could undermine its effectiveness.

Conclusion: State policing should not be regarded as an automatic solution to Nigeria's security challenges. Its effectiveness would depend on appropriate constitutional, institutional, financial, and accountability arrangements.

Unique Contribution: The study integrates comparative federal experiences with Nigeria's security context and conceptualises state policing as a broader security-governance reform.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends constitutional clarity, independent oversight, professional recruitment and training, sustainable financing, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and safeguards against political and discriminatory policing.

Keywords: State policing; internal security; decentralised policing; security governance; Nigeria.



INTRODUCTION

Internal security is a fundamental responsibility of the state, underpinning political stability, economic development, democratic governance, and the protection of lives and property. Governments increasingly face complex threats, including terrorism, organised crime, violent extremism, cybercrime, and communal conflict, prompting renewed attention to policing arrangements that can improve security while maintaining democratic accountability (Reiner, 2010; Shearing & Wood, 2003).

In federal democracies, policing responsibilities are distributed across levels of government. The United States, Germany, and India operate systems in which subnational authorities exercise significant policing responsibilities alongside federal institutions. Comparative evidence suggests that decentralised policing can improve local responsiveness, intelligence gathering, and community engagement, but its effectiveness depends on clear constitutional responsibilities, institutional capacity, coordination, and accountability (Bayley, 1994; Leuprecht et al., 2019). These experiences demonstrate that decentralisation does not produce uniform outcomes; its effectiveness depends largely on how policing powers are allocated and governed.

In Africa, persistent insecurity has similarly fuelled debates about policing reform and more locally responsive security governance. However, experiences with decentralised and community-oriented policing indicate that political interference, inadequate funding, weak institutional capacity, and limited accountability can constrain reform outcomes (Baker, 2008; Bénit-Gbaffou et al., 2012; Marenin, 2014).

Nigeria remains central to the debate over policing reform because persistent insecurity—including insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, farmer–herder conflicts, separatist violence, and communal conflict—continues to pressure the centralised Nigeria Police Force (Alemika, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2018). Consequently, state policing has gained prominence within broader constitutional and security-sector reform debates. Proponents argue that it could improve local intelligence, operational responsiveness, and community participation, while critics highlight risks of political interference, abuse of power, ethnic bias, unequal capacity, and institutional fragmentation (CLEEN Foundation, 2022).

Although considerable scholarship examines Nigeria's policing challenges and the merits and risks of decentralisation, limited research systematically integrates comparative experiences from established federal systems with Nigeria's contemporary security realities to identify governance arrangements and safeguards for effective state policing. This study addresses this gap through a qualitative comparative analysis of the United States, Germany, and India. It assesses the prospects and challenges of state policing and identifies policy options to strengthen Nigeria's internal security while maintaining accountability and effective federal coordination.

The study addresses four questions: (1) What lessons can Nigeria draw from state policing in the United States, Germany, and India? (2) What are the limitations of Nigeria's current centralised policing system? (3) How could state policing help address Nigeria's contemporary security challenges? (4) What constitutional and institutional safeguards are necessary for its effective implementation? The study answers these questions through comparative case analysis and a documentary review of relevant academic, legal, and policy sources.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of State Policing

State policing is a system in which subnational governments possess constitutionally or legally recognised authority to establish and operate police organisations within defined jurisdictions. It differs from centralised policing, in which a national police institution holds primary law-enforcement responsibility. In the United States, for example, states retain general police powers under the federal constitutional structure (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

The effectiveness of state or decentralised policing depends not only on the existence of subnational police organisations but also on how policing powers are constitutionally allocated, coordinated, and regulated. Comparative federal systems show considerable variation in these arrangements. The United States, Germany, and India, for example, organise public security through different combinations of federal and subnational responsibilities (Leuprecht et al., 2019).

Proponents of decentralisation argue that subnational policing can improve local responsiveness by enabling police institutions to better understand local security conditions and priorities. Bayley (1994) likewise emphasises the importance of police organisation and jurisdictional arrangements in determining policing effectiveness. However, decentralisation can also create coordination problems, overlapping responsibilities, uneven institutional capacity, and accountability challenges if responsibilities are poorly defined.

In Nigeria, the debate has intensified amid persistent insecurity and concerns about the centralised Nigeria Police Force's capacity to respond effectively to diverse local security challenges. Supporters view state policing as a means to improve local intelligence, responsiveness, and community engagement. At the same time, critics raise concerns about political interference, abuse of police powers, unequal capacity, and institutional fragmentation. Consequently, the debate extends beyond establishing state police to the constitutional, institutional, financial, and accountability safeguards required for effective and democratic policing.

Concept of Internal Security

Internal security is a multidimensional concept concerned with protecting state institutions, citizens, communities, and critical infrastructure from threats within national borders (Rieger & Manic, 2018). While traditional approaches emphasised state authority, territorial integrity, and law and order, contemporary security scholarship also focuses on threats to individuals and communities, including terrorism, organised crime, violent extremism, communal conflict, kidnapping, cybercrime, and environmental insecurity (Krause, 2009; Nasu, 2013; Newman, 2016).

Within federal systems, internal security is increasingly regarded as a shared responsibility among national and subnational authorities, security agencies, intelligence institutions, and communities. Effective security governance therefore requires coordination, information sharing,



community participation, and responsive policing, while maintaining national cohesion and accountability (Shearing & Wood, 2003; Loader & Walker, 2007).

Nigeria faces overlapping threats, including insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, farmer–herder conflicts, separatist violence, cult-related violence, and communal clashes (Olanrewaju & Balana, 2023). These challenges have intensified scrutiny of the centralised policing system and strengthened calls for reforms to improve responsiveness, intelligence gathering, community engagement, and crime prevention (Alemika, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2018).

This conceptualisation is central to the state-policing debate because many security threats originate locally but have wider national implications. State policing could improve local intelligence, community engagement, operational responsiveness, and crime prevention, but its effectiveness would depend on clear constitutional responsibilities, intergovernmental coordination, professional standards, institutional capacity, and independent accountability. The study therefore assesses whether state policing can strengthen Nigeria's internal security while limiting political interference, institutional fragmentation, unequal capacity, and abuse of police powers.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Empirical Studies on State Policing in Federal Democracies

For this review, decentralised policing broadly refers to arrangements in which subnational or local authorities exercise significant policing responsibilities. In contrast, state policing refers specifically to constitutionally or legally recognised policing powers exercised by constituent states within a federation. This distinction matters because federal systems distribute policing responsibilities differently. Accordingly, the review focuses on the United States, Germany, and India.

Comparative evidence indicates that constitutional and institutional arrangements shape how policing responsibilities are distributed and coordinated (Bayley, 1994; Leuprecht et al., 2019). In the United States, policing operates across federal, state, and local levels; in Germany, Länder police perform major policing functions alongside federal agencies; while in India, states exercise substantial authority over law enforcement despite the country's comparatively centralised federal structure (Singh, 2019).

These cases demonstrate that decentralised policing takes different forms and that its effectiveness depends on clear responsibilities, intergovernmental coordination, institutional capacity, professional standards, and accountability (Bayley, 1994; Leuprecht et al., 2019). For Nigeria, these experiences highlight the need to address constitutional powers, federal–state coordination, professional standards, accountability, and equitable institutional capacity when considering state policing.



Empirical Studies on African Experiences with Decentralised, Localised, and Community-Oriented Security Governance

African experiences offer valuable insights into the relationship between localised policing, community participation, and internal security. However, community-oriented policing should be distinguished from state policing. Community-oriented policing emphasises police–community cooperation and participation, whereas state policing concerns the allocation of policing authority to subnational governments.

Baker (2008) demonstrates that security provision in Sub-Saharan Africa extends beyond formal state police institutions to include community, private, informal, and other non-state actors. This plural policing environment raises important concerns about coordination, regulation, accountability, and the respective roles of state and non-state security providers.

Similarly, Bénit-Gbaffou et al. (2012) examine community-driven security initiatives in Johannesburg, including neighbourhood security arrangements and community patrols. Their analysis shows that local political interests and relationships between state authorities and community groups shape these initiatives. Localised security arrangements can therefore encourage community participation while also creating opportunities for political influence and competing security interests.

Marenin (2014) highlights how broader political, social, and economic conditions shape policing and security reforms in African states. Weak governance, corruption, organised crime, political violence, and inadequate institutional capacity can constrain reform outcomes, underscoring that policing reform cannot be separated from the wider governance environment.

Overall, African experiences indicate that local participation and diversified policing arrangements do not automatically produce effective security governance. Their effectiveness depends on institutional capacity, coordination, accountability, regulation, and professional standards. These lessons are relevant to Nigeria because state policing would need to balance local responsiveness with democratic accountability, professional policing, and effective coordination across levels of government.

Empirical Studies on State Policing and Internal Security in Nigeria

The debate over state policing in Nigeria has intensified amid worsening insecurity and concerns about the centralised Nigeria Police Force's capacity to respond effectively to diverse, locally specific security challenges (Ikubanni et al., 2024). Existing Nigerian studies generally suggest that greater subnational involvement in policing could improve local intelligence, operational responsiveness, and community participation. However, they differ on the institutional feasibility of state policing and on the safeguards needed to prevent political abuse, ethnic bias, jurisdictional conflict, and unequal policing capacity across states.

Policy-oriented evidence also contributes to the debate. Reports from the CLEEN Foundation, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), the International Crisis Group, and SBM Intelligence have examined aspects of policing, insecurity, and security-sector reform in Nigeria.



Collectively, these policy perspectives underscore the importance of institutional capacity, professional policing, effective coordination, sustainable funding, and civilian accountability in addressing Nigeria's security challenges. However, the specific relevance of these reports to state policing should be assessed carefully, particularly when they address broader police reform or internal security rather than state police institutions.

Synthesis of the Literature and Research Gap

The literature indicates that decentralised policing can enhance local responsiveness, intelligence gathering, community participation, and operational effectiveness. However, these benefits depend on constitutional clarity, institutional capacity, professional standards, effective intergovernmental coordination, and accountability. Conversely, political interference, inadequate funding, weak institutional capacity, and ineffective oversight may undermine its effectiveness, particularly in developing democracies.

Although Nigerian studies identify limitations in the centralised policing system and increasingly examine state policing as a reform option (Alemika, 2013), three gaps remain. First, limited research systematically integrates lessons from established federal democracies into Nigeria's state-policing debate. Second, existing studies often emphasise either the benefits or the risks of state policing rather than providing a balanced assessment of both. Third, limited scholarship develops an integrated governance framework that combines constitutional reform, institutional accountability, sustainable funding, professional standards, and intergovernmental coordination as conditions for effective state policing.

This study addresses these gaps through a qualitative comparative analysis of policing arrangements in the United States, Germany, and India. By linking comparative evidence to Nigeria's contemporary security realities, it offers a balanced assessment of the prospects and challenges of state policing. It identifies governance safeguards and policy options to strengthen internal security while preserving accountability, professional standards, and federal coordination.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Security Governance Theory, which provides a useful framework for examining state policing and internal security within a federal system. Unlike traditional approaches that view security primarily as the responsibility of the central state, the theory emphasises coordinated action among multiple actors and levels of government (Shearing & Wood, 2003; Loader & Walker, 2007).

Shearing and Wood (2003) and Loader and Walker (2007) conceptualise security as a shared responsibility involving national and subnational governments, communities, private organisations, and civil society. Effective security governance therefore depends on institutional cooperation, information sharing, accountability, and public participation in responding to complex security threats.



The theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a basis for assessing whether state policing can complement the Nigeria Police Force by improving local intelligence, operational responsiveness, community engagement, and crime prevention. It also facilitates analysis of how constitutional arrangements, intergovernmental relations, and institutional accountability influence decentralised policing within Nigeria's federal system (Loader & Walker, 2007; Bevir, 2013).

However, the theory has limitations. It assumes institutions capable of effective coordination and accountability, conditions that may be weakened by political patronage, corruption, and institutional fragmentation (Bever, 2013). In Nigeria, these challenges, together with political interference and disparities in state capacity, could constrain the effective implementation of state policing.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, combining qualitative content analysis with a comparative case-study approach to examine the prospects, challenges, and policy options for state policing and internal security in Nigeria. This approach is appropriate for analysing institutional arrangements, constitutional issues, security governance, and policing reforms that require contextual interpretation rather than quantitative measurement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The study relies exclusively on secondary data from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, government and constitutional documents, policy papers, reports from international organisations, and publications by reputable research institutions. Sources were selected for relevance, credibility, and recency. Documents were included if they provided substantive evidence on policing structures, decentralisation, internal security, accountability, intergovernmental coordination, or state policing; sources lacking clear authorship, institutional credibility, or direct relevance were excluded.

The study purposively selected the United States, Germany, and India as comparative cases because they are federal systems with established subnational policing arrangements and offer contrasting experiences of policing authority, intergovernmental coordination, institutional accountability, and local responsiveness. The units of analysis comprised relevant scholarly and policy documents, together with the policing governance arrangements of Nigeria and the three selected federal systems.

Data were analysed thematically using qualitative content analysis. Documents were reviewed, classified, and interpreted against themes derived from the research objectives, including state policing, internal security, institutional effectiveness, accountability, intergovernmental coordination, and policing reforms. The comparative evidence was then examined in relation to Nigeria's institutional and security context to identify relevant policy lessons (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

To enhance credibility and dependability, evidence was triangulated across diverse academic and policy sources. Recent and credible publications were prioritised, while seminal and earlier works were retained where necessary to provide theoretical, historical, and conceptual context.



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Prospects of State Policing for Strengthening Internal Security in Nigeria

The findings suggest that state policing could strengthen internal security in Nigeria by bringing law enforcement closer to local communities and improving the responsiveness of security institutions to local needs. Drawing on comparative experiences from federal democracies, the study identifies several potential benefits, including stronger police–community relations, improved grassroots intelligence gathering, greater operational efficiency, enhanced crime prevention, and better coordination among security agencies. However, these benefits would depend on the institutional arrangements governing state policing, particularly professional standards, accountability, respect for human rights, and effective intergovernmental coordination. These conditions are consistent with the assumptions of Security Governance Theory, which emphasises the importance of coordinated security provision, institutional accountability, and cooperation among relevant actors.

One major prospect identified by the study is the potential of state policing to strengthen police–community relations and public confidence in law enforcement. Comparative evidence suggests that decentralised policing can improve police legitimacy, citizen participation, and public trust when transparency and accountability are maintained (Bayley, 1994; Skogan, 2006; Baker, 2008; Leuprecht et al., 2019). In Nigeria, however, concerns about corruption, excessive use of force, and weak accountability have undermined public confidence in the police (CLEEN Foundation, 2022). By bringing police institutions closer to the communities they serve, state policing could create opportunities for more sustained engagement between officers and residents. Nevertheless, this potential benefit would depend on professional recruitment, civilian oversight, and safeguards against political interference.

Closely related to improved community relations is the prospect of strengthening grassroots intelligence gathering. The findings indicate that subnational police organisations could benefit from information supplied by residents, traditional and community leaders, local networks, and other actors familiar with prevailing security conditions. Such proximity could improve officers' understanding of local terrain, suspicious activities, emerging threats, and community-specific security concerns. Evidence from federal democracies suggests that decentralised policing can facilitate locally informed intelligence collection and improve responsiveness to community-level security dynamics (Bayley, 1994; Leuprecht et al., 2019). Similarly, African experiences with community-oriented policing demonstrate the importance of police–community relationships and local participation in security provision (Baker, 2008; Bénit-Gbaffou et al., 2012). In Nigeria, where banditry, kidnapping, farmer–herder conflicts, and communal violence frequently have strong local dimensions, improved access to community-based intelligence could facilitate the earlier identification of threats and more proactive security responses (Alemika, 2013). The effectiveness of this approach, however, would depend on public trust, professional conduct, human-rights protection, and appropriate institutional oversight.



Beyond intelligence gathering, the study suggests that state policing could improve operational efficiency by reducing bureaucratic delays in deploying personnel and responding to emergencies. Comparative experiences in the United States, Germany, and India indicate that subnational police organisations operate closer to local security environments while maintaining relationships with federal institutions for matters extending beyond their jurisdictions (Bayley, 1994; Leuprecht et al., 2019). This arrangement could be particularly relevant to Nigeria, where delayed responses to kidnapping, banditry, communal violence, and farmer–herder conflicts have raised concerns about the capacity of the centralised policing system (International Crisis Group, 2018; SBM Intelligence, 2020). By allowing security decisions to be made closer to the locations where incidents occur, state policing could facilitate quicker deployment and more context-sensitive operational decisions. Nevertheless, improved responsiveness would require adequate funding, logistical support, professional training, and effective coordination among security agencies.

Another potential benefit concerns the strengthening of crime prevention, particularly in rural and conflict-prone communities where insecurity remains pronounced. Whereas operational efficiency focuses on the speed and effectiveness of responses to security incidents, crime prevention emphasises the identification and reduction of risks before crimes occur. Comparative evidence suggests that decentralised policing can support preventive patrols, locally informed security strategies, and early intervention through sustained community engagement (Bayley, 1994; Baker, 2008; Leuprecht et al., 2019). In Nigeria, state policing could expand security coverage in underserved rural communities and enable police institutions to develop responses that reflect local security conditions. However, such gains would depend on adequate personnel and logistics, community participation, professional standards, and collaboration with federal security agencies (International Crisis Group, 2018; SBM Intelligence, 2020; Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2019).

Finally, the potential benefits of state policing would depend on effective intelligence sharing and intergovernmental security collaboration. Although decentralisation could improve local responsiveness, its contribution to national security would be limited if state police institutions operated independently of federal security agencies. Evidence from federal democracies indicates that decentralised policing is more effective when federal and subnational institutions cooperate through joint operations, intelligence sharing, and clearly defined constitutional responsibilities (Loader & Walker, 2007; Bayley, 1994; Leuprecht et al., 2019). This is particularly important in Nigeria, where institutional rivalry, overlapping mandates, and weaknesses in intelligence coordination have constrained responses to terrorism, organised crime, and other security threats (International Crisis Group, 2018; SBM Intelligence, 2020). Accordingly, any state-policing arrangement should operate within an integrated security framework that provides for shared intelligence mechanisms, interoperable communication systems, joint operations, and clearly defined responsibilities across the different levels of government (Deribe, 2023; Shearing & Wood, 2003).



Policy Implications and Governance Framework

Although the findings identify several potential benefits of state policing, they also reveal significant institutional, constitutional, and governance challenges that could undermine its effectiveness. The realisation of the anticipated benefits would therefore depend on the capacity of the Nigerian state to establish appropriate safeguards against political interference, inadequate financing, jurisdictional conflicts, discriminatory policing, and weak accountability. These challenges are interconnected and require a governance framework that balances local autonomy with professional policing standards, constitutional safeguards, and national security coordination.

One of the most significant challenges identified by the comparative analysis is the risk of political interference. Although decentralisation could improve local security responsiveness, inadequate safeguards might enable state authorities to use police institutions for partisan interests, political intimidation, or selective law enforcement. Comparative evidence indicates that decentralised policing is more effective when constitutional safeguards, judicial oversight, legislative scrutiny, and independent accountability mechanisms protect police professionalism and operational autonomy (Bayley, 1994; Reiner, 2010; Loader & Walker, 2007). African experiences similarly demonstrate that political interference and weak institutional oversight can undermine police professionalism and public confidence (Baker, 2008; Marenin, 2014). In Nigeria, concerns have also been raised about the potential vulnerability of state police to political manipulation, particularly during elections and other political contests (Alemika, 2013). The findings therefore suggest that state policing would require clearly defined operational autonomy, independent oversight, and democratic accountability to prevent decentralisation from becoming an instrument of political control.

Closely connected to the question of institutional autonomy is the challenge of sustainable financing and unequal fiscal capacity among states. Effective policing requires continuous investment in personnel, training, equipment, intelligence systems, infrastructure, and staff welfare. Comparative experiences indicate that decentralised policing is more sustainable when stable fiscal arrangements and clearly defined intergovernmental responsibilities support minimum operational standards (Bayley, 1994; Leuprecht et al., 2019). However, many Nigerian states depend heavily on federal allocations, raising concerns about their capacity to maintain adequately resourced and professional police services (Alemika, 2013). Without sustainable financing arrangements, clearly defined funding responsibilities, and mechanisms for maintaining minimum national policing standards, decentralisation could produce significant differences in police capacity and security outcomes across states. Consequently, the implementation of state policing should incorporate transparent funding arrangements and measures to address disparities in states' financial and institutional capacities.

Beyond political and financial considerations, constitutional and jurisdictional issues constitute another major challenge to the implementation of state policing. Under Section 214(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the Nigeria Police Force is



established as the police force for Nigeria, while Item 45 of Part I of the Second Schedule places police and other government security services established by law on the Exclusive Legislative List. Establishing constitutionally recognised state police would therefore require appropriate constitutional reform to define the respective powers, functions, and responsibilities of federal and state police institutions.

The need for constitutional reform also raises questions about jurisdictional boundaries and the management of security operations that extend beyond individual states. Comparative evidence from Germany, the United States, and India suggests that decentralised policing functions more effectively when legal mandates and institutional responsibilities are clearly defined, thereby reducing operational conflicts and institutional rivalry (Bayley, 1994; Reiner, 2010; Leuprecht et al., 2019). In Nigeria, unclear jurisdictional boundaries could complicate interstate investigations, counter-terrorism operations, and responses to national emergencies (Alemika, 2013). Appropriate constitutional and legislative provisions would therefore be necessary to regulate cross-border operations, interstate pursuit of suspects, mutual legal assistance, and the circumstances under which federal or state police assume primary operational responsibility. Such provisions would help ensure that decentralisation strengthens security provision without creating competing centres of authority.

In addition to these institutional challenges, Nigeria's complex ethno-religious composition raises concerns about the impartiality of recruitment, deployment, and law enforcement. Without transparent recruitment procedures, merit-based promotion, equitable deployment, and independent oversight, state police could be perceived as serving sectional, ethnic, religious, or political interests rather than the broader public interest. Comparative evidence suggests that decentralised policing is more likely to maintain legitimacy when professionalism, impartiality, and constitutional safeguards underpin fair and consistent law enforcement (Reiner, 2010; Loader & Walker, 2007). In Nigeria, perceived or actual discriminatory policing could undermine public trust, discourage cooperation with law enforcement, hinder intelligence sharing, and weaken institutional legitimacy (Alemika, 2013).

Although discriminatory policing may be reinforced by political interference, the two challenges require distinct safeguards. Political interference involves the direct manipulation of police institutions by political office-holders, whereas discriminatory policing concerns the unequal treatment of individuals or communities in recruitment, deployment, enforcement, and access to police protection. Effective state policing would therefore require transparent recruitment and promotion, equitable deployment, professional standards, independent oversight, and explicit safeguards against discriminatory practices. These measures would help ensure that state police institutions serve all residents fairly, irrespective of ethnic, religious, or political affiliation.

The findings further indicate that the legitimacy of state policing would depend on professionalism, accountability, and respect for human rights. Comparative evidence identifies independent oversight, transparent disciplinary procedures, continuous professional training, and adherence to human-rights standards as essential components of effective decentralised policing



(Bayley, 1994; Reiner, 2010). In Nigeria, persistent concerns about police misconduct, corruption, and excessive use of force underscore the importance of establishing a state-policing framework that combines internal professional accountability with external civilian oversight (Alemika, 2013; CLEEN Foundation, 2022; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023).

To translate these principles into practice, accountability should operate at both internal and external levels. Internal accountability should encompass professional standards, merit-based recruitment and promotion, continuous training, transparent disciplinary procedures, and effective mechanisms for investigating misconduct. External accountability should include independent civilian complaints mechanisms, judicial review, legislative oversight, and human-rights monitoring. Together, these mechanisms could provide avenues for addressing abuse, reviewing police conduct, protecting citizens' rights, and ensuring compliance with legal and democratic standards. Accordingly, state policing should be designed not merely around the decentralisation of authority but also around robust accountability arrangements capable of preventing the reproduction of existing institutional weaknesses.

Effective coordination among security agencies constitutes a further requirement for the success of state policing. While decentralisation could create opportunities for stronger collaboration across different levels of government, it could also intensify institutional fragmentation if coordination mechanisms were inadequate. Comparative evidence indicates that decentralised policing is more effective when federal and subnational agencies cooperate through integrated intelligence systems, joint operations, and clearly defined operational responsibilities (Loader & Walker, 2007; Leuprecht et al., 2019). In Nigeria, weak intelligence sharing and inter-agency rivalry have constrained responses to insecurity (International Crisis Group, 2018; SBM Intelligence, 2020). Consequently, the establishment of state police should be accompanied by institutional mechanisms that promote intelligence sharing, interoperable communication systems, joint operations, and clearly defined responsibilities across federal, state, and other security agencies. Such arrangements would help reconcile decentralised operational authority with the need for coordinated national security responses.

Taken together, these governance considerations demonstrate that accountability must be integrated into the entire state-policing framework rather than treated as a separate administrative concern. Although independent oversight, judicial review, legislative scrutiny, and civilian complaint mechanisms have already been identified as essential safeguards, their effectiveness would depend on clear legal mandates, institutional independence, adequate resources, and consistent enforcement. Experiences from federal democracies indicate that subnational police institutions operate more effectively when these mechanisms provide meaningful checks on police authority (Bayley, 1994; Reiner, 2010; Loader & Walker, 2007). For Nigeria, an effective framework should establish independent civilian oversight, transparent complaint and disciplinary procedures, legislative monitoring, judicial safeguards, and regular human-rights monitoring. These mechanisms would help ensure that decentralising police authority does not simply transfer existing accountability weaknesses from the federal level to state institutions (Abbas, 2026).



CONCLUSION

This study examined the prospects, challenges, and policy options associated with state policing and internal security in Nigeria, drawing comparative lessons from the United States, Germany, and India. The analysis demonstrates that the central issue is not merely whether policing authority should be decentralised, but how decentralisation can be designed and governed to improve security without undermining accountability, professionalism, or national cohesion.

The study finds that state policing could bring law enforcement closer to communities, improve access to local intelligence, enhance operational responsiveness, strengthen police–community relations, and support crime prevention. Nevertheless, these benefits are not automatic. Their realisation would depend on clearly defined constitutional responsibilities, adequate institutional capacity, sustainable financing, professional standards, effective accountability, and coordination between federal and state security institutions. Without these safeguards, decentralisation could intensify political interference, ethnic or sectional bias, fiscal inequality, institutional rivalry, and human-rights violations.

The study therefore concludes that state policing should be approached as a broader security-governance reform rather than simply the creation of additional police organisations. Nigeria’s policy approach should prioritise clear jurisdictional boundaries, independent oversight, professional recruitment and training, sustainable financing, integrated intelligence sharing, and effective federal–state coordination. If properly regulated and adequately resourced, state policing could complement existing federal security institutions, strengthen local responsiveness, and contribute to internal security while preserving accountability, human rights, and national cohesion.

Ethical Clearance

This study relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from academic publications, policy documents, legal documents, institutional reports, and other documentary sources. No human participants were involved in the study; therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest associated with this study.



Authors' Contributions

Ojuawo Olakunle Olaniyi conceived and designed the study, conducted the literature review, and wrote the initial manuscript. Adetunberu Oludotun PhD contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the findings and critically reviewed the manuscript. Both authors critically reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and accept responsibility for its content and similarity index.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly for language editing and grammatical refinement.

Data Availability Statement

The study used secondary documentary data obtained from academic publications, legal documents, policy reports, and institutional sources. The materials used in the analysis are available through their respective published or institutional sources and may be accessed upon reasonable request where applicable.

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