

# UAI JOURNAL OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (UAJAHSS)



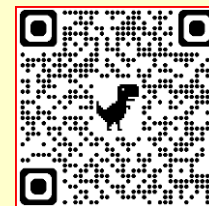
Abbreviated Key Title: UAI J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 3048-7692 (Online)

Journal Homepage: <https://uaipublisher.com/uajahss/>

Volume- 3 Issue- 4 (April) 2026

Frequency: Monthly



## STATE POLICING AND THE DYNAMICS OF NON-STATE SECURITY ACTORS (NSSA) IN NIGERIA: CONTESTATIONS, COLLABORATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

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### ABSTRACT

*This article interrogates the complex relationship between state policing institutions and non-state security actors (NSSA) in Nigeria. It explores how state bond vigilante groups interact with formal national policing structures in the contexts of insecurity and weak state capacity, raising public distrust of law enforcement and unconstitutional framework. By analysing the tensions, complementarities and governance challenges inherent in these interactions, the paper highlights the implications for accountability, human rights and sustainable national security provision in Nigeria. It recommends constitutional reforms that shape the way for the creation of state police along with the NPF for a balanced national security.*

**KEY WORDS:** National Security, Non-State Security Actors, Nigeria Police Force, Security Governance, State Police

### Introduction

Nigeria's security architecture has long been characterized by surge in separatist agitation in the south-east, youth restiveness in the south-south and Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east, kidnapping in the south-west, all marked by increasing insecurity, civil unrest, and the erosion of public trust in state institutions. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), constitutionally mandated to maintain law and order, has struggled with chronic underfunding, inadequate manpower, lack of equipment and declining public trust. These institutional weaknesses have created fertile ground for the proliferation of non-state security actors (NSSA), ranging from state owned vigilantes, private securities and community-based initiatives. These groups have capitalized on long-standing grievances, including perceived marginalization, underdevelopment, and political exclusion, to the use of informal security structures – from local vigilante to regional outfits (Ekhomu, 2019).

The emergences of these actors reflect both the resilience of state governments, local communities in the face of insecurity and the fragility of national institutions. In many rural and urban areas, citizens often rely more on vigilante groups or private guards than on the national police for protection against crime, insurgency and communal violence. This dynamic raises critical questions about the monopoly of security traditionally claimed by the state, and the legitimacy of hybrid security arrangements that blur the boundaries between formal and informal governance and the interest of national security.

Scholars have noted that the inability of state policing institutions to adequately provide security has underpinned the rise of NSSA in Nigeria, who now play a significant role in everyday security provisioning (Kwaja, 2017). These groups, while filling gaps left by the national police, also pose challenges to national security through human rights abuses, constitutional lapses, jurisdictional conflicts,

training experiences, and the creation of parallel security authority structures (Mailumo, 2020). However, some studies highlight the potential for collaboration between federal police and NSSA, particularly in intelligence sharing and community policing initiatives (Partners West Africa Nigeria, 2019).

This paper situates the Nigerian case within broader debates on security pluralism and hybrid governance. It examines how national policing interacts with NSSA – sometimes in collaboration and in contestation – and explores the implications of these relationships so as to understand how regional states negotiate authority in the contexts of insecurity, and how citizens navigate the complex terrain of overlapping security providers.

**Theoretical Framework**

Bruce Baker in 2008 rooted the Security Pluralism theory. He posits that security provision is no longer the exclusive domain of the state. Instead, it is shared among various actors, the state and non-state security actors, who fill gaps in protection and law enforcement. Therefore, in Nigeria, new groups must emerge to assist counter threats like banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, cattle rustling, etc. hence, the state must regulate the formation through a constitutional framework for all the 36 states, integrate them into a unified training and avoid fragmentation by names, structures and competition.

Security Governance theory equally emphasizes the shifting nature of security provision from a state-centric model to a more pluralistic and decentralized framework involving a variety of actors. In contexts where state institutions are weak, contested, or absent, security governance is increasingly undertaken by NSSA such as that formed by many state governments. Security Governance Theory recognizes these actors as legitimate, though not always formally recognized, providers of security services, particularly in fragile or conflict-affected settings.

Applying these theories to Nigeria’s insecurity affected regions, the research explores growing relevance of how NSSA emerged as critical players in filling the gaps left by overtaken, ineffective or mistrusted state forces. These actors negotiate authority, legitimacy, and service delivery in a hybrid security order where citizens and businesses are compelled to interact with multiple security providers. The theories also provide a framework for analysing the implications of such arrangements for state sovereignty, rule of law, and security risk management. By situating non-state security actors within broader governance dynamics, the study highlights the need for constitution/policy reforms that recognize and regulate these actors to ensure coherence, support business, accountability, and the protection of fundamental rights.

**Conceptual Framework**

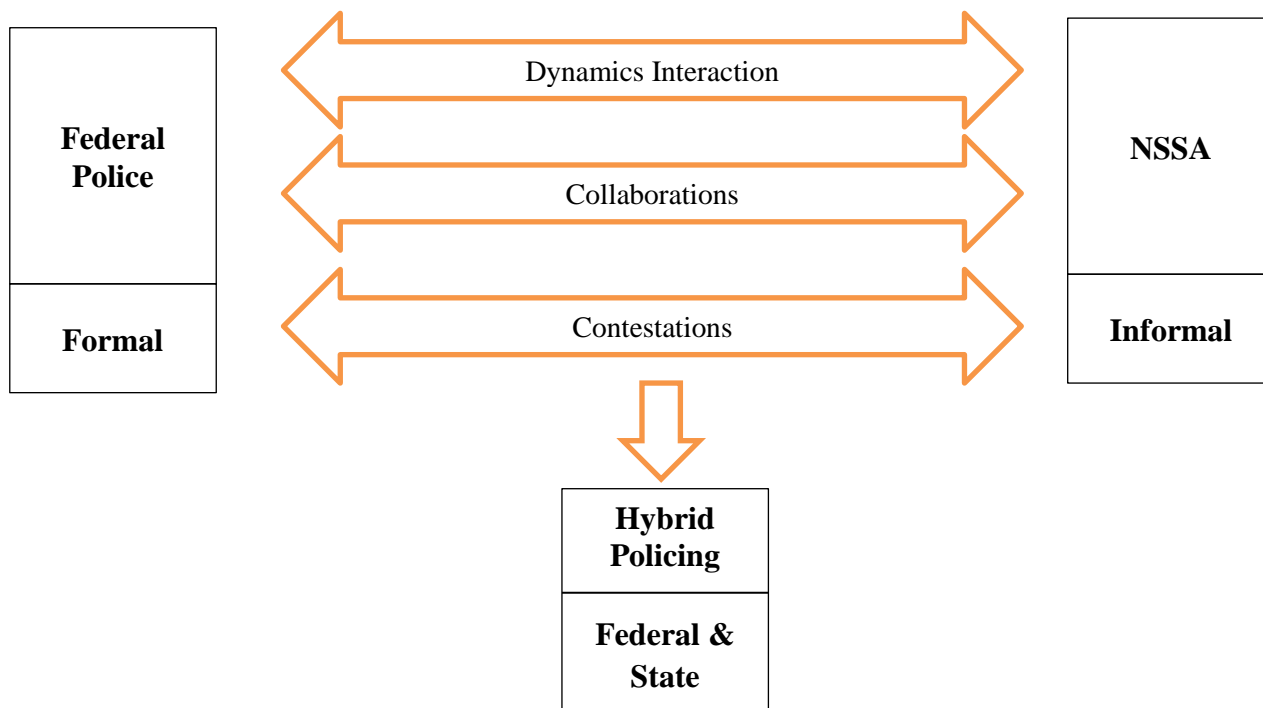


Figure 1. Hybrid Policing Model

Federal police represents the central NPF, while the NSSA includes all states vigilantes and private security outfits. With the formalization, interactions, collaborations and contestations of the NSSA groups, a new and hybrid security governance will be formed with sectorial divisions of the federal and state – a definite pattern and adaptive against national insecurity.

**State Policing in Nigeria**

Policing philosophy is universal with the provision of order. Historical roots of vigilante groups and community policing efforts in Nigeria predate the colonial days, where traditional cultural societies, age grades and community councils were essentially the means of upholding norms and order. These groups with different names in various cultures were organized for the enforcement of

laws, recompense conflicts and guard palace and properties. They formed the Non-State Traditional Actors (NSTA). Examples are the Olodes, Yan Banga, Ekpe, Ekpo Obon, Ndiche across several parts of Nigeria. According to Ogbozor (2016), these institutions failed in dominance with the establishment of colonial institutions in the post-independent era. However, in most rural communities, they are still the functional law enforcement groups.

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was established as a centralized state institution under the colonial rule and has remained a federal agency since. Its constitutional role, as outlined in the 1999 Constitution as amended and the Police Act, is to prevent and detect crime and maintain public order. However, decades of military rule have left the NPF plagued with allegations of corruption, inefficiency, human rights abuses, all undermining its essence in the eyes of citizens (Ugbo & Egondou, 2025).

The birth of NSSA is creating an idea for the establishment of state police forces, which has gained traction as insecurity worsens across Nigeria. Proponents are of the view that, decentralizing policing would allow states tailor some security responses, foster true federalism, and reduce the burden on the overstretched federal police (Mustapha & Umoru, 2024). They contend that state police could improve intelligence gathering and community trust, especially where policing is absent or ineffective.

However, critics warned that, state policing could be politicized, with governors using state-owned forces to suppress opposition. Other aspects of concerns are funding, training and oversight (Arase, 2018). State policing will serve as a solution to Nigeria's insecurity problems.

Despite the absence of a constitutional framework and formal state police structure, several states have experimented with a quasi-policing structure. In 2019, the south-western states adopted the Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) - Amotekun. Four of the south-eastern states of Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi and Imo have created various vigilante groups. In the north-west, five (Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara) of the seven states have established watch groups. Four out of six north-eastern states of Adamawa, Borno, Taraba and Yobe have their security outfits. In the south-south zone, only two states – Edo and Cross River have security groups, while only Benue state in the north-central has guards.

This approach of adopting NSSA to address threats of people's security, relating to economic, social, health, and transportation issues have implications in the short and long run of our national security. The diversified perspectives to security units in the country underscore national security interests. The issue here is how the creation of NSSA affects national security governance, taken into account the interrelationship between the national police and the disguised state police. Without a constitutional reform, this arrangement remains informal, legally ambiguous and continuously creating tension between the federal police structure and state government agents.

### Non-State Security Actors

The NSSA have emerged as grassroots responses to the inadequacies of the NPF. These actors provide the first line of defence against crime, banditry and communal violence. Their proximity to the local populations assists in quick and effective response where the national police is absent (Kwaja, 2017). In the view of Ajayi, (2025), they poses intimate knowledge of the terrain, understand traditional norms, criminal social networks which enhances intelligence gathering and crime prevention approach.

Generally, national security means the protection of governance, resources and the development of the economy of states. Nigeria is of age in the provision of multi security outfits since the establishment of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), for the specific function of the protection of national infrastructures, and regulation of private security guards. With the utilization of our ungoverned spaces by bandits, the Forest Guards Security (FGS) have been expanded and re-tasked with securing our forests. This is in line with modern security framework.

### Dynamics of Interactions

The relationship between national police and NSSA is not uniform across states and zones. It is characterized by shifting patterns of collaboration, contestation and co-optation. These reflect the challenges of national security with states seeking alternative forms of protection.

In many communities, NSSA provide local intelligence, manpower drive and cultural support. The NSSA assist to patrol neighbourhoods, apprehend suspects and police take-over (Kwaja, 2017). But the issue of contestation lie on jurisdiction, where NSSA assume policing powers leading to clashes with the NPF. Mailumo, (2020), points out that human rights, accountability and torture are reported and are of concerns. The aspect of corporation is very necessary. State governments have started integrating them into the policing frameworks. Without a constitutional reform, clear legal frameworks, these arrangements remain vulnerable and partisan.

The dynamics between federal policing and state NSSA groups illustrate a heterogeneous national security system. Formalization of the groups can strengthen national security; contestation exposes governance weaknesses, while co-optation reflects state policing adaptation. Effective reforms to establish state police (optional to each state government) is a benefit to the sort for community policing.

### Implications for National Security Governance

The various state governments in Nigeria have queued up in the direction and pursuit of parallel provision of social security for their citizens and in line with sustainable development. The implicating issues and challenges are on the following areas:

1. Recruitment – The measure of recruitment standard, criteria, background checks, age limits, criminal affiliations and the agency that supervised the process is necessary and important. A bridge in the fore mentioned will mar the process.
2. Training – There is no unified training programme for NSSA. Across the board, no standardized curriculum set for training. The issues here are, duration of training, aspects of specialization, self-protection, human right abuses etc. This is because there are no established structures. Their creation is spontaneous and of dire need.
3. Command and Control Structure – In general, there is need for standard nomenclatures for NSSA. All agencies of the federal government are structured with badges of rank, which are clearly seen, known with name tags. By this, one could be identified if and when things go wrong. The NSSA systems lack operational and administrative structures as well as official designated offices. What are equally lacking are discipline measures and responsibilities.
4. Arms Control and Types – All states NSSA are armed. This is because of the nature of their duties. Questions are, on whose approval are the arms? National or state approval? What types of weapons? Where there adequately trained in musketry - handling, shooting, maintenances, registration, armoury - and who audits their arms? Were the men licenced to bear lethal weapons?
5. Misuse of Power – While the good initiative of the NSSA is carried out, it is possible that miscreants from the outlawed groups will infiltrate the new groups. The essence will be to obtain new identity, have access to arms, and create commotion within the system. There is much to be desired with profiling of volunteers. Equally, the political class in usurping power may use the group to fight against their opponents. Contrary to the aim and objectives of its formation. Much in checks and balance are still required in this regards.
6. Deployment and Nature of Duties – All states in Nigeria are not facing similar security challenges. Therefore,

training must differ, as well as the nature of duties. This calls for, what they deployed to do? Are the citizens aware? What report must they receive? What are the boundaries of their duties and responsibilities? Do their duties conflict with any national agency? What measures are in place to ensure peaceful coexistence with other national security organizations?

7. Internal Conflicts – During conflicts, especially riots and communal crisis, it is feared that state NSSA will become closely used to build local capacity and interferences against communities with less population and quota in the group. They may take sides in conflict situations.
8. Accountability and the Rule of Law – The state NSSA in Nigeria are the products of corporate registration establishment and not of the Constitution. The Constitution for now does not grant powers for the establishment of NSSA in the status of state police. But by the enactment of state legislative approvals, state police is being formed. With uniforms, powers of arrest, bearing of arms, what happens when abuse occurs? What is the report mechanism? The issue of inter-state cases are not yet considered. What role will they play during national and local government elections? Will they equally guard state dignitaries in times of emergencies?
9. Constitutional Mandate - The Constitution for now does not grant powers for the establishment of state police. It is only the constitution that can give us the clarity of where we are heading to.
10. Continuity – The Nigerian political landscape is allergic to continuity of policies and systems. The fears are the non-usage in names, political administrative changes, dissolution of structure, etc. with a constitutional mandate; the live of the organizations will be sustained.

## Recommendations

To address the challenges and create opportunities for the coexistence of state policing with the federal police in Nigeria, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. The 1999 Constitution Section 214 (1) should be amended to allow for the creation of state police forces with clear mandates and oversight functions for both the federal and state structures. Here, political misuse and structure will be spelt out.
2. Develop a national security policy for the states that are ready to create and standardized the system. By establishing recruitment and training standards, mandate audit on arms flow, performances and command structure.
3. Institutionalize duties boundary, intelligence-sharing, and law enforcement partnerships between federal and state police.
4. Establish independent oversight bodies to monitor the activities of state police on accountability, so as to promote transparency. Create avenues to address grievances and redress misconduct.

5. Invest in infrastructure, training, improve welfare and professionalism of both service structures – federal and state police.

## Conclusion

In our age long drive for standard security, Nigeria cannot ignore the complex dynamics of multiple security actors. As vast as are our territory is, as intricate as our ethnic boundaries are, as desirable as our peaceful coexistence remains and as competing interests continue to shape the pursuit of a truly valid national security framework. The state policing initiatives will create an agenda of improving security of citizens, and contribute strategies to address national security.

The interplay between the police and NSSA in Nigeria reveals a complex and evolving security landscape within the national security framework. If state police is established, their presence will underscore the pluralistic nature of security governance in Nigeria, for a national issue. This dynamics are not merely oppositional but hybrid. As Nigeria continues to grapple with insecurity, the path forward lies in choosing State Police as balance security architecture. State police, if formal, will serve the public good within the bounds of law and justice.

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**Funding:** No institutional funding was received for this article.