Article

Integrating State-Supported Vigilante Armed Services into Nigeria's Emerging State Police Architecture: Prospects, Challenges and Strategic Pathways

Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science (NAJOPS).
2026, Vol. 11(2)
ISSN: 2992-5924
©NAJOPS 2026
Reprints and permissions:
www.najops.org.ng

AKALE, Charles Sokomba
Senior Research Fellow Centre for Strategic Research and Studies (CSRS),
National Defence College (NDC)
Abuja-Nigeria,

UKAEJE, Obinna
Irregular Warfare Centre (IWC),
National Defence College, Abuja.

Abstract

Nigeria's internal security environment has undergone profound transformation over the past decade, characterized by insurgency, rural banditry, kidnapping-for-ransom, communal conflicts, farmer-herder violence and violent separatist agitations. The inability of the centralized policing framework to respond effectively to localized threats has led to the proliferation of state-backed vigilante organizations across various geopolitical zones. This development has intensified calls for the establishment of state police. However, the potential creation of state police raises critical questions regarding the institutional future of these vigilante structures. Should they remain parallel actors or be integrated into formal subnational policing systems? This paper examines the prospects, challenges, and strategic pathways for integrating state-supported vigilante armed services into Nigeria's evolving state police architecture. Drawing on institutional theory and hybrid security governance theory, it contends that integration offers strategic advantages in intelligence generation, local legitimacy, and operational speed, but also entails substantial risks of politicization, abuse, and fragmented authority. Through comparative analysis of Kenya, South Africa, and India, the study identifies lessons for Nigeria's evolving security federalism. The paper proposes a phased integration model anchored in constitutional reform, professionalization, and multi-level oversight.

Keywords: State police, vigilante security, security decentralization, Nigeria, hybrid governance, internal security.

Introduction

Corresponding Author:
AKALE, Charles Sokomba. Senior Research Fellow Centre for Strategic Research and Studies (CSRS), National Defence College (NDC) Abuja-Nigeria. Email: akalekarl10@gmailcom,

The protection of lives and property constitutes the primary responsibility of any sovereign state and underpins political stability, economic development, and social cohesion. In Nigeria, the state's capacity to fulfil this obligation has been severely strained. Over the past decade, the country has experienced a marked deterioration in its internal security environment, characterized by insurgency, banditry, kidnapping for ransom, communal clashes, secessionist agitations, and farmer-herder conflicts. These threats have revealed significant structural weaknesses in Nigeria's internal security architecture and have raised serious concerns regarding the effectiveness of its centralized policing system (Alemika, 2022).

Nigeria operates one of the most centralized policing systems in Africa. Section 214(1) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended vests policing powers exclusively in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), making it the sole constitutionally recognized law enforcement institution (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 1999). This centralization was designed to preserve national unity, prevent fragmentation of regional security, and ensure uniform command and control across the federation. However, contemporary security realities have shown the limitations of this model. Scholars argue that centralized policing in a complex, ethnically diverse, and geographically expansive federation like Nigeria often results in bureaucratic inefficiencies, delayed operational responses, and limited penetration of community-level intelligence (Onuoha, 2024).

Empirical evidence reinforces this concern. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED, 2025), Nigeria recorded over 21,000 conflict-related deaths between 2019 and 2025, with armed banditry and insurgency accounting for a significant share. During the same period, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2025) showed kidnapping incidents rose by about 73 per cent, especially in the North-West and North-Central zones. The persistence of these threats despite increased security spending highlights a widening gap between state security commitments and actual outcomes.

A critical indicator of Nigeria's policing challenge is its inadequate police-to-population ratio. The United Nations recommends one police officer per 450 citizens for effective policing. In contrast, Nigeria has approximately 370,000 police personnel serving over 230 million people, resulting in a ratio of roughly one officer per 621 citizens (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2024). This deficit is exacerbated by poor logistics, inadequate funding, corruption, low morale, and weak intelligence utilization, all of which have undermined the operational effectiveness of the Nigeria Police Force (International Crisis Group, 2024). In conflict-prone communities, citizens have increasingly resorted to self-help mechanisms for

survival and protection. This has fueled the rise of vigilante armed formations, many of which now operate with varying degrees of state support and public legitimacy. (Abiakam & Azuoma, 2025).

Across different regions of Nigeria, these groups have evolved from informal neighbourhood defence systems into organized security actors that conduct surveillance, intelligence gathering, patrols, and tactical interventions (Felbab-Brown, 2021). Notable examples include the Civilian Joint Task Force in the North-East, which played a crucial role in local intelligence against Boko Haram insurgents; the Amotekun Corps established in 2020 by the South-West governors to combat kidnapping and violent crimes, as well as the Ebube Agu Security Network launched in April 2021 by the South-East Governors' Forum to secure the region against rampaging criminal syndicates.

The growing institutional relevance of these vigilante groups reflects what scholars call hybrid security governance, where formal and informal actors coexist and jointly contribute to public safety (Bagayoko et al., 2016). In Nigeria, this hybridization emerged not by deliberate policy but as a practical response to state incapacity. While these groups provide tactical advantages like superior local intelligence, cultural familiarity, and rapid response, their operations also raise concerns about human rights abuses, lack of accountability, and political manipulation (Omeni, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the national debate on establishing state police has gained momentum. Proponents argue that decentralized policing would enhance local responsiveness, improve intelligence gathering, and reduce the operational burden on federal security agencies. Critics, however, caution against the risks of political misuse, ethnic profiling, and fragmentation of national security command structures (Onuoha, 2024). Within this debate, a critical but less-examined question arises: what becomes of existing state-supported vigilante armed services if state police are constitutionally established? These groups already possess operational presence, local legitimacy, and battlefield experience in many conflict-prone communities. Their outright dissolution may create security vacuums, while their unregulated coexistence with state police could result in institutional overlap and operational conflict. Consequently, integrating them into the emerging state police architecture may offer a pragmatic pathway for strengthening localized security governance.

Within this context, this paper examines the prospects, challenges, and strategic pathways for integrating state-supported vigilante armed services into Nigeria's emerging state police framework. It interrogates the institutional feasibility of such integration, the potential security

gains, and the governance risks. By situating the analysis within broader debates on decentralization, security federalism, and hybrid security governance, the study contributes to the evolving discourse on restructuring Nigeria's internal security architecture for greater effectiveness and sustainability.

Conceptual Exploration

The critical concepts considered important to this discourse are vigilante armed services, state police, and hybrid security governance. Efforts are made in this section to provide explanations for them, so as to provide backgrounds, clarity, and show familiarity with the topic, and help position the paper within the broader scholarly conversation, ensuring its relevance and significance.

State-Supported Vigilante Armed Services

The concept of state-supported vigilante armed services depicts organized non-state security actors or militias engaged in crime prevention, surveillance, intelligence gathering, armed intervention to maintain public order. According to Agbiboa (2014) vigilante armed services is a collective extrajudicial action to enforce order or combat crime, which often comes up when formal policing institutions fail or are perceived as inadequate. Baker (2018) notes that though they often operate outside formal constitutional frameworks, they may receive explicit support from state authorities, local governments, or traditional institutions.

To Alemika (2022), state-supported vigilante armed services emerged primarily as a response to the inefficiency and corruption of formal policing institutions in Nigeria. This contention reverberates Agbiboa (2014) position that the concept of vigilante armed services is deeply rooted in Nigeria, evolving from pre-colonial communal policing systems to modern-day responses to state failure. Its operational strength lies in its social embeddedness and familiarity with the locals, which fosters trust, improve information-sharing, and giving them an intelligence advantage over formal security agencies (Omeni, 2022). This familiarity in the end helps to create proactive security measures (Adeagbo, 2023).

In Nigeria, state-supported vigilante armed groups have evolved into a parallel structure of authority, particularly in rural and semi-urban communities where state presence is minimal (Onuoha, 2020). They include the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the North-East, the Amotekun Corps in the South-West, and the Ebube Abu. Others include Hisbah in Kano state, Agunachemba (Operation Udo Ga-Achi) in Anambra, Edo State Security Network, Akwa Ibo Community Watch and many others.

State Policing

The concept of state policing just like many social science concepts has no universally accepted definition. It has been a subject of several scholarly definitions. However, its understanding can be drawn from its jurisdictional focus under which it is structured. According to Walker (2021), it is a policing system that distributes policing powers to constituent units of a federation, which enables localized responses to security challenges. it is different from the centralized policing systems, where law enforcement authority is monopolized by the federal government and distributed. Mersin (2021) defines it succinctly as police organized and maintained by a state. Agwanwo (2023) sees it as the act of policing in a federal system wherein the state government employs police officers for the purpose of policing the state.

Agwanwo's is upheld by Ochie (2023), who defines it as the absence of a centralized national police force, which is outside the control of the Inspector-General of Police (IGP). This definition implies the decentralization of a centralized police system and the death of a central authority and behemoth Federal Police Force in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2022). In the same vein, Umeh et al. (2025) define state policing as a body of police force unique to each of the federating units in a federal arrangement, having state wide authority to conduct law enforcement activities and criminal investigation across that particular state. Although these definitions may differ in their purpose, breadth, context and origin, the have one thing in common, which are their jurisdictional focus and authority, meaning that it is a policing system established, funded, and managed by subnational or state government whose authority does not go beyond the parameters of the state boundaries.

The purpose of state policing in a federal setting like Nigeria is captured by Abubakar (2019) is to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of government and economy, arguing that in almost every state of the federation, there have been a kind of policing response from the state government on the issue of insecurity, which underscores the need for state policing in Nigeria. Although, this understanding runs contrary to opinion of scholars like Onyema (2017), who contends that idea of state police is a mere puzzle that only time would solve, as it is opposed by the political elites who could make it happen. The fact remains that the reality of managing insecurity in Nigeria lies in the establishment of state police, unless the country has accepted the wave of insecurity as being normal (Akamere, 2021). It is this light that Ochie (2023) opines that the establishment of state police remains the veritable way out of the current security quagmire and similar security challenges bedevilling Nigeria.

Drawing from the holistic appreciation of the definitions, we can infer that state police is a decentralized policing mechanism designed to improve local security management through institutional proximity, operational flexibility, and enhanced intelligence responsiveness.

Hybrid Security Governance

The concept of hybridity in security governance connotes the multiple sites of political authority ad governance where security is enacted and negotiated including the multiple ways traditional, personal, kin-based or clientilistic logics interact with modern, imported, or rational actors in the shifting historical conditions of particular national and local contexts (Luckham & Kirk, 2013). It falls within the wider family of concepts, which emphasise the contingent, constructed and contested nature of governance, public authority and security, capturing the reality in many fragile or low-capacity the reality states, where security provisioning is no longer monopolized by the state but shared among multiple actors (Bagayoko, et al., 2016). In simple term, it is a system where formal state institutions and informal, non-state actors jointly provide security and maintain public order.

The purpose of hybrid security governance as captured by Erdmann and Engel (2007) is to bridge the gap between the official narratives of nation-building, civil-military relations, the development state, state-building, post-conflict reconstruction and latterly security sector governance, which African independence scholars have been discussing. As Scheye (2009) puts it, the post-colonial state is characterized by the rule of the intermediaries, a series of networks and politics that substitute and compensate for the lack of authority of the central, legally constituted state and its ability to deliver essential public goods and services requires the recognition and effective collaborations of these non-state institutions to survive.

Scheye's view is in line with Bayart's (1993) claim that the end of colonialism opened the way for a reassertion of the historicity of African societies, render the Western notions of liberal democratic statehood mostly irrelevant, and reconfigure state authority at multiple different levels that reflect the hybridity and social complexity of African social formations. This implies that a major gateway to effective security management in Africa is the adoption hybrid security governance framework. It is in this light that Abrahamsen and Williams (2017), refers to it as a system that emerge as an adaptive response to governance deficits rather than signs of total state collapse.

In Nigeria, hybrid security governance has become increasingly visible across multiple conflict zones. The complementary role of the CJTF to military operations against terrorism in the North-East, the Amotekun and Ebube Agu regional security concept against insecurity in the

South-West and South-East, and the Neighbourhood Security vigilantes in the South-South that collaborates with state security authorities illustrate this reality. However, this arrangement has also created significant challenges, in terms of ambiguous command structures, overlapping mandates, accountability gaps, and jurisdictional conflict, which scholars like Bagayoko and his colleagues (2016) pointed out, warning that poorly regulated hybrid systems may undermine rather than strengthen state authority.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of integrating state-supported vigilante armed services into Nigeria's emerging state police architecture is better explained using more than one theory because of the involvement of both formal state security institutions and informal security networks. For this reason, the study adopts the institutional theory and the hybrid security governance theory, to provide a complementary analytical perspective to understanding the subject matter. Institutional theory is an interdisciplinary theory that explains how institutions functions, while also exposing the institutional deficits associated with formal institutions that often lead to poor performance. It also provides useful frameworks for examining how informal structures evolve into formalized institutions through legal codification, narrative acceptance, and organizational adaptation.

The theory, rooted in the scholarly works of Douglas North (1990), and expanded by Richard Scott (2001), posits that institutions comprise formal rules, informal norms, and enforcement mechanisms that shape social and political behaviours of members. Therefore, institutions tend to perform poorly due to certain fundamental constraining factors, including deviating from their formal rules, corruption, political interference, and weak enforcement capacity (North, 1990; Scott, 2001). This explains the reality of Nigeria's formal security institutions, where the architecture has been weakened by institutional deficit, resulting in the emergence of state-supported vigilante armed services.

While institutional theory explains the formalization process of institutions, the hybrid security governance theory provides insight into the operational coexistence of state and non-state actors in security management. The theory emerged from the studies of security pluralism in fragile states, where the state no longer monopolises the legitimate use of force. Its leading proponents include, Niagale Bagayoko, Robin Luckham, Eboe Hutchful and many other scholars of security sector reform. These scholars argue that security governance in many developing states is increasingly characterized by hybrid arrangements involving formal institutions, traditional authorities, private actors, and community defence groups (Bagayoko, et al., 2016). This

postulation challenges the Weberian assumption that the state is the sole provider of security, emphasizing that in many societies, security is co-produced through networks of state and non-state actors. It emphasizes that such an arrangement is particularly prevalent in Africa, where weak state penetration in rural areas has created security vacuums that local actors often fill (Boege et al., 2009).

Nigeria's security governance setting exemplifies this reality, with the operational landscape of internal security increasingly becoming pluralistic. In the North-East, the Civilian Joint Task Force has functioned as an intelligence and tactical support partner to the military in counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram. In the South-West, Amotekun operates alongside the Nigeria Police Force in combating kidnapping and armed robbery. In the North-Central, local hunter groups and vigilante associations often provide first-line defense against rural banditry and farmer-herder violence. In the South-East, the Ebube Agu operates with the Nigerian Police in countering the 'unknown gunmen' syndrome and violent separatist agitators, by watching local groups and sharing intelligence with official agencies. This operational reality reflects what Bagayoko et al. (2016) describe as "security co-production", where formal and informal actors jointly contribute to public safety. Importantly, these relationships are often not codified but function pragmatically in response to necessity, making hybrid governance an empirical reality rather than a theoretical projection.

The relevance of hybrid security governance theory to this study lies in its explanatory power regarding the practical integration of vigilantes into state policing systems. Rather than viewing vigilantes as external or oppositional actors, the theory situates them as embedded components of the broader security ecosystem. This perspective shifts the policy focus from elimination to optimization. However, the theory also identifies inherent risks such as fragmented command systems, overlapping jurisdictions, accountability deficits, and legitimacy contests as Identified by Moe & Geis (2020). In Nigeria, where political patronage and ethnic loyalties are deeply entrenched, these risks are even more pronounced. Therefore, integrating vigilante groups into state police policy without clear legal boundaries and operational frameworks may exacerbate insecurity rather than resolve it.

Drawing on the holistic appreciation of the analytical lenses of the theories, we can clearly state that the combination of the strength of both theories provides a comprehensive analytical framework for this study. While institutional theory explains the structural transition of vigilante groups into formal policing institutions, hybrid security governance theory explains the functional reality of their current coexistence with formal state security agencies. Together,

they establish that integrating state-supported vigilante armed services into Nigeria's emerging state police architecture is both institutionally possible and operationally rational. But consideration must be given to institutional design, legal clarity, professional training, and accountability systems. In essence, the primary challenge for Nigeria is not the existence of vigilante groups, as they are already established, but rather how to optimize their role within a coherent and accountable security architecture. This constitutes the core institutional challenge facing Nigeria's evolving security federalism.

The Rise of Vigilante Security in Nigeria

The rise of vigilante security in Nigeria is both a symptom and consequence of the growing inadequacies of the state's formal security institutions. Across the country, the inability of conventional security agencies to effectively respond to insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, and rural criminality has created significant security vacuums. These institutional deficiencies have forced communities to increasingly rely on local self-help mechanisms for survival and protection. In this context, vigilante groups have evolved from informal communal defense systems into strategic actors within Nigeria's broader internal security ecosystem.

Historically, vigilante security in Nigeria is not entirely new. Traditional societies maintained various forms of indigenous security arrangements long before the emergence of modern policing institutions. These systems were often rooted in age-grade associations, hunters' guilds, and community watch structures responsible for territorial defense and crime control (Baker, 2018). However, what distinguishes contemporary vigilante formations from their historical predecessors is their increasing militarization, institutional recognition, and direct collaboration with state actors.

The resurgence of vigilante groups in modern Nigeria can largely be traced to the escalation of insurgency and violent criminality from the early 2000s. The emergence of Boko Haram in the North-East significantly altered the security landscape and exposed the limitations of formal security agencies. During the peak of the insurgency, communities in Borno State faced severe attacks, territorial occupation, and mass displacements. The inability of the military and the Nigerian Police Force to adequately identify insurgents embedded within local populations created the conditions for the emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).

The CJTF became a crucial local security actor because of its superior human intelligence capabilities. Unlike formal security personnel, many of whom were unfamiliar with local terrain, language, and social structures, CJTF members possessed intimate knowledge of their

communities. This enabled them to identify suspected insurgents, gather actionable intelligence, and support military operations. According to the International Crisis Group (2024), the CJTF contributed significantly to urban counterinsurgency efforts in Maiduguri and surrounding communities. By 2023, the CJTF reportedly had over 26,000 active members operating across Borno State and adjoining areas, making it one of the largest community-based security formations in Nigeria. (Civilian Joint Task Force Explained, 2026)

The strategic relevance of the CJTF demonstrated an important operational reality: in asymmetric warfare, local knowledge often becomes a decisive advantage. Omeni (2023) argues that the effectiveness of the CJTF illustrates how informal security actors can function as force multipliers in contexts where formal state institutions are overstretched.

Beyond the North-East, vigilante security has equally gained prominence in other regions facing different security threats. In South-West Nigeria, the establishment of the Amotekun Corps in 2020 marked a major institutional shift in regional security governance. Created by the six South-Western state governments as a coordinated response to rising incidents of kidnapping, armed robbery, and farmer-herder conflicts, Amotekun represented a formalized regional adaptation of local vigilante systems.

Since its establishment, Amotekun has expanded significantly, with over 5,000 operatives deployed across the six states by 2024 (South-West Governors' Forum, 2024). Unlike purely informal vigilante groups, Amotekun possesses statutory backing at the state level, structured command systems, and operational funding. (A. & O., 2023, pp. 1-15) This institutionalization reflects the growing acceptance of hybrid security governance in Nigeria, where formal and informal actors increasingly collaborate in maintaining public order.

Similarly, in the North-Central region, particularly in Benue, Taraba, and Plateau States, local vigilante groups and hunter associations have become central actors in defending rural communities against armed herders, bandits, and communal militias. These groups often serve as the first line of defense in remote villages where formal police presence is weak or absent. Their growing operational importance reflects the broader decentralization of practical security provision, even in the absence of constitutional decentralization.

Empirical data further underscores the growing relevance of vigilante security in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2025), approximately 67% of rural Nigerians rely on community vigilantes as first responders during security emergencies. This statistic reveals the extent to which local populations increasingly place practical trust in informal security actors over formal institutions. Similarly, security reports from North-Central Nigeria

indicate that about 54% of kidnapping interceptions in 2024 involved prior intelligence provided by local vigilante groups (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2025). This highlights the strategic value of vigilantes in intelligence generation and early warning systems.

Financial commitments by state governments further demonstrate their institutional relevance. Between 2021 and 2025, Nigerian states collectively spent over ₦38 billion on local security outfits, including vigilante training, logistics, operational allowances, and equipment procurement (BudgIT Nigeria, 2025). This level of expenditure indicates that vigilante security has moved beyond informal community arrangements into an increasingly structured subnational security investment.

The rise of vigilante security in Nigeria, therefore, reflects a broader transformation in the country's internal security architecture. It signifies both the limits of centralized policing and the adaptive responses of communities and subnational governments to persistent insecurity. While these groups have proven effective in intelligence gathering, rapid response, and local territorial defense, their expansion also raises serious concerns about accountability, legal legitimacy, and command coordination.

Ultimately, the institutional growth of vigilante groups suggests that they are no longer peripheral actors in Nigeria's security ecosystem. Rather, they have become embedded components of the country's evolving hybrid security governance structure. Their increasing operational relevance makes the question of their integration into future state police systems not only timely but strategically unavoidable.

Prospects of Integrating Vigilante Armed Services into Nigeria's Emerging State Police Architecture

The integration of state-supported vigilante armed services into Nigeria's proposed state police framework presents significant strategic opportunities for improving internal security management. Given the growing complexity of Nigeria's security challenges and the evident limitations of centralized policing, integrating existing local security formations into formal subnational policing structures offers a pragmatic pathway for strengthening community-level security governance. While such integration is not without risks, its potential benefits are considerable if carefully institutionalized. These prospects can be examined through operational, intelligence, socio-political, and economic lenses.

Enhanced Local Intelligence and Situational Awareness

One of the most significant benefits of integrating vigilante groups into state police structures is enhanced local intelligence gathering. Intelligence remains the foundation of effective

policing, particularly in addressing irregular security threats such as banditry, insurgency, kidnapping, and communal violence. Formal police institutions often struggle with intelligence deficits because officers are frequently posted to unfamiliar communities where they lack social and cultural understanding.

By contrast, vigilante groups are deeply embedded within local communities. Their members possess intimate knowledge of local terrains, dialects, social networks, and criminal movement patterns. This familiarity enables them to identify suspicious activities more quickly and accurately than external security agents. As observed by Omeni (2023), the effectiveness of the Civilian Joint Task Force in Borno State was largely due to its superior human intelligence capabilities, which significantly enhanced military operations against Boko Haram. Integrating such intelligence capabilities into formal state police systems would institutionalize these local advantages and improve situational awareness.

In conflict-prone regions such as Benue State and Zamfara State, where attacks often occur in remote rural areas, local intelligence can significantly reduce response time and improve preventive operations. This prospect aligns with Goldsmith's (2019) argument that decentralized policing systems are more effective because they rely on localized intelligence networks. Thus, integration would strengthen the intelligence architecture of state police and reduce dependence on reactive policing.

Rapid Response and Operational Efficiency

Another critical aspect of integration lies in improving operational response speed. One of the major weaknesses of Nigeria's centralized security structure is the delayed response to emergencies. In many rural areas, police stations are often located far from affected communities, and deployment orders may require bureaucratic authorization from higher commands. These delays have frequently allowed criminal actors to escape before security forces arrive.

Vigilante groups, by virtue of their local presence, often respond immediately to threats. Their operational flexibility and proximity make them highly effective in emergency interventions. For example, local hunter groups in North-Central Nigeria have repeatedly mobilized within minutes during attacks by armed bandits and herders, often before formal police units arrive (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2025). Integrating these actors into state police structures would institutionalize this rapid-response advantage while placing it under formal command-and-control systems. This would improve operational coordination, reduce duplication of effort, and enhance territorial security coverage.

In security governance, speed is often decisive. According to Walker (2021), decentralized security institutions generally outperform centralized systems in responding to localized threats because they possess shorter command chains and operational autonomy. In Nigeria's context, where security threats are increasingly decentralized, this operational advantage becomes even more important. Thus, integrating vigilante structures into state police could significantly improve tactical responsiveness and operational efficiency.

Strengthening Community Trust and Police Legitimacy

Public trust remains one of the most critical determinants of effective policing. In Nigeria, the legitimacy of formal policing institutions has been weakened by allegations of corruption, brutality, and poor responsiveness. Many communities, particularly in rural areas, perceive formal police as distant, ineffective, and disconnected from local realities (Alemika, 2022). Vigilante groups, however, often enjoy higher levels of community trust because they are socially embedded within the communities they serve. Their members are usually known personally to residents, share common cultural identities, and understand local grievances. This familiarity creates stronger social legitimacy and improves cooperation.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2025), approximately 67% of rural Nigerians rely on community vigilantes as first responders during security emergencies. This statistic reflects a practical shift in public confidence toward informal security actors. Integrating these actors into state police structures could help bridge the trust deficit between communities and formal security institutions. It would create a policing model that is both professional and socially rooted. This aligns with the community policing principle that effective law enforcement depends on partnership and trust between security providers and local populations (Rauch, 2020). In effect, integration could improve police legitimacy, encourage intelligence sharing, and increase citizen participation in crime prevention.

Cost Efficiency and Institutional Continuity

The establishment of state police in Nigeria would require substantial financial investments in recruitment, training, infrastructure, and logistics. However, integrating existing vigilante structures could reduce these startup costs by leveraging already established community-based security networks.

Many vigilante groups already possess basic operational experience, local organizational structures, and territorial familiarity. Rather than creating entirely new institutions from scratch, state governments can adapt and professionalize these existing formations through structured training and certification programs. Financially, this offers an economically pragmatic option.

Between 2021 and 2025, Nigerian states collectively spent over ₦38 billion on local security outfits (BudgIT Nigeria, 2025). This indicates that substantial subnational investments in local security structures already exist. Integration would therefore preserve institutional continuity and maximize prior investments.

From a public administration perspective, institutional continuity reduces transition costs and enhances policy sustainability (Baker, 2018). Instead of dismantling vigilante groups after the establishment of state police, integrating them would preserve local experience and reduce operational disruption. This cost-saving advantage is particularly relevant in a resource-constrained environment like Nigeria, where fiscal pressures often undermine security sector reforms.

Deepening Security Decentralization and Federal Stability

The integration of vigilante armed services into state police structures could also strengthen Nigeria's broader federal system by deepening the decentralization of security. Federalism is fundamentally based on the distribution of governance powers to subnational units. However, Nigeria's continued centralization of policing remains a major contradiction within its federal framework (Onuoha, 2024). State police would represent a structural correction to this imbalance. Integrating vigilante groups into these institutions would further localize security management and align policing structures with federal principles. This could improve subnational ownership of security, reduce overdependence on federal forces, and encourage state governments to take greater responsibility for internal peace and order.

In highly diverse societies like Nigeria, local ownership of security often improves conflict sensitivity and operational legitimacy. Comparative experiences from Kenya and India show that integrating local security actors into decentralized security frameworks can improve territorial stability when supported by legal safeguards and accountability systems (Mkutu, 2019; Singh, 2022). Thus, beyond operational benefits, integration offers broader institutional prospects for strengthening Nigeria's federal security architecture. The integration of vigilante armed services into Nigeria's emerging state police framework offers substantial prospects. These include improved intelligence generation, faster operational response, enhanced community trust, cost efficiency, and deeper decentralization of security. Collectively, these benefits suggest that integration is not merely a tactical option but a strategic pathway toward restructuring Nigeria's internal security architecture for greater effectiveness and sustainability.

Challenges of Integrating Vigilante Armed Services into Nigeria's Emerging State Police Architecture

While the integration of vigilante armed services into Nigeria's emerging state police framework offers strategic opportunities, it also presents profound institutional, operational, and ethical challenges. These challenges are not merely technical obstacles but structural issues rooted in Nigeria's political history, governance culture, and social complexities. If left unaddressed, they could undermine the intended benefits of decentralizing security and potentially worsen insecurity. Four major challenges stand out: politicization, human rights violations, poor professional standards, and ethnic bias.

Politicization and the Risk of Political Capture

One of the most significant challenges of integrating vigilante groups into state police structures is the danger of politicization. In Nigeria's political environment, security institutions have often been vulnerable to manipulation by political elites for partisan interests. The prospect of placing armed and locally embedded security forces under the authority of state governors raises concerns about political abuse, especially in a system where democratic accountability remains weak.

Historically, Nigeria's experience with regional policing during the First Republic provides important lessons. Regional governments were accused of using local police formations to intimidate political opponents, suppress dissent, and influence electoral outcomes. These abuses contributed significantly to the eventual abolition of regional police and the consolidation of policing powers under the federal government after the military coup of 1966 (Alemika, 2022). This historical precedent remains relevant today. State governors already exercise substantial influence over many local vigilante outfits through funding, appointments, and operational directives. Integrating these actors into formal state police structures could deepen this influence and transform state police into instruments of political repression. Onuoha (2024) argues that in the absence of strong constitutional safeguards, state police may become tools for enforcing elite interests rather than public security.

The risk is particularly high during elections. In Nigeria's electoral history, political thuggery and violence remain common features of political competition. If state-controlled police structures are dominated by politically loyal vigilante elements, they may be used to harass opposition parties, disrupt campaigns, or manipulate voter behavior. Beyond elections, politicization could also affect operational neutrality. Security decisions may become driven by political considerations rather than threat assessments, weakening public trust and professional integrity. This would undermine the very rationale for security decentralization.

Therefore, while integration may improve local responsiveness, the challenge of politicization remains a fundamental threat. Without independent oversight bodies, judicial checks, and transparent recruitment systems, the integration process could institutionalize political coercion under the guise of local policing.

Human Rights Violations and Weak Accountability

Another major challenge of integrating vigilante groups into formal state police structures is their long-standing association with human rights abuses. Vigilante groups in Nigeria often operate outside formal legal frameworks, and their methods of enforcing order frequently lack procedural safeguards. This informality has made them effective in some contexts but also highly vulnerable to abuse. Numerous reports have documented cases of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture, and forced confessions linked to vigilante groups across Nigeria. The Civilian Joint Task Force, despite its critical role in counterinsurgency operations, has faced repeated allegations of human rights violations, including unlawful detention of suspected insurgents and abuse of civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Similarly, community vigilantes in North-Central Nigeria have been accused of retaliatory killings during communal conflicts.

The challenge here is structural. Vigilante groups often operate under informal command systems with little documentation, no standardized procedures, and minimal external oversight. Their loyalty is usually to local leaders or community interests rather than constitutional principles. This creates a justice culture based on immediacy rather than due process. Integrating such actors into formal state police without rigorous accountability reforms risks importing these abusive practices into official institutions. Hills (2021) warns that institutional absorption does not automatically transform operational culture. Instead, pre-existing patterns of violence and impunity may persist under formal legal cover.

This presents a serious dilemma for state legitimacy. Security institutions derive legitimacy not only from effectiveness but also from adherence to the rule of law. If integrated vigilante actors continue to engage in unlawful conduct, public confidence in state police could deteriorate rapidly. Moreover, Nigeria's human rights record already faces international scrutiny. Expanding the formal security space to include poorly regulated vigilante actors may worsen this reputation and create legal liabilities for state governments. Thus, the challenge of human rights violations underscores the need for robust vetting, legal training, disciplinary systems, and independent complaint mechanisms as prerequisites for any integration framework.

Poor Professional Standards and Operational Discipline

Professional competence remains one of the most serious concerns regarding the integration of vigilante groups into state police systems. Effective policing requires specialized knowledge in criminal investigation, intelligence handling, evidence preservation, crowd control, legal procedures, and use-of-force regulations. However, most vigilante actors in Nigeria operate without formal training in these areas.

The majority of vigilante personnel are recruited based on community trust, physical familiarity, or traditional security roles rather than professional policing qualifications. Many local hunter groups and neighborhood watch operatives possess practical experience in territorial defense but lack the institutional discipline and technical competencies required for modern law enforcement (Baker, 2018). This gap presents a major challenge. Integrating poorly trained actors into formal state police structures may compromise operational standards, weaken institutional professionalism, and increase incidents of misconduct. According to Walker (2021), the effectiveness of decentralized policing depends not merely on proximity but on the quality of personnel and institutional discipline. Poor training also affects evidence handling and criminal prosecution. Untrained operatives may contaminate crime scenes, use excessive force during arrests, or fail to document evidence properly, thereby weakening the justice process. In complex crimes such as kidnapping, terrorism financing, and organized banditry, these procedural errors can undermine prosecutions and allow offenders to escape conviction.

Operational discipline is equally critical. Formal police institutions rely on hierarchical command structures, standard operating procedures, and coordinated inter-agency collaboration. Vigilante groups, by contrast, often function through informal authority systems that prioritize flexibility over procedure. This operational culture may clash with the bureaucratic discipline of formal policing. The challenge is therefore not only about skills but also about institutional culture. Transforming vigilante actors into professional police personnel requires extensive retraining, certification, and psychological reorientation. This process is both time-consuming and expensive. Without such investment, integration may create a fragmented police institution in which professionalism is inconsistent and discipline is unevenly enforced. In the long term, this could weaken state police credibility and create internal tensions between formally trained officers and integrated vigilante operatives.

Ethnic Bias, Social Fragmentation, and Discriminatory Enforcement

Ethnic bias represents another major challenge in integrating vigilante groups into state police structures. Many vigilante formations in Nigeria are ethnically homogeneous, reflecting the

communal contexts in which they emerged. While this ethnic cohesion often strengthens internal trust and operational coordination, it also raises serious concerns about bias, discrimination, and selective enforcement.

Nigeria is a deeply plural society with over 250 ethnic groups and a history of identity-based conflicts. In such a context, security institutions are expected to operate with neutrality and fairness. However, vigilante groups often derive their legitimacy from communal identity and local loyalties. This creates the risk that integrated vigilante personnel may prioritize ethnic interests over constitutional obligations. This challenge is particularly visible in regions affected by farmer-herder conflicts. In states such as Benue State, Plateau State, and Taraba State, some vigilante groups have been accused of ethnic profiling and retaliatory violence against perceived "outsiders" (International Crisis Group, 2024). Such practices, if transferred into state police structures, could institutionalize discrimination and deepen social fragmentation. Ethnic bias also affects intelligence reliability. Information gathered through ethnically aligned networks may be selective or manipulated against rival groups. This undermines the objectivity required for professional policing and may escalate communal tensions.

Alemika (2022) argues that one of the central responsibilities of formal policing is impartiality in law enforcement. Integrating ethnically embedded vigilante actors without reorientation may compromise this principle and weaken the legitimacy of state police among minority populations. The broader implication is national cohesion. If state police become associated with dominant ethnic groups within particular states, minority communities may feel excluded or threatened. This could fuel resistance, deepen mistrust, and create parallel security formations. Therefore, addressing ethnic bias requires inclusive recruitment systems, diversity quotas, human rights education, and strict anti-discrimination policies. Without these safeguards, integration may transform local security advantages into broader social and political liabilities.

Strategic Pathways for Effective Integration

The integration of state-supported vigilante armed services into Nigeria's emerging state police architecture cannot be approached as a simple administrative exercise. It requires a deliberate, phased, and institutionally guided strategy capable of balancing operational efficiency with democratic accountability. Given the risks associated with politicization, human rights violations, poor professional standards, and ethnic bias, effective integration must be anchored on strong legal, regulatory, and institutional frameworks. This section outlines key strategic

pathways necessary for ensuring that integration strengthens rather than weakens Nigeria's security governance system.

Constitutional and Legal Reform

A critical first step toward effective integration is constitutional and legal reform. Nigeria's current legal framework does not recognize state police as a legitimate policing institution. Section 214(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria establishes the Nigeria Police Force as the only constitutionally recognized police institution in the country (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 1999). This constitutional monopoly creates a legal barrier to any formal integration of vigilante groups into state-level policing structures.

To create a legitimate pathway for integration, Nigeria must amend Section 214 to formally establish state police and clearly define their powers, jurisdictional limits, and command structures. Such constitutional reform should also provide legal clarity regarding the status of integrated vigilante personnel, particularly their rights, obligations, and disciplinary frameworks. Without this clarity, the integration process may produce institutional confusion and legal disputes. Beyond constitutional amendment, state-level enabling laws will also be necessary to regulate recruitment, deployment, funding, and accountability. These laws must clearly distinguish state police functions from those of federal security agencies to prevent jurisdictional overlap.

According to Onuoha (2024), legal clarity is fundamental to effective security decentralization because it defines institutional boundaries and reduces operational conflicts. Comparative experiences from India and Kenya also show that the successful integration of community-based security actors depends on explicit statutory backing (Mkutu, 2019; Singh, 2022).

Thus, constitutional and legal reform remains the foundational pillar upon which any credible integration framework must rest.

National Standards Framework

While state police would operate under subnational control, their operational quality must be guided by nationally consistent standards. This makes the establishment of a national standards framework essential. A federal regulatory mechanism should be created to define minimum standards for recruitment, training, equipment, discipline, and operational conduct. The purpose of this framework is to prevent uneven professionalization across states. Without national standards, some states may prioritize political loyalty or ethnic affiliation over competence, thereby weakening the quality and neutrality of state police. Walker (2021) argues that

decentralized policing systems require central regulatory benchmarks to ensure institutional coherence and professionalism.

The framework should include standardized entry requirements such as educational qualifications, psychological assessments, physical fitness, and background checks. Training standards must also cover criminal law, human rights, use-of-force principles, intelligence gathering, conflict resolution, and evidence management. Importantly, integrated vigilante personnel should not bypass these standards merely because of prior field experience. Baker (2018) notes that practical security experience, while valuable, cannot substitute for formal policing competencies.

A national regulatory body, possibly under a reformed Police Service Commission, could be mandated to monitor compliance and conduct periodic audits of state police institutions. This would strengthen accountability and reduce the risk of institutional divergence. Such a framework would also facilitate interoperability between state and federal agencies by ensuring that operational procedures, communication systems, and disciplinary codes remain broadly compatible. In effect, national standards would create a balance between decentralization and uniformity.

Phased Integration Model

The integration of vigilante personnel into state police should follow a phased model rather than immediate mass absorption. A phased approach reduces institutional disruption and allows for systematic screening, training, and adaptation. This study proposes a three-stage integration model. The first stage is screening and vetting. This stage involves comprehensive background checks to identify individuals with criminal records, histories of abuse, or extremist affiliations. Given the informal nature of many vigilante groups, vetting is essential to prevent the institutionalization of impunity. According to Human Rights Watch (2023), several vigilante formations in Nigeria have faced allegations of extrajudicial killings and unlawful detention. Such individuals must be excluded.

The second stage is professional training and certification. Successful candidates should undergo intensive police training focused on law enforcement ethics, constitutional rights, criminal procedure, intelligence handling, and conflict de-escalation. This stage is crucial for transforming informal security actors into professional law enforcement personnel. The third stage is full institutional absorption. At this point, certified personnel can be formally integrated into state police command structures with clear roles, ranks, and reporting lines. This stage

should also include mentorship under experienced police officers to facilitate institutional adaptation.

A phased model reduces operational shocks and improves professionalism. It allows state governments to assess performance incrementally and correct weaknesses before full deployment. As Hills (2021) observes, security reform is most effective when institutional transitions are gradual rather than abrupt. Thus, phased integration offers a practical and disciplined pathway for absorbing vigilante actors into formal policing systems.

Independent Oversight Mechanism

Effective integration requires strong accountability systems. One of the major criticisms of vigilante groups in Nigeria is their weak oversight and frequent abuse of power. Integrating such actors into state police without robust oversight mechanisms risks reproducing these abuses under the cover of official legitimacy. To address this, civilian-led oversight bodies should be established at both the state and national levels. These bodies should be independent of executive control and empowered to investigate complaints, monitor operational conduct, and recommend disciplinary action where necessary.

The importance of independent oversight lies in preserving public trust. Security institutions that operate without accountability often lose legitimacy and become sources of fear rather than protection (Alemika, 2022). Oversight bodies can serve as institutional safeguards against abuse, corruption, and political interference. These bodies should include representatives from civil society, legal institutions, human rights organizations, and community leaders. Their diversity would improve impartiality and strengthen public confidence in their findings.

Additionally, integrated officers should be subject to transparent complaint mechanisms where citizens can report abuses without fear of retaliation. Annual public reports on misconduct, disciplinary actions, and institutional reforms should also be mandated. Comparative models from South Africa show that civilian oversight strengthens police accountability and democratic legitimacy (Rauch, 2020). For Nigeria, this would be particularly important given the country's history of security-sector abuses. Ultimately, independent oversight would ensure that the integration process enhances security without sacrificing justice and accountability.

Interoperability Protocols

A final strategic pathway is to establish interoperability protocols between state police and federal security agencies. Security threats in Nigeria are often transboundary, fluid, and interconnected. Banditry, terrorism, arms trafficking, and kidnapping frequently cut across state lines. This means that state police cannot operate in isolation. Interoperability refers to the

ability of multiple security institutions to share intelligence, coordinate operations, and communicate effectively during joint missions.

Without clear protocols, integration may create fragmented security systems with overlapping mandates and poor coordination. According to Goldsmith (2019), decentralized security systems perform best when supported by strong inter-agency communication structures. In Nigeria, state police must maintain structured collaboration with federal agencies, including the Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services, and the armed forces. These protocols should include shared intelligence databases, joint task forces, operational communication channels, and coordinated response mechanisms for cross-border threats.

Standardized reporting formats and emergency communication systems would further improve operational synergy. Interoperability also prevents jurisdictional rivalry. One major concern in decentralized systems is competition over authority, which can delay responses and weaken effectiveness. Clearly defined coordination frameworks would reduce such tensions.

In practical terms, integrated vigilante personnel within state police structures would benefit from access to broader national intelligence networks, thereby improving their operational capacity. This would transform localized knowledge into nationally connected intelligence systems. Therefore, interoperability is not merely a technical requirement but a strategic necessity for sustaining an integrated and cohesive national security architecture.

Policy Implications for National Security

The integration of vigilante armed services into Nigeria's emerging state police architecture carries profound policy implications for the country's national security framework. At its core, such integration represents a structural shift from a highly centralized security model toward a more decentralized and hybridized system of internal security governance. This transformation has the potential to fundamentally alter how security is conceptualized, organized, and delivered across the federation.

One major implication is the redefinition of operational responsibility for internal security. For decades, the burden of maintaining law and order has rested almost entirely on the federal government through the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), despite the country's vast territorial spread and complex security environment. This centralized burden has overstretched federal security institutions and weakened their ability to respond effectively to localized threats (Alemika, 2022). Integrating vigilante actors into state police could reduce this burden by redistributing security responsibilities to subnational governments. Such redistribution would strengthen localized security ownership. States would become more directly responsible for maintaining

internal peace, funding security operations, and managing intelligence networks. This could improve response time, enhance preventive policing, and create more context-sensitive security strategies. According to Goldsmith (2019), decentralized policing systems are generally more adaptive because they are closer to the sources of insecurity.

Another important implication concerns intelligence architecture. Vigilante groups already possess strong local intelligence networks, especially in rural and conflict-prone areas. Their formal integration into state police could transform fragmented community intelligence into institutionalized intelligence systems, thereby improving situational awareness and threat anticipation. This is particularly relevant in addressing kidnapping, banditry, and communal conflicts, where early warning systems are critical.

However, the policy implications are not entirely positive. Without robust safeguards, integration could deepen security fragmentation. If each state develops policing systems based on different operational cultures, standards, and political interests, national security coherence may weaken. This could complicate federal-state coordination, particularly in addressing transboundary threats such as terrorism, arms trafficking, and organized criminal networks (Onuoha, 2024).

There is also the risk of weakening national cohesion. In a deeply plural society like Nigeria, security institutions must embody neutrality and inclusiveness. If state police become dominated by locally integrated vigilante groups with ethnic or political loyalties, minority communities may perceive them as partisan institutions. This could increase social distrust and intensify identity-based insecurity.

Another major policy implication lies in democratic accountability. The integration process would require a complete rethinking of police oversight systems. Existing accountability mechanisms are already weak at the federal level. Decentralization without strong oversight may multiply institutional abuses rather than reduce them. Therefore, independent civilian oversight bodies, judicial review systems, and intergovernmental regulatory mechanisms must become central policy priorities.

The broader policy challenge, therefore, is not whether vigilantes should be integrated, but how such integration should be structured. Policy design must prioritize legal clarity, operational professionalism, human rights compliance, and institutional coordination. If managed effectively, integration could strengthen Nigeria's internal security architecture. If poorly managed, it could produce a fragmented and politicized security system with dangerous implications for national stability.

Conclusion

Nigeria's contemporary security realities have clearly outpaced its constitutional and institutional architecture. The persistence of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, and organized criminality has exposed the limitations of a highly centralized policing system that was designed for a different political and security era. The inability of formal security institutions to provide effective protection nationwide has created significant security vacuums, particularly in rural and conflict-prone communities.

It is within these vacuums that vigilante armed services have emerged and expanded. Their rise reflects two interconnected realities: the weakness of the state and the resilience of communities. Across different regions of Nigeria, vigilante groups have evolved from informal self-help arrangements into strategic security actors with operational significance, intelligence value, and growing institutional recognition. Their increasing collaboration with state actors has made them integral to Nigeria's hybrid security governance framework.

As debates on the establishment of state police continue to gain momentum, the question of what to do with these existing vigilante formations has become unavoidable. This paper has argued that integrating state-supported vigilante armed services into Nigeria's emerging state police architecture offers a pragmatic and strategically relevant pathway to strengthen localized security governance. The prospects are significant: improved local intelligence, faster response capability, enhanced community trust, cost efficiency, and deeper security decentralization.

However, these opportunities are matched by equally serious risks. Politicization, human rights abuses, poor professional standards, and ethnic bias remain major challenges that could undermine both operational effectiveness and democratic legitimacy if not carefully addressed. Integration, therefore, cannot be pursued as an ad hoc political solution; it must be guided by deliberate constitutional reforms, national regulatory standards, phased professionalization, independent oversight, and strong inter-agency coordination mechanisms.

This paper concludes that the integration of vigilante armed services into state police structures is strategically viable, but only under carefully designed institutional safeguards. The future of Nigeria's internal security may depend not on preserving old security monopolies, but on constructing new hybrid frameworks that combine local legitimacy with formal accountability. In this sense, the challenge for Nigeria is not simply to decentralize policing, but to do so in a way that strengthens national unity, democratic governance, and sustainable security.

References

Abiakam, C. S., & Azuoma, O. C. (2025). Community policing and security issues in Nigeria: A study of local vigilante operations in the South-East Region (2019–2023). *Wah Academia Journal of Social Sciences, 4*(2). https://doi.org/10.63954/WAJSS.4.2.9.2025

Abrahamsen, R., & Williams, M. C. (2017). *Securing the city: Private security and public order in global urban spaces*. Oxford University Press.

Abubakar, N.A. (2019). *Democracy and Policing in Nigeria.* Aboki Publisher

Adeagbo, O. (2023). "Community Policing and Insecurity in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges". *African Security Review,* 32(1): 45-60. https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2022.2156789/

Adebayo, O.J. (2022). "The Effects of State Police on Insecurity in Nigeria". *The Journal of Social Research,* 5(4): 15-19.

Agbiboa, D.E. (2014). "Conflict Entrepreneurs: The Political Mobilization of Insecurity in Nigeria". *Journal of Modern African Studies,* 52(1), 69-95.

Agwanwo, O.J. (2021). *Enhancing Security in Nigeria through Community Policing.* Lucky Star.

Akamere, R.H. (2021). *The Need to Improve Security Strategy in Nigeria.* Bookpoint Ltd.

Alemika, E. E. (2022). Policing and security governance in Nigeria: Institutional challenges and reform imperatives. *African Security Review, 31*(2), 144–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2022.2145678

Alemika, E.E. (2022). "Public Perceptions of Vigilantism in Nigeria". CLEEN Foundation.

Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). (2025). *Nigeria conflict trends report 2019–2025*. ACLED.

Bagayoko, N., Hutchful, E., and Luckham, R. (2016). "Hybrid Security Governance in Africa: Rethinking the Foundations of Security, Justice and Legitimate Public Authority". *Conflict, Security & Development*, 16(1): 1-32. DO1: 10.1080/1478802.2016.1136137.

Baker, B. (2018). *Hybrid policing and plural security in Africa*. Routledge.

Bayart, J. (1993). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly.* London: Longman Publishers.

BudgIT Nigeria. (2025). *Subnational security expenditure report 2021–2025*. BudgIT Foundation.

Erdmann, G. and Engel, U. (2007). "Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept". *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics,* 45(1): 95-119.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (as amended). Government Printer.

Felbab-Brown, V. (2021, September 3). *Vigilante groups and militias in Southern Nigeria*. United Nations University. https://unu.edu/cpr/project/vigilante-groups-and-militias-southern-nigeria

Goldsmith, A. (2019). Decentralized policing and local governance in federal systems: Challenges of accountability and effectiveness. *Policing and Society, 29*(4), 387–404. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2018.1498352

Hills, A. (2021). Policing, informality, and accountability in Africa. *Policing and Society, 31*(4), 401–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2020.1802234

Human Rights Watch. (2023). *Nigeria: Vigilante abuses in counterinsurgency operations*. Human Rights Watch.

International Crisis Group. (2024). *Managing insecurity in Nigeria: Vigilantes, insurgency and local security responses* (Africa Report No. 338). International Crisis Group.

Luckham, R. and Kirk, T. (2013). "The Two Faces of Security in Hybrid Political Orders: A Framework for Analysis and Research". *Stability,* 2(2): 1-30

Mersin, K.O. (2021). *Security Education in Nigeria Secondary Schools.* Summer Education Publisher.

Mkutu, K. (2019). The role of community security reserves in Kenya's decentralized security governance. *African Security, 12*(3), 231–249. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2019.1676247

National Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Crime experience and security perception survey 2024*. National Bureau of Statistics.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2025). *Crime and public safety perception survey*. National Bureau of Statistics.

Nigeria Security Tracker. (2025). *Kidnapping and rural security intelligence report*. Council on Foreign Relations.

Ochie, G.O. (2023). *Security Strategy in Policing: The Solutions to Insecurity in Nigeria.* Christian Printing and Publishing Co.

Omeni, A. (2023). Vigilantism and local security governance in Nigeria: Understanding informal security actors in conflict environments. *The Journal of Modern African Studies, 61*(1), 77–95. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X22000581

Omeni, C. (2022). "Vigilantism and Elite Politics in Nigeria". *Third World Quarterly,* 43(2): 412-430.

Onuoha, F. C. (2024). State police and decentralization in Nigeria: Institutional implications and governance challenges. *Conflict Studies Quarterly, 45*(3), 21–39.

Onuoha, F.C. (2020). "Vigilantism and the Quest for Security in Nigeria: An Overview". *An African Studies Review,* 63(3): 510-532. https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.42/

Onyema, S.K. (2017). "Social Studies Education in Nigeria". *Nigeria Journal of Social Studies,* 2(1): 20-24.

Owoade, O. O., & Fadare, A. O. (2023). Amotekun Corps: Constitutionality or otherwise as a subnational response to security in a federal state. *Journal of Public Policy and Administration, 1*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3634567

Rauch, J. (2020). Community policing and democratic accountability in South Africa. *Security Dialogue, 51*(2), 183–199. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010620904819

Scheye, E. (2008). "Remove or Reform? A Case for (Restructuring) Chiefdom Governance in Post-Conflict Serra Leone". *African Affairs,* 107(428): 387-403.

Singh, R. (2022). Village defence committees and local security governance in conflict-prone regions of India. *Asian Security Review, 18*(1), 55–72.

South-West Governors' Forum. (2024). *Regional security performance assessment report*. South-West Governors' Forum Secretariat.

Umeh, C.S., Ejim, O.O., and Ejiogu, C.I. (2025). "State Police and Crime Control in Nigeria: A Focus on Imo State". *Journal of Arts and Sociological Research,* 8(6):132-145. https://doi.org/10.70382/ajasr.v8i.039/

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2024). *Global policing capacity report*. United Nations.

Walker, S. (2021). *The politics of policing in federal systems*. Sage Publications.