

Can State Police Solve Nigeria's Security Crisis?

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In typical Nigerian fashion, the increasingly complex, multifaceted and geographically diverse security challenges have been defined in various ways. From hash tags and protests to funny comments on the social media accounts of individuals who indicate interest in visiting the country. One thing remains clear; we have a security crisis on our hands.

From insurgency in the North-East and banditry in the North-West to kidnapping, communal violence, separatist agitations and organised criminal activity across other parts of the country, the limitations of a centrally controlled policing system have become difficult to ignore.

In June 2026, the National Assembly passed a constitutional amendment bill paving the way for state police, subject to approval by two-thirds of State Houses of Assembly. The Federal Government, the Inspector-General of Police, and several stakeholders have publicly endorsed the reform as part of a broader security restructuring agenda. While proponents argue that decentralised policing will bring security closer to the people, critics warn that it may merely relocate existing governance problems from the federal level to the states.

The debate therefore extends beyond security. It raises fundamental questions about federalism, accountability, constitutional governance and the balance of power within the Nigerian federation.

A worthy question is why has the demand for state police persisted? Nigeria operates a federal system of government but maintains a largely centralised policing structure. State Governors are constitutionally recognised as Chief Security Officers of their states, yet they exercise little operational control over the police commands operating within their jurisdictions.

This disconnect has often created situations where Governors bear political responsibility for insecurity without possessing the legal authority to direct policing operations effectively. Supporters of State Police contend that security challenges are often local in nature and require local intelligence, local knowledge and local accountability mechanisms.

In many rural communities, security threats emerge and evolve long before information reaches federal authorities. A decentralised policing structure may therefore improve response times, intelligence gathering and community engagement.

Perhaps the strongest argument for State Police lies not in security alone but in constitutional philosophy. A federation functions most effectively when governmental powers are distributed in a manner that allows constituent units to address local realities. Many federal systems, including those of the United States, Canada and Australia, operate multiple layers of policing without compromising national security.

For decades, critics have argued that Nigeria's federalism remains overly centralised. The State Police proposal presents an opportunity to recalibrate this imbalance by granting states greater responsibility over internal security while preserving federal oversight for national security matters. If properly designed, State Police could become one of the most consequential federalism reforms since the return to democratic rule in 1999.

Despite its potential benefits, State Police is not the answer to all our security problems.

The greatest concern remains political abuse. Nigeria's political history contains numerous examples of state institutions being deployed against political opponents, dissenting voices and perceived rivals. Without strong safeguards, State Police could become vulnerable to similar misuse.

Questions also arise regarding funding. Security institutions require significant and sustainable investment. While some states may possess the financial capacity to establish professional police services, others may struggle to fund recruitment, training, equipment and welfare.

A further challenge relates to operational standards. Maintaining consistent training, discipline, accountability and human rights compliance across thirty-six different state police services would require a well detailed regulatory framework and effective oversight institutions.

In essence, decentralising policing without decentralising accountability could create new problems while attempting to solve existing ones.

It is safe to say that the success or failure of State Police will depend less on constitutional amendments and more on institutional design.

Key questions which must be answered include:

- Who appoints and removes State Police leadership?
- What safeguards will prevent political interference?
- How will complaints against officers be investigated?
- What oversight role will the National Assembly and State Assemblies play?
- How will federal and state police agencies coordinate intelligence and operations?
- What minimum professional standards must every state police service maintain?

The answers to these questions will determine whether State Police becomes a transformational reform or merely another layer of bureaucracy.

The issue is no longer whether Nigeria should reform its policing architecture. The growing consensus among policymakers suggests that reform is inevitable. The more pressing question is whether Nigeria can design a decentralised policing system that strengthens security without weakening democratic accountability. State Police may bring law enforcement closer to the people. However, unless accompanied by strong constitutional safeguards, independent oversight mechanisms and professional standards, decentralisation alone will not guarantee security.

The success of State Police will ultimately be measured not by the number of new police commands created, but by whether ordinary Nigerians feel safer, better protected and more confident in the institutions responsible for their security.

Sources

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