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Responsibility without Power: Federalism and the Dilemma of Internal Security Management in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

Security has taken centre stage in Nigeria's political discourse, as in most developing countries. Across the different geopolitical zones in the country, different factors of insecurity have continued to take a heavy toll on lives and properties. Yet, the challenge of maintaining security in the country is compounded by the nature and character of Nigeria's federal governance structure, which vests the sole constitutional responsibility for security maintenance in the federal government, leaving the component units with no formal control over the security forces. This paper examines how lopsided security responsibilities and powers of federal and component units contribute to widespread insecurity in contemporary Nigerian society. Using both primary and secondary data, this paper argues that the contradictions of Nigeria's federal governance are not only undermining the maintenance of security but also contributing to the exacerbation of insecurity in Nigeria as a result of the use of extra-legal means by the component units to ensure the security and safety of lives and properties. Given the ongoing reforms in Nigeria, the study recommends security sector reform that ensures the constitutional entrenchment of local security mechanisms for the component units—States and Local Governments—to enhance effective security governance.

Keywords

security, federalism, internal security management and governance



1. Introduction

Nigeria is currently facing a dire security challenge. To understand the magnitude of Nigeria's current security challenges, the Cato Institute ranked Nigeria 161st out of 162 countries in terms of safety and security. This, in essence, means that Nigeria is the second most unsafe country in the world (Vasquez et al, 2021). The failing security of Nigeria did not just start today. It is a build-up that culminates in the present security situation Nigeria finds itself in today. As the report shows, Nigeria's score on the safety and security index dropped sharply from 2008, from a high of 7.14 to 2.35. Although it reached its lowest point in 2016, when the country scored 1.57, it rose slightly in 2017 before starting to drop again. Meanwhile, Nigeria is ranked poorly in other security-related reports. For example, the country is ranked 148th out of 163 countries on the 2025 [Global Peace Index](#) (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2025). It is the sixth most terrorised country in the world on the [Global Terrorism Index](#) (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2025).

The various geopolitical zones of Nigeria face distinct security challenges that collectively contribute to the country's pervasive insecurity. In the South-South region, which comprises six states, the enduring crisis of militancy continues to threaten the region's security, despite the government's implementation of the amnesty programme since 2009. Further, the region faces security crises relating to cultism, farmer-herder clashes and oil theft. In the South East, which consists of five states, the resurgence of Biafran secession has taken a violent dimension and “unknown gunmen” are on a killing spree in the region. There is also the growing crisis of cultism, which is taking a new dimension (Alumona, 2022). The South West, which comprises six states, is arguably the most peaceful region in Nigeria. However, it is still experiencing farmer-herder clashes, as well as secessionist campaigns. In the North Central region, which also has six states, farmer-herder clashes and banditry in some states like Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Niger states, and recent terrorist attacks in Kogi and Kwara states have rendered the region ungovernable.

This is also the case in the Northwest, which comprises seven states, where farmer-herder clashes, which began in Zamfara State, have gradually degenerated into banditry and terrorism that now engulfs almost all the Northwest states. This has led to kidnapping, killings and maiming of people in the region (Owonikoko et al, 2023). In the North East,



which also comprises six states, terrorism and insurgency, which began in 2010, continue to expand, leading to the deaths of thousands and the displacement of millions. The region has also witnessed and continues to witness farmer-herder clashes and intercommunal clashes. The plummeting security in the states of the federation has resulted in many fatalities. The fatality figure captured by Nnabuihe et al (2023) revealed that a total of 150,888 persons died across the 36 Nigerian states and the federal capital territory between 2006 and 2020. Between 2020 and 2025, the figure has increased tremendously due to the intensification of acts of banditry, communal clashes, farmer-herder clashes, secessionist agitations, and election-related violence. According to the report of Amnesty International, over 10,000 people have been killed across various states of Nigeria in two years, ranging between 2023 and 2025 (Sahara Reporter, 2025).

The collapsing security architecture of the Nigerian state has prompted research from scholars seeking to explain the reasons behind the state's failing security. As a result, scholars have offered many explanations. Most of the trending and popular explanations for collapsing security architecture of Nigeria are neo-patrimonialism and the economy arising from the counterterrorism efforts of the state (Njoku, 2020), youth bulge and unemployment (Kwaja & Owonikoko, 2020) corruption of the political class and security managers (Onuoha et al, 2023; Kwaja & Yau, 2021), lack of coordinated responses of the state to the security challenges confronting the Nigerian state (Bappa, 2016; Nnabuihe et al, 2023) and so on. While these explanations are valid and important for understanding Nigeria's failure in security architecture, they are insufficient. Many other explanations must be brought into the analysis for a holistic understanding of the security vulnerability of the Nigerian State. The lopsided allocation of security responsibilities and power between the levels of government, particularly between the central government and the component units, as outlined in the Constitution of Nigeria (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999), is an explanation that cannot be ignored. This is primarily due to the centralisation of the security power of the component units, which limits them from performing their constitutional responsibility of providing security to their subjects. This study, therefore, provides an alternative explanation that ties Nigeria's plummeting security to the lopsided federal system in the 1999 constitution, which gives security responsibilities to the component units without corresponding power to perform them.



However, this is not the first study that will unpack Nigeria's lopsided federal system in the post-colonial Nigerian state. Several studies have discussed Nigeria's federalism as lopsided and unable to address Nigeria's ethno-religious diversities, thus fomenting protests from marginalised minority groups, which have disturbed the peaceful coexistence of the different groups in the country (Oshaghe, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Onyeoziri, 2005; Benjamin, 2011). However, these studies, although they contribute largely to understanding the failure of Nigeria's federalism in addressing Nigeria's diversities, especially the concerns of the minority groups and how that threatens Nigeria's corporate existence, only limit security challenges emanating from the lopsided nature of Nigeria's federalism to something that comes from its inappropriate response to Nigeria's diversities, particularly ethno-religious diversities. The impediments to the power of the component units to deliver on their security responsibilities to their subjects are conspicuously ignored or discussed as a footnote. This study fills these significant gaps in the literature. It critically examines how the lopsided practice of federalism in the Nigerian state, in terms of the allocation of responsibilities and powers among all existing levels of government, contributes to the perpetuation of insecurity in the current Nigerian state. It also explains the extra-legal responses of the component units to meet their responsibility of providing security for their subjects, as well as the implications of these responses for the security of the subjects.

The study will be divided into nine sections. After the introduction, which gives background to the study, the second section conceptualises federalism. The third section examines federalism, peace, and security in Africa, with a focus on reviewing the literature on the impact of federalism on the continent. The fourth section discusses the evolution of federalism in Nigeria. The fifth section discusses the methodology. The sixth section discusses the security provision of the federating units under the 1999 constitution. The seventh section examines the extra-legal responses of the lower federating units to insecurity in their domains and their implications for security. Section eight discusses the findings while the ninth section is the conclusion and recommendations. The study argues that the lopsided allocation of power for the responsibility of providing security under the Nigerian federal structure, as currently entrenched in the 1999 constitution, is a threat multiplier as the extra-legal responses of the lower component units contribute to exacerbating the security challenges of the Nigerian state. Consequent upon this, the study recommends federalisation of institutions for the security provision, especially the police, so that the component units



are constitutionally allowed to own and control their own security apparatuses. Until this is done, the component units—the states and local government areas—will continue to use extra-legal means to address the complex security challenge they face and the security implications will remain dire.

2. Conceptualising federalism

The word “federalism” originated from the Latin word “foedus”, meaning “treaty” or “covenant”. The earliest meaning of federalism, therefore, is a treaty among sovereign states. However, the contemporary understanding of the concept has evolved beyond this, even though the etymological understanding remains embedded in it. Wheare is one of the earliest theorists to define federalism. According to him, federalism is a term used to designate an association of states that come together to form a larger state in which member states retain a considerable measure of their independence, based on the division of power so that the general and regional governments are each within a sphere, coordinate and independent (Wheare, 1945). While Wheare emphasises the core principle of federalism, which is the division of powers, it is not always the case that federalism is voluntarily adopted as a result of two or more states coming together. In some circumstances, it can also be imposed, as in the case of Nigeria and other countries that experienced colonialism.

Foremost American political scientist, David Elazar, reinforced Wheare by defining federalism as having to do with the “need of the people and polities to unite for common purposes yet remain separated to preserve their respective integrity” (Elazar, 1988, p. 33). In this definition, Elazar views federalism as involving the constitutional diffusion of power by constitutionally distributing power among general and constituent governing bodies in a manner designed to protect the existence and authority of all. Leff (1999:210) defines federalism more succinctly as an institutional arrangement whereby “authority and functional competences are shared among different levels of government”. In other words, it is a political arrangement whereby units within the state derive their power from the constitution. According to Nwabueze (1983:159), federalism has two primary cardinal objectives. These are: first, to enable each group in a pluralistic society to manage its affairs; second, to limit the centralisation of powers, functions and responsibilities at the centre to prevent the



national government from becoming an “instrument of total domination and tyranny”. Therefore, federalism aims to enhance diversity management within the union. As such, the federal state attempts to operate under a written constitution, where all the powers and responsibilities of the federal entities are clearly defined. The constitution outlines, among other things, the terms by which power is shared in the political system so that the central and component units can understand the limits of their powers and the extent of their responsibilities. This is why Watts (1999:110) refers to federalism as “the basic notion of involving the combination of shared rule for some purposes and regional self-rule for others within a single political system so that neither is subordinate to the other”.

Typically, in a federal state, the federation comprises a central (federal) government, regional (state, regional, and provincial) governments, and sub-regional (local, community, and municipal) governments. All these levels of government operate independently, each being responsible within its respective spheres of power and authority, as defined and allocated by the constitution. Scholars who support the operation of federalism in a deeply divided society have argued that federalism facilitates the management of differences among diverse groups, as well as other societal differences (Nnoli, 1978; Eliagwu, 1993; Ayoade, 1998; Onyeoziri, 2005). This is because it accommodates the people's demands for self-government and provides governments closer to the people than the central government, which the people can more easily hold accountable for the unmet needs, rather than the distant federal government. Arising from the aforementioned fact, one of the key attributes of federalism is the territorial division and separation of state power, as well as the assignment of various powers and responsibilities to different layers of government through the means of the constitution.

According to Benjamin (2011), one of the key attributes of federalism is the constitutional delineation of revenue sources for the various government tiers. Not only this, responsibilities and powers must also be shared. Therefore, federalism is a constitutional framework for enhancing democracy, local self-governance and development. The essence is to effect the dispersal of power and enhance local autonomy and capacity, so that each group is empowered to address its own problems, whether social, political, economic, or security-related.



3. Federalism, peace and security in Africa: A review of literature

Scholars identify several factors that drive the adoption of federalism globally. Elazar (1987) links federalism to the pursuit of freedom, equality, and liberty. Riker (1964) argues that larger geographical units adopt federalism to pool resources together and enhance their own security. Stephan (1999) notes that federalism is adopted to facilitate diversity management and provide accommodative mechanisms. The management of diversity and the provision of accommodative mechanisms are the most consistent reasons the practice of federalism has appealed to many countries worldwide. This is why countries with heterogeneous characters often consider federalism as the most reliable system of government to practice.

While federalism has gained broader acceptance in Africa, the appeal is tied to the continent's ethnic and regional heterogeneity. Studies show that African federal systems have remained enduring but display persistent limitations. Yimenu (2022; 2023a; 2023b) aptly observed that many African federations provide limited accommodation of group interests, weak conflict management, and insufficient subnational autonomy. Insufficient subnational autonomy is a significant challenge that hinders the state's ability to address security issues in Africa in a timely manner. It restricts the capacity of subnational entities to respond to internal challenges, thereby reducing the effectiveness of federal structures in addressing security and governance issues.

4. Evolution of federalism in Nigeria

The origin of Nigeria's federalism can be traced to the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Provinces by Lord Lugard (Coleman, 1958). This amalgamation led to the formal formation of the Nigerian state. However, the entrenchment of federalism in Nigeria after the amalgamation can be traced to Sir Arthur Richards's Constitution of 1946, which divided Nigeria into three (3) regions: Western, Northern, and Eastern. However, despite the division of Nigeria into regions, there was no constitutional division of power between the centre and the regions (Osaghae, 1989). For instance, the regional assemblies lacked the constitutional power to enact laws for their regions. However, the Macpherson



Constitution of 1951 improved on the Arthur Richards Constitution by introducing a quasi-federal one. Quasi-federal because it contains elements of both unitary and federal systems. It empowered regional legislative houses to make laws on specific matters, subject to approval by the central government. The Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 introduced a form of “true federalism” into Nigeria, dividing legislative powers into exclusive, concurrent, and residual lists between the federal and regional governments (Sklar, 1963; Elaigwu & Erim, 2001). The exclusive list includes the list of activities that the central government can legislate on. In contrast, those on the concurrent list can be legislated by both regional and federal governments. On the other hand, the residual list can be legislated upon exclusively by the regional government.

Since this moment, Nigeria’s federalism has undergone significant evolution. As Table 1 shows, from a three-region state, Nigeria currently has 36 states and 774 local government areas federating with the central government. The fundamental problem, however, remains the allocation of powers and responsibilities among the federating units, particularly concerning the power to protect the lives and property of the people within the component units. The component unit derives its own power and responsibility from within the constitution. However, the constitution grants the central government extensive power to control security apparatuses, while the component units lack any power or control over these apparatuses.

Table II: Evolution of Nigeria’s Federal Structure

YEAR	CONSTITUTION/RULE	COMPONENT UNIT CREATED	NUMBER
1946-1963	Arthur Richard Constitution	Creation of Regions	3
1963-1967	Republican Constitution	Addition of a region	4
1967-1975	General Yakubu Gowon Military Rule	Creation of states from existing regions	12
1975-1987	General Mohammed Murtala/Olusegun Obasanjo Military Rule	Addition of 7 states	19
1987-1996	General Ibrahim Babangida Military Rule	Addition of 3 states	21
		Addition of nine states	30



1996 to date	Sanni Abacha	Addition of 6 states	36

Source: Authors' compilation

5. Methodology of data collection

The study utilised primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from interviews with relevant stakeholders across Nigeria. A total of 26 interviews were conducted across Yola, Jalingo, Kaduna, Zamfara, Enugu, Ibadan, Warri and Lagos. The targeted population included community/traditional leaders, security agents, and state government personnel in charge of security. The table below shows the details of interviews conducted with respondents.

Table I: Breakdown of the Interview Conducted

S/N	Population	Sample
1	Security Agencies	9
2	Government Personnel	10
3	Traditional/Community leaders	7
4	Total	26

Fieldwork, 2022

Samples were taken from the population using a purposive sampling technique. In this case, we selected individuals knowledgeable about the deployment of security forces to address security challenges, as well as community leaders involved in security matters within their communities. Data collected from them were transcribed and analysed using content analysis approach. In some places, direct quotations of the respondents' utterances were used verbatim to support the point being made. Meanwhile, the respondents' identities were shielded by tagging them for security reasons. Secondary sources, including published materials such as books, journal articles, and newspapers, supported the primary sources.



6. Security provisioning and the responsibilities of the federating units under Nigeria's 1999 Constitution

In most countries operating a federal system, there is a constitutionally entrenched demarcation of powers and responsibilities between the federating units regarding national security and public security. In all cases, for countries operating under federalism, national security, which involves defending the state against external threats through the armed forces, border security agencies, and intelligence services, is a primary function of the central government. Thus, the Central Government typically controls these institutions: the armed forces, border security agencies, and intelligence services. However, public security, which involves ensuring the security of lives and property through law enforcement, justice administration, and the maintenance of public order, is a responsibility usually shared between the central government and its component units. Therefore, institutions responsible for law enforcement, maintaining public order, and administering justice are jointly owned and controlled by the Central Government and the Component Units. The essence of this is to empower different levels of government to fulfil their security responsibilities over their respective subjects. This, however, is not the case in Nigeria.

There are three levels of government in Nigeria, federating under the Nigerian Constitution: the federal government, the state governments, and the local governments, which form the third layer. These three levels of government derive their power from the Constitution; therefore, they are autonomous in their own respect and have different levels of influence. However, their autonomy is often theoretical and less practical. In other words, their autonomy is enshrined in the constitution, but it is less evident in practice. A glaring manifestation of this is how the federal government utilises its emergency power against the states and how states directly influence those who administer affairs in local government areas. While Nigeria's 1999 constitution grants the federal government the power to declare a state of emergency, it does not empower it to remove the elected governor from office. However, the practice has been that the federal government will suspend the state governor. In 2004, President Olusegun Obasanjo declared a state of emergency in Plateau State due to an ethno-religious conflict in Yelwa town and suspended the then governor, Joshua Dariye, allegedly, for his weak and incompetent leadership, as he was unable to halt the conflict and



replace him with another (The New Humanitarian, 2004). This was also the case in Ekiti State in 2006. President Obasanjo (1999-2007) suspended Governor Ayo Fayose from office because he was unable to prevent political violence from occurring in his state (News24, 2006). Most recently is President Tinubu (2023 till date) suspending the elected governor of River State, Mr Similayi Fubara, as well as the whole State Assembly and imposed a sole administrator on the allegation that Mr Fubara's supporters were fomenting trouble that could plunge the country into economic crisis (Olabimtan, 2025)

At the local government level, the local government authorities are usually appendage of the state governors. For most of the time, governors in Nigeria have appointed local government chairmen in their state rather than through elections, until recently, when the federal government challenged the autonomy of local governments in the Supreme Court and emerged victorious. Although most local government authorities are now mandated to be a product of elections, they still largely remain an appendage of the state governors. This means that the autonomy for the component units in Nigeria's federal constitution is rather theoretical than practical.

Another major issue that highlights the theoretical nature of component units' autonomy in Nigeria is the control of the security apparatus. Even though governments at the lower federating units, such as states and local government areas—governors and local government chairmen/persons—are the Chief Security Officers of their respective states and local government areas, the power to perform the function is not constitutionally entrenched. The constitution saddled them with the responsibility of providing for the security and welfare of the respective levels of government, but it does not grant the power to ensure this. For instance, Chapter Two, Section 13, Sub-section 2b of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution observed “that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government” (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999). Since Nigeria has three levels of government, this shows that all the levels of government have the responsibility not only to ensure the welfare of the people but also to ensure the security of their lives and property within the vicinity of the states or local governments.

To achieve this, the lower-level federating units should have control over the security apparatus, enabling them to respond adequately to security situations that require attention. Unfortunately, however, this is not so. The control of the security and defence apparatuses is put in the exclusive list, which means that only the federal government can legislate on



such matters. Under the Executive Legislative List, which consists of items such as Arms, ammunition and explosives (item 2), defence (item 17), military (Army, Navy and Air Force) (item 38), police and other government security agencies established by law (item 45) are all under the exclusive legislation of the Federal government. This means that states and local governments do not have control over the police and other statutorily established state security agencies. Furthermore, Section 215 (subsections 2-4) mandates the Nigeria Police Force, particularly the Inspector-General and the Commissioner of Police in the respective states of the federation, to comply with the directives of the President or those of the ministers concerning public safety and order. However, the section went ahead to say, about the power of the Governors and units affiliated to the State Governments, thus:

Subject to the provisions of this section, the governor of a state or such commissioner of the government of the state as may authorize in that behalf, may give to the Commissioner of police of that State such lawful directions with respect to the maintenance and securing of public safety and public order within the State as he may consider necessary, and the Commissioner of Police shall comply with those directions or cause them to be complied with provided that before carrying out any such directions under the foregoing provisions of this section the Commissioner of Police may request that the matter be referred to the President or such Minister of the Government of the Federation as may be authorized in that behalf by the President for his directions (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999; Section 215, Subsection 2—4).

The foregoing quotation indicates that before a Commissioner for Police¹ or any police officer can be deployed for public safety by Governors or Local Government Chairmen, authority for deployment must be obtained from the federal capital, either from the President, the Inspector-General of Police, or the Minister of the Federal Government.

Even in the composition of National Defence Council which have the power to advise the president on matters relating to defence of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nigeria and National Security Council which have the power to advise the president on matters relating to public security including matters relating to any organisation or agency established by law for ensuring the security of the federation, lower-level federating units are not involved. Governors, the states' Chief Executive Officers (CEO) are only permitted to



be part of the Nigeria Police Council. Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, Section L (Third Schedule, Part I, L) (28 A, B & C), observed that the function of the Nigeria Police Council shall include "the general supervision of the Nigeria Police Force; and advising the President on the appointment of the Inspector-General of Police". This indicates that the power of the lower-level federating units in Nigeria, particularly the governors, regarding the control of the Police under the Nigeria Police Council, is minimal, as they do not have control over the use and operational control of the force. Although they may have a say in advising the President on appointing the Inspector-General of Police, the President hardly seeks their advice. Even when it is freely given, the President can accept or reject the advice. It is not mandatory. Therefore, the lower-level federating units do not have any control over the use and operational control of the police and any other statutorily established security agencies in their localities. The implication is that, although security agencies are present at all levels, from federal to local, within the Nigerian state, none of the lower-level federating units has the authority to direct the actions of those security agencies when necessary. Many state governors in Nigeria have vociferously complained about this. For Instance, the immediate past Governor of Rivers State, Governor Nyesome Wike, expressed that he has refused to answer CSO because he has no security apparatus to control (Abaenogbe, 2021). In the same vein, the former Governor of Kaduna State, Nasir El-Rufai, expressed:

We are all frustrated. I am frustrated in my state, many governors are frustrated in their states; we are called chief security officers only in name, we have no control over cohesive instruments of the state...Some of us have more influence than others, but to a large extent, you ask the commissioner of police to do something and he has to clear with the Inspector-General of Police; this is the reality. We are not in control of the police, I don't determine who gets posted to my state as CP and if I give him directives, he can decide to flout the directives. So, we are all frustrated (cited in Abaenogbe, 2021:28-31)

The import of Nasir El-Rufai's statement here is that the personal relationship of the governors with the Commission for Police is usually deployed when there is a need for the use of the services of the commissioner of police or any of its police men. Thus, states and local government authorities strive to maintain good relationships with the heads or leadership of the security agencies in their states/localities by funding their logistics and



paying them allowances, thereby making them more responsive to security threats in their areas. The former governor of Niger State, Babangida Aliyu, hinted at this thus:

Governors lack control over security apparatus in their domain who are answerable to Federal authorities, I remember when I was governor, I established a cordial relationship with the security agencies in payment of their allowances as well as the purchase of vehicles... (cited in (Abaenogbe, 2021: Para 30)

Furthermore, these security formations rarely penetrate locally due to a shortage of police personnel. The farther you move away from the city, the thinner the security presence becomes. For instance, all the offices of the security agencies terminated in the local government areas, which are third-level government in Nigeria. Thus, all the local government areas have at least one office of the major civil security outfits, especially the Police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and the Directorate of State Security Services (DSS). However, the problem of manpower deprives them of reaching villages. Meanwhile, most of the activities of terror groups in Nigeria takes place in villages. One of the respondents confirmed this. According to him:

All local government areas have a police division that covers them. However, some local governments may have more than one police division or one or two outposts at the village level, based on the area's population, landmass, and the extent of criminal activity in the area. However, the problem is that it can hardly go around the local government. Even in the villages where outposts are established, the problem of enough personnel and logistics remains a significant challenge (Divisional Police Officer/Key Informant Interview/Yola/ February 3, 2023)

This expression featured prominently in the responses of the security personnel interviewed. They complained of being unable to extend their coverage network to villages due to a shortage of personnel and logistics. The implication is that security agencies are only able to police towns in local government areas effectively, but villages remain porous. This is one of the reasons villages have become safe havens for criminal activities in local government areas.



At the state and local levels, governors and Chairmen/chairpersons convene security meetings with all relevant security agencies to coordinate efforts and pool resources and expertise to address the security situation in their respective areas. The significant contributions of state and local government authorities in this respect include paying stipends to security operatives, supplying them with logistics for movement, and providing them with other necessary equipment. As one of the security operatives interviewed explained:

The federal government hardly provides logistics and transportation for us. State governors and local government chairmen typically do this. Without their funding, we might have been conducting our patrols on foot (Divisional Police Officer/Key Informant Interview/Yola/January 23, 2023).

Buttressing the point above, another representative of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) interviewed observed that:

When it comes to funding security personnel to do their work well, governors are really trying. In all the states where I have served, it is the governors and local government chairmen who purchase security gadgets, as well as means of transportation, such as vehicles, for us. Anytime they fail to do this, the security personnel fail to work appropriately (District Officer/Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps/Interview/Yola/January 21, 2023).

However, in the area of control and given directives for the action of the security agencies, the governors and local government chairmen cannot order the security agencies to deploy without taking orders from above. During interviews with security personnel, all of them expressed that governors and state commanders of the security agencies constantly clash because whenever governors deploy them to address a security situation, they would not honour the order unless another order from Abuja supports it. To cite one of the security personnel interviewed

We often meet (security agencies and governors as well as chairmen of LGAs) to strategise on how we can address the security situation prevalent within a state. However,



Governors do not have control over any security apparatuses. They cannot order them to respond except it is an order from Abuja or the order is strengthened by a superior order from Abuja (Senior Police Officer/Phone Interview/Yola/December 2, 2022).

The implication is that although governors and local government chairmen have the responsibility to provide security for the people, they do not have the requisite power to command or order any statutory security agencies to act, except their orders are reinforced by a superior order from Abuja, either from the headquarters of their agency or from the President. This has had many effects on society.

One of the effects of this is lack of effective security collaboration among the security agencies and between the security agencies and the Chief Executive Officers at the State and Local Government Levels. On several occasions, governors and local government chairmen have had to fall out with police officers because they could not honour their orders on security provision. Where the CEO and the security agencies in their areas are not on good terms with one another, it will be an opportunity for the criminals to have a field day. This is the current situation in Nigeria. Arising from this lack of effective collaboration and the delay in deployment are also challenges to the prevalence of insecurity in Nigeria. As a community leader, an interviewee said:

Whenever there is a security challenge in any locality, and the governor orders the deployment of security personnel, they must wait for an order from their headquarters in Abuja before they can be deployed. Most of the time, before the deployment is done, the criminals have also concluded their actions and fled. That is when the security personnel will come, and there will be nobody to arrest except the innocent. Criminals are aware of these hurdles, and they make good use of them (Government Personnel/Key Informant Interview/Ibadan/December 28, 2022)

From the analysis above, the lack of collaboration causes a delay in deployment. Delay in deployment makes it difficult to apprehend criminals. In most accounts of victims regarding the arrival of security personnel at the venue of the incident, it is prevalent to hear that while they informed security personnel quickly about the attack, they arrived very late after the incident had occurred. One of the primary reasons for this is the lengthy wait for



the order to be approved for deployment. Criminals are aware of this gap and exploit it in their operations. Therefore, a delay in deployment leads to impunity and exacerbates insecurity.

7. Responses of the component units and implications for security

The lack of constitutional power to accompany the performance of the CSOs' responsibility at the component units has elicited various responses from them. These are:

7.1. Formation of vigilante groups

One of the responses from lower-level federating units is the formation of vigilante groups as an ad hoc response to bridge the security gap left behind by the over-centralisation of security agencies in Nigeria. Numerous vigilante groups have been established in Nigeria to address local security challenges. Table III presents some of the vigilante groups, their types and descriptions, and the current state of their operations in Nigeria. While these vigilante groups have been able to bridge the gap left behind by the inadequacies of the state security agencies, they have also contributed to the exacerbation of security challenges in some cases. They are sometimes involved in gruesome human rights abuses that contribute to the exacerbation of insecurity. For instance, a study carried out by Owonikoko and Onuoha (2019) revealed that the formation of the CJTF and its deployment to combat Boko Haram led to the decimation of the group, which in turn encouraged the formation of similar groups in Lake Chad to fight Boko Haram. However, they were involved in human rights abuses, abuse of position to witch-hunt opponents, serving as informants to Boko Haram members, as well as manipulation by the elites for political reasons. Similarly, in his study on banditry in the North West, Rufai (2021) also expressed that the gruesome abuse of human rights by *Yan Sakai* contributed to the exacerbation of insecurity in the North West.



Table III: Some of the vigilante groups in Nigeria

S/N	Name of Vigilante Group	Status of Existence	Type/Description	State of Operation
1	Civilian Joint Task Force	Still existing	Formed to fight the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East	Yobe, Borno and Adamawa States
2	Hunters Association of Nigeria	Still existing	Reinvigorated to fight insecurity in Adamawa State	Adamawa State
3	Professional Hunters Association of Nigeria	Still existing	It is a splinter group from the Hunters Association	Adamawa State
4	Yan sakai	Still existing	Formed to counter banditry and kidnapping in the North West	Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Kaduna,
5	Oodua People's Congress	Still existing but not as viable as before	Ethnic militia/vigilante group	All South West States
6	Vigilante group of Nigeria (VGN)	Still Existing	Voluntary security group. This currently	Present in all the states of Nigeria
7	Hisbah	Still existing	Established to implement Sharia laws and principles in Kano State	Kano
8	Kaduna State Vigilante Service	Still existing	State-sponsored Vigilante group	Kaduna State
9	Bakassi Boys	Now moribund	Established to fight crime in the South East	South East states
10	Community Security Watch	Recently created with the training of 2400 members	Established by the State Government of Katsina to confront bandit-terrorists	Katsina State Government
11	Niger Rangers	Recently created to secure the Forests	Established by the State government of Niger State	Niger State



12	Community Protection Guard	Recently Created	Established to provide security for the people from banditry	Niger, Zamfara and Katsina States
13	Agwunchemba Vigilante Group	Existing	Established to provide security in the Anambra metropolis	Anambra State

Source: *Author's Compilation.*

7.2. Tacit approval of private citizens to own arms for personal security

The call for private ownership of firearms for personal security is a relatively recent phenomenon, but it has become widespread. An open call for people to arm themselves was first noticed when Governor Aminu Bello Masari, the then executive governor of Katsina State, urged residents of areas prone to banditry in the state to acquire weapons and defend themselves against bandits. According to him, “We must all rise to counter the insecurity challenge, we must not sit and watch some people buying guns attacking our Houses, we too should buy the guns and protect ourselves...” (Channels Television, August 2021: Para 4 cited in Owonikoko et al, 2023). Similarly, the Governor of Kaduna State and the Governor of Ondo State have also called on the people to arm themselves against their attackers (Owonikoko et al, 2023). The latest development is the legitimisation of weapons acquisition by the Zamfara State government, which was announced on Sunday, June 26, 2022. This reflects the state's frustration with managing its insecurity, hence the announcement. However, as Owonikoko et al. (2023) have argued, it represents a breakdown of the social contract between the government and the people, and an invitation to chaos.

7.3. Formation of regional security outfits

Another response is the creation of a regional security outfit by a combination of states within the region. Two different security outfits stand out in this regard. These are the Western Nigeria Security Network, also known as *Amotekun* in the Southwest and Ebube-Agu in the Southeast. These two regional security outfits arose from the prevalence of what is tagged “herdsmen attacks,” particularly in rural communities, and the inability of the state security agencies to curtail them.

Amotekun was founded on January 9, 2020, in Ibadan, Oyo State, by the six governors of the South-Western States of Nigeria—Lagos State, Oyo State, Ogun State, Ondo State, Osun



State and Ekiti State, with the sole mandate to curb insecurity in the region. The establishment of the security outfit was subject to the decision by all six governors at the regional security summit held in Ibadan, Oyo State, in June 2019, through the Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN) to establish such a security outfit. Members of the outfit are drawn from local hunters, members of the Oodua People's Congress, Agbekoya, and Vigilante groups (Ojelu, 2020). On the other hand, Ebube-Agu is a security outfit established by the five governors of the South-East region: Imo State, Abia State, Enugu State, Ebonyi State, and Anambra State. The group's formation stemmed from a security summit convened by the region's governors and security agencies. Establishing these security outfits has generated controversies around the outfit's constitutionality and has significantly limited the weapons they can use. They were only permitted to use dane gun against highly sophisticated criminal groups. Again, establishing these security outfits has raised many human rights and inter-group relations issues in Nigeria. One of the outcomes from the announcement of the regional security outfits—Amotekun and Ebube-Agu—is the disagreement among the governors of the South and the North. The Northern Governors in the All Progressives Congress (APC) rejected the creation of Amotekun (News Wire Nigeria, 2020). This is not the only complaint against the creation of regional security outfits. The Chairman of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, Abdullahi Bello Bodejo, also condemned the creation of the group as a plot against the Fulani and Northerners in the South West and South East. According to him

If the Federal Government doesn't stop Amotekun and the one coming from the South-East, we will have no option than to roll out our own with over 5, 000 personnel in all the 36 states of the federation and Abuja to protect our Fulani people in the forests and bushes, whose lives are in danger. You can see how the Amotekun are killing our people in the South-West, as if they are having an agenda. I'm very much surprised the way they are taking the law into their hands. There is no problem. If the Federal Government cannot stop them, then it is time to unveil our own under the umbrella of Miyetti Allah. Both Amotekun and the new one from the South-East, Ebube Agu, are targeted against the Fulani. Since it has come to this, our own security outfit is inevitable (cited in The Sun, 2021: Para 6-7)



The creation of regional security outfits in the South East and South West has raised tension in the polity, further weakening the already fragile social cohesion among different groups across the North-South divide in Nigeria.

7.4. Dialoguing and Granting of Amnesty to Threat Groups

Dialoguing and granting amnesty to threat groups is one of the measures taken by state governments that struggle to deal decisively with the threat groups operating within their domain. The state government's first obvious use of amnesty for a threat group in their domain was in Rivers State in 2004. During this period, Governor Peter Odili, with support from the President of Nigeria, then President Olusegun Obasanjo, organised an amnesty programme for the militants operating in the Niger Delta region. Several weapons were collected from the militants (Owonikoko, 2016). In the wake of the unrest caused by banditry in the North West region of Nigeria, some governors from the North West States, including Sokoto State, Katsina State, Kaduna State, and Zamfara State, have also deployed the instruments of dialogue and amnesty for the bandits. The state governors met with the bandits and reached an agreement that led to the declaration of amnesty for the bandits. Following this, the governors released members of the bandit groups in the custody of their states. However, amnesty hardly led to sustainable peace and security, primarily when it does not address the root cause(s) of the crisis or presents the state as being weak to act against the threat groups (Owonikoko & Danjibo, 2019; Owonikoko, 2020). In the River State Government 2004 Amnesty Programme for militants, weapons collected from the militants were paid for. According to Asuni (2011:159), the average cost of a serviceable AK-47 was approximately USD 2,000, which was contrary to international best practice.

Similarly, the amnesty deal in the North West States followed the same pattern and outcomes. With the announcement of amnesty for the bandits, incentives were introduced to encourage them to accept. Although there was no official information regarding whether the governors gave money as an inducement to the leaders of the bandit groups, a form of incentive was given to sustain the amnesty in some states, like Zamfara and Katsina states, where banditry was higher. In the report of the Director of Press to the Zamfara State Government, it was reported that, in order to sustain peace and facilitate the rehabilitation of repentant bandits, the Zamfara State government has mapped out intervention programmes to recruit 18,000 youths among the bandits, who will be paid a monthly



allowance of N20,000. This was also the case with other North West States (Vanguard, 2016; Ejiofor et al, 2019; Musa, 2022; Owonikoko et al., 2023). The leader of the bandit group reciprocated by laying down their arms and turning over a new leaf. At the end, about 477 hostages were released, 218 guns, including AK-47 and SMG, were surrendered by the bandits across the North West States (Ejiofor et al, 2019). After a temporary lull in banditry in the Northwest, attacks resumed in the States of the region several months later. For instance, in Zamfara State, between January 2021 and June 2023, about 911 persons, including women and school children, were abducted by bandits in about 108 incidents. Meanwhile, in the whole of the North West Region, between January 2021 and June 2022, there were 521 violent attacks by bandits, leading to the death of about 3,009 persons (Nextier SPD, 2022, p. 3). So bad was the bandit attack that some state governments, like Zamfara State, Katsina State and Kaduna State, encouraged the citizens to defend themselves by acquiring weapons (Owonikoko et al, 2023).

Documentation revealed that between 2016 and 2025, six amnesties were implemented for bandits by governors in the North West Region of Nigeria; however, this has not translated into lasting peace in the region (Mohammed, 2025). The decision to grant amnesty is borne out of resignation to fate among the governors, who lack the power to ensure the safety of the lives and properties of the people. As Mohammed argued, this continued to embolden bandits to carry out attacks. So far, bandits have been responsible for most of the attacks against innocent people in Nigeria's North West.

8. Discussion of findings

The findings indicate that centralising security control in Nigeria diminishes the capacity of both state and local authorities to respond swiftly to internal threats. Similar findings are observed in studies that explore federal security coordination issues in other federations. Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) contend that policing in Nigeria functions through a command-and-control structure inherited from military rule, which restricts initiative at the subnational level and delays field responses during emergencies. This corroborates the interview evidence, which indicates that police officers often wait for clearance from Abuja before deployment, even when governors request immediate action.



Comparative research also demonstrates that federations with decentralised policing achieve quicker response times and greater accountability. Brodeur (2010), writing about Canada, found that provincial police forces enable regional governments to influence law enforcement priorities based on local conditions. The lack of similar autonomy in Nigeria explains why state governors recognise a gap between their constitutional responsibility as chief security officers and their practical limitations. The study also indicates that shortages in manpower and logistics hinder security agencies from maintaining an effective presence in rural communities. A similar pattern is observed in Olonisakin (2017), who notes that many African security institutions lack sufficient personnel to cover their territories, thereby increasing ungoverned spaces and providing opportunities for armed groups to expand.

The rise of vigilante and community protection groups in Nigeria reflects civilian self-help responses noted in the broader African security literature. The risks identified in interviews, including human rights abuses and political manipulation, also appear in Baker (2002), who documented how civilian patrols in South Africa sometimes reproduce the same violence they are meant to prevent when oversight is weak. The paper also highlights negotiation and amnesty as common responses by states to armed groups. In other African cases, such as Sierra Leone and Mozambique, Richards (2005) notes that amnesty policies without accompanying structural reforms often provide only temporary calm rather than lasting security. The resurgence of attacks in parts of northern Nigeria thus reflects a familiar pattern where negotiations enable armed actors to regroup when governments lack the enforcement capacity.

Today, Nigeria faces increased security challenges. Nigeria has been designated as a country of particular concern by Donald Trump over allegations that Christians are specifically targeted for killings, which some have called “genocide”. While this cannot be disproved in some parts of Nigeria, especially the North Central region, these attacks highlight the country's overall insecurity (Owonikoko, 2025). They originate from the state's failure to respond effectively to insecurity. There remains growing concern that President Donald Trump might order direct military intervention in Nigeria, potentially breaching Nigeria's sovereignty. This serves as a reminder that failing to address Nigeria's insecurity directly could lead to further problems for the country.



9. Conclusions and recommendation

As discussed in this study, one important lesson from the constitutional allocation of security responsibilities and power in Nigeria is that the security sector can be a source of widespread insecurity or complicate the security challenges it is intended to address. This implies that a poorly constructed security sector represents a significant obstacle to promoting peace and development. Conversely, a well-thought-out Security sector enhances effective, efficient security delivery. This underscores the importance of security governance in public governance and administration. As this study has shown, Nigeria's case involves the arrangement of different levels of government within the federal system to respond to security challenges in their respective domains. Over-centralisation of the security agencies in Nigeria's federal system encouraged a top-down approach to security that prevented the component units from actively addressing the security challenges facing their subjects. While this has given threat groups a field day to operate in Nigeria without apprehending the deployment of extra-legal means, in a bid to enhance their response to the security challenges they face, it has also contributed to exacerbating these challenges.

As the federal government of Nigeria is currently driving economic and security reforms to improve the country's performance, such as tax reform and legislation on the creation of state police, Nigeria needs to undertake a comprehensive reform of its security sector. Although the bill for the creation of state police is currently going on at the National Assembly, state police are necessary but not sufficient. Security reform should go beyond the state to the local government areas. This will encourage a bottom-up approach to addressing insecurity in the states. Criticism of the need to establish local security under the control of component units is often attributed to the local political elites' manipulation of local security platforms and the cost implications of running a local security unit, as most component units are financially weak without support from the central government. However, the reality, as shown in this study, has revealed that the consequences of not entrenching the creation of local security in Nigeria's Constitution are more dire and can exacerbate insecurity in Nigeria, as we have seen in the recent allegation of Christian genocide in Nigeria, as well as the categorisation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern. Reforming Nigeria's security



arrangement is inevitable. Security control must not only be extended to state governments but also to local authorities.

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¹ The Commissioner for Police is the head of the police unit at the state level.

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