

Operationalizing State Police in Nigeria: An Institutional Framework for Coordination, Accountability and Crime Management

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Fig. 1: Nigerian security officials (Copyright: Adekunle Ajayi/
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KEY MESSAGES

- State Police could improve local responsiveness, but decentralization alone will not guarantee better security outcomes.
- Fragmented mandates and weak coordination across federal, state and local institutions can undermine the effectiveness of multi-level policing.
- Political interference and accountability gaps require independent oversight, transparent recruitment and effective complaint mechanisms.
- State Police should be integrated into wider crime prevention and peacebuilding systems, including community-based early warning and early response.
- Clear jurisdictional boundaries, sustainable financing, national professional standards and intelligence sharing are essential to operationalizing State Police.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposal to establish State Police represents a major constitutional reform intended to address Nigeria's severe security challenges, including terrorism, banditry, and kidnapping, which have exposed the limit of the highly centralized Nigeria Police Force. Operating under an overstretched police-to-citizen ratio of 1:600, the current architecture faces fragmented inter-agency coordination, risks of political interference, accountability gaps, jurisdictional conflicts, and a lack of integrated conflict management frameworks across the three tiers of government.

This policy brief evaluates the decentralization of policing by examining weaknesses in institutional coordination, accountability gaps, comparative federal policing practices, and integrated conflict management frameworks across all three tiers of government. It argued that constitutional approval alone will not guarantee security. Success requires moving beyond devolution of powers to establish operational autonomy, clear jurisdictional boundaries, independent oversight, and community-centered early warning systems.

The brief makes the following recommendations, among others:

1. Governments must enact a national coordination framework that will define jurisdictional boundaries to avert possible conflicts.
2. Creation of independent State Police Commissions that will provide oversight in the implementation of the State Police model. The Commissions should oversee recruitment, discipline, and complaints management, while State Houses of Assembly should strengthen legislative oversight through regular performance reviews and budget scrutiny.
3. The Federal Government, in collaboration with state governments, should establish minimum national standards for funding, training, operational procedures, and performance evaluation. The standards should be translated into a public state-readiness checklist covering legal safeguards, recruitment and vetting, training and certification, equipment, communications,

detention and custody, complaints, data protection, budget transparency and independent oversight. States should publish implementation plans and report progress against the checklist before full operational deployment.

4. State and local governments should establish formal links between State Police, existing early warning and early response mechanisms, local government authorities, traditional institutions, women and youth organizations, and civil society.
5. The Federal Government and state governments should adopt a phased implementation plan with readiness criteria covering legal safeguards, funding, personnel, training, infrastructure, and oversight.
6. Implementation should also be supported by a transparent financing plan that separates recurrent and capital costs, provides for independent audit, and considers criteria-based transitional assistance for fiscally constrained states. Publish evaluation findings and use them to correct implementation weaknesses before expanding to additional functions or locations.

1.0 Introduction



Fig. 2: Map depicting Nigeria's diverse security threats
(Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies)

Nigeria has several security institutions responsible for conflict prevention, including the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), and the Armed Forces, among others. However, they remain largely fragmented, limiting their collective capacity to respond effectively to Nigeria's increasingly complex security environment (FRN, 2019; IPCR, 2023).

A major weakness of the current architecture is the absence of an integrated coordination framework that clearly defines institutional roles and operational relationships. Multiple agencies often undertake similar responsibilities without clear guidelines, resulting in duplicated efforts, inefficient use of resources, and delayed emergency responses. Coordination challenges are equally pronounced across the three tiers of government, where collaboration between the federal, state, and local governments remains largely reactive. This weak vertical coordination undermines cooperative federalism and limits the effectiveness of existing conflict management frameworks, particularly in addressing local security challenges that require timely, context-specific responses (FRN, 2023). A practical coordination framework should specify which institution leads for different incident types, how information is shared, when

joint operations are activated, and how jurisdiction disputes are resolved. These arrangements should be tested through regular joint exercises and reviewed after major security incidents.

To make coordination operational rather than aspirational, the national framework should require agreed protocols for identifying the lead agency and supporting agencies during incidents; sharing and protecting intelligence; conducting joint operations; referring cases and transferring evidence; resolving jurisdictional disputes; and undertaking post-incident reviews. Each participating institution should designate coordination officers, maintain secure communication channels, and participate in periodic joint exercises. Protocols should also specify escalation arrangements where agencies disagree or where a threat crosses state boundaries.

Establishing State Police offers an opportunity to address these weaknesses by bringing police closer to the communities where security threats emerge. However, operationalizing State Police should be accompanied by institutional reforms that strengthen coordination across all levels of government. Such reforms should establish clear lines of authority between federal and state policing institutions, institutionalize regular intergovernmental security coordination, strengthen intelligence-sharing platforms, and promote joint operational planning among security, humanitarian, and peacebuilding agencies. An integrated coordination framework would improve operational efficiency and ensure that State Police complements, rather than competes with, existing national security institutions.

2.0 Current Context of Nigeria's Conflict Management Architecture

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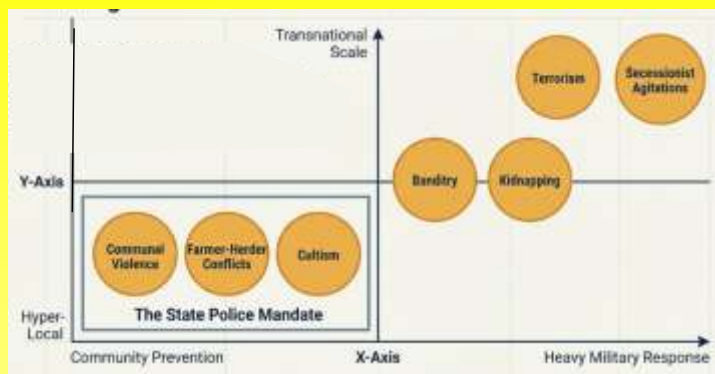


Fig. 3: Threat Complexity Matrix, depicting how a monolithic federal force is unsuited to manage hyper-local conflicts

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3.0 Accountability Gaps and Policy Implementation Outcomes

The effectiveness of State Police will depend not only on its operational capacity but also on the strength of the accountability mechanisms governing its activities. While decentralized policing offers significant opportunities to improve local security, it also raises legitimate concerns about political interference, abuse of power, weak oversight, and uneven institutional capacity across states. Unless these concerns are adequately addressed, State Police may replicate existing governance weaknesses rather than strengthen Nigeria's security architecture. Despite robust policies such as the National Security Strategy (2019) and the Nigeria Police Act (2020), weak institutional oversight, overlapping mandates, inadequate coordination, inconsistent funding, and limited monitoring of institutional performance have largely constrained implementation (FRN, 2019, 2020, 2023).

Perhaps the greatest concern surrounding State Police is the possibility of political interference by state governments. Without appropriate constitutional and institutional safeguards, state governments could deploy policing powers to intimidate political opponents, suppress legitimate civic activities, or influence electoral processes. These concerns are particularly significant within Nigeria's highly competitive political environment, where executive influence over public institutions remains substantial (Oladeji, 2025). Building public confidence in State Police, therefore, requires governance arrangements that guarantee operational autonomy while maintaining democratic accountability. Safeguards should include transparent appointment and promotion procedures, independent investigation of complaints, judicial remedies, protection for complainants, and public reporting on allegations and outcomes. Oversight bodies should have secure tenure, adequate resources, and authority to act



Fig. 4: Three-tiered framework of security oversight

without direction from the executive they oversee.

Institutional accountability should also extend beyond political oversight to include administrative, financial, and operational accountability. Clearly defined institutional responsibilities, transparent recruitment processes, merit-based promotions, independent disciplinary procedures, and regular performance assessments are essential to promote professionalism and prevent abuse of authority. Similarly, predictable funding arrangements, financial audits, and public reporting mechanisms are necessary to ensure that State Police institutions remain adequately resourced while operating transparently and efficiently (CLEEN Foundation, 2023; FRN, 2020).

Effective accountability further requires independent oversight across all tiers of government. At the federal level, constitutional provisions should set minimum professional standards and define circumstances that require federal intervention when constitutional rights or national security are threatened. At the state level, independent State Police Commissions should oversee recruitment, discipline, and complaints management, while State Houses of Assembly should strengthen legislative oversight through regular performance reviews and budget scrutiny. Citizen complaint mechanisms, judicial oversight, and periodic public reporting should complement these institutional safeguards to enhance transparency and strengthen public trust. Thus, operationalizing State Police should focus not only on devolving policing powers but on building a governance system that keeps security institutions professional, transparent, and accountable to the law and the citizens they serve. Strengthening accountability across the three tiers of government will minimize political abuse, improve institutional performance, and ensure that State Police contribute meaningfully to democratic governance, conflict management and national security.

Before a state deploys a State Police service, it should demonstrate minimum readiness in law and regulations, approved and transparent budgets, recruitment and

vetting, training and certification, equipment and communications, custody and detention procedures, complaints handling, data protection, independent oversight, and cooperation with federal agencies. Readiness criteria should be published and applied transparently. States that do not yet meet the requirements should receive time-bound improvement plans and technical support; phased implementation should allow different starting points without lowering minimum safeguards or professional standards.

4.0 Effective Conflict Management and Integrated Institutional Governance Framework

The creation of State Police should be viewed as one component of a broader conflict management system rather than a standalone security reform. Contemporary security challenges, including terrorism, banditry, communal violence, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts and violent extremism, are multidimensional and require coordinated responses that combine law enforcement with conflict prevention, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and post-conflict recovery. Consequently, the effectiveness of State Police will depend on how well it is integrated into Nigeria's existing security and conflict management architecture (FRN, 2019, 2023).

An effective State Police system should operate within a multi-level governance framework that clearly allocates responsibilities across the federal, state and local governments. While the Federal Government should retain responsibility for national security, terrorism, transnational crime and interstate criminal activities, State Police should focus on community policing, intelligence gathering, crime prevention and rapid response to local security challenges. Local Government Authorities, traditional rulers, community leaders and civil society organizations should be institutionalized as partners in early warning, community engagement and peacebuilding initiatives. Such an arrangement would strengthen local ownership of security while maintaining national coherence in conflict management (FRN, 2023; Oladeji, 2025).

An integrated conflict management framework should also prioritize prevention rather than reaction. Many violent conflicts in Nigeria are preceded by identifiable warning signs, yet institutional responses often occur only after violence has escalated. Integrating State Police into existing early-warning and early-response systems would improve intelligence gathering, risk assessment, and timely intervention. This requires coordinated

information sharing among security agencies, greater use of technology and data analytics, and structured community engagement to detect emerging threats before they develop into violent conflicts (ONSA, 2023; IPCR, 2023). A common protocol should define how community reports are verified, how risk levels trigger action, which agency is responsible for response, and how outcomes are documented while protecting sensitive personal information.

Each state should prepare a periodic, evidence-based security and conflict assessment that identifies priority threats, local conflict drivers, vulnerable groups, geographic hotspots, early-warning signals and gaps in current responses. The assessment should inform a state policing and prevention plan that sets priorities for deployment, community engagement, prevention, and referrals to federal or specialized agencies. Local governments, communities, women and youth groups, traditional and religious institutions, civil society, and relevant security agencies should develop the plan, while protecting sensitive operational information.

Finally, sustainable peace depends on inclusive governance. Security institutions alone cannot effectively manage Nigeria's complex conflict environment. Traditional institutions, religious leaders, women, youth organizations, community development associations, and civil society organizations have local legitimacy and contextual knowledge indispensable for mediation, trust-building, and conflict prevention. Institutionalizing their participation within State Police structures and broader peacebuilding processes would strengthen public confidence, improve intelligence gathering, and promote community ownership of security initiatives (CLEEN Foundation, 2023; FRN, 2023). Operationalizing State Police should then focus on building an integrated governance system that promotes coordination, accountability, prevention, and inclusive participation. Embedding State Police within Nigeria's wider conflict management architecture will enhance institutional resilience, improve responses to emerging security threats and contribute to sustainable peace and national stability.

Performance should be assessed through a common results framework, including response times, public confidence and perceived safety, complaint resolution, compliance with human-rights standards, inter-agency coordination, case referrals and the implementation of agreed prevention actions. Crime trends may be tracked alongside these measures but should be interpreted in context because reporting rates and recording practices can differ. Where feasible, disaggregate data by sex, age, disability, and location, with safeguards for privacy and protection. Complaint numbers alone should not be treated as proof of poor performance; the quality, accessibility and resolution of complaints are equally

important.

5.0 Conclusion

Establishing State Police represents one of the most significant security governance reforms currently under consideration in Nigeria. While decentralizing policing offers opportunities to improve local security and strengthen community participation, its success will depend on the institutional framework governing its implementation. Without effective coordination among security institutions, robust accountability mechanisms, and an integrated conflict-management approach, State Police may simply reproduce existing weaknesses. The reform should therefore be implemented as a phased institutional programme, with progress assessed against clear measures of responsiveness, public trust, rights compliance, coordination, and conflict prevention.

Financing will be a decisive test of implementation. State Police plans should distinguish recurrent costs from capital investment and identify credible funding for personnel, training, communications, equipment, maintenance, oversight, and public complaints systems. State budgets, procurement, and expenditure should be transparent and subject to independent audit, while protecting information whose disclosure would create genuine operational risks. If transitional federal support is considered for states with limited fiscal capacity, allocation should be based on transparent criteria and linked to readiness, accountability, and service-delivery improvements rather than political discretion.

6.0 Policy Recommendations

Operationalizing State Police should be accompanied by institutional reforms that strengthen coordination, accountability, and conflict management across Nigeria's federal system. The following actions are recommended:

1. Establish a National Framework for Coordination of State Police

The National Assembly should enact legislation to establish a national coordination framework that clearly defines the operational responsibilities, jurisdictional boundaries, and collaborative arrangements among the Nigeria Police Force, State Police, and other security agencies. The framework should include protocols for intelligence sharing, joint operations, case referrals, and resolving jurisdictional disputes. The framework should include standard operating protocols for intelligence sharing, joint operations, case and evidence transfers, cross-border incidents, jurisdictional disputes,

	Federal Level	State Level	Community Level
Primary Mandate	National Security & Transnational Crime	Community Policing & Local Response	Early Warning & Peacebuilding
Key Actors	ONSA, NPF, Armed Forces	State Police, Independent Commissions	Traditional Rulers, Civil Society, Youth/Women Orgs
Operational Focus	Macro-Reaction & Counter-Terrorism	Crime Prevention & Rapid Local Response	Trust-building & Intelligence Gathering

Fig. 5: A jurisdictional framework for operationalizing state policing

escalation, and post-incident review. It should define which level of government leads in specified situations and provide a mechanism for periodic review as operational lessons emerge.

2. Create Independent State Police Oversight Mechanisms

Each state should establish an independent State Police Commission responsible for recruitment, promotions, discipline, and public complaints, while State Houses of Assembly should strengthen legislative oversight through regular performance reviews and budget scrutiny. These commissions should publish periodic reports on complaints, disciplinary outcomes, recruitment, and compliance with human-rights standards. Oversight arrangements should provide accessible and confidential complaint channels, protection against retaliation, published procedures and timelines for investigating complaints, and periodic public reporting on complaints received, resolved and pending. Oversight bodies should have sufficient independence, staffing and resources to examine misconduct and systemic patterns, with referral pathways to courts and other competent bodies where appropriate.

3. Develop National Standards for Funding, Training and Performance Monitoring

The Federal Government, in collaboration with state governments, should establish minimum national standards for funding, training, operational procedures and performance evaluation. Adopt a harmonized monitoring and evaluation framework, supported by periodic independent audits and public reporting, to ensure professionalism, accountability, and consistent service delivery across all State Police formations. Standards should also provide for predictable financing, independent audits, transparent procurement, and phased implementation based on state readiness.

4. Integrate State Police into Early Warning and Conflict-Prevention Systems

State and local governments should establish formal links between State Police, existing early warning and early response mechanisms, local government authorities, traditional institutions, women and youth organizations, and civil society. Agreed referral and response protocols should ensure that emerging risks are addressed before violence escalates.

5. Establish a Phased Implementation and Independent Evaluation Framework

The Federal Government and state governments should adopt a phased implementation plan with readiness criteria covering legal safeguards, funding, personnel, training, infrastructure, and oversight. Independent periodic evaluations should assess response times, public complaints, rights compliance, inter-agency cooperation, and community confidence, using findings to improve implementation. Implementation should be judged by outcomes, not by the number of states that establish State Police services. The central test is whether the reform produces more effective, locally responsive, coordinated, and accountable policing while protecting citizens' constitutional rights.

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