

Chapter 6

Reform the Police and End the Violence: What Works Between Community Policing and State Police in North Central Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Policing in Nigeria has never been this challenging. Aside from accusations of violence and brutality, the police are widely regarded as ineffective and inefficient. While insecurity surges across the country, regional security networks are springing up in an uncoordinated manner, raising questions about ownership and control. This further gave rise to agitations for either community policing and state police from the political class, civil societies, and traditional institutions. This chapter situates police violence in the context of the popular #EndSARS# protest and reviews issues surrounding police reforms in Nigeria. Within the context of the challenging insecurity in the north central region, the chapter looks at the merits and demerits of community police and state police to determine what works and makes recommendations on the appropriate policing strategy in the region.

INTRODUCTION

From ancient times, policing has been part of every society and a necessary ingredient for order maintenance. Its absence could lead to increased crime rates and a needless loss of lives and property. This underscores the critical roles the police play in maintaining law and order and in crime prevention and internal security. However, there are variations in the nature and pattern of policing depending on the historical experience and institutional preferences of each political community (Swhartz, 2015). Police actions and conducts reflect the political and economic character of the society and what those in power are willing or able to tolerate or condone (Oladipo, 2013). Similarly, Alderson argued that when the society is adjudged to be corrupt, it deserves, and gets corrupt police; when it is under a totalitarian leadership, it

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gets distrustful police while violent societies get violent police. A tolerant society on the other hand gets tolerant police and wise societies get restrained and legitimate police (as cited in Alemika, 2018, p.14).

In Nigeria, policing has never been this challenging. Aside from accusations of violence and brutality which have historical antecedence, it is highly regarded as ineffective, inefficient, and corrupt. This is not an isolated case for the police but a reflection of Nigeria's failing security architecture and state craft. While insecurity surges across the country, regional security networks are springing up in an uncoordinated manner, raising questions about ownership and control. In the North Central part of the country where attacks and kidnappings of farmers and herders are common occurrences, the police are facing more daunting tasks of securing lives as their professionalism is continuously being put to test.

At the center of this chapter are issues relating to police violence and the search for a policing strategy considered more effective in crime control and internal security. In specific terms, the chapter examines the extent of police violence towards its citizens and how reform policies have fared over time. Focusing on the North Central Nigeria, the chapter contextualizes the manner in which the police manage emerging and changing security challenge in the region. It also seeks to bring to light the unending debate about community policing and state police from the political class, civil societies, the police and traditional institutions with a view to recommending the most appropriate strategy for better policing in the country.

BACKGROUND

The history of policing in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial period when the British authorities imposed various aspects of their cultures and traditions including politics and economy on captured territories as a way of expanding their influence and dominance (Audu, 2016). During this period, the British colonial government established the police force and employed them as constabulary and para-military forces for colonial wars and punitive expeditions. In many areas, the police engaged in the brutal subjugation of communities and the suppression of resistance to colonial rule (Jonson, 2013). This orientation affected the psyche of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and it continued through the period of transition from military rule to democratic rule (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000).

In 1992 for example, a unit of the NPF was created known as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) to respond to increasing rates of violent crimes. The mandate of officers in the unit included arrest, investigation and prosecution of suspected armed robbers, murderers, kidnappers, hired assassins and other suspected violent criminals. Initially, they were to operate undercover with plain clothes and plain vehicles without any security or government insignia and never to carry arms in public. However, officers began to deviate from their original mandate of covert operation to mounting of roadblocks, extortion of money from citizens and started carrying arms in public (Malumfashi 2020). Today, activities of SARS have further complicated policing in Nigeria as members of the squad constantly harass and abuse citizens while pretending to be investigating armed robbery suspects (Paquette, 2020). Violence has therefore come to be associated with policing practice as their activities are rife with accounts and cases of brutality characterized by physical assault, harassment, illegal arrest, and detention (Lar, 2018). Their excesses have also been displayed during crime control operations, ranging from crowd control, demonstration, and protest management to harassment at checkpoints (Network on Police Reform in Nigeria, NOPRIN 2010; Lar, 2018).

Recent developments further indicate that the police have become more punitive as they are now being used by authorities to silence condescending voices. On a daily basis, the media is awash with reports

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