

Private Security Organizations and Policing in 21st-Century Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of private security organizations in policing 21st-century Nigeria. It utilized exploratory research analysis drawing strength majorly from secondary data, including books, journals, internet resources, etc. The paper employed the third-party policing perspective as the theoretical framework of analysis. The paper posits that the role of private security organizations in policing in Nigeria is under-explored and inadequate, thereby undermining the critical role of the sector in national security architecture. The paper recommends among others the integration of private security organizations in national security designs and policies because of their crucial role in policing in Nigeria and government should legislate laws enabling them to bear firearms.

Keywords: Private Security, Private security Organization, Policing, Crime Prevention

Introduction

Insecurity is inherent in every human society and there is no society, no matter how simple or complex; that is immune from it. However, the capacity of a people or state to manage the menace is significantly critical to their well-being and welfare. The Sahel and the Horn of Africa have been grossly infested with non-state actors who feast on the governance weakness of most African states explicitly exhibited by ineptitude leadership in the region to unleash terrorism and destruction of human lives. More pathetic is the fact that most African leaders and their cohorts do not prioritize the lives and security of their citizens in policy-making and decisions. African leaders see themselves as lords above the citizens whose plights are not their concern and life seems to have returned to the primordial state of nature. The only law that existed in the state of nature was that based on the principles of self-preservation in which case every man was for himself. Survival of the fittest became the only slogan in which the strongest takes all. It was on this basis that it became necessary for a social contract to be initiated between those who hold authority and those who do not. Following this narrative man and society relinquished their rights of protection and security to the state.

In 21st Century Nigeria, policing has become extremely difficult for government law enforcement agencies because of the increasing sophistication of criminal use of dangerous weapons and crimes of various intensity and dimensions such as murder, terrorism,

kidnapping, armed bandits, insurgency, cattle rustling, armed robbery, herdsmen terrorism, drug abuse and trafficking, trans-border human trafficking, cyber-terrorism, money laundering etcetera. The National Bureau of Statistics (2017) reported a total of 125,790 cases of crime nationwide in 2016. Nigeria was ranked second in 2021 as the most terrorized country in the world (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021). The World Poverty Clock in 2018 tagged Nigeria as the poverty capital of the world (Yomi, 2018). In 2016, Nigeria's poverty rate was put at 71% (The Conversation, 2021). The World Poverty Clock in 2023 reported 71 million Nigerians to be extremely poor while the National Bureau of Statistics classified 133 million Nigerians as multi-dimensionally poor (Ubanagu, 2023). Global Peace Index ranked Nigeria 144th out of 163 peaceful countries in the world in 2023 (Oyebade, 2023). The implications are severe for our security delivery in the country. Crime and criminal elements have infiltrated all sectors of the country's socio-political and economic spheres. Criminal elements have virtually taken over all ungoverned spaces across the country.

Government efforts to contain these criminalities have proved abortive as criminal gang groups operate openly with impunity at the expense of citizens' lives and property. The working manpower strength of the Nigeria Police is put at 371,800 (Oyemiwinmina & Aibieyi, 2016). This in fact cannot police a population of over 200 million people in Nigeria. The utilization of private security organizations in policing citizens has become a global trend. For example, in Canada and Australia, private security personnel out-number the public police by 2:1. In South Africa it is 3:1 while in the United States of America shows 8:1 (Asomah, 2017). The implication is that there is a global trend and increasing significance and participation of private security organizations in policing and security provisioning across the globe. Accordingly, Lalic et al. (2019), aver that the weakening role of the nation-state, the speed of goods and capital movement, high levels of social inequality, the expansion of international organized crime, terrorism, and armed conflicts are just some of the factors creating the social reality of modern states and a certain security vacuum in the social space filled by the private security sector. This is coupled with inadequate public policing and an inefficient, corrupt and ineffective criminal justice system. Our social realities are constructed around these prevailing insecurity problems in the country with increasing demand for private security participation in policing in the country.

Various scholars (Igbo & Chinwokwu, 2020; Owosu, et al., 2016; Omotosho & Aderinto, 2012; Ruddel, et al., 2010) have written on Private security companies (PSCs), Corporate private security organizations (CPSOs), Private security guards (PSGs) and other private securities' participation and contribution in crime control and prevention across various

climes, yet there is dearth of literature on private security organizations participation in policing in Nigeria. It is a fact that for national security architecture and Grand National security strategy to be enhanced holistically the inclusion and involvement of the private security sector or organization is imperative. Therefore, this paper examines the role of private security organizations in policing 21st-century Nigeria. This paper will enlighten the general public, policymakers, stakeholders and criminologists on the enormous contribution of PSOs in policing and arouse awareness for their integration into the national security architecture for a more robust, effective and efficient policing in Nigeria. This is because taming insecurity in Nigeria needs everyone's participation and their inclusion in the security framework of Nigeria's security architecture will pave the way for greater security network and policing strategies.

Conceptual Clarification

Policing refers to the whole structures and processes that are associated with the control of crime and the maintenance of order in society (Deflem & Hauptman, 2015 p. 260). So policing has to do with police functions. It covers a wide range of social roles which are intended to regulate human behaviour and conduct to ensure the security and protection of everyone in society. Policing is a critical component of crime control and order maintenance in every society. Policing involves not only the enforcement of law but also the well-being, health and happiness of the people (Palmitto & Unnithan, 2011). It is on this basis that private security organizations engage not only in crime prevention and control but also in other social services that ensure the welfare and well-being of members of society.

There is no agreement as to what constitutes private security, and so various concepts have been used in previous research. Cunningham, et al., (1990), aver that the concept of private security seems to focus on job functions, the influence of profit and users. It also involves the inclusion of the material production sector, namely the manufacturing, distribution and installation of equipment and technology (Strom, et al., 2010). The American Society for Industrial Security (ASIS International, 2009) sees private security as the informal sector which engages in protecting people, property, and information, conducting investigations, and safeguarding the assets of corporate organizations. Private security has a role in helping the private sector secure its business assets and other critical infrastructure from natural disasters, accidents and planned actions. We define private security as a non-state or unconventional policing system structured or unstructured formed to provide protection or policing services to individuals, groups, organizations, communities or even government agencies for a stipend. The implication is that private security performs multi-task functions closely related to that of formal public police.

Private security organizations (PSOs) are organizations companies or groups that provide security (protection) services to individuals, businesses, government, communities, and other organizations for reward or payment. Private security organizations are often called private security companies (PSCs), private military companies (PMCs), or private security outfits (PSOs) (Kasali, 2011; ASIS International, 2009). PSOs have a multi-task role in policing society. The concept of the involvement of private security organizations in policing is described as the multilateralization of policing (Bayley & Sheraing, 2001) in which case the government no longer have the sole charge of providing policing service to citizens. Private security organizations here involve all individuals, organizations and groups other than government-owned security agencies who provide policing services to citizens for crime prevention and control in society; they may include structured private security organizations or unstructured security groups like the vigilante groups, neighbourhood watch, village watch-keepers etc.

Theoretical Framework

The third-party policing perspective is utilized as the theoretical framework for analysis. This theory was formulated by Michael E. Buerger and Loraine G. Mazerolle in 1998 and further enunciated by Loraine G. Mazerolle and Janet Ransey in 2005 and Loraine G. Mazerolle and Janet Ransey in 2006 (Buerger & Mazerolle, 1998; Mazerolle & Ransey, 2006). The main premise of the third-party policing theory is that police alone cannot succeed in preventing crime and disorder in society, they need the collaboration of the private security organizations and other stakeholders to provide the required security for effective and efficient policing. It is when the police and other government forces leverage the powers held by these other non-state actors to help control crime that criminal activities could be reduced in society. Cherney (2008) is of the view that third-party policing is a problem-solving approach. More so, third-party policing is built on a proactive crime prevention strategy that enhances increased problem-solving relating to crime (National Academies of Science, 2017).

The main focus of private security organizations is not really to catch the criminal but to provide visibility that makes it ethically hard for potential criminals to commit crimes in society. Third-party policing is functionally focused on collaboration, proactive crime prevention and innovation in solving crime-related problems. The success of the collaboration of private security and government security forces in combating Boko Haram, terrorism and other violent crimes in the northeast and other parts of the country is quite evidence of the potential capacity of a joint effort of government forces and private security organizations.

Public policing is faced with the challenges of inadequate funding, inadequate personnel, lack of training and skills, lack of facilities, inadequate technological tools etc.; therefore the need for partnership with private security organizations for effective policing. In 21st-century Nigeria, policing has become intensely difficult due to the increasing rise and use of sophisticated weapons by organized criminal elements of various dimensions coupled with their technological advancement. While there may be other theories like plural policing theory, state failure theory and public private partnership theory that can be used in the explication of this study we opt for the third-party policing theory as very apt for this analysis.

Methodology

The study is qualitative based mainly on secondary sources. The study was carried out through a meta-analysis of extant reports on private security organizations, policing generally and stakeholder involvement in policing Nigeria for a secured environment. Relevant extant literature such as journal articles, crime statistics from National bureau of statistics and other government records, internet and books on private and public policing and stakeholder management were adequately reviewed with thematic codings leading to insight and stimulating research.

Brief Overview of Prevailing Insecurity and Policing in Nigeria

There were an estimated 1,500 cases of kidnapping in Africa with the majority of the cases in Nigeria (Obiezu, 2021). It is on record that on March 28, 2022, terrorists attacked a train from Abuja to Kaduna killed over 8 persons and abducted 168 persons (Ayitogo, 2022). Also, on July 5, 2022, terrorists attacked Kuje Correctional Services, Abuja and more than 879 inmates including 65 Boko Haram members detained in the facility escaped (Adepegba, et al., 2022). Most pathetically, more than 250 school children and women kidnapped from schools and communities across the country are still in the hands of their captors while many of them have also been killed. According to the Global Peace Index, Nigeria is ranked the 17th least peaceful country in the world (Statistica Research Department, 2024). Nigeria ranks second in Africa on the Organized Crime Index 2023. Nigeria's ranking rose from 7.15 in 2021 to 7.28 in 2023 and Nigeria is said to be the epicentre for cybercrimes cum the most pervasive criminal market for human trafficking in Africa (Ephraim, 2023). The issue of Boko Haram terrorism and kidnapping for ransom have devastated many communities and states. Sasu (2023) identified most states affected by Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism between 2011 and 2023 as Borno 28,255; Zamfara 6,803; Kaduna 6,195; Benue 4,391; Adamawa 4,127; Plateau 3,768; and Yobe 3,229 all totaling 38,000.

The activities of armed banditry include kidnap for ransom, armed robbery, massacre of rural communities and farm settlements, rape, cattle rustling, and illegal possession of dangerous firearms have similarities with that of pure terrorism in terms of operation, pattern, intensity, density and dynamics. Armed bandits have become a very security threat to the country's governance thereby making life misery and hopeless. TNigeria is classified as one of the most kidnapping hotspots globally, driven by organized crime, insurgency and banditry. In fact, between July 2022 and June 2023, 582 kidnap-related cases resulting in 3,620 persons amounting to about #5 Billion in ransom payments were reported (SBM Intelligence, 2023). Another terror group known as Lakurawas has emerged in Sokoto and Kebbi states of North-West Nigeria. The group is majorly composed of foreigners from Niger, Mali, Chad, Libya and Somalia. In November 2024 the Lakurawas carried out an attack in some communities in Kebbi state, North-West Nigeria in which about 15 persons were said to have been killed (Ahmadu-Suka, et al., 2024). This terrorist group is said to be an offshoot of Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), inclined towards Jihadist ideology and more deadly than Boko Haram. Most pathetically, these bandits and terrorists are foreigners who have made insecurity their main occupation and rendering public policing gravely impossible. Efficient and effective collaboration with private security policing is imperative and crucial if meaningful progress is desired in that direction.

Policing Roles of Private Security Organizations

Private security organizations play great roles in policing not only in Nigeria but globally. The roles of private security organizations in policing 21st-century Nigeria are multifaceted. Private security organizations have effectively complemented the efforts of the public police by improving the security of the state. They are partners with the police in terms of crime prevention and control in the country. They have been found to control loss and improve the security of their clients which results in crime reduction in the society generally. The private security organizations are seen in all nooks and crannies of the country rendering policing services to government, organizations, communities and individuals. Owusu et al., (2016) aver that one of the increasing responses to crime across the globe is the privatization of security and the proliferation of private security organizations and their presence has reduced fear of crime and criminal victimization. Communities, villages, homes, organizations, industries, government facilities and individuals rely now on private security organizations for effective policing of their areas and properties.

Private security organizations perform a variety of legitimate policing roles, most of which are complementary rather than supplementary to those of the public police. Private security organizations are key drivers of businesses in most urban cities across the world especially

in areas where public police are inadequate or completely absent. In urban cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Abuja, Enugu, Kaduna etc., there are no public and private corporations where private security guards are not visibly present and in most cases in government facilities. Their activities have reduced a lot of strain on public policing. Chinwokwu (2018) study found that in Lagos metropolis, due to the importance attached to human security, the provision of private security in any large property estates or enclosed residential estates was very vital and imperative for the property to be economically valuable and rentable by prospective tenants, especially high-income earners.

Scholars (Anyanwu, 2012; Carballido, 2008) have identified some of the basic roles of private security organizations in policing to include but not limited to the following: armed and unarmed guarding; patrols; escorts; intelligence services; trained dogs; electronic monitoring; investigations; fortification of buildings; protection of infrastructure; safety and self-defence training, a joint police/private security patrols; rapid response; executive protection; security consulting; electronic surveillance; alarm system installation; cash in transit movement; security awareness training; protocol services; etc. The task of private security organizations is multifaceted but the main philosophy is to provide seamless security and proactive preventive policing to individuals, corporations, organizations, agencies and government for meaningful economic development.

Effectiveness of Private Security Organizations in Policing Society

Richard and Smith (2007) aver that effective private security organizations should be accountable to and serve the needs of their clients without causing any negative effects on the users or other members of the public, especially in terms of unwarranted risks. As a result of this, its establishment would demand that they are accountable to the state and citizens, and this is done or achieved through a system of effective state regulatory and oversight functions as well as working in partnership with the state. Accountability could be a yardstick to measure PSO's performance and effectiveness and where it is lacking it can create a loophole in their performance. The effectiveness of PSOs could be visibly noticeable in the roles they play as undercover agents in bursting many organized criminal gangs.

Anyanwu (2012) found that security guards in some private security companies have demonstrated to be more proficient than others and this can be a consequence of a combination of a range of factors not restricted to training, education, and experience cum company policy. Private security organizations have been actively employed by the police to perform police-related functions like apprehension of offenders, and raiding and combating organized criminal syndicates (Gurcia & Manning, 2007). They have been

effective in reducing the illegal gathering and loitering of potential criminals in public spaces by their presence in such places thereby proactively preventing criminal occurrences. The effectiveness of private security organizations in most of our tertiary institutions in curbing and controlling the excesses of cult activities has not gone unnoticed. In the same way, private security organizations contribute unarguably to crowd control or riotous protest activities.

Collaborative Efforts of Private Security Organizations and Formal Policing Agencies

The private security sector ranging from local vigilante groups to local hunters has actively joined collaboratively the military and the police in the fight against insurgency and terrorism nationwide. For example in Southwest Nigeria, the South West Security Network (Alias Amotekun), Odua People's Congress (OPC) and the police have been involved in securing forest reserves from unknown gunmen, armed bandits and herdsmen militias. The collaboration between private security organizations and the police in fighting insecurity has been heightened following the influx of terrorists from Northwest Nigeria to Southwest Nigeria (Shaibu, et al., (2024). These collaborative efforts of both formal and informal policing mechanisms have greatly mitigated the rising impact of insecurity in not only the Southwest but also in the entire country. The Vigilante groups such as the Civilian task force and organized hunters have been working jointly in collaboration with the military to combat the Boko Haram insurgency and other extremist elements in Northeast Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2017).

In Katemba's (2022) study of the effectiveness of private, he found that private security companies/organizations engage in a variety of crime prevention protocols and achieved an increase in interception of criminal activities in 2021 as compared to 2020. It was also found that PSCs were in the process of developing close relationships with the police in the area of information sharing, crime mapping and identification of crime hotspots in the city. Chinwokwu (2018) found in his study that operational collaboration and networking between PSCs and the police in crime prevention strategies in the Lagos metropolis were imperative for achieving a crime-free society. It was also found that private security companies have been actively employed by the police to perform police-related functions like apprehension of offenders, and raiding and combating organized criminal syndicates (Gurcia & Manning, 2007).

Scholars (Shaibu et al., 2024; Chinwokwu, 2018; Martin, 2017) have demonstrated that police effectiveness in crime prevention and control is most likely to be high when they cooperate and work in synergy with civilian forces. This is because policing society is

everyone's duty. Most importantly, information sharing is a very effective strategy in sustaining any operational relationship between private security organizations and the police. In this regard, private security organizations cum the public must trust the police to share intelligence for effective policing.

Challenges of Private Security Organizations in Policing

Suchi (2017) conducted a study in Abuja on the regulation of private security companies and found that there was a lack of speciality in the classification of PSCs licenses, limited regulatory scope, lack of uniform standards on training and high cost and difficulties in obtaining an operational license. He concluded that the regulatory setup for PSCs in Nigeria was ineffective and unsustainable. These observations are still very crucial and affect policing and the development of private security organizations in Nigeria and indeed a great setback in national security strategy.

Similarly, poor funding, interference of godfathers, inadequate training, inadequate equipment, poor welfare, and lack of education and skill are some of the challenges that affect the effective performance of private security forces/organizations (Shaibu et al. 2024). Private security organizations have their shortcomings or lapses which affect their effectiveness and efficiency in policing. Some scholars (Chinwokwu, 2018; Plessis, 2015; Abrahamsen & William, 2005) identified cheating, pilfering, gross negligence, lack of training, inability to bear firearms, lack of certification in industrial security, and lack of education as some of the major challenges of private security organizations in policing.

Curbing the Challenges Facing Private Security Organizations in Policing

The most critical challenge of private security organizations in Nigeria is the issue of legal recognition and authorization to bear arms for their operational duties for effective policing services. The sector must be allowed to carry at least minimum firearms to protect themselves and their client's lives and property, especially going by the increasing trend in security. Across the globe where security has been privatized and the demand for private security has increased, the narrative is not the same as private security organizations are legally recognized and allowed to bear firearms. Nigeria has become a theatre of high-risk insecurity zone with no sight of ending the insecurity in the country.

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defense (NSCDC) is empowered to supervise the operations of private security organizations and to help in providing the necessary training of their personnel. This function of NSCDC lies low and comatose as far as the operation and policing service of private security organizations is concerned. As a result, there is no central

or uniform training manual or curriculum for the training of private security personnel. Therefore, dealing with the challenge of inadequate or lack of training of private security organizations will require the NSCDC to rise to their responsibility and ensure a uniform training manual or training curriculum is developed for them.

In the Niger Delta area, there are variants of foreign private security organizations offering policing services to multinational companies without any legislation against it. These foreign private security organizations bear firearms in their policing duties while indigenous private security organizations are prohibited from bearing firearms. This is discriminatory and an affront to our national security imperatives. Nigeria must have a law that protects its citizens and ensures foreign private security organizations are sanctioned to operate in the country. The law establishing a private guards company (PGC) forbids the operation of foreign private companies in Nigeria. Indigenous private security organizations providing policing services must be protected against foreign exploitation and competition.

Funding is critical to the survival of any organization globally. The effectiveness of policing organizations is most likely dependent on the financial strength of the organization. Government and stakeholders in the security sector must collaborate to ensure the availability of financial resources to support the operations of private security organizations. Most pertinently, the financial burden on the registration and licensing of private security organizations must be reviewed downward to boost the economic sustainable development of private security organization cum enhance effective policing delivery in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Private security organization's involvement in security policing across the world is critically imperative as the government alone cannot offer all the security needs of citizens. The more crime intensifies the more likelihood private security engagement in policing becomes. In fact, in some climes private security organizations are becoming more visible in public spaces in terms of policing than public police. The following recommendations are presented for effective private security involvement in policing Nigeria:

1. Strengthening and improving the capacity and effectiveness of private security organizations in policing through legislative policy framework for their integration into the mainstream national security architecture is an imperative and urgent necessity.
2. Police authorities and communities must ensure private security and police work mutually in a symbiotic relationship with each other for the effectiveness of community policing.

3. The government should legislate laws enabling PSOs to bear firearms as this is imperative for effective protection and defense especially coupled with the sophisticated weapons which trend in the criminal world.

4. The National Assembly should enact laws that harmonize the operations of various organizations of private security under one umbrella.

5. There should be a legislative bill empowering private security to engage in private investigation/detection cum prosecution in collaboration with the police.

6. Stakeholders in the security industry must sensitize members to professionally engage the government to grant inclusivity of the industry in national security planning as a way forward in combating insecurity in the country.

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