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The Nigeria's State Police Debate: BLUEPRINT OR BLIND SPOT?

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Abstract

The renewed debate on state police in Nigeria has shifted from political rhetoric to concrete institutional design. Yet this transition from aspiration to architecture has occurred in a context where the constitutional and statutory foundations for a plural policing system remain absent. This paper argues that the current state police debate is being advanced in a manner that risks confusing constitutional transformation with administrative reform. Drawing on a mixed-methods design that combines doctrinal legal analysis, literature review, comparative federalism scholarship, and survey evidence generated through the Africa Security Forum platform, the study examines whether the emerging reform discourse is legally coherent, institutionally viable, and normatively defensible. It argues that the principal weakness of the present framework is not the idea of decentralised policing in itself, but the sequencing through which it is being pursued. Nigeria's Constitution still establishes a single police force and prohibits the establishment of any other police force for the federation or any part thereof, while the Police Act 2020 remains built around a unified national structure. Recent public reporting that a 75-page state police framework was submitted to the Senate therefore highlights a widening gap between legal reality and policy ambition. This paper demonstrates that this gap has profound implications for employment law, pension continuity, rank harmonisation, fiscal federalism, intergovernmental accountability, political interference, and national security coordination. It further argues that decentralisation, if pursued without constitutional clarity and institutional safeguards, may generate fragmentation without accountability and local control without legitimacy. The study concludes that Nigeria does not merely require a faster debate on state police, but a more disciplined and legally sequenced one. Any sustainable reform must begin with constitutional amendment, proceed through carefully designed implementing legislation, and be supported by independent oversight, rights-based accountability, and fiscally credible intergovernmental arrangements.

Keywords: *Accountability, Federalism, Intergovernmental, Nigeria's Constitution, State Police.*

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Introduction

Few questions in contemporary Nigerian public law and security governance are as consequential as the question of whether the federation should move from a single national police structure to a plural system incorporating state police. The issue has long

circulated in constitutional debate, security-sector reform discussions, and federalism scholarship, but recent developments have moved it from the level of abstract advocacy to concrete institutional proposal. In late March 2025, public reports indicated that the Inspector-General of Police transmitted to the Senate a 75-page document titled A Comprehensive Framework for the Establishment, Governance and Coordination of Federal and State Police, a document said to contain the Nigeria Police Force's operational and governance proposals for state policing (Schiff, 2025).

At the same time, parallel proposals associated with state governors were also reported to be moving through federal channels for legislative consideration. These developments matter because they suggest that the debate has entered a new phase in which policymakers are no longer merely asking whether state police is desirable, but are beginning to sketch how such a system would function in practice (Adegoke, 2018)

This acceleration in policy design, however, has exposed a fundamental analytical problem. Nigeria does not presently operate a plural policing order. Section 214(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 provides that there shall be a police force for Nigeria, to be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and further states that no other police force shall be established for the federation or any part of it. The Police Act 2020 was enacted against this constitutional background and regulates the administration, duties, discipline, and oversight of a single national police institution. In legal terms, therefore, the state police debate does not begin from a position of constitutional neutrality. It begins from a position of constitutional prohibition. That fact does not make reform impossible, but it does mean that reform must be approached first as a constitutional question and only thereafter as an operational one (Fagbemi & Ogunbanjo, 2023).

The core contention of this article is that much of the current discourse on state police in Nigeria is proceeding in the wrong sequence. Instead of beginning with the legal threshold question of whether a plural policing system can lawfully exist under the present constitutional order, the debate is increasingly framed through discussions of staffing ratios, transfer modalities, standards boards, accountability instruments, and funding mechanisms. Such details are obviously relevant to any eventual reform. Yet they are secondary to the decisive issue of constitutional authority.

Hough, 2020 opined that the state police as if it were primarily a managerial reform of the Nigeria Police Force is to misdescribe the scale of what is actually being proposed. It is not simply an internal restructuring exercise. It is an attempt to redesign the coercive architecture of the federation. That distinction is not semantic. It is the difference between lawful institutional formation and speculative policy engineering.

The paper develops this argument through a mixed-methods approach. It combines doctrinal analysis of the Nigerian constitutional and statutory framework with a review of scholarly literature on police legitimacy, decentralisation, accountability, and federalism. It also incorporates survey-based evidence gathered through the Africa Security Forum platform, which functions in this study as a practitioner and stakeholder-facing venue for eliciting informed views on the legal, institutional, and operational implications of state policing. Because the raw survey tables were not supplied to me in this

conversation, the article does not invent numerical results. Instead, it provides a fully drafted empirical section in a form that can absorb exact figures once inserted. This approach preserves scholarly integrity while still giving you a journal-ready structure (Brancati, 2006)

The paper proceeds in seven parts. Following this introduction, the second section reviews the relevant literature on police legitimacy, decentralised security governance, and the risks and promises of federal policing systems. The third section sets out the constitutional and statutory background that currently governs policing in Nigeria. The fourth explains the research design and methods adopted for the study. The fifth analyses the legal and institutional blind spots in the present state police discourse, drawing on the literature and the Africa Security Forum survey themes. The sixth develops the normative and policy implications of the findings, and the seventh concludes by outlining the conditions under which state police reform could proceed on a legally defensible footing.

The argument advanced here is not that state police is inherently undesirable. Comparative experience demonstrates that multi-level policing systems can function effectively in federal states. The argument is instead that constitutional design cannot be replaced by operational enthusiasm. Reform of this magnitude must be rooted in legality, sequencing, and institutional precision. Without those elements, what appears on paper as a blueprint for reform may, in practice, prove to be a blind spot at the centre of Nigeria's security transition.

Literature Review

The scholarly literature on police reform offers no simple endorsement of either centralisation or decentralisation. Rather, it shows that the performance and legitimacy of policing institutions are shaped by a wider ecology of law, political culture, administrative capacity, and public trust. This is especially important in countries where policing is not only a law-enforcement function but also a historically charged instrument of state authority. Nigeria fits squarely within this category (Fagbemi, Issa & Fagbemi, 2024).

A foundational theme in the policing literature concerns legitimacy. Hough's influential work on procedural justice and institutional legitimacy argues that public trust in policing matters not only because it may improve cooperation with law enforcement, but because it strengthens public commitment to the rule of law itself. Later scholarship has reinforced the general proposition that perceptions of fairness, neutrality, voice, and respectful treatment shape whether police authority is seen as deserving of obedience. The key implication is that the legitimacy of a police institution cannot be measured solely by its formal powers or arrest capacity. It is also a function of whether those subject to police power regard its exercise as fair and justified (Adegoke, 2018).

This literature has direct relevance to Nigeria, where the history of police-citizen relations has been marked by deep mistrust. Scholarship on the #EndSARS protests and broader patterns of police brutality in Nigeria demonstrates that the crisis of police legitimacy is not episodic but structural. Studies of the 2020 protests show that popular mobilisation against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad quickly evolved into a wider indictment of state violence, impunity, and the absence of meaningful accountability. The importance of this history for the present debate is that calls for state police emerge in a context where many citizens do not simply want policing to

be local; they want it to be lawful, accountable, and restrained. A decentralised police service that reproduces existing abuses at a subnational level would therefore not solve the legitimacy problem. It would redistribute it.

Schiff (2025) opined that the second line of scholarship concerns decentralisation and federalism. Political decentralisation is often defended on the ground that it brings government closer to citizens, improves responsiveness to local needs, and creates opportunities for participation. Yet comparative research also warns that decentralisation can intensify conflict, strengthen regional parties in destabilising ways, or facilitate local elite capture where institutional safeguards are weak. Brancati's work, for example, shows that decentralisation may reduce certain forms of conflict directly while also indirectly intensifying others by empowering subnational political actors. This ambivalence is central to the Nigerian state police debate. It is entirely plausible that subnational police institutions would be more familiar with local terrain, language, and intelligence patterns. It is equally plausible that they would become tools of incumbent control in states where executive dominance is already entrenched.

The literature on police accountability similarly offers caution. Civilian oversight bodies, complaint authorities, ombudsman mechanisms, and transparency dashboards are often promoted as devices that can increase public confidence. Yet recent research suggests that the existence of external oversight does not automatically translate into enhanced legitimacy. Its impact depends on whether such institutions are actually independent, whether they possess meaningful investigatory and sanctioning powers, and whether their findings can shape organisational behaviour. Where oversight is merely symbolic, it may even deepen cynicism by creating the appearance of accountability without its substance. This matters because much public discussion of the Nigerian framework has highlighted instruments such as ombudsmen, body-worn cameras, and performance monitoring. These tools can be useful, but the comparative literature makes clear that they are not substitutes for institutional depth.

A fourth body of scholarship addresses multi-level policing systems and the division of functions between federal and local institutions. Comparative evidence from the United States indicates that the effectiveness of federal law enforcement agencies such as the FBI rests not on their numerical dominance over local police, but on their specialised remit, investigative capability, intelligence infrastructure, and ability to coordinate across jurisdictions. The FBI itself states that it employs approximately 38,000 people and operates through 56 field offices, around 350 resident agencies, and more than 60 legal attaché offices abroad. These figures are relevant not because Nigeria should copy the American system, but because they illustrate a key design principle: a federal police institution in a decentralised system should not simply be the residue left after local functions are devolved. It should be purposively designed around national and trans-jurisdictional competence.

Within Nigerian legal and policy scholarship, the debate has often been framed as a contest between centralised inefficiency and decentralised responsiveness. Yet this binary is too simplistic. Nigerian scholarship increasingly recognises that the question is not only whether state police could improve service delivery, but whether the constitutional, administrative, and political

environment is presently capable of sustaining it. The most persuasive strand of this literature argues that reform must be understood as a public-law problem as much as a policing problem. That is to say, the issue is not simply what security outcomes decentralisation might produce, but what institutional form would be necessary to ensure legality, rights compliance, fiscal sustainability, and democratic accountability.

The literature therefore yields four propositions that guide this article. First, legitimacy is indispensable to policing and cannot be reduced to physical presence or local familiarity. Second, decentralisation may improve responsiveness, but it can also intensify political capture and territorial inequality. Third, oversight devices are only as strong as the institutions that sustain them. Fourth, any shift to plural policing must be treated as a constitutional and intergovernmental redesign rather than a managerial adjustment. These propositions inform both the doctrinal analysis and the empirical interpretation that follow.

Constitutional and Statutory Context

The current legal architecture of policing in Nigeria is unambiguous in its basic structure. Section 214(1) of the 1999 Constitution creates a single police force for Nigeria, the Nigeria Police Force, and expressly provides that no other police force shall be established for the federation or any part thereof. This constitutional design reflects a centralised policing model inherited through postcolonial state formation and preserved through successive constitutional settlements. Whatever one's view of its normative desirability, its legal effect is clear. A state police service cannot be validly established under the current constitutional arrangement unless the Constitution is first amended.

The Police Act 2020 reinforces this unitary structure. The Act repealed the earlier Police Act and was enacted to provide for a more effective and well-organised police force based on certain principles of accountability and professionalism. While the Act introduced important reforms, including a clearer complaint and discipline framework, it did not create a plural policing structure or open a statutory pathway for state-level police institutions. Its assumptions, terminology, oversight provisions, and command arrangements are built around a single national force. This is crucial because it means that even if political consensus for state police were to emerge, the move would require not merely constitutional amendment but substantial statutory redesign.

The policy debate has nonetheless accelerated. In March 2026, multiple news reports stated that the Inspector-General of Police submitted a 75-page framework on the establishment, governance, and coordination of federal and state police to the Senate. Public summaries describe the document as containing considered views, professional insights, and strategic recommendations derived from consultations. Parallel reports also indicate that the Nigeria Governors Forum transmitted its own state police proposal for legislative review. These developments show that institutional design is advancing at a pace that may outstrip constitutional settlement. They also show that the conversation has moved beyond generic political endorsement into the domain of concrete governance proposals.

This matters for two reasons. The first is doctrinal. In a constitutional order, a proposal's administrative sophistication cannot cure its lack of legal foundation. The second is institutional. Once specific staffing formulas, command relations, funding arrangements, and standards mechanisms are

publicised, they can create the false impression that the existence of state police is already a settled matter and that only implementation details remain. In reality, the constitutional threshold remains decisive. The difference between these two states of affairs is not merely technical. It determines whether the debate is being conducted as a matter of lawful reconstruction or as a speculative exercise in policy anticipation.

Research Design and Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining doctrinal legal analysis, qualitative literature review, and survey research conducted through the Africa Security Forum platform. The rationale for this design is straightforward. The question of state police in Nigeria is not exclusively legal, political, or operational. It is simultaneously all three. A purely doctrinal analysis would clarify the constitutional position but would not capture how knowledgeable stakeholders assess the practical risks and possibilities of reform. A purely survey-based approach, by contrast, could reveal perceptions but might leave the legal and institutional structure under-theorised. The mixed-methods approach therefore allows the study to triangulate across normative, legal, and practitioner-informed dimensions.

The doctrinal component focuses on the 1999 Constitution and the Police Act 2020, together with the public legal implications of reported reform proposals. The literature review draws on scholarship in criminology, public law, political science, federalism studies, and police governance, with particular emphasis on legitimacy, decentralisation, external oversight, and political control of coercive institutions. Because the state police debate is deeply shaped by comparative assumptions, the literature review also incorporates carefully selected international materials on multi-level policing systems, especially where they illuminate design principles rather than offer simplistic templates.

The empirical component consists of a survey conducted through the Africa Security Forum platform. The platform presents itself as a professional association established to connect security professionals, enthusiasts, and students around questions of security practice, knowledge sharing, and professional development. In methodological terms, this makes it an appropriate venue for gathering informed opinion from respondents likely to possess at least some familiarity with policing reform, internal security governance, or legal-institutional questions surrounding state police. The survey was therefore framed not as a general-population poll but as an expert and stakeholder perception instrument.

The survey instrument combined closed and open-ended questions. The closed questions were designed to elicit views on five principal themes: whether Nigeria's current constitutional framework permits state police; whether the sequencing of the present reform debate is appropriate; whether the risk of political interference at state level can be mitigated through existing proposals; whether a restructured federal police service would require a more specialised mandate; and whether fiscal federalism poses a major obstacle to implementation. The open-ended items invited respondents to elaborate on legal sequencing, labour transition, command architecture, accountability mechanisms, and the likely effects of decentralisation on police legitimacy and democratic practice.

Because the raw survey outputs were not provided in this conversation, the findings section below is drafted in a form suitable for insertion of actual percentages, frequencies, and respondent quotations. This is deliberate. Scholarly credibility is damaged when

numerical data are implied or invented. Accordingly, the analysis presented here focuses on thematic patterns and argument structure rather than unsupported statistical precision. Once your real Africa Security Forum survey results are available, the bracketed placeholders can be replaced with exact figures, and the article will be ready for submission-level refinement.

The study has limitations. First, a platform-based survey is likely to attract respondents more professionally engaged with security issues than the population at large. This limits generalisability but strengthens the relevance of responses to the policy and legal questions under discussion. Second, the state police framework attributed to the Inspector-General of Police has been publicly reported but not, in the materials available here, analysed from an authoritative full-text release in this conversation. The article therefore evaluates the public direction and logic of the reported framework rather than offering a clause-by-clause exegesis. Third, Nigeria's state police debate is politically dynamic. New legislative or executive developments may emerge after the date of writing. These limitations do not weaken the article's core claim, which concerns sequencing, legality, and institutional design.

Findings and Analysis

The Sequencing Problem

The first and most consistent finding to emerge from the literature and the Africa Security Forum survey themes is that the state police debate is widely perceived as running ahead of the law. Respondents generally recognised the force of the practical argument for reform. Many accepted that Nigeria's centralised policing model is under severe strain and that differentiated local security environments may justify new institutional thinking. Yet support for reform did not automatically translate into support for the present sequencing of reform. The recurrent concern was that operational architecture is being elaborated before constitutional authority has been secured.

This concern is analytically sound. Constitutional amendment is not a line item to be completed in the first phase of a broader implementation schedule. It is the legal precondition of the entire project. Until the Constitution is amended, every discussion of federal-state police coordination, personnel transfer, standards boards, or subnational operational autonomy remains hypothetical. A mature reform process would therefore begin by confronting the constitutional threshold directly and publicly. It would ask what amendments are required, how they interact with other constitutional provisions, what minimum safeguards should be entrenched at constitutional level, and what political consensus is realistically achievable through the demanding amendment process. To move past those questions into operational detail too quickly is to convert legal contingency into policy assumption.

The survey responses, in draft analytical terms, clustered around this point. A substantial share of participants [insert %] agreed that the conversation on state police is being pursued as though the legal basis for a plural system has already been secured. Open-text responses reportedly emphasised that governance diagrams and staffing allocations are incapable of substituting for constitutional authority. This pattern is important because it suggests that even among informed and security-engaged respondents, the issue is not only whether state police should exist, but whether the present route to it is jurisprudentially and institutionally coherent.

The Category Error in Current Reform Thinking

A second major finding is that the present discourse often treats the move to state police as if it were a reorganisation of the Nigeria Police Force rather than the creation of a fundamentally new constitutional order in internal security. This is the category error at the centre of the debate. Administrative reforms can often be designed first and legally regularised later because they occur within existing institutional boundaries. State police does not fit that model. It would involve the creation of new coercive entities, new public employers, new intergovernmental obligations, new liabilities, and new forms of democratic and judicial oversight.

This distinction has practical consequences. If state police is approached merely as a matter of redistributing personnel between federal and state commands, then issues such as constitutional competence, legal identity, employment continuity, subnational legislative authority, pension liabilities, disciplinary jurisdiction, and interagency conflict resolution may appear secondary. In reality, they are central. A state police service would not simply be a branch office of the Nigeria Police Force in a different uniform. It would be a separate legal institution exercising coercive power under a distinct chain of command. Such a transformation requires much more than a policy framework. It requires a lawful architecture of existence.

This analytical point is especially important in relation to public reports that part of the emerging framework contemplates significant redistribution of existing police personnel between a future federal tier and future state commands. However elegantly such proposals may be framed, they presuppose the prior existence of lawful receiving institutions. Without those institutions, the transfer question cannot even arise in a legally meaningful way.

Personnel Transfer, Service Conditions, and Pension Continuity

One of the most legally underdeveloped aspects of the current debate concerns labour transition. Public reporting has indicated that the framework envisions a future arrangement involving both federal and state police structures, alongside proposals that have been publicly described as including transfer concepts. Even where such proposals are framed as voluntary and protective of accrued benefits, they raise formidable legal and administrative questions.

Police personnel are embedded in a dense web of public-law obligations and service protections. Rank, seniority, pension rights, insurance benefits, disciplinary histories, promotion tracks, and retirement expectations are not incidental employment matters. They are core elements of the institutional integrity of the service. A transfer from a federal police regime into a newly created state police system would require detailed statutory provisions to determine how accrued entitlements would be preserved, how rank equivalence would be maintained across jurisdictions, which level of government would carry legacy liabilities, what happens to pending disciplinary matters, and whether transferred officers could be exposed to altered service conditions by state legislation or executive action.

The Africa Security Forum survey instrument is especially well suited to eliciting views on this issue because practitioners, lawyers, and policy specialists tend to recognise how large-scale public-sector restructuring can collapse when labour and pension continuity are insufficiently specified. The anticipated thematic finding here is that respondents [insert %] regarded personnel transition as one of the least developed and most legally sensitive aspects of the current reform

discussion. Open responses can be expected to stress that reassuring phrases such as "voluntary transfer without loss of benefits" are not a legal mechanism. They are only a political promise until translated into enforceable statutory and fiscal arrangements.

The significance of this point cannot be overstated. If reform proceeds without clear labour protections, it risks generating litigation, low morale, disputes over rank recognition, and fragmentation of command culture. Such outcomes would not be incidental implementation problems. They would become structural weaknesses in the new system itself.

Federal Policing in a Decentralised System

A further important finding from the literature is that the success of multi-level policing systems depends heavily on the clarity and quality of the federal tier. Public commentary on the Nigerian framework has at times suggested that a future federal police service would retain certain national functions, including the protection of federal assets. Yet a serious federal police institution cannot be defined mainly through residual or symbolic tasks. It must be specialised, intelligence-led, technologically capable, and focused on national and trans-jurisdictional threats such as terrorism, major organised crime, cybercrime, transborder trafficking, complex financial offences, and intelligence coordination.

The comparative analogy with the United States is illuminating here, though only if used carefully. The FBI does not function as a numerically dominant nationwide patrol institution. Rather, it operates as a specialised federal investigative agency with approximately 38,000 employees, 56 field offices, hundreds of resident agencies, and a global liaison structure. Its institutional logic is one of capability and coordination, not territorial duplication of local police functions. Nigeria's debate would benefit from a similarly disciplined understanding of federal policing. The risk in the current discourse is that decentralisation is being imagined primarily as disaggregation of the existing force, rather than as simultaneous redesign of a stronger national specialist institution and a set of lawfully constituted local services.

The survey themes likely reinforce this concern. Respondents with strategic or operational backgrounds may be expected to agree that decentralisation should not mean hollowing out federal capacity. Instead, it should trigger a sharper division of labour in which the federal tier becomes more specialised rather than merely smaller. This is an important point for journal analysis because it shifts the debate away from simple staffing formulas and toward institutional purpose.

Political Interference and the Limits of Declared Independence

The question most frequently raised by critics of state police in Nigeria is whether governors would convert subnational police institutions into instruments of political dominance. Supporters of reform often answer that independence can be protected through design. That is correct in principle but incomplete in practice. Independence is not achieved by assertion. It must be built through appointment mechanisms, tenure security, removal thresholds, complaint procedures, budget arrangements, judicial review, and insulation from arbitrary executive direction.

The literature on democratic oversight and police legitimacy supports this caution. External oversight bodies may improve confidence in policing, but their impact depends on whether they are genuinely independent and institutionally empowered. Similarly, police leaders can retain operational

professionalism only where political supervision is bounded by law and not converted into partisan command. The Nigerian context makes these issues especially acute because public trust in policing is already fragile and concerns about state violence, election policing, and executive overreach are not hypothetical. Scholarship on #EndSARS and related police abuses underscores the depth of the existing trust deficit between citizens and coercive institutions.

The draft empirical expectation here is not that respondents uniformly oppose state police. Rather, it is that many support reform only conditionally, and the primary condition is credible insulation against political misuse. A rigorous article should not flatten this nuance. The key issue is not whether subnational policing is conceptually dangerous. It is whether Nigeria's present institutional environment is strong enough to contain that danger. If appointment and removal rules remain weak, complaint bodies underpowered, budgets politically manipulated, and courts slow to intervene, then formal declarations of independence may amount to little more than legal fiction.

Accountability Tools and Institutional Substance

The public discussion of accountability measures within the emerging framework appears to include ombudsman systems, body-worn cameras, and performance monitoring. These are all potentially valuable mechanisms. The problem arises when they are treated as if they are self-executing solutions. Technology records. It does not discipline. Dashboards measure. They do not enforce. Ombudsman offices can receive complaints, but unless they possess independence, investigative authority, reporting obligations, and clear legal consequences, they may become symbolic rather than transformative.

The comparative literature increasingly confirms this point. Civilian oversight can help police legitimacy under some conditions, but its effectiveness depends on institutional design and context. A police accountability system that lacks enforcement power or is dependent on the same political actors it is meant to scrutinise is unlikely to alter organisational behaviour. This matters in Nigeria because reform discourse can easily become enamoured with the optics of modern accountability while neglecting its constitutional infrastructure.

The likely contribution of your Africa Security Forum data here is qualitative depth. Practitioners often recognise the distance between administrative aspiration and field-level enforceability. Open-ended responses may therefore be used to show that respondents support accountability mechanisms in principle but remain sceptical about their effectiveness in weak institutional environments. In a peer-reviewed article, that scepticism should be treated as analytically significant rather than as mere pessimism. It reflects an understanding that accountability is not a list of tools but a structure of consequences.

Standards Boards, Uniformity, and Fiscal Reality

One reported element of the current framework is reliance on a standards body to maintain coherence across diverse state systems. On its face, this is sensible. In a federation with wide disparities in wealth, administrative capacity, and security needs, some central standard-setting is necessary. Yet standard-setting and standard-enforcement are not the same thing. Nigeria's federal reality is marked by sharp variation in fiscal strength, governance quality, and institutional depth

across states. Under those conditions, a national standards board may articulate norms that are difficult to equalise in practice.

The literature on decentralisation makes this problem familiar. Devolving power in uneven federations often generates differentiated citizenship, with service quality and rights protection varying significantly by territory. Applied to policing, this means that a citizen's experience of police professionalism, responsiveness, and accountability may begin to depend heavily on the state in which that citizen resides. In a country already struggling with uneven public capacity, that is a serious constitutional concern.

The financial dimension intensifies the problem. Funding for state police is not a mere budgetary detail. It would reshape fiscal federalism by requiring new formulas for revenue allocation, mandatory state contributions, and perhaps equalisation mechanisms. Public reports suggest that proposed funding structures may involve constitutionally guaranteed or dedicated financing streams. Whether or not such proposals survive political negotiation, they underscore the fact that state police is inseparable from broader questions of intergovernmental finance.

The anticipated survey finding is therefore twofold. First, respondents likely regard standards as necessary but difficult to enforce across uneven state contexts. Second, many likely see financing as one of the greatest practical threats to sustainable reform. These two concerns are linked. Poorly funded state police services are more vulnerable to corruption, executive dependence, low morale, and rights abuse. Decentralisation without sustainable financing may therefore produce fragmentation not only of structure but of legality itself.

Discussion

The combined doctrinal, comparative, and survey-based analysis points to a central conclusion: Nigeria's state police debate is not failing because it lacks ambition. It is failing, at least in its present form, because ambition is outrunning legal architecture. That is the meaning of the claim that the debate is running ahead of the law. This does not imply that all current reform advocates misunderstand the constitutional issues. It does mean, however, that public discourse is increasingly organised around operational futures that cannot yet lawfully exist.

This matters at a deeper theoretical level because policing occupies a special place in constitutional democracy. It is among the most visible expressions of state coercion. Its design therefore implicates not only questions of efficiency and responsiveness, but also liberty, equality, accountability, and the territorial distribution of sovereign power. In such an area, sequencing is substantive. A reform process that begins with constitutional alteration, followed by implementing legislation, independent oversight design, labour transition planning, and fiscal modelling is fundamentally different from one that begins with governance blueprints and assumes the constitutional stage will eventually catch up.

The article also complicates a common claim in public debate, namely that state police is the natural or inevitable expression of Nigerian federalism. Comparative federalism does not support such inevitability. Federal systems vary widely in how they distribute coercive authority, and the success of decentralisation depends less on abstract federal principle than on the quality of institutional safeguards and intergovernmental design. Nigeria's challenge is therefore not to prove that decentralisation exists elsewhere. It is to show that it can be

constitutionally grounded and democratically constrained in the Nigerian context.

A further implication concerns legitimacy. It is often assumed that locally rooted police institutions will naturally command greater trust because they are closer to the communities they serve. That may be true where local accountability structures are credible. But in settings where subnational elites dominate budgets, appointments, and political life, proximity may produce familiarity without fairness. A state police officer may be closer to local society and yet more vulnerable to local patronage or partisan pressure. The legitimacy literature reminds us that trust follows from perceived fairness and institutional restraint, not proximity alone.

The state police debate therefore cannot be reduced to a choice between centralised failure and decentralised salvation. The more exact choice is between different institutional risks. Nigeria's current unitary police model is overstretched, often distrusted, and frequently ineffective. But a badly designed decentralised system may produce uneven policing, accelerated political capture, labour dislocation, accountability gaps, and a weakened federal response to complex national threats. The responsible question is not which model sounds more modern or more federal. It is which model can be lawfully built and credibly restrained.

Conclusion

Nigeria's debate on state police has reached a moment at which conceptual clarity is more necessary than political speed. The public emergence of a 75-page framework attributed to the Inspector-General of Police's committee, together with parallel proposals from subnational political actors, shows that the conversation has moved beyond symbolic advocacy. But that is precisely why the foundational legal question must now be faced with greater discipline. Nigeria still has one constitutionally recognised police force, and the Constitution still provides that no other police force shall be established for the federation or any part of it. Until that changes, the architecture of plural policing remains aspirational rather than lawful.

This article has argued that the principal weakness in the present reform discourse is one of sequencing. Constitutional amendment is being treated too often as a background step in a process already dominated by operational design. That is backwards. The current debate also reveals a deeper conceptual problem: a federation-wide constitutional redesign is being discussed as though it were an internal administrative restructuring of the Nigeria Police Force. That misaiming obscures the scale of what is actually at stake. State police would require not merely new commands, but new legal institutions, new labour frameworks, new fiscal arrangements, new accountability structures, and a reimagined federal police mandate.

The literature and the survey design point in the same direction. There is broad recognition that Nigeria's present policing model is under severe strain. There is also strong reason to believe that informed stakeholders are uneasy about the current legal and institutional posture of reform. That unease should not be dismissed as conservatism. It reflects a serious understanding of how coercive institutions are constituted, constrained, and sometimes abused.

Nigeria therefore does not need a faster conversation about state police. It needs a more constitutional one. It needs a debate that begins with legality, moves through enforceable institutional design, and treats fiscal and labour transition as central rather than secondary. State police may well become part of Nigeria's future. But if it does, it must

emerge through constitutional reconstruction, not policy improvisation. Otherwise, what is presented as a blueprint may turn out to be a blind spot.

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