Research Article

DECENTRALISATION OF SECURITY SYSTEM AS KEY TO DE-ESCALATION OF CRIMES AND CRIMINALITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria's security system has been centralized across different and successive governments and administrations, military and democratic regimes. However, there has been advocacy from various angles; a call to migrate to decentralized security system. The paper explored the need for this call to decentralization as a sure way of combating criminal activities. It adopted a mix of conceptual review and thematic analysis as its methodology. For its theoretical framework, the paper adopted the Social Disorganization Theory. The theory is applicable to this study, as it explores the role that individual communities play in dealing with crimes in their own peculiar ways. The paper relied on the works of other researchers, viewing and analysing their perspectives on the subject matter. It was discovered that criminal activities thrive simply because of the complex structure of the security system of the nation. The paper concludes that decentralization of the security system is very necessary if crime must be tackled from the grassroots. It is recommended that the federal system should begin the process of devolution of power, in the case of security system, and thus empower each state governor to tackle crimes that are peculiar to them.

Keywords: Decentralisation, De-escalation, Crimes and Criminality.

INTRODUCTION

The high rate of crime in Nigeria in recent times is creating a cause for alarm. It can be agreed that the rate keeps escalating as the figures of crime reported increases on a daily basis. The evidence of this is being featured in daily news, appearing in different forms of crime such as cyber-crime, car theft, armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, burglary, and several other social crimes (Ibrahim, 2019; The Punch, 2019). Tragically, the youths are the ones being recruited to carry out criminal activities. They have become militant groups as witnessed in the South-South region of Nigeria. Some religious extremist groups such as Boko Haram are in constant recruitment of youths in order to train and arm them, after which they are deployed to inflict violence on citizens. (Ajide, Ajisafe and Bankefa 2018; Fasakin, 2015; Iyekekpolo, 2018). For terrorists whose aim is to cause damage on lives and properties of citizens, crime seems to be a major weapon and an avenue for generating funds. This is because numerous groups and people have participated in robberies and kidnappings that resulted in the payment of ransoms, which have been utilized to commit crimes in the country (Munir, Asghar and Rehman, 2017). Apart from the recruitment of youths by terrorists and organised crime groups, Nigeria is known for having high rates of inflation and youth unemployment, which have had an impact on the nation's security in terms of citizens, enterprises, and the standard of institutions (Ajide, 2019). The research of Igbinedion and Ebomoyi (2017) divulges that inflation and unemployment directly affect the rate of crime and criminal activities. While this present study unravels more on the status quo, it deviates slightly from existing studies in a number of ways, focusing on the effectiveness of the Nigerian security system, as a decentralized system, in de-escalating crime and criminal activities.

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Combating the issue of crime and criminality is one of the major responsibilities of the security system, even though it is tasked with other aspects of society. The police force, which is a branch of the security system, isauthorised by the State to protect lives and property, enforce laws and order, condense civil disorder, detect and avert crime; and arrest offenders of laws (Alpert & Dunham, 2004). The centralization of the security system across the country has, however, not been as effective as it ought to, as criminals now develop new and novel forms of carrying out their activities. As a result, the debate of decentralizing the security system, and state policing, has generated much attention. It is anticipated that Nigeria's decentralized and expanded security system will adequately contain the developing societal ill of increased crime and violence. In order to complement the existing federal government-controlled Nigeria Police Force, for instance, the ambition for an expanded police system will resultin the establishment of state and local government police organizations in Nigeria. In an effort to permanently fix the nation's inadequate security framework, Nigeria's upper lawmakers submitted a measure for the establishment of a state police.The Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF) offers certain policy recommendations for the federal government as a remedy. The governors take their cues from the global uneasiness brought up by socioeconomic and political disadvantages (Innocent and Ogbochie, 2014).In a bid to put decentralization of security system in place, some of the regions have established their own peculiar security system and deployed it into its region. For instance, the south-west region deployed the "Amotekun", "ObubeAgu" was established in the south-east, and so was the "BRACED" in the south-south. The other regions have formulated, or are in the process of formulating their own peculiar security system in a bid to combat the local crimes bedevilling the region. This paper takes into account the huge population of Nigeria, and the diversity of its people, and thus encourages the decentralisation of the security system.

Conceptual Discourse

Security

Security is basically freedom from fear. According to Ball (2019) security means the yearning for protection and defence. Drawing from this, security therefore implies that threat to the lives and well-being of people is eradicated. Osawe (2015) asserted that security is liberty from fear, danger, and anxiety. Afolabi (2015) meanwhile described security as the sensation of being free from fear, harm, oppression, poverty, danger, and the protection of one's values from such threats. Jore (2019) defined security as the sense of being safe and secured, as well as being freed from fear and at the same time adequately managing future risks. Degaut (2015) and Stone (2020) observed that security is about the quest for liberty from threat as well as the ability of a country and societies to uphold their independent identity and functional integrity against forces of change, and anything that is considered to be hostile. The dimensions of security as identified by Moller (2000) includes political security, societal security, economic security and environmental security. The political dimension of security, according to him, refers to both the relationship between the state and its citizens as well as the political facets of foreign relations. Societal dimension of security, he defined to be the survival and persistence of the people in relation to their well-being. He further elaborated that economic dimension of security is considered as the financial management and immunity to economic hazards. Addressing the issue of environmental deterioration, which poses a risk to human survival and well-being and can shorten life expectancy, increase new-born mortality, and worsen overall health conditions, is referred to as environmental security. For the protection and preservation of persons, all of the security factors mentioned above are crucial. Olonisakin (2020) observed that the use of weapons by warlords, ethnic insurgents, and personal security groups rather than the formal armed forces, the pervasive propagation of small arms and light weapons, the enormous trafficking, kidnapping, and recruitment of children and teens for use in violent conflict, whose total deterrence and demobilization is often a challenge, and complex humanitarian crisis, including displacing millions of people, are among the factors posing security concerns in Nigeria.

State Security/Policing

State security denotes a security system in a federal structure that the state government, operating independently and though is in a federal structure, is not controlled by the federal government, but rather by the state government. According to Aremu (2014) "state police is territorial policing which has a subnational form of policing in which there is devolution of security operations in the hands of the federating states or regions." Okaiyeto (2021) observes that "state policing operationally is when policing and all its operations and logistics are controlled by other governments other than the national or federal government." He expanded on this by further adding that:

"Because of the poor performance of federal government in catering for the police, frequent support is being rendered to the federal police at state commands by state government. Thus, it seems irrational for state governors, as the chief security officer of it state not to have control over the police system they are spending a lot of state resources in assistance." As a result, Innocent & Ogbochie (2014) critique that a number of explanations have been offered for the country's trend of increasing insecurity as well as the poor state of the police. Other security systems, such vigilante organizations, have been established by state governments to carry out various police-related duties. Yet, antagonists believe that this idea is a first step to subtly developing state security. However, a course of concern that had not been taken into consideration by opposition is why, in the first place, states and communities had to establish peculiar security as vigilante if the centralized system of security is really effective. The simple message of this idea is that the federal controlled security system is no more meeting the care of the people.

Crime and Criminality

Crime, according to Adebayo (2013), is a threat to the fabric of society. It causes unneeded suffering, agony, loss of lives, and damage to properties while instilling dread in the population. The safety and stability of society are also at risk. Wilson (2015) observed that crime is a social fact, a dangerous phenomenon in any city, region, or nation. Crime is an act that is in contradiction to the law and is considered as unacceptable immoral act. Osawe (2015) defined crime as an unlawful conduct; unlawful activity that entails breaking the law; immoral action that is considered inappropriate; and an act that is humiliating, imprudent, and regrettable. According to Adebayo (2013), crime is a breach of the social norms that all members of society are expected to uphold. As a result, the rest of society punishes the violators. When crimes are committed, society suffers the repercussions. Muhammad (2008) listed the dysfunctional family structures, social environments, and economic conditions as the reasons for crime. According to him, the economic scenario includes poverty and inequality, which may make it difficult for a father to send his kids to school, giving those kids a chance to spend most of their time on the streets and develop criminal thoughts. Douglason (2009) pointed out that there are several costs associated with crime for both society and the economy, including lost wages, property damage, decreased local productivity, etc. Psychological impact on victims and their family and friends, pain and suffering, and a worse quality of life are among other less obvious costs of crime. The greatest expense in all of these and other related losses is the loss of life. As a social phenomenon, crime is motivated by a number of factors that have their roots in community norms. It frequently results from societal social determinants that have not been addressed. These social forces cause large rises in societal crime rates when they are not appropriately recognized or addressed. The result is a society that is unsafe for its citizens and is in disarray and anarchy. Farbod, Kamal and Maulan (2017) cited that these social forces include peer groups, social media, peer status, education, religion, and belief systems. Skogan (2015) contends that social forces can most effectively combat crime if they are properly harnessed, which calls for, according to Skogan (2008) focusing resources on preventing disorder, social nuisance, and minor offenses like vandalism, drinking in public, loitering, rowdiness, and disorderly behaviour as well as upgrading dilapidated physical structures in urban areas.

METHODOLOGY

A combination of conceptual review, theme analysis, and theoretical presentation make up the methodology used. The

methodology heavily leaned on qualitative data gathered from secondary sources like journals, official websites, and written works. Every piece of information gathered for this study is pertinent to it. Content analysis was performed to sort through the large amount of data collected in order to determine the originality of the study. This made the study more credible and reliable.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Social Disorganization Theory as its theoretical underpinning. Past research carried out within this approach reinforced environmental explanations of criminality, however, they could not offer a fundamental theory that contributed to the explanation of these results. Instead, the results were often used to opine the lack of morality in specific population groups or ethnicities (Shoemaker,1996).The Chicago School of Sociology developed the social disorganization theory in the early 1920s, which is the belief that existing social norms of behaviour are losing their power to affect people inside a group. Fundamentally, social disorganization is the outcome of a society's failure to uphold shared ideals and address the issues faced by its members, which leads to the breakdown of effective social control in that group (Shaw and McKay, 2002).According to this notion, delinquency was not a result of an individual's actions, but rather was thought to be a typical reaction of normal people to aberrant societal circumstances. Due to the unrestricted freedom that people had to express their attitudes and aspirations, there was a consequent indirect loss in the capacity to act communally, which frequently led to criminal behavior (Short, 1972). Social disorganization as an explanation for variances in crime is the growth of selfishness, swift societal change, and the dysfunctional or dysregulation factors that followed (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918). In fact, Sutherland (1939) emphasizes how industrialization and urbanization have an impact on people's experiences and are marked by inconsistency and conflict. Faris (1948) advanced this fundamental argument by explaining crime trends as "social diseases" related to the deterioration of relationships and referring to it as the bond communities. In the same vein, Bursik (1988) shows that crime leads to greater social organization breakdown.

Due to its operational definition and underlying presumptions, Shaw and McKay's social disorganization theory, which focuses on how neighbourhood structures, social control, and crime interact, is now one of the most commonly evaluated and challenged theories since its development in the field of criminology (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). It is crucial to highlight that, like with all theoretical methods, social disorganization has long been criticized as a possible explanation for variances in crime. Cohen (1955) said that the theory explains why crime exists as a result of the lack of restraints. He adds that while a lack of strong community ties may result in high crime rates, this does not fully address the problem of impulsivity or agency as it relates to person offending variations. Cohen also makes the point that there will surely be a sizable portion of the local community that is opposed to the practices that are thought to be associated with social disorder in any of these high-crime locations. Despite these criticisms, it is evident that social disorganization theory has provided us with a long-lasting ecological explanation for variances in crime. While this is settled, the theory also explains why society finds it difficult in fighting against and

conquering crime. The theory is therefore applicable to this study, as it explores the role that each community play in dealing with crimes in their own peculiar ways. This therefore, calls for the decentralization of the security system, requiring the federal government to relinquish the appropriate power to states and communities to combat crime in their peculiar ways.

Decentralised Police System During the Colonial Rule

The Northern Nigeria police formation, known as the Royal Niger Constabulary, was founded for the Northern region in 1886 with its headquarters located in Lokoja. This illustrated the decentralizing mindset of the British colonial administration towards police activities in Nigeria. The Northern Nigeria protectorate was, however, established in 1900, leading to the dissolution of the Northern Royal Niger Constabulary. In order to safeguard the safety of people, property, and the enforcement of the law, the Northern Nigeria police force was established. The Niger Coast Constabulary, with its main office in Calabar, was founded by the colonial government in 1894 for the southern region of Nigeria. This particular constabulary assumed control of the policing responsibilities in Nigeria's Eastern and current South-South regions. The Niger Coast Constabulary and the Lagos Police force were amalgamated into the Southern Nigeria Police Force in 1906 after the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria was declared in 1900. Notedly, both the Northern Nigeria Police Force and that of the Southern Nigeria Police were independently governed at the time the Northern and Southern protectorates were combined in 1914, demonstrating the regional decentralization of the police activities in Nigeria. The Northern and Southern police forces were not combined until April 1, 1930, creating the current Nigeria Police Force under a single command (Ugwu, Ngige & Ugwuanyi, 2013). Despite the 1930 alliance of the police forces from the Northern and Southern protectorates and their constitutionalizing into a Federal Police Force with municipal commands in the 1954 Lytteton constitution, the colonial administrative regulations in Nigeria never forbade the execution of a decentralized policing system. As Adefi (2010:214) rightly noted, there existed "multiple police systems existing with the Nigeria Police Force, including the local government authority police and the Native Authority Police of the Western and Northern regions respectively."

Owemena (2006) maintains even among the participants in the 1958 Willinks Commission and 1958 Nigerian Constitutional Conference in London, the decentralized nature of police operations in Nigeria persisted. The outcomes of these Willinks Commission discussions and those of the 1958 Constitutional Conference influenced the establishment and operation of regional, local government, and native authority systems of police operations in Nigeria in the 1960 Independence Constitution and the 1963 Republican constitution. In identifying the 1960 and 1963 constitutional provision for decentralized policing system in Nigeria, Olowokere *et al.,* (2011) commented that:

"Section 105(7) of the 1963 Republican constitution permitted the legislature of a region to make provision for the maintenance by any authority or local government authority established for a province or a part of a province, a police force for employment within the province. This made it possible for the northern and western regional governments under the constitution to retain and expand the local police forces

established and maintained by some of their native authorities, under the Native Authority ordinance of 1943. For example, the local government police law 1959 of the Western Region confirmed existing police forces in the region." From the above analysis, it could be deduced that the constitution gave the three main regions of Nigeria, along with their local governments and native authority systems, the right to create their own police forces appropriate to their unique conditions and environments. Although the East region did not make use of this constitutional provision, it is important to note that it existed along with decentralized operational processes in Nigeria until the military coup led by Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi on January 15, 1966.

During the brief Ironsi administration, the Working Party on Nigeria Police, Local Government, Native Authority, and Prisons was established with the purpose of determining whether Nigeria's decentralized police forces and regionalized jail system could be combined (Ugwu *et al.*, 2013). Ironsi's administration however, didn't last enough to receive the feedback. The Working party, as a result, presented its recommendation to the following administration, which was that of Yakubu Gowon. From the recommendation, the regional and local police system was disbanded, leading to the formulation of a federal police system, under the sole control of the federal government.

Combating Crime Through the Adoption of Decentralized Security System

Since the decentralized system of police system was abolished, and the centralized system adopted, there has been several debates and arguments as to why the decentralized system should be restored. One principal reason is the rate and peculiarity that each state and region experience. However, the party arguing against the notion have brought tangible reasons for the discouragement of the decentralized security system. For instance, Nwabueze (2009) observed that during Ironsi's administration, the local police in these two regions of Northern and Western Nigeria, where they operated, were transformed into local arms of the parties in power, becoming ready tools for the oppression, suppression, intimate, and harassment of political opponents and barely distinguishable from the political party tugs in the North.

There is fear that if the police system is decentralized, some overly ambitious governors and power-crazed politicians may resort to abuse, particularly towards imagined and actual political rivals and enemies. For instance, Orifowoma and Taiwo (2020) chronicled the abuse of the federal police force in 2003 by Gbenga Daniel, a former governor of Ogun State, who directed the closure of the House of Assembly based on flimsy disagreements with the leadership of the House of Assembly. In line with this, the antagonists to decentralization of the system argue that state governors may repeat the mistakes of their predecessors by using the state police force as personal property, intimidating other political opponents, and toppling anyone they choose, as was the case with practically every LGA's local government chairman. Should there be a dispute, the governors may use the state police forces for less ethical tasks like manipulating the results of elections, intimidating political opponents, and other strange tasks like annihilating competing ethnic groups. Crime, however, thrived outside of the veil of the reasons outlined for the fear of decentralization. Ugwu *et al.* (2013) observed that Nigeria is

plagued by a number of crimes, including terrorism from the Boko Haram Islamic group, kidnapping, child trafficking, Niger Delta Avengers, and other associated crimes like banditry that were not previously known to the public, particularly in the early 1960s and 1970s. They pointed out that the majority of these crimes are primarily committed in rural regions, hence it is important to have proper security oversight to curtail or, if feasible, eradicate them.

Agwanwo (2014) puts it in perspective when he noted that in a federal organization, the term "state police" refers to the policing apparatus that the state government creates for the purpose of policing the state. Ugwu *et al.* (2013) likened Nigeria state governors an army commander with jurisdiction but without troops. What this essentially mean is that the escalation of crime will blossom. This has, of course, been taken place already in several parts of the country. In the East for instance, there are several organized crime groups that constantly terrorize travellers, robbing them of all their belongings. Likewise in the North, travellers are often kidnapped, after which the kidnappers would have to negotiate with the government, demanding huge sums of money as ransom.

Depending on the current status of security, a country may have implemented a state security system or a decentralized police force. To put it mildly, Nigeria falls into this circumstance (that is, decentralized security system) to checkmate the ongoing insecurity wreaking havoc on the polity due to its heterogeneous population, various cultures, and languages. In the opinion of Anyadike and Eme (2021) which fascinated the backing of many, the establishment of a state police organization would also be a significant step towards the nation's long-desired real federalism, which has eluded the country for a very long time.

The proponents of a decentralized police force claim that the single Nigerian police force is overly politicized, underfunded, unmotivated, unequipped, poorly trained, corrupt, abusive, and completely alienated from the local community. They also blame the force for rampant insecurity and pervasive lawlessness, kidnapping, armed robberies, political assassinations, communal conflicts, ritual murders, crude oil theft in the Niger Delta, and sectorial insurgency in the North. As a result, they advocate for a multi-tiered decentralized policing framework with distinct national, state, local, and community police organizations to address the many levels of policing needs (Amucheazi & Ekweremadu, 2015). Putting in consideration the fact that most of the crime escalating do so in local communities. It would be easier then if the security system combating such crime is from the locale, as the officers would not only be familiar with the territory, but understand the thinking pattern of the criminals involved.

Conclusion

The fight against crime and criminal activities have been a long haul in Nigeria. Before and during the period of the colonial regime, Nigeria security system operates under the regional system, with both the North and South having its own peculiar security system. However, the first coup which ushered in the first miliary government administration of Aguyi Ironsi began the process of centralizing the security system, an idea that came into full flesh under the administration of Yakubu Gowon. Since then, the centralized

system has been in use. While it has its numerous advantages, it also has its plenty disadvantages, which is the reason for the clamouring that the system be decentralized. Criminals have taken advantage of the opportunity of the centralized system to escalate their operations, gaining territories beyond what the system can easily step into. Several debates have gone up as to either why the security system, the police especially, should or should not be adopted. The popular point of argument being that state governors may decide to use the security system for their own personal gain, isn't justifiable enough. After all, it is the same circle of people who often ends up becoming the president, and by implication become the commander of the armed forces. Couldn't the person at that point use that tremendous power for personal interest? To put in perspective, it is dangerous to put such tremendous power on the shoulder of just one person. The need to decentralize the security system is absolutely necessary, as this is one way to the process of completely defeating criminal activities across the country.

Recommendation

The research into the subject of the decentralization of Nigerian security system in order to de-escalate the rate of crime is of utmost relevance. In regards to this, the following recommendations are made:

1. The federal government should carefully and critically consider the current trends of criminal activities. This would reveal the myriad of needs for the decentralization of the security system, whose process should then be put in place.
2. Each state governor should agree on how the proceedings of the decentralization should be and make the petition known to the federal government.
3. Decentralizing the security system would mean an amendment in the constitution since it recognizes just the federal security system. This may be a rigorous process, but one that is worth it.
4. There should be laid out plans by each state governor on how precisely the state security system would function and do so effectively.

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