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Intelligence Information And Policing In Nigeria: Issues And Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

Recent trends in community-based violent crimes have exposed the shortcomings of the Nigerian police in security operations and intelligence gathering, particularly in preventing criminal and deviant activities before they escalate. Contributing factors include inadequate capacity building and the state's failure to make qualitative investments in modern policing strategies that reflect the country's socio-cultural realities. Likewise, investment in police intelligence has been grossly neglected, unlike in the pre-colonial era when it was given more attention. This paper explores the Nigerian police and their policing strategies, with particular focus on intelligence gathering since independence. The study is anchored on systems theory, which emphasizes the survival and efficiency of various subunits in sustaining societal order. Findings indicate that despite the introduction of modern and community policing trainings, policing practices in Nigeria remain largely combative and reactive rather than preventive and proactive. Furthermore, investment in policing has steadily declined, contributing significantly to the persistent breakdown of law and order in major urban centers. The paper, therefore, recommends, among other things, the adoption of true federalism in Nigeria's policing structure, drawing lessons from the American model of decentralized policing.

Keywords: intelligence gathering, policing strategies

INTRODUCTION

The protection of life and property is a fundamental human right guaranteed by the Nigerian Constitution. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, successive administrations have attempted to improve security. However, persistent poverty, widening income inequality, high unemployment, rural–urban migration, and the erosion of societal values manifesting in business fraud, drug abuse, and community unrest have continued to heighten insecurity across the country. Institutions mandated to safeguard citizens remain hampered by inadequate manpower, poor training, underfunding, obsolete equipment, and in some cases, a lack of commitment and orientation among operatives. A fragile economy only worsens the situation (Otubu & Coker, 2006). In response, government has introduced a range of measures, such as establishing the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), implementing the Justice Kayode Esho Commission of Inquiry's recommendations, strengthening agencies like NAFDAC, and boosting police manpower, equipment, and mobility. Yet, these efforts fall short of delivering the level of security and justice Nigerians expect. Several laws, including the Police Act, empower the police to maintain internal security. Section 4 of the Act specifically mandates the police to prevent and detect crime, apprehend offenders, preserve law and order, protect life and property, and enforce all laws within their jurisdiction.

While these provisions outline police duties, they remain largely silent on the specific modalities of intelligence gathering. This paper therefore examines policing strategies in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on intelligence and information gathering since independence. Following this introduction, the paper explores the concept of crime prevention and its relationship to crime detection, highlighting police strategies and practices under the Police Act. It also considers the role of community participation in crime prevention before drawing conclusions and recommendations.

Policing in Nigeria

Unlike Western countries where policing is narrowly defined, policing in Africa is more complex, often extending beyond formal law enforcement institutions. In Nigeria, policing involves not only the Nigeria Police Force but also the military (sometimes deployed for internal security), several paramilitary agencies, palace guards, quasi-official state outfits, and even informal vigilante groups. Examples include the Bakassi Boys and the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), which in some cases have been equipped or supported by state authorities (Heap, 2000; Ismail, 2008). This blurring of lines makes it difficult to distinguish between policing and military operations—for instance, Lagos State's "Operation Sweep" in the 1990s, described as an anti-crime initiative but executed with heavy military involvement. Despite these variations, the purpose of policing in Nigeria has remained largely consistent over the years, positioning the country as a case study for Security Sector Reform (SSR).

The Purpose of Policing in Nigeria

Nigeria provides a useful context for examining the role of policing in SSR, particularly regarding its interactions with other security actors. Post-colonial experience across Africa shows that police forces do not evolve linearly toward Western models of accountability and professionalism. Instead, they adapt to political changes, regime demands, and socio-political pressures. Historical legacies, political ambitions, institutional resilience, and state interests have shaped African police institutions more profoundly than donor-driven reforms (Hills, 2001). Since the mid-1970s, Nigeria has experienced what criminologists describe as a "crime problem" (Odekunle, 2005), where crime levels escalated from tolerable to pathological, becoming a social problem requiring coordinated efforts from the police, the government, and communities. Preventing crime is therefore both difficult and resource-intensive. Police officers must combine intelligence, courage, and dedication with institutional support in manpower, logistics, and funding.

Policing Strategies in Nigeria

(a) Beat Patrols: A beat refers to the area assigned to a police officer or team for patrol during a duty shift. Beats vary in size and significance depending on population density, crime rates, or the importance of particular establishments. In rural areas, they may cover villages or border stretches, while in urban centers, they may be limited to a few streets. Officers may patrol on foot, bicycles, horseback, vehicles, or with dogs (though the latter has largely disappeared since independence). The primary aim is deterrence: by dispersing officers across communities, opportunities for crime are reduced, and offenders are more likely to be caught in the act. Historically, beat patrols were supported by policies such as posting Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) to their home localities, which enhanced local knowledge and accountability. However, challenges such as corruption, nepotism, ethnic bias, and poor infrastructure weakened the system. Despite these issues, technologies such as GSM phones have strengthened communication, improving the effectiveness of beat patrols.

(b) Anti-Vice Squads: These units operate covertly, monitoring locations such as markets, motor parks, and entertainment spots known for crimes like gambling, prostitution, theft, and drug trafficking. Their role is to gather intelligence and prevent crime proactively or, when necessary, arrest offenders during the act. While sometimes successful in raiding criminal hideouts, the system is costly, unsustainable in the long term, and vulnerable to abuse by overzealous officers. Overreliance also reinforces a reactive, "fire-brigade" approach to policing.

(c) Stop, Detain, and Search: Under Section 25 of the Police Act, officers are empowered to stop, detain, and search individuals reasonably suspected of possessing stolen property or items linked to crime. When applied diligently, this tool significantly aids both crime detection and prevention.

(d) Specie Escorts: The police provide armed escorts for the movement of cash, valuables, and explosives. While government agencies receive this service free of charge, private organizations and individuals pay fees.

(e) Static Guards: This system, rooted in colonial and early post-independence policing, involves stationing officers at key public institutions or facilities to monitor movement and deter crime. Though increasingly replaced by modern surveillance technologies such as CCTV, static guarding remains common at critical installations, such as NNPC pipelines, where vandalism has been widespread (Ikelegbe, 2005; Ahmed, 2006; Ikporupo, 2007).

(f) National (Internal) Security: In collaboration with other state security agencies, the Nigerian Police Force provides surveillance on individuals and groups deemed potential threats, with the goal of preventing sabotage and subversion of the state and its institutions. Despite these efforts, internal security outcomes have been described as disappointing. Over the years, both prominent and ordinary citizens have lost their lives in unresolved violent crimes, underscoring the deficiencies of investigation and intelligence-gathering within the Force. High-profile cases that remain unsolved include the assassination of Chief Bola Ige, former Minister of Justice (2001, Ibadan), the killing of Barrister and Mrs. Igwe (2002, Onitsha), the murder of Alhaji Isiaku Muhammed (2002, Kano), Sir Theodore Agwatu (2003, Owerri), Chief Ogbonna Uche (2003), and Dr. Harry Marshall (2003), among others. Such unresolved cases have severely damaged the image of the police and contributed to the public's reluctance to share information with law enforcement (Olujinmi, 2004; Bruce & Neild, 2004). Given that effective crime prevention, detection, and prosecution cannot be achieved without community cooperation, this mistrust remains a critical challenge. Odekunle (2004) identifies four key benchmarks for assessing policing effectiveness:

- **Effectiveness**: reduction in victimization, higher clearance rates, improved recovery of stolen property, increased conviction rates, fewer traffic accidents, and faster response times.
- **Responsiveness**: improved citizen perception of safety, higher satisfaction with police services, and greater approval of officer conduct in terms of honesty, fairness, and courtesy.
- **Equity**: equal provision of protection across all segments of the population.
- **Efficiency**: effective cost–benefit balance between policing inputs (financial, human, material) and outcomes.

By these measures, policing in Nigeria has steadily declined since independence, particularly in the area of intelligence and information gathering.

Community Responsibility for Crime Prevention

Public hostility and indifference remain major obstacles to policing in Nigeria. Citizens often hold very high expectations of the police, yet fail to recognize the institutional limitations that hamper law enforcement. While the police leadership acknowledges the urgent need for reforms, they also stress that without public cooperation, policing efforts cannot succeed.

Unfortunately, many citizens fail to appreciate that law enforcement is a shared responsibility. Witnesses to crimes frequently choose silence rather than fulfilling their civic, and sometimes legal, duty to provide information. Criticisms of the police—such as corruption, excessive use of force, inefficiency, unnecessary delays, and harassment of the public—have further damaged police–community relations.

Nonetheless, individuals and communities have a fundamental responsibility to safeguard their own security. This responsibility is not exercised through retaliation or vigilantism, but rather through cooperation with law enforcement. Prompt reporting of incidents to the police or other agencies is central to this duty, which is also recognized under Section 34(b) of the Criminal Procedure Act: "every person is bound to assist a police officer in the prevention or suppression of a breach of the peace." Restoring trust and ensuring collective participation are therefore essential for effective crime prevention.

Effective and Efficient Policing in Nigeria: Inadequacies, Problems, and Obstacles

There is no need to "prove" the underperformance of the Nigerian Police Force, as this is well documented in both official reports and scholarly research. The more pressing task is to identify the inadequacies and obstacles that explain this reality. These can be grouped into three categories: **material inadequacies, human problems, and external obstacles.**

1. Material Inadequacies: Resources for crime prevention, detection, investigation, traffic control, communication, and research are grossly insufficient. Between 1994 and 2003, police budget allocations were consistently inadequate: capital votes ranged from 0% (2003) to 9.5% (1998), while overhead funding ranged from 4% (2003) to 5% (1998 and 2002). Yet, the police are expected to serve a population of over 120 million people spread across 926,000 square kilometers.

2. Human Problems: Material shortages are compounded by personnel issues, which significantly undermine performance. Key challenges include:

- Colonial legacies that still shape recruitment, training, and orientation.
- Corruption and nepotism in recruitment, prompting vetting exercises in 2002–2003.
- Inadequate training duration for recruits, with curricula emphasizing drills and paramilitary routines over practical policing.
- Limited exposure of recruits to broader civil institutions beyond police training schools.
- A pervasive "police sub-culture" that shapes new officers into adopting unprofessional attitudes.
- Poor conduct by officers, including corruption, misuse of authority, and discourtesy toward the public.
- Organizational emphasis on episodic raids instead of systematic patrols.
- A notorious reputation for excessive aggression, particularly among Mobile Police units.
- Negative public image and strained community relations.
- Low salaries, poor conditions of service, and weak promotion systems for rank-and-file officers.
- Resistance to external collaboration, such as academic research, due to a "we-know-best" mentality.

3. External Obstacles

- Absence of a comprehensive national crime-prevention and control policy.
- Political interference, with the Force accountable more to ruling governments than to the rule of law.
- A corrupt and undisciplined socio-economic environment that undermines reform.
- An outdated legal system inherited from colonial rule, which prioritizes technicalities and delays justice rather than ensuring fairness and speed.

Taken together, these inadequacies and obstacles highlight why the Nigerian Police Force continues to struggle with intelligence gathering, proactive crime prevention, and overall public trust.

The Way Forward: A Systemic Approach

The challenges confronting the Nigerian Police have no quick or simplistic solutions. Improving training or salaries, or prosecuting a few officers, will only deliver superficial and short-lived results if deeper institutional weaknesses that foster corruption remain unaddressed. Scholars and international experts emphasize that policing reforms are long-term—often generational—endeavors (Uruena, 2003; Uzendo, 2006; Neild, 2007). While some gains can be recorded in the short run, sustaining them over time is the real test. Because opportunities for corruption are constant in policing, reforms must adopt systemic and long-term strategies. Approaches that situate police reforms within broader governance reforms may also encounter less resistance than those that appear to single out the police. Equally important is the need to address linkages across the entire criminal justice system.

For instance, when police officers perceive judges as "compromised," they are less motivated to conduct serious investigations and more inclined to collect bribes before cases reach court. This illustrates how corruption and inefficiency cut across the justice chain. Therefore, efforts to strengthen judicial independence and access to justice must align with policing reforms. Initiatives to secure judicial

independence should run parallel with projects aimed at improving the operational independence of the police. Similarly, enhanced prosecutorial and judicial oversight of police investigations would help check police misconduct and corruption. Where reforms focus on trial efficiency, case management systems should include mechanisms for tracking detainees in police custody to minimize abuses. Unfortunately, such synergies between police and judicial reforms remain underexplored.

Key areas for building a more effective and accountable policing system include:

1. **Democratic Policing:** Reform strategies emphasizing accountability, transparency, and professionalism can improve both efficiency and responsiveness to communities. Raising standards in recruitment, training, and remuneration will boost morale, capacity, and professionalism. Introducing performance indicators, clear job descriptions, and merit-based promotion systems will also enhance accountability.
2. **Building Public Support:** In contexts where political will is weak, raising public awareness about corruption dynamics and mobilizing demand for reform is a critical first step. Informed public debate, supported by reliable data, can counter misperceptions about corruption and help sustain reform momentum. However, caution is needed, as civil society groups that expose corruption may face reprisals. Risk assessments and consultations should guide civil society engagement.
3. **Countering Police Resistance:** Police institutions possess significant capacity to resist reform and are acutely aware of their political leverage. By highlighting the need for resources or powers to maintain public order, they can temper government resolve. Since police actions—or inactions—carry political consequences, governments often soften reform pressures to avoid instability. Effective reform must therefore anticipate and address such resistance.
4. **Recognizing the Limits of Community Policing:** Community policing alone does not solve corruption or strengthen intelligence gathering. In some contexts, it risks entangling the police in local power dynamics while distancing them from national accountability structures. While Sierra Leone's experience demonstrated positive outcomes when community policing was embedded in broader systemic reforms (Horn et al., 2006), Uganda and Kenya illustrate the risks of introducing community policing without strong national accountability (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2006). Clear standards and accountability frameworks must therefore precede community policing initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Police grew from about 110,000 personnel in 1999 to approximately 410,000 by 2009, yet effectiveness remains elusive. To meet modern policing and crowd control challenges while reducing corruption, reforms must prioritize capacity building, a paradigm shift in orientation, and better equipping of the force. Specific initiatives should include:

- Re-orientation to enhance service quality.
- Expanded use of scientific methods to strengthen evidence collection and investigations.
- Deployment of modern equipment and exclusive communication systems to improve operations.
- Continuous training, retraining, and stronger community involvement in policing.

Raising the entry qualification to a minimum of OND, and eventually to HND or degree level, would also enhance professionalism. With GSM technology, advanced communication tools, and improved logistics, police performance should gradually improve.

Nonetheless, these initiatives cannot succeed in an environment marked by distrust, ethnic bias, nepotism, and systemic corruption. The Nigerian Police remain embedded within the wider political and institutional framework and can only improve with sustained support from government, communities, and the private sector. Effective policing also depends on functional infrastructure such as reliable communication systems, good roads, and stable energy supply. Although the initial cost of nationwide reforms may be high, the benefits are evident: since the advent of GSM technology, crime detection and

prevention have improved, showing that continued investment in systemic reforms can deliver measurable progress.

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