PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN DECENTRALIZED POLICING AND INTERNAL SECURITY MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH WEST, NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The increasing rate of insecurity in the Southwest, Nigeria and the inability of the Nigeria Police Force to effectively, efficiently and strategically position itself in order to perform a range of constitutional roles: protection of lives and property as well as maintenance of law and order, has led to proliferation of decentralized policing groups in contemporary Nigeria and the Southwest in particular. This article examines the nature of public confidence in the decentralized policing group in ensuring internal security. In addition, the challenges of decentralized policing in internal security management in Nigeria. This study utilized survey research design to obtain primary data through interviews. A total of 60 individual were interviewed in Oyo, Ogun and Ondo States using purposive sampling method. Data from secondary sources were collected from published books and reports both in the library and the internet. The paper argued that Citizen's confidence in any policing group is a significant measure in determining how effective the policing group can function, as the cooperation and confidence of the public is important in combating crime and maintaining law and order. The paper revealed that factors such as social, cultural, economic, political, and the disposition of individual security officers contribute towards the level of public confidence in the policing group. It is noted that with regard to policing strategy, community engagement, being fair at all times, foot patrols and neighbourhood policing can enhance public confidence in the police. The paper identified inadequate funding, lack of fire arm, lack of persecuting power, lack of state recognition, police victimization, and inadequate training appear as challenges confronting the decentralized policing group from fulfilling their obligations to citizens. Based on the major findings, it was recommended that the Federal government should harmonized overlapping mandates in the various Acts establishing existing security agencies to make provision for a recognized and formidable force of community policing in the States and Local government, recruited from the community and empowered to bear firearms.

Keywords: Public Confidence, Decentralized Policing, Internal Security Management

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globally, internal security challenges within the society, though it is a negative phenomenon, are becoming part of every society. However, these internal security challenges present a worrisome situation to most of the members of the society. Therefore, concerted efforts are made in every society to manage internal security (Onwuegbusi, 2017). It is the primary responsibility of the Police to manage internal security in every country. However, with the increasing rate of crimes and insecurity and consequent inability of the Nigeria police to effectively perform its primary role, many countries have responded by creating other policing groups for their internal security management. Some of these groups work with the police organization while some have worked independently to confront local insecurity problems within their community (Alemika, 2004). Mostly, these groups always function in weak societies that lack the capacity to provide effective internal security management for the people (Davis, 2020).

In Mexico, the continued activities of drug traffickers have culminated to the proliferation of private security groups to manage internal security. In the Mexican State of Michoacan, these private security groups are known for the opposition to drug traffickers. As the private security groups in Michoacan has continued to increase in number and grow in strength, the government of Mexico has seen the need to decentralize policing and has taken steps to regulate and legalize the activities of these private security groups for internal security management with the introduction of Rural Defense Corps (Horton, 2021). Although there were incidences of excessive use of force and human right violations, this group has continued to resist drug traffickers in their society.

In Kenya, the increase in crimes and insecurity raises questions on the ability of the law enforcement in discharging their responsibilities appropriately. For instance, in Sungusungu Province, the introduction of vigilante group to manage internal security was as a result of high crime rates. The Sungusungu vigilante group was initially created in Kenya by the provincial administrators of the Kuria ethnic group. This group was further adopted by the Abagusii people of Western Kenya in 1990s as a way to decentralize the police to help them contain the increasing crime rate at that time (Fleisher, 2000). Since then, the vigilante group has been managing internal security in form of community policing in these areas in Kenya (Oyagi, 2016).

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), whose responsibility is the management of internal security in the country, appears to have been less than optimal in their performance. Possibly, this has informed governments, non-governmental organizations, groups and even individuals at various levels of the Nigerian federation to create other security outfits into internal security architecture and some granted licenses to operate as a formal security group to cushion the effect of insecurity in Nigeria. As a result of increase in crimes, ethnic tensions, religious differences, limited economic opportunities, and numerous socio-political grievances fuelling the unrest in Nigeria and contributing to flashpoints of violence, crime and insecurity, organizations and communities in different states have been establishing security groups to manage internal security. The challenges have posed serious threats to the survival of the country. Particularly, in South Western States of Nigeria, there is prevalence of crime rate, some of the high crimes include murder, maiming, assault and child stealing. Others are kidnapping, rape, indecent assault, banditry, drug, armed robbery, theft/stealing, burglary, housing breaking, force pretence and cheating/fraud.

For instance, in the South-Western States, such groups have sprung up. Some have been under the auspice of Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), while others such as the O'Odua People's Congress (OPC) have also existed (Akinyele, 2001; Nolte, 2004; 2007). More recently, in January 2020, in Ibadan, due to the increasing rate of crimes in the South-western States, the governments of the different States collaboratively established the security Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) popularly known as 'Operation Amotekun' which is translated in Yoruba language to mean Leopard. This was after series of agitations over the spate of insecurity in the southwest. The birth of Amotekun gave rise to the establishment of other security initiatives. On the 5th of February, 2020, the Northern governors teamed up to come up with "Shege-Ka-Fasa" which in Hausa is translated as "I dare you" and it has a Lion as its symbol (Enyiocha and Idowu, 2020: Isenyo, 2020; Hassan, 2020). In the same vein, the Ohanaeze Ndigbo (the apex socio-cultural organisation of the Igbo land) suggested 'Operation Ogbunigwe' as a security initiative (Punch, 2020).

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Nigeria has grappled with mounting internal security challenges over the last decade, with the South West region witnessing a significant rise in criminal activities including kidnapping, armed robbery, unabated killings, rape, herder-farmers conflict, banditry and cult violence. Despite the centralized structure of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), these persistent threats have exposed critical inefficiencies in intelligence gathering, response time, community trust, and localized decision-making, prompting a growing call for decentralized policing.

The centralized policing model has been criticized for its top-down command structure that often limits local engagement and delays effective responses to security threats. Scholars such as Alemika and Chukwuma (2013), and more recently Adebayo (2020), have noted that centralized policing in Nigeria struggles with overstretch, poor logistics, and a lack of community-rooted intelligence. These inadequacies have sparked debates on the feasibility and necessity of decentralized policing systems, such as the formation of regional security networks like Amotekun and the reliance on other groups like the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), O'Odua People's Congress (OPC), Hunters and Agbekoya (meaning farmers reject suffering) in the South West.

However, the movement toward decentralized policing faces a series of institutional, legal and perceptual challenges. There are concerns about role duplication, constitutional limitations, operational overlaps, lack of funding, political interference, and public skepticism about the professionalism and legitimacy of these regional forces. Studies have largely focused on either the advocacy for state policing (Onuha, et, al, 2024; Ekhomu, 2021; Nu'uman, 2015) or general security sector reform, but there remains a dearth of empirical research analyzing the practical outcome, internal coordination mechanisms, and public perception of decentralized policing initiatives within the Nigeria federal system.

Moreover, while existing literature has discussed decentralization broadly in terms of governance and public service delivery (Okafor, 2007; Fatile and Ejalonibu, 2015; Suberu, 2023), there is limited focus on public confidence on the decentralized policing group, particularly in the context of the South West. The intersection of citizen trust, local accountability, and the operational efficiency of decentralized policing outfits remain

underexplored. This research, therefore, seeks to fill the gap by critically examining public perception of decentralized policing groups within internal security management frameworks in South West Nigeria.

3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was to examine the link between decentralized policing groups and effective internal security management in the Southwest. The specific objectives are to:

i. Determine the people's perception and confidence level in decentralized policing.
ii. Identify the challenges confronting decentralized policing in supporting effective internal security in the Southwest.

4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted the Social Contract Theory as the theoretical framework in explaining and discussing decentralized policing and internal security management. The Social Contract Theory is a popular theory that is widely used to explain the origin of the state (Ogunnoki, 2018). The theory was propounded by three great scholars – Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679) and John Locke (1632 – 1704), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778). For this study, the contributions of Thomas Hobbes would suffice. The English Civil War (1642 – 1651) and the occurring events in England during the mid-17th century shaped the perception of Thomas Hobbes. This led to his publication called the "Leviathan".

The main thrust of this theory is that the citizens and the sovereign (state) reached an agreement that spells out the rights and duties of each other: the citizens surrendered their individual powers to the state in exchange for the protection of life and property. This theory is chosen for the study because Social Contract postulation assumes that the state exist to enforce the rules necessary for social living, thereby creating social order, ending the state of nature and making it possible for people to cooperate and produce social goods.

However, given the rampant insecurity in the Southwest geo-political zone and the country at large, it appears that this social contract has not been fulfilled. Virtually every area of the country has been affected by insecurity, to the extent that news of murder, robberies, kidnapping, banditry and the likes have become commonplace. When the state fails in thius primary duty, the contract is effectively broken. As a result, Citizens, groups, communities, local and state governments revert to self-help strategies, forming community vigilante groups, Neighbourhood watches, ethnic or religious security outfits, local militias, hunters' associations for community defense etc. These groups conceptualized as decentralized policing in this study are recruited among members of the community thereby expected to earn the trust and public confidence in the discharge of their duties.

5.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

5.1 Confidence

The concept of 'confidence' applies to all segments of the criminal justice system and processes. While the literary meaning of confidence implies belief, certitude, dependence,

faith, reliance, trust, assurance, boldness, cocksureness, courage, firmness and self-reliance, with regard to policing, confidence refers to the feeling of 'trust', and 'assurance' (Skogan, 1994). Thus, a dictionary definition provides three distinct ways of defining confidence. Firstly, confidence can be defined as trust, faith or reliance on someone or something. Secondly, confidence is synonymous with certainty, assurance and boldness. Finally, it refers to a thing shared confidentially or a trustful relationship (Brown and Evans, 2009). They also noted that confidence is not an easy concept to grasp as it t can have different meanings in different contexts and there are different types of confidence that must be taken into account in understanding the issue from a policing perspective. With regard to public and police 'confidence,' this concept is closely associated with 'image,' which refers to public image about the police.

In Nigeria as in all parts of the world, the public-police interaction and relationship has its issues. It is not unusual to find mixed feelings about how satisfied and confident people are about their local police force. "The police are a segregated group in society. Public opinion varies from suspicion to hostility, and a major police problem appears to be relations with the public" (Marsh, Keating, Punch and Harden (eds.) 2009:577). It is common knowledge that the "police depend on the active co-operation of the public to get their job done. They need to be notified promptly of crimes and other emergencies, and members of the public must be willing to step forward when they have information which would be useful in their investigation" (Skogan, 1990). On the other hand, the public expects efficient and courteous service from the police (Skogan, 1994). Thus, public confidence in the police is crucial for proper enforcement of law, order, prevention and detection of crime.

5.2 Decentralized Policing

Decentralized policing is defined as an organized attempt by a group of ordinary citizens to enforce norms and maintain law and order on behalf of their communities, often by resorting to violence, in the perceived absence of effective official state action through the traditional police and the courts (Saye and Abraham, 2003). It is concerned with any group of persons which undertake services of watching, guarding, patrolling or carriage for the purpose of providing, protection against crime and ensuring security of lives and property (Owemena, 2006).

This concept is used in this study to refer to all forms of security groups organized by groups or individual to protect lives and properties in the community other than the conventional police. It ranges from neighbourhood watches, communal guards, hunters, vigilantes, age grades and other forms of groups that are formed to enhance the safety and security of residents especially in neighbourhoods where the traditional police are unable to effectively guarantee safety of lives and properties. They are called different names in different communities and also vary structurally and organizationally from community to community. The term and practice of decentralized policing have been applied to groups such as the Bakassi Boys, who were initially set up with the purpose of fighting crime without an explicit political agenda, as well as to others such as Odua People Congress (OPC), the Yoruba ethnic militia active in South west of Nigeria. In Kano State of Northern Nigeria, there is a group known as Hisba Corps referred to as vigilantes, which is responsible for the enforcement of Sharia laws to

Muslims in Kano State and other parts of the Northern Nigeria ("Kano State Hisbah Corps", 2023).

5.3 Internal Security Management

According to Kitler (2020:53), internal security management means 'freedom from threats and disruptions to existence and development'. It is a value and a good, and at the same time a need and an objective of a threat- and disruption-free entity, in every field of its functioning. Arase (2018) refers to internal security management as the protection of the values, critical human and infrastructural assets, territorial integrity, and lives and property of citizens from threats. For Oshita and Ikelegbe (2019), internal security management refers to the dynamics of security within a determinable unit of existence, which may be a community, town or country. This study will align with Oshita and Ikelegba on their view on internal security management but will add that the need for efficient security management in a country includes the necessity to engender peace and development. Therefore, it follows that internal security management involves the provision of safety and security for citizens as well as the presence of socio-economic development in a country. In the context of this study, internal security management refers to the provision of security by formal and informal security agencies, with public collaboration to ensure socio-economic development in a nation.

This study intends to examine the research evidence about public confidence in the police, and how or what the police might do to improve public confidence in the police. In accomplishing this task, first, a brief look at what the police do is highlighted. Second, research and findings are examined, and theoretical approaches aimed at enhancing public confidence in the police are explored. Further, the history, nature and problems associated with effective policing with particular reference to the situation in Nigeria.

6.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method adopted for this study is the survey method. In-depth interview guide was utilized in data collection. It involved a face-to-face, verbal and non-verbal communication between the investigator and the stakeholders. The in-depth qualitative data was gotten from the population of interest and sampled areas of Oyo, Ogun and Ondo states. The choices of the local governments must reflect some measures or challenges of internal security and/or presence of sub-national security group, also one of the LGA was predominantly rural and the other urban, so as to capture a range of different experience and to facilitate rural-urban comparison. The sampling strategy was entirely purposive. The selected LGAs are:

   i. Akinyele LG (rural) and Ibadan South West LG (urban)   - Oyo State
  ii. Ogun Waterside LG (rural) and Abeokuta South LG (urban)   - Ogun State
 iii. Ose LG (rural) and Akure South LG (urban)   - Ondo State

7.0 ISSUES IN THE INTERNAL SECURITY MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

7.1 Poor Policy Linkages

There is currently no comprehensive policy instrument dealing with internal security management in Nigeria. In addition, the several policy instruments affecting internal security

management that exist have little or no linkages. For instance, the frameworks such as the 1999 CFRN and the Police Act do not provide for coordination and collaboration amongst the security agencies, including sub-national security groups. These inhibit achievement of the broad policy objectives on internal security.

7.2 Poor Implementation of Policies

Poor implementation of certain critical aspects of existing policy provisions is one of the major problems of internal security management in the country. For example, the NSS (2019) provides for the active engagement of traditional institutions in the security architecture, but this is yet to be implemented. The traditional and religious institutions have not been assigned clear roles in the aspect of security management in the country. Furthermore, the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2016) provides that the Counter-Terrorism Centre (CTC) in the ONSA facilitates oversight of operations by security and intelligence agencies. The oversight of the ONSA in security and intelligence agencies is yet to be effective, thereby affecting internal security management in the country.

7.3 Policy Coordination

Another issue is the poor coordination of the various policies that have been put in place to deal with internal security issues in Nigeria. This has resulted in inefficiency and inadequate synergy thereby weakening the general internal security management in the country. The different legal instruments establishing the security agencies made provisions for policy coordination and synergy among the agencies for effective internal security management. However, the security and law enforcement agencies in Nigeria are not under the control of one Ministry (NIPSS, 2018). The NSS (2019) thus seeks to "guide, organise and harmonise the nation's security policies and efforts" as the divergent perception of security agencies on issues of internal security could jeopardise synergy and the much-needed cooperation among the various security agencies. It also provides for a common framework on which the entire nation should focus its efforts and coordinated through the platform for inter-agency collaboration.

This coordination is achieved through the ICC and the JIB established by the National Security Agencies Act (NSA Act). However, weak policy coordination exists among the security agencies at the operational level resulting in ineffective internal security management. This was also affirmed by Arase (2018), who observed that internal security management in the country is driven by competitive rather than collaborative orientation. Similarly, Nabhon and Aghedo (2014), opines that intense rivalries fostered by a keen sense of competitiveness and belief that relevance lies in hoarding information from others and being the first and only source of a crucial piece of information exist among security agencies. Such an attitude denies relevant agencies of the needed information, which could have informed the immediate conduct of remedial counter actions. Internal security management and criminal investigations are, therefore, hampered by squabbles among the security agencies, which are often counter-productive.

7.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

Openness and accountability mechanisms for security agencies is an issue, which has affected security management. Some of the internal security frameworks identified observation,

surveys, comparisons and archives as some of the evaluation methods to be utilised while performance indicators and outcome measures were also clearly defined. However, there are weak incentives for the implementation of the M & E framework.

The NSS (2019) provides that the state of internal security in Nigeria shall be measured by improved public perception of security, public confidence and trust in the security agencies particularly the NPF, drastic reduction in the incidence and statistics of crimes and all forms of insecurity. This M & E responsibility rests on the ONSA, which is the coordinating organ for national security. The ICC and the JIB are veritable platforms for the M & E as the agencies periodically meet under the ONSA and review their activities.

7.5 Weak Coordination

Coordination of the various security agencies in the country is weak thereby leading to low level of cooperation, inter-agency rivalry as well as inefficient and ineffective internal security management. The ONSA is responsible for coordinating intelligence functions of various security agencies. However, internal security management goes beyond intelligence, extending to other operational activities of the agencies, for which there is no central coordinating mechanism. This results in duplication of functions and waste of scarce resources both of which further weaken the internal security framework (NIPSS, 2018).

8.0 THE PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION AND CONFIDENCE LEVEL IN DECENTRALIZED POLICING IN THE SOUTHWEST

There are understandings among community members/respondents that there is no significance in the need to call for the attention of the Nigeria police, since the police cannot respond to an outcry for rescue from the hands of criminals at the appropriate time. The community's perception of the police, low response level and corruption account for the reason community members have lost confidence in the Nigeria police. This has resulted to unnecessary delays in most of the job of policing in Nigeria as respondents on their part have refused to give the necessary sense of cooperation. The call for the decentralization of police institutions by respondents is in favour of the posting and recruitment of natives to police their environment. This is premised on the belief among the citizens that police officers can only police where they can understand better. This argument according to respondents has propelled the establishment of other decentralized policing institutions. From a point of view, such an arrangement can check corruption in the system of policing in the region and increase the confidence level of the people.

However, this level of confidence has been lost in the Nigeria Police and it is found in the decentralized policing institutions. According to Fredrick Akinrinlola, a trade union leader:

> *Nigerians are clamouring for state police. This is because we have seen the effectiveness of the Amotekun, local hunters, vigilante. We know the personnel who are our brothers. We see them around at strategic points patrolling, unlike the Nigeria police. How do you post a policeman from Edo to police Oyo State, how do you expect the person to understand the terrain of his/her duty post. This hinders the operational capacity of the police. (Interview transcripts, May 2024).*

Another respondent expressed his concern for the loss of confidence in the Nigeria police. This view is expressed by a police respondent signifying that the nature of organizational structure of the police in Nigeria remains one of the factors inhibiting better performance and confidence level of the Nigeria police. The narrative of Egbokare, a police officer is instructive:

> *Even if a criminal case is reported to you as a police officer, superior officer(s) must have to act on it first. There is no decentralization in the operations of the police in Nigeria at the moment. You must convey it to the appropriate quarters and continue to live at the mercy of directives. There is no freedom to take action on any case without sufficient consultations with the head office (Interview transcripts, May 2024).*

As these feelings suggest, there are strong indications that such structure does not permit the use of discretion on the part of the police at the grassroots level. They have to wait for a directive from the top management centrally located at the capital, before taking any vital decisions. As a result, so many issues would be pending regardless of the urgency such an issue may call for. This explains why the police, more often than not have appeared at the scene of crime long after the perpetrators might have gone wild or escaped. As these feelings would suggest, there are strong indications that such structure does not permit the use of discretion on the part of the police at the grassroots level. They have to wait for a directive from the top management centrally located at the capital, before taking any vital decisions. As a result, so many issues would be pending regardless of the urgency such an issue may call for. This explains why the police, more often than not have appeared at the scene of crime long after the perpetrators might have committed the crime or escaped. Egbokare's point of view indicate that readily available are the decentralized police who live and reside within the neighbourhood and are swift in response to distress call and their presence while patrolling restrain criminals from engaging in criminal activities. All these indicate loss of confidence in the Nigeria police which is not found in the operations of the decentralized policing institution. All these indicate loss of confidence in the Nigeria police which is not found in the operations of the decentralized policing institution.

Below is the narrative of Ogundipe Paul, a Community Youth leader for a point of reference:

> *However our experience is that any time a case is brought to the police, money or other forms of gratifications would be demanded from us before any serious attention is given. Otherwise the case would be pending. Meaning that if one does not have monetary energy to back up complain on the table of the police, it is considered a forgotten issue. Because of this, people see our hunters, OPC, vigilante as an alternative. They apprehend criminals and the law does not permit them to punish or persecute (transcripts, May 2024).*

This point of view is suggestive of the fact that, what the Nigeria police is accused of is minimally or not found at all in the decentralized policing institution. In the context of Aian's viewpoint, demands for money have subjected police officers to all kinds of manipulations, poor performance and that is the more reason the community have to develop lack of confidence and fear in the police. At the hight of insecurity, the decentralized police was seen escorting farmers to their farmland for fear of being kidnapped. In addition to this is the view of a market woman, Aina Olukoga:

We have to put ourselves in groups, and invite the Amotekun, OPC and hunters to secure us and our produce while going to the farm and also on our market days because the women can be raped and the men killed. We cannot stay back at home because of hunger. (Interview transcript, May 2024).

The study observed that the decentralized policing structure is owned by the community as such the people trust and support the operation, having a high confidence level in the decentralized policing. This has given rise to the call for state recognition and approving arms and ammunition for the decentralized policing structure. The negative perception of the centralized NPF has led to increased advocacy for decentralized policing structure. Iloh and Nwokedi (2019) have further substantiated this in their study by showing that the decentralized policing group have increasingly bridged the vacuum created by the inability of formal security institution to ensure the safety of citizens and their properties. This has build up trust and made the people continuously called for the retention and strengthening of the capacity of the decentralized policing group towards effective internal security management. Onwuegbusi (2017) corroborated this by stating that despite the number of shortcomings and limitations of the decentralized policing group in Anambra State, the citizens of the State are still largely trusting and supportive of the group for the service rendered to them specifically to ensure a crime free society and this is not different from what is obtainable in the southwest region. Chikwendu, Nwankwo and Oli (2016) supported this in their study which indicates that socio-cultural factors like the inability of the formal police to adequately and effectively control crime necessitated the formation of informal policing structures. As a result the informal policing structures are significantly accepted as agents of crime control in the communities wherein they exist.

9.0 CHALLENGES CONFRONTING DECENTRALIZED POLICING IN EFFECTIVE INTERNAL SECURITY IN THE SOUTHWEST

It was found in the study that factors like illiteracy, inadequate training, lack of support from government, police victimization, not licensed to carry firearm are basically some of the challenges confronting the decentralized policing institution. This finding reveals that a good number of the decentralized policing institution lacks formal education and belongs to the group of people who dropped out from school. A greater number of them resorted to joining the decentralized institution as a result of lack of job. Their lack of formal training in security matters has also impeded on the level of professionalism when it comes to ensuring security of lives and properties.

The study also found out that the usage of automatic double barrels, sticks, machete, rope, whistle and catapult and to some, charms as weapons has not been too effective because of the sophisticated weapons and firearms handled by the criminals they go after. Sometime the lack of sophisticated firearms and mobility limits the extent to which they can go after criminals in their hideout particularly in the forest. Regular patrolling and combing the nocks and crannies of the community/streets have been not so effective, maintaining constant presence in the community/street to prevent criminals from operating and rapid response to security threats to prevent breakdown of law and order have not also been too effective because the decentralized policing institution is ill equipped.

Lack of recognition and support by government has also limited the operation of the decentralized policing. This should have been a morale booster for them, however most times they are left to survive on what well meaning community members could offer them in terms of food stuff, cash gift and clothing as a form of appreciation.

Also, findings further revealed that the Nigeria Police sometimes sabotage their effort by releasing vital information which could aid in securing lives and properties to criminals. This is why there is absence of information sharing and coordination between the Nigeria Police and the decentralized policing institution. It was found out that the decentralized policing personnel can only make arrest and not persecute. As a result, after investigation and eventual arrest of criminal(s), both the criminal and the case are handed over to the NPF for persecution. It becomes disheartening that the arrested criminal is released back to the community by the police after money had exchange hands and a way of bribery and corruption.

Several attacks on the decentralized policing personnel by the Nigeria police was revealed. These attacks are as a result of exposing the NPF connivance and collaboration with criminals to dispose community members of their valuables. It is on record that some personnel of the Amotekun Corps have been killed by men of the Nigeria police during joint operation for exposing them, sometime the decentralized policing personnel are framed up and put behind bars for crimes not committed. This can be substantiated in the view of Doyin Adelakun:

> *At the initial stage of the commencement of Amotekun Corps, we lost some of our men who were framed up and killed by men of the Nigeria Police Force. Sometimes, this happens during joint operations and again it could be as a result of 'calling a child bad name, so as to hang him'. This happen more often and some of our men will be detained and put behind bars. This has been a very big challenge to us (Interview transcript, May, 2024).*

10.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study examined public confidence in decentralized policing in relation to effective internal security management in the Southwest. This is as a result of the continuous call for sub-national police and the prominence gained by the decentralized policing group in fighting insecurity. The study observed that proliferation of decentralized policing group by state and non-state actors is birthed by the people's need for safety and as a result of government inadequacy. The study observed that the rate of crime was drastically reduced when the decentralized police were formed. Decentralized policing groups are seen as community owned outfit that is sustained most time through free donations from community members, support from the local government and also contributions from the personnel. It was also observed that the people find succor and are more accommodating to the decentralized policing group. High level of trust, confidence and acceptability is vested in the decentralized policing group because the operatives/personnel are members of the community. The study noted that among the challenges confronting decentralized policing group are: Illiteracy, poor funding, inadequate vehicular mobility for personnel, lack of firearms, inadequate training of personnel, lack of information sharing and synergy with the NPF, Police victimization, lack of persecuting power, lack of State recognition and support. Finally, the study observed that the people want

government to recognize and formalize the decentralized policing group into becoming the State policing institution.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proffered:

The Federal Government should harmonize overlapping mandates in the various Acts establishing existing security agencies and address ambiguities in the Constitution on the capacity of States to establish security agencies. This will require the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice to seek judicial interpretation of the provisions of Section 11(2) and Item 45 of the Exclusive Legislative List of the Constitution, with a view to determining the extent of the powers of State governments to establish security agencies. The Inspector General of Police should establish a deployment policy that favours familiarity with local terrain and culture; while having traditional rulers institutionally recognized and integrated into internal security architecture.

The State governments should institutionalize/harmonize the decentralized policing groups into a recognized and formidable force with clear operational guidelines and legal backing, recruited from among the community and empower to bear firearms under strict regulatory supervision by trained and certified local police personnel while the federal government should support the legalization and funding of decentralized policing units, ensuring oversight mechanisms. Also the federal and state government should encourage inter-agency collaboration between federal and state security structures for intelligence sharing and coordination.

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