

**Regionalizing security and decentralizing Nigeria's security architecture: What is the position of the media?**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** The debate on decentralization of Nigeria's internal security architecture is not a recent one and the clamour for state and community policing have not died down either. However, the recent twist in this debate is the introduction of "regional security outfits" - which intensify the arguments. Media, the vanguard of the society has been partly blamed for fanning the embers of regionalism in the country and the escalating of insecurity.

**Objective:** Investigates the position of media amidst the debates on community policing, state policy and regional security network for efficient security of the country

**Methodology:** Data were sourced through interviews with media scholars and professionals who have wealth of experience on the arguments on regional security, state police, community policing and the alternative solution to myriad of insecurity challenges bedevilling the nation; fashioning the role media should play in providing solutions. The data were analysed thematically.

**Results:** The study found that through correlation and surveillance roles, media provide a robust platform for cross-fertilization of ideas on solutions to looming insecurity challenges facing the entire nation. Media is expected to serve as unbiased umpire in the debates for community and state policing as a form of decentralization of the security architecture which the various regions of the country wants to achieve through the creation of "regional security outfits" - "Amotekun" in Southwest; "ShegeKaFasa" in the North; "AbubeAgu" in the Southeast; "BRACED" in the Southsouth and similar moves in the North central. The fear is that if these issues are not managed properly, regionalism will create more security challenges as done in the past than solving it.

**Unique Contribution:** The study provides the position of media regarding insecurity amidst the debate for community policing, state police and regional security for the effective security of Nigeria.

**Key Recommendation:** At this period of serious insecurity in the land, all stakeholders and media inclusive is expected to promote ideas that will ensure full security of the country.

**Keywords:** Regionalism, Regional Security, State Police, Community Policing, Insecurity and Nigeria

## **Introduction**

The debate on decentralization of Nigeria's internal security architecture is not a recent one and the clamour for state and community policing have not died down. Obviously, what is fuelling the debates is the spate of insecurity in the country. There is no region that is immune as terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, arm robbery, cattle rustling, herdsmen-farmers crisis, communal conflicts, ritualists activities, assassinations, politically motivated violence to mentioned but a few have inflicted gruesome insecurity from Northeast, Northwest, North central to Southwest, Southeast and Southwestern.

In an effort to provide lasting remedy to the weak security architecture in the country, the Nigerian upper law makers proposed bill for the establishing state police. The simple reason is that the entire country is primarily under siege, as both northern and southern governors see no reason to shy away from the plight of their people leaving in trouble spots faced daily. To provide solution, the Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF) outlines some policy proposal for the federal government. The governors take a cue from the socio-economic and political drawback insecurity created in the world (Innocent & Ogbochie, 2014). The suggestions are in reaction to governors, federal and state lawmakers, and opinion leaders who have been echoing their support for the establishment of state police. The governors highlighted multiple dimension of support being given to state police commands, such as donation of housing, vehicles, uniforms, guns, and cartridges which the federal police stipulate as qualification for state government to own and manage state police structure.

However, the issue of insecurity continue to aggravate into the year 2020. The governors have sensed the Federal Governments not giving positive nod towards decentralizing the security system; moved to establish regional security outfits. Serious move to establish "Amotekun" in Southwest with legislatures and structures already put in place, while "ShegeKaFasa" in the North, "ObubeAgu" in the Southeast, "BRACED" in the Southsouth and similar moves in the Northcentral are being in discussion. This development makes the federal government that seems to be sleeping to wake up with the idea of resuscitating community policing that has been constituted back in 2004.

These development have reawaken the debates of whether the present Nigeria security system does not need restructuring but just to strengthen its capacity; underpinning the federal government claim to be doing all the time the issue of insecurity come up. Or the country security system has failed, thus the need to decentralize it. This position strengthened the clamour for state police and the federal government seems to be confused as they decided to reintroduce community policing when it noticed that the supporters of state police went ahead to establish regional security outfits.

The debate now become more pronounced as the promoters of state policing have moved one step further to establish regional policing system; while the opponents of state police or regional policing have moved one step further to reintroduce community policing. This measures signals that the issues of decentralization of Nigeria's security architecture are inevitable. However, the noise in the media on the issue of insecurity and the measures being taken that seems not to be effective, thus, making the issue to be more complex than it seems. What should be the position of the media which is expected to be vanguard of the society but been partly blamed for fanning the embers of regionalism and heightening insecurity in the country?

The media is caught in the middle as the opponents of state or regional security system; the fear is that the agitations for creation of regional security structure can be a threat to existence of Nigeria as one nation. The opponents of the idea warned those arranging for regional security outfits to be wary as their actions and reactions could impact on national integration.

However, the proponents of decentralization of the security system believe the solution to herdsmen, bandit killings; continue mayhem in our villages, and kidnappings activities is the establishing of regional security outfits. Federal government also recognized the need of decentralizing the security system by reintroducing community policing. This means that the media can help established a common ground in the need to find better alternative for the country security challenges through is constructive reportage. Thus, the thrust of this paper is to clearly re-echo the position of media amidst the debates on community policing, state policy and regional security network for efficient security of the country.

### **Methodology**

The paper employed qualitative method as data were sourced through interview with stakeholders in media profession. The table below shows the informants that were interviewed.

S/N	INFORMANTS	NUMBER INTERVIEWED
1	Media Scholars	5
2	Media Professionals/Practicing Journalists	5
	Total	10

Source: Authors compilation, 2020

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Insecurity in Nigeria**

There is unanimous opinion among informants on the precarious nature of insecurity the country is facing currently. Constituted authorities are been blamed on poor performance of the security agencies, which result into escalating situation (Informants, 1, 4)

In Nigeria, myriad of violent insecurity issues such as Boko haram insurgency, militancy in the southern region, Kidnapping all across the country, cattle rustling in northern region, banditry in northwest, resurgence of Biafra protest in southeast, inter-ethnic conflicts and herders-farmers conflicts (Adisa, Mohammed & Ahmad, 2015; Eyekpimi, 2016; Okaiyeto&Faruk, 2019) which have characterized the socio-cultural coexistence of the people still remain unabated.

Nigeria internal security is very crucial for it peace, sociocultural coexistence and economic development (Informant 5). The current internal security challenges pose serious challenge to Nigeria internal security.

It is an axiom that the continues wave of kidnapping, murders, ritual killings, mayhems, assassinations, armed banditry, gunmen killings and general eruption of insecurity in the country have put both the government at the centre, the state government and the people on the edge (Informant 3, 4, 7). Insecurity issues are now becoming new normal as hardly should a day pass without sorry tales of pre-meditated killings and kidnappings across the country.

It is no doubt that Nigerians and the government are getting overwhelmed with the deteriorating nature of insecurity which beacon for urgent solution (Informant 1). A country that is already faced with ethnic and cultural diversity problems that seem to defer solution.

And if these issues and that of insecurity are not managed, the quest of political and economic development in the country will always be frustrated by ethnic and cultural jingoism; increasing sharp division along regional and religious lines.

### **Community Policing and State Police to the Rescue**

Informants have divided opinion on the establishment or creation of community policing and state police respectively. The major reasons behind the polarized views is because of ethnic, political and religious influence on security and governance ( Informants 1, 4 ); together with the poor support to existing security structure ( Informant 5, 6, 7 ), can befall community and state police when established.

The Nigerian police have faced widespread criticisms in the country since the down of this current democratic dispensation in 1999. Public complain about performance of the police borne out of the myriad of challenges the agency has been facing and the overbearing insecurity problems the populace are experiencing daily ( Informant 1). The police is face with series of issues of which some include, institutional weaknesses such as inadequate manpower, inadequate education and training, nepotism, ethnic jingoism, endemic corruption, insufficient working gadgets, poor conditions of service to low and middle ranking officers ,extra-judicial killings and human right abuses, poor relationship between the subordinate and superior officers, poor police- public relationship, constitutional challenge of one central command, and most critical, lack of public trust and confidence (Kpae&Adishi, 2017;Ordu&Nnam, 2017). The public have continued to lost confidence on the police role in providing security, seeing the myriad of insecurity challenges going-on almost unabated. Any effort the police bring to solve its problems ends up in frustration and an increase in public complaints. Thus, the advocacy for alternative policing becomes much stronger in recent times (Kasali&Odetola, 2016; *Vanguard Newspaper*, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019).

Respondents in support of community policing welcomed the idea of government introducing it as it will help in solving security problems at the community level (Informants 4, 6 & 7)

Community police, as one of the alternative solution the government has introduced in 2004 for the improvement of policing Nigeria is being considered to be fully embraced currently. Community policing has to do with the partnership between police and members of the community for the sole aim of problem-solving and enhancement of public safety (Ibrahim, Saleh &Mukhtar, 2017). This policing approach is expected to help the police to identify, investigate and incisively provide solution to societal problems with the support of community members. The idea of police-community collaboration, police-community information sharing, or police involvement in community affairs was not noticeable programmes/strategies for effective community policing as currently obtained in Nigeria (Ordu&Nnam, 2017). The challenges of community policing has to do with poor perception of police, more opportunity for corruption, institutional constrain, military orientation, godfatherism among others (Ibrahim, Saleh &Mukhtar, 2017; Okeshola&Mudiare, 2013) has been the bane to effective community policing since 2004 of its introduction without improvement in security. Government itself has not support community policing with resources, talk of it to be vibrant in complimenting the police operation. As it is now, community policing just exist on paper and not in reality.

The fear of respondents about community policing are poor management and lack of provision of adequate operational apparatus (Informants 2 & 7). However, *Informant 1* was not in support of community police that:

*community policing and other mushroom security agencies. All of them are means of creating employment to the unemployed persons. Interest is not really to fight insecurity. We have the*

*Police, NSCDC, DSS and others. To start with, how is the funding and motivation? It is nothing to write home about. Look at the barracks. Look at their salaries. Look at the weapons that they are using to fight crimes and insurgents. Look at those that retired and after putting 36 years, many don't have anything to write home about. That's the reason many of them engages in corruption to survive. People don't join police as pride but to get employment and make it in life by all means.*

Another alternative to solving Nigerian police problem is the advocacy for state police functioning along federal police. Proponents of state police argued that the overbearing nature of the police and very limited manpower calls for support from state police. State police denotes policing system in a federal structure which the state government form police structure for the purpose of policing the state (Agwanwo, 2014 ). Aremu (2014, p.33) defines state police as “territorial policing” which has “a subnational form of policing in which there is devolution of security operations in the hands of the federating states of regions. State policing operationally is when policing and all its operations and logistics are controlled by other governments other than the national or federal government”. 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 officers of it state not to have control over the police they are spending a lot of state resources in assistance. Therefore, many reasons have been adduced for the current sorry reality of the police and that of the trend of insecurity ravaging the country (Innocent & Ogbochie, 2014). State governments have established other security arrangements that perform some of the functions of police such as the vigilante groups. While antagonist of state police are of the view that it will be subjected to political abuse by state government against opposition, lack of funds and difficulty in control and management by state governments.

*It is a feasible way to end the existing challenge with Nigerian security system yet it is terrible to note that the Federal Government will do everything overtly and covertly to bury the idea of state police. It is a bigger polity, same reason why Nigeria is where we are today, stagnated (Informant 8).*

*State policing idea must not be welcome in Nigeria because all the governors will see the officers as a tool to perpetrate their evil acts against their political opponents especially during electioneering period. For me, I say no to state police (Informant 2).*

Those sceptical of government intentions are of the view that:

*Nigeria is not ripe or matured for the establishment of state policing, politically we are not ready at all because our political climate is filled with money bag politicians and desperate politicians are always looking for every available opportunity to undermine the political process of the country to their own selfish advantage. If we don't want to heat up the polity with violence threat it is possible to look for other possible means of addressing the fragile state of the nations' security.*

A lot of resources are being spent on security without results.

*It's very unfortunate that the security situation in the country is getting worse by the day. Despite the huge amount of money spent annually on security, the relevant authorities saying they are trying their best, I think their best is still not enough, because the whole country, particularly the north-west, north-east and some part of north-central have all become danger zone, so much so that one needs to think twice before embarking on a journey towards that axis. People have lost confidence in the law enforcement agencies and agents as a result of the renewed attacks by Boko haram, killings and burning of villages by bandits*

*and kidnappings along different highways of the country. These have become the order of the day and government needs to look into the security architecture of the country and come up with a formidable solution on how to tackle the security challenges facing this country (Informant 9).*

Nigerians need a police structure that is up to the task of providing societal safety. Constitutionally, Nigerian police has a laudable role to ensure full internal security through its basic functions, which the current system is not effective in meeting expectations: 1. *The prevention and detection of crimes* 2. *The apprehension of offenders* 3. *The preservation of law and order* 4. *The protection of life and property* 5. *The due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly or indirectly charged* and 6. *To perform such military duties within and outside Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of this or any Act.* Therefore, the Nigerian government and its populace should be thinking of establishing a police system that will be effective in performance, so that the level of insecurity in the country will be thing of the past. Rather than engaging on unending unfruitful deliberation on which kind of police system is suitable for the country. Now, advocates of state police have went a step further in institutionalizing regional security outfit with resemblance of police structure and functions (Informant 1).

*The issue of state police should not even be considered by the National Assembly and of course the central government, because that will weaken the activities of the Nigeria Police Force and even the security architecture of the country. Some state governors can also abuse it by using them for their own personal interest, and if the state fails to fully fund them, they may end up creating more problems for themselves (Informant 9).*

### **The Creation of “Regional Security Outfits”: It is the way out?**

Regional security idea is being supported by those who desire to see that regions are given some level of autonomy (Informant 3 & 8) and because of the perceived inability of the security agencies to tackle the precarious security challenges (Informant 2 & 7). While those opposing regional security are of the fear that it has great implication on national integration (Informant 1, 4 & 5).

The deteriorating nature of insecurity around the country makes the people and state government to see federal security apparatus to be overwhelmed with the situation. Their reactions to the incessant bandits' killings, kidnapping and arm robbery, political killings, ritual killings, arm herdersmen killings, ethno/religious motivate killings to mentioned but a few is pushing the creation of regional security force to compliment that of the federal if at all is realistic in federal structures state ( Informant, 7 & 8).

*The issue of regional security outfit is as a result of the failure of the central government and because the regions have lost confidence in the security agencies of the country, they no longer feel secured, hence the need for them to look for an alternative. However, given the enormous security challenges, it is a welcome development, they will help in curbing the insecurity within their respective regions, but the regional security should have limit, let there be bye laws establishing them, they should work hand in hand with other federal law enforcement agencies for the unity of the country, they should not be allowed to prosecute any criminal, that should solely be the responsibility of the Nigeria Police Force (Informant 9).*

The spate of insecurity in the county shows that no region or state is immune from the horror of blood splitting or citizenry intimidations. In response to provide alternative security, state governments where moved for the creation of one along regional line; but not without heavy criticism (Informant 6). At the height of the uproar is the fear that regional security will

create avenue for more insecurity and even threat to national integration. It was the South west governors that make the first move in establishing ‘Amotekun’. This increases the sentiments across the regions. “ShegeKaFasa” as northern security outfit is being discuss in the North. While the Southeast, are to establish “EbubeAgu” and Southsouth resuscitating “BRACED”. A Similar moves in the Northcentral is on the discussion table.

Proponents of ‘Amotekun’ are of the position that their task is to provide security to their people and they cannot seat and continue to see lives and properties being destroyed incessantly without end in sight. That Amotekun will complement the operation of the police incontendinginsecurity in southwest. The basic reason is that current security arrangement have failed in addressing the current level of insecurity-bringing about the needed safety of lives and property in line with the fundamental objectives and principles of state policy as captured in Chapter II, Section 14(2b) of the Nigerian Constitution.The section states that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government...”

However, opponents of a security outfit with regional sentiment are of the strong opposition, just as the federal government is a constant force in kicking against such kind of arrangement in a federal state.Their arguments is that a regional or state police, with similar responsibility and structuring of the current security networks for the main reason of dealing with the identifiedinsecurity in the region will be counterproductive (Informant 2). They see regional security networks as anathema to Nigeria’s unity and coexistence. That those promoting regional security system to be careful not to cause national disintegration.

In quick response to the criticism of Amotekun, A serving southwest governor point that “we do not want this to create fear in the mind of anybody as we are not creating a regional police force and are fully aware of the steps we must take to have state police. We do not want anybody to misconstrue the concept of Amotekun”.

Nigeria presently is practicing constitutional democracy with a federal structure, thereby no recognition of regions, but rather states within the federation. As such, the issue of regional security outfits is completely at variance to the constitution. Though, the country is structured into 36 states, the states were created along regional and ethnic sentiments. This reality has being awakening the consciousness of regionalism among populat. However, security challenges in the country have outgrown regional boundaries as there is no part of the country that is not facing the insecurity horror highlighted in this study.

Since it is obvious that regional security outfit cannot be constituted presently in Nigeria; what the country’s political leaders and citizens should be concerned with a kind of security arrangement that will be people-centric. That is, a security system that the people will have sense of ownership of, so at to give it full support and gain their trust. There should be conscious security summit in which cross-fertilization of ideas among the various componentsof the society with true representation across the country in which security solution will be the agenda (Informant 1 & 4).

### **Media Role in the Current Security Debates**

In a democratic setting like that of Nigeria, media is major a stakeholder in ensuing that the government and the governed meet up with their respective societal expectations; as respondents agreed.

*On the issue of community policing, state police, regional security outfit, the media should continue to be neutral, continue to have an independent editorials on that, and if eventually the relevant authorities have been able to establish all the aforementioned security outfits, the media should always set agenda on them by making it a point of duty upon themselves to sensitize and enlighten the general public to always cooperate with them, accord them all the necessary courtesy and assistance they desire and help in educating the general public on the duties and obligations of the security outfits (Informant 9).*

The societal expectations of the media in a democracy are borne out by main journalistic functions of correlations and surveillance. In Nigeria, media has been ascribed the ‘fourth estate of the realm’; connoting social responsibility and accountability of media as vanguard of the people. However, a lot of complains have being raised overtime in respect to media performance in Nigeria instead of promoting national interest, end up promoting values that are threats to internal security (Auwal, 2015).

The public are now conscious of the propaganda nature of media culminating in the spread of fake news, hate speech, misinformation and mischievous contents to the public (Chukwuere&Onyebukwa, 2018). Media channelling it cause through promotion of acrimonious contents all in the name of profit maximization or promotion of political interest has become a source of concern to all and sundry (Olayiwola, 2013; Ali, 2013). However, security has always being a major public interest and an active mass media profession is expected to have a genuine interest in people (Ali, 2013). The primary focus of ‘fourth estate of the realm’ is on issues that profit the general public and through upholding fairness, justice, advocacy, national unity and social cohesion ( Informant 3 & 4).

No doubt, Nigeria is in a crossroad regarding the issue surrounding insecurity and the push for community policing, state police or even regional security platforms as alternative solutions to myriad of insecurity challenges the people are facing daily. The mass media, through its power and capability is expected bring about positive change in the society and for the improvement of the quality of life, which in the case of Nigeria media is expected to promote security. Media has this ability to interpret, report, and inform the public effectively; thereby serving as active change agents. Through correlation and surveillance role the mass media can contribute effectively to national security, that’s as it perform in accordance to the dictate of the constitution and the social responsibilities of the press (Informant 5).

In reporting issues that has to do with solutions to insecurity the media is expected to adhere to the professional and trained journalistic ethos of fairness, objectivity and impartiality in such matters and provide a platform for cross-fertilization of ideas for the transformation of the society towards common good ( Informant 1). It is important to note that media contribute to the public thinking and perceptions on issues of national interest and concerns through their “agenda setting” power. However, individuals are equally expected to form different views on such issues which can either be positive or negative. But, media is not expected to take side when it is reporting public opinion issues, which has not always been the case in Nigeria.

*The media has good role to play in sensitizing the people in the position of authority to look inward and address the state of insecurity in the country with right approach. One is by relaying the opinion of security experts on the best approach to take on either community policing, state police or regional security outfit this can be done through objective news reportage. The advantage and disadvantage of each approach should be analysed to members of the public in relations to happenings in the country.*



The under listed common practices of the media as Pate (2011) documented contribute negatively to crises situations should be completely discouraged in this current debate on insecurity. These media approach tended to inhibit dangers to Nigeria's national security when it comes to politics, religion, ethnicity, power and revenue sharing which are crucial to a stable and enduring democracy (Ali, 2013). The above argument was the echo of *informant 8* that *due to patronage from government and heavy weights, the media has become toothless yet needless to undo the country's many security challenges.*

Media will do a lot of good to the society if it sees it as an obligation not to be used as tool by those that promote regionalism sentiments and sectional interest (Informants 2, 4, 5 & 6). Rather, media should see it as their constitutional responsibility to encourage the promotion of national interest and internal security.

### **Conclusion**

One of the major issue that characterized Nigerians mind and debate is the incessant insecurity the country is facing with little or no hope of ending of killings and looting of vulnerable citizens. The current debate around community policing, state police and regional security outfits is all about the solution to the insecurity threats that seems to overwhelm the current police structure. However, instead of constructive discussions, what characterise the debate is noise as the governments and the public have divided opinion to the extent the alternative option of security is seen by pessimists as another major threats for insecurity. Media, on its part, have it share blame as she provides the platforms for the noisy discussion of the new structure of policing system the country needs. Thus, as the debates continue, insecurity horror also continued. This paper concludes that media through its correlation and surveillance roles, provide a robust platform for cross-fertilization of ideas on solutions to looming insecurity challenges facing the entire nation. Media is expected to serve as unbiased umpire in the debates for community and state policing as a form of decentralization of the security architecture which the various regions of the country wants to achieve through the creation of "regional security outfits" ("Amotekun" in Southwest; "ShegeKaFasa" in the North; "EbubeAgu" in the Southeast; "BRACED" in the Southsouth and similar moves in the North central). The fear is that if these issues are not managed properly, regionalism will create more security challenges as done in the past than solving it. At this period of serious insecurity in the land, all stakeholders and media inclusive is expected to promote ideas that will ensure full security of the people and the land and nothing more.

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## **Contribution**

The debates on prevailing insecurity and the quest for community policing, state police and recent regional security outfits have drew a lot of polarized and unhealthy arguments which the media is not left. However, there is no existing literature on the position of the media amidst the debate.

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