

Politics of Security Sector Reform: Violence and the Emergence of Regional Security Outfits in Nigeria

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Abstract: A growing deterioration of the security situation in Nigeria is provoking debate about the subsisting federalized but ineffective policing structure. The general deterioration of security is also manifesting in the growth of regional outfits that have emerged to fill the security gap created by a weak and centralized security arrangement. While there is a plethora of literature discussing security governance in Nigeria—with an emphasis on reforms—emergent regional security outfits receive marginal attention. Relying on oral interviews with security experts, including personnel of *Amotekun* and *Ebube Agu*, datasets from Nigeria Watch, and relevant secondary sources, this article interrogates the interplay of insecurity, the imperative of security sector reforms (SSR), and suspicion generated by the emergence of vigilante and regional security outfits. The study concludes that Nigeria's over-centralized security framework has created a vacuum in security provisioning, necessitating the emergence of alternative security outfits. The polemics surrounding the emergence of parallel security organizations underscores the need for SSR. It is nudging the country towards devolution of security functions to the subnational governments.

Keywords: Nigeria, Security sector reform, suspicion, *Amotekun*, *Ebube Agu*

Introduction

The conversation around security governance suggests that security sector reform (SSR) is the most dominant subject in security research since the 1990s.¹ Studies indicate that the end of the Cold War gave rise to pressures for political and economic liberalisation around the globe.² In this connection, states aspiring to democratic governance and strong economies required capable administrative and political structures. In this instance, a well-governed security sector comprising the civil, political, and security institutions responsible for protecting the state and communities within becomes very crucial.³

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Studies on security governance in Africa have continued to emphasize a shift from state and military-centered notions of security, drawing attention to a broader discourse on human security with the connections between security governance and economic/political well-being.⁴ Furthermore, while a plethora of literature discusses reforming the centralized structure of security architecture, few empirical studies exist on the emergent alternative security outfits induced by the inability or weakness of the state to provide adequate security.⁵ As insecurity increases and the state is unable or unwilling to respond, those affected seek other means of protecting themselves, as demonstrated in the case of Nigeria.

In Nigeria, security challenges have multiplied since the 2019 general elections.⁶ In the North-East region, Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) conduct deadly attacks on civilian and military targets.⁷ Similarly, kidnapping, rural banditry, armed robbery, cattle rustling, and communal conflicts have been on the increase since 2015.⁸ There are also renewed local grievances in the oil-rich Niger-Delta. These growing concerns have placed much pressure on Nigeria's highly centralized security architecture, rendering them weak and ineffectual. These weaknesses suggest a general decay in security design, making Nigerians more vulnerable to insecurity and therefore requiring reforms.

Akinsanya and Hassan traced the remote causes of violence and instability in Nigeria to three sources.⁹ First, the skewed nature of the federation with the attendant centrifugal forces pulling in different directions. Second, the mismatch between economic growth and rising poverty among the vast majority of the populace. Lastly, the weakening capacity of the Nigerian state to exercise monopoly over the instruments of coercion—manifesting in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Most of these issues have characterized Nigeria from its inception, but past military dictatorships largely suppressed them. Explanations for how these developments induced insecurity suggest that the military appropriated responsibility for more and more facets of daily life within the period of its rule. In this way, they sidelined the police by first excising its intelligence unit. Underfunding the police followed.¹⁰ This created a huge gap in the capacity of the centralized police that has not filled since the return to civilian rule in 1999.

As such, several regional security outfits emerged to fill the gap created by the centralized security structure and the declining capacity of the state to secure its citizens. The emergence of these regional outfits have in turn generated suspicion, framed national security around identity politics, stimulated 'us versus them' politics, and rejuvenated the call for restructuring the political space as well as the security architecture. Relying on oral interviews with security experts and regional organizations (including personnel of *Amotekun* and *Ebube Agu*), datasets from Nigeria Watch, and relevant secondary sources, this article interrogates the interplay of insecurity, the imperative of security sector reforms, and suspicions generated by the emergence of regional security outfits such as *Amotekun*, Eastern Security Network, and *Ebube Agu*. The body of the article consists of four parts. The first explores the concept of security sector reform and the concentric circle model of understanding security. The second examines centralized security management structure and how it interacts with questions of insecurity. The third discusses the emergence of regional security outfits and how these reinforce politics of identity and suspicion. The fourth explores the connections between trust and security management in Nigeria.

Engaging the Framework: Insecurity and the Quest for Security Reforms

Security sector reform emerged in the 1990s as a key component of the post-Cold War political and economic restructuring around the globe, particularly in Eastern Europe.¹¹ Its emergence became crucial since “states aspiring to democratic governance and strong economies require capable administrative and political structures.”¹² Such capable administrative and political structures are only possible with a well-governed security sector, comprising the civil, political, and security institutions with a role in ensuring the protection of the state and its people. SSR is therefore critical because meaningful economic, political, and sociocultural reforms significantly depend on a secure context.¹³ The concept generally refers to a process to reform or rebuild the state security sector. SSR responds to a situation in which a dysfunctional security sector is unable to provide effective security to the state and its people under democratic principles.¹⁴

The security sector can itself be a source of widespread insecurity arising from discriminatory or abusive policies and practices. Keen observers contend that the kinds of security policies that governments adopt, the instruments used to implement these policies, and the interests served by these policies are critical factors.¹⁵ This implies that a poorly constructed security sector represents a significant obstacle to the promotion of peace and development. Conversely, a well thought-out SSR enhances the delivery of effective, efficient security and justice services by institutions that are accountable to the state and its people. This underscores the importance of governance issues and civilian input into policymaking. Thus, SSR aims to help states enhance the security of their citizens through greater emphasis on human security, institution building, and accountability.

Dominant discourses on SSR have often focused on rebuilding the security sector of countries emerging from conflicts.¹⁶ However, SSR cannot be restricted to the post-conflict period as it also applies in transitional and developed countries. In whatever context, the application of SSR stimulates significant criticism. The most dominant criticism is that SSR has failed to yield expected results because it is unable to adapt to local situations, remains highly elitist, rarely discusses reforms among political actors, and is often not locally owned.¹⁷

The point to reiterate is that SSR remains a critical element of a vibrant state. The absence of core security provisions that a state is weak, failing or failed. SSR is crucial to produce a secure and conducive environment for good governance, justice, and fairness. In Africa, a weak security sector represents a significant impediment to sustainable peace and development. In fact, the prevalence of non-state security actors has further weakened traditional state institutions, worsening security situations and leading to even greater government reliance on extraordinary measures to ensure security.¹⁸ These non-state actors are sometimes government-sanctioned private armies, ranging from hunting societies, neighborhood watches, and sectarian militias. Explanations for the prevalence of non-state security actors in most parts of Africa, include weakness of the state, chronic shortage of state revenue, lack of government presence in hinterlands, decades of rapid urbanization without corresponding infrastructure in municipalities.¹⁹ These factors have not only deepened the decline of the state and stimulated questions of ungoverned spaces but it has also opened up spaces for non-state actors, worsening the questions of insecurity in the continent. This has in turn induced agitations for SSR.

The Concentric Circles Theory (CCT) of national security management draws attention to the growing weakness of security architecture. The theory asserts that security concerns and actions exist at different levels of an environment in relation to a center, regarded as “security communities.”²⁰ This suggests that the security of each circle or security community should form the thrust of security concerns and operations in a hierarchy, going on from the individual, community, region, or nation to the international community. While these security communities overlap in many ways, it is imperative that security at lower-level security communities is effective before progressing to higher levels in order to avoid creating security vacuums at lower levels.

In Nigeria, such security vacuums have therefore necessitated the need to rethink and restructure the security architecture for better delivery. Yet, successive governments have been unable to address the situation. There is scant debate about the steps necessary to reform Nigeria’s security apparatus and make it more effective. Most often, successive political leaders deploy a similar methodology and postpone much needed security sector reforms. These repetitive methodologies include “vote more money to purchase vehicles and equipment, recruit more policemen and give orders for arbitrary arrest, urge all arms of security and intelligence to collaborate in ways that permit those dealing with intelligence and counter-intelligence to dabble in security matters and vice versa.”²¹

Consequently, orthodox or statist approaches to security management fail to address the questions of growing insecurity. Weak management approaches, nepotism, and policing failures not only generated a public outcry about growing insecurity but also stimulated a resurgence and continued agitation for the renegotiation of the Nigerian state by its constituent elements. Apart from a 2018 nationwide poll that indicated 65 percent of Nigerians feel the country is not secure, popular discourses suggest that several groups within the polity feel their identities are under threat given what keen observers refer to as high-level nepotism particularly in the security sector.²² Any identity that perceives itself under threat at any time—even if an illusion—often vigorously and vociferously attempts to defend this identity.²³

The identity-threat narrative is backdrop to several ethnic militia groups, non-state security outfits, and separatist movements in Nigeria. For instance, the Yoruba ethnic group, in southwestern Nigeria perceived their identity to be under threat with the annulment of the 1993 presidential election. This led to the formation of the quasi militia group, the O’dua People’s Congress (OPC). Similarly, such perceived identity threats stimulated development of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in southeastern Nigeria. Most recently, the upsurge herdsmen militia activities and state inability to address it—resulting mainly from the centralized security structure—exacerbated other rival ethnicities and stimulated panicky measures to curb growing security concerns, namely the emergence of regional security outfits.

Centralized Security Management and the Spectre of Insecurity

Nigeria operates a centralized security architecture under a federal system of government. In most federations, there is a clear (constitutional) delineation between the provision of, and responsibility for, national security and public security. In Nigeria however, this delineation, at least in practice, is quite blurred. Justifiably, national security—protecting the state against

external threats through the instrumentality of the armed forces, border security agencies, and intelligence services—is a primary function of the central government. However, public security—law enforcement, justice administration, and maintenance of public order—is a responsibility usually shared between the center and its constituent units. But the Nigerian federation instituted a strange aberration where the policing agencies responsible for public security are highly centralized.

The Nigerian constitution places control of the military, police, and related security organizations under the central government. Nigeria thus operates a unique federation where all the agencies of coercion are under the control of the president. Hence, though statutes designate state governors as chief security officers, and expend substantial financial and materials support to the police and other security formations in their respective states, in practice, they have no control over the institutional law enforcement agencies within their jurisdiction. The illogic of a centralized policing system reduces the capacity of state governors to respond adequately to security challenges within their states.²⁴ Under the present centralized security arrangement, the enormity of internal security challenges bedeviling the country are overstressing and overwhelming the police and other security agencies.

Nigeria is also under-policed as the ratio of police officers in Nigeria to the general population is abysmal. The United Nations recommends one police officer for every 450 citizens.²⁵ With a population of approximately 220 million, Nigeria has about 370,000 police personnel—and a significant percentage of these policemen are attached as guards to public office holders and some wealthy private citizens.²⁶ In addition, the Nigerian Police is largely ill equipped, under-trained, ill motivated, lacks operational flexibility, and has been unresponsive to local needs. The import of a weak policing framework manifests in the pervasiveness of insecurity and threats to human lives. Explaining this challenging security situation, a security expert averred that:

If you scan through the entire country, you will see that every region is engulfed in serious conflict starting with Boko Haram in the North-East, banditry and kidnapping in the North-West, farmer versus pastoralist conflict in the North-Central, separatist agitations in the South-East, militancy in the Niger Delta, and violent crime and robbery in the South-West. Taking all these together, the fatality rate will be more than a thousand in a calendar year, which going by the definition of war, shows clearly that the country is in a state of warfare.²⁷

The diagram below demonstrates growing fatality rates from the spectre of insecurity in Nigeria.

Thus, Nigeria faces insecurity linked to the activities of various non-state armed groups. Widespread youth unemployment, excruciating poverty, vertical and horizontal inequality, and a pervading feeling of marginalisation amongst the different ethnic and religious groups further compounds the situation. These security challenges, coupled with an ineffective centralized security management architecture, provide environment and ingredients for the emergence of different shades of criminal groups. The mushrooming of these criminal gangs has given rise to the security nightmare the country is currently grappling with.²⁸



Figure 1-Fatality trend by states (Source: Nigeria Watch Database 2020).

The recurring and increasing spate of violent conflicts, including kidnapping, banditry and terrorism—especially since the return to civil rule—indicate the failure of successive administrations to live up to the expectations of Section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution which views “security and welfare of the people” as the primary purpose of government.²⁹ The 2022 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) report ranked Nigeria as sixth most impacted by terrorism due to the activities of groups like ISWAP, Boko Haram, bandits, and pastoralist/herdsmen militia.³⁰ The fatality figure resulting from different shades of insecurity and generated between 2006 and 2019—totalling 142,207—confirms the extraordinary level of insecurity in Nigeria. An additional 8681 casualties occurred in 2020 alone.

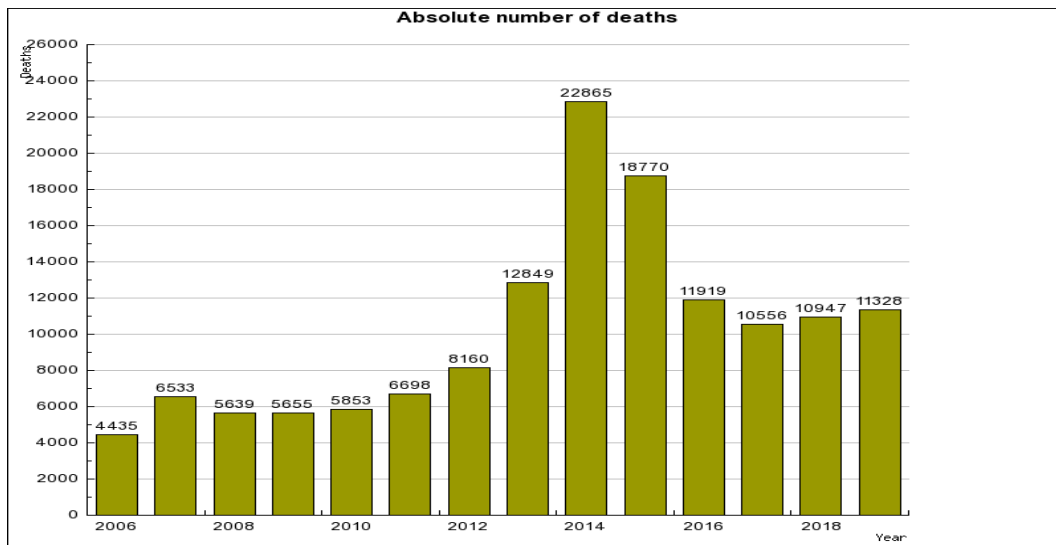


Figure 2-Fatality trends 2006-2019 (Source: Nigeria Watch Database 2020).

In an attempt to sidestep the glaring need to address structural security defects of the country, successive administrations resorted to stop-gap and ad-hoc measures such as constituting various military-dominated Joint Task Forces (JTF) for internal security operations. There are currently military operations and JTF in virtually all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. This has further spread thin the resources of the armed forces that have been battling Boko Haram for over a decade.³¹ Despite its glaring inability to ensure public security, the federal government remains actively unwilling to share internal security functions with the federating units in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

Amid a prolonged security breakdown in Nigeria, the prospect of state police became fashionable. Since 2016, there has been a deafening clamour for the creation of police to be responsible for local security under the control of the respective federated state governments. This has met with serious resistance by the federal government and its supporters. Advocates of the status quo point to a potential suborning of the state police by local political elites—a concern with some merit but one that the federal government could equally be accused. They have also alluded to the cost implication of supporting state polices as virtually all the states are financially weak.³² Given these potential limitations, some argue that the focus should instead be on improving the present policing system by equipping the security agencies and boosting capacity, discipline, and skills of personnel.³³

Meanwhile, advocates of state police point to the agonizing security breakdown and rapidly deteriorating personal security in Nigeria, as well as a general lack of capacity and public confidence in the federal police.³⁴ Furthermore, in most areas of unrest community vigilante groups assume the task of local security wherever the federal security structure has collapsed or been proven inadequate.³⁵ Government authorities often tacitly endorse and fund such groups, pointing to the need for the decentralization of the policing system in Nigeria. Given the reluctance by the Federal Government to devolve local policing authority, some regional political leaders and even non-state elements decided to pursue alternative security initiatives to curb insecurity in their region. In the South-West, the governors of Ekiti, Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo and Lagos states initiated the Western Nigeria Security Network, codenamed *Amotekun*. In the South-East, whilst the regional political leadership dallied, IPOB announced the establishment of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) charged with eliminating threats posed by herdsmen in the region.³⁶ Somewhat belatedly, in 2021 the South-East state governors established a regional security network—codenamed *Ebube Agu*—to address insecurity.

Emergence of Regional Security Outfits: The Case of *Amotekun* and Eastern Security Network

Amotekun officially launched in January 2020 to address the worsening state of insecurity in the region, amidst intense opposition from the Federal Government. Nigeria's Attorney General, Abubakar Malami, declared the initiative an illegal attempt by state governors of the South-West to create a regional police unrecognized by the federal constitution.³⁷ Opponents of *Amotekun* viewed its creation as part of a larger plan by the South-West to secede from Nigeria. However, the South welcomed it as a response to an existential threat confronting the people. Herdsmen attacks intensified in the south since 2015, resulting in widespread accusations that

the Buhari administration either tacitly supported the perpetrators or at least remained lukewarm in containing their criminal activities. According to a respondent:

The emergence of *Amotekun* have come to stay in my opinion regardless of the opposition from certain quarters who perceive such arrangement as the first step towards the disintegration of the country. No true leader sits idly by while his or her people are being slaughtered by marauding herdsmen. In fact, *Amotekun* is the summation of the will of the South-West people to protect and defend their territory from these invaders. Meanwhile, the North has Shari'ah law, *Hisbah* and civilian JTF. Did anyone in the South oppose these groups?³⁸

Amotekun combats insecurity, especially kidnapping and killings linked to pastoralist elements in the South-West region. Though regional in outlook, it operates a decentralized structure: each state command functions independently but coordinates with counterparts in the other states. *Amotekun* is operational in all the South-West states except Lagos where the Lagos Neighbourhood Safety Corps (LNSC) performs similar functions according to the state government, though it passed the *Amotekun* bill into law. Critics argue that the reluctance to operationalize *Amotekun* in Lagos State boils down to politics. According to Adejumo, similar political pressure from the Federal Government compelled the South-West leaders to alter the legal framework of *Amotekun* as a loosely structured, state-based security entity rather than a regional police as originally intended.³⁹ Thus, *Amotekun* operates as a state-based vigilante-style security network whose primary function is to provide security intelligence and sundry support to the police. Despite its presence, clashes between herdsmen and farmers, kidnaping, and killings remain common in the region.

Unlike *Amotekun*, a proscribed IPOB created ESN in December 2020 to secure the South-East and areas comprising the defunct Biafra from criminal herdsmen activities. Some therefore view it as the military wing of IPOB that has openly declared its goal of actualizing a Biafran state. Emergence of ESN owes largely to the inability—or reluctance—of the South-East political leaders to act proactively to ensure security in the region. Like the South-West, the region faced herdsmen in continual conflict with local farming communities. However, while the South-West governors responded by creating *Amotekun*, popular demand for a similar outfit to curtail herdsmen criminality in the southeast initially gained little traction with political leaders.⁴⁰

As Wilson contends, where the state is unwilling or unable to guarantee internal security, non-state actors step forward to fill the emergent security vacuum, as IPOB did by inaugurating ESN.⁴¹ According to Agbo, while ESN lacks backing among governors in the eastern region, at least publicly, it nonetheless enjoys considerable support from the local population who historically believe that marginalized Igbo are repeated targets of migrant herdsmen.⁴² There is also the perception among the population that political authorities and security institutions are complicit in the security problem, i.e. while political leadership is largely unresponsive to local demands for security against herdsmen attacks, they are actually proactive, alongside the security agencies, in preventing affected communities from adopting self-defense measures. The seeming aloofness of political authorities and the brutality of security agents against community response to herdsmen attacks bred negative sentiments against political leaders and members of the security forces.

The emergence of ESN coincided with an escalation of violent attacks against security personnel, formations, and facilities in the southeast. Between December 2020 and March 2021, about 70 security agents were murdered in South-East and South-South regions. On 5 April 2021, Imo State Police Command Headquarters and a correctional center came under attack; armed men freed over 150 suspects in police custody and another 1500 inmates of the correctional center. Media accounts accused ESN of masterminding many of the attacks.⁴³ Following the attacks, governors of South-East states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo held a security summit and announced the establishment of *Ebube Agu* to enhance security in the region. *Ebube Agu* was to cooperate with the security agencies in protecting lives and property in the South-East. However, some suggest that a primary objective of *Ebube Agu* is to counter the activities of IPOB/ESN rather than curtailing the actions of criminal herdsmen in the region.⁴⁴ Responding to this suggestion, an operative of *Ebube Agu* stated that:

Ebube Agu was late in coming, but better late than never. As for the ESN, they are not recognised by the South East Governors and leaders. Where they (ESN) are involved in criminality in the name of protecting the region against Fulani herdsmen, it is our responsibility to tackle them. Some of their objectives may be laudable, like protecting the region, but they have not acquitted themselves creditably in the eyes of the people, especially the political leaders.⁴⁵

Ebube Agu's emergence, indeed, raises the possibility of a potential clash between the new regional security outfit and ESN. The presence of these contending alternate security outfits in the South-East also demonstrates the politics around security and security sector reform in Nigeria.

Why the difficulty in devolving security powers in Nigeria, despite the observable ineffectiveness of the Nigerian police in internal security management? More so, why the seeming politicization in southern Nigeria when a variety of state-backed and non-state local security initiatives such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and *Hisbah* have existed across northern Nigeria with minimal interference from central government? Analyzing the politics of security in Nigeria, Odobo suggested that federal and northern opposition to decentralization of security architecture stems primarily from the concern that it would weaken their hold of state power.⁴⁶ Nigeria practices a 'warped' federal democracy in which state capture is a predominant goal of the competing ethno-religious factions of the Nigerian ruling class. Thus, control of the security architecture is a vital political resource.

Notwithstanding the constitutional and political encumbrances against the decentralization of security in Nigeria, the southern state governors seem reticent to exploit the limited legal and political window to strengthen security in the region. Agbo claimed that many of the southern state governors were products of fraudulent electoral processes and their continued political survival is dependent on perceived support of the northern political elite who dominate central government.⁴⁷ Corroborating this claim, a ranking *Amotekun* official contended that:

The truth is, our leaders in the South are in a quandary; a wholehearted support for the regional security agenda implies a grim political future without the endorsement of the northern oligarchs. Meanwhile, by not showing the courage to stand up for their people buffeted by insecurity, they risk the scorn and alienation from those they supposedly represent. In any case, the emergence of *Amotekun*,

and also, *Ebube Agu* in the East is a commentary on the failure of the federal security agencies to adequately police the country⁴⁸

This explains why southern political leaders are often hesitant to perform their most important function, and consistently defer to the northern power structure on security sector reforms. Additionally, many political leaders implicated in cases of monumental graft become willing victims of political blackmail by government anticorruption agencies—widely perceived as a tool deployed by successive administrations to muzzle political opponents.⁴⁹

Trust and Security Management in Nigeria

The failure of various institutions charged with the responsibility of providing security in Nigeria have stimulated fear, suspicion, and lack of trust by the public that has continued to undermine security management in the country. Emerging research on trust and security suggest that developing a security community of trust is crucial in managing security questions.⁵⁰ Trust is important in understanding particularly human security management “because it is impossible to regulate every aspect of human interaction on the basis of legal codes.”⁵¹ Trust in public institutions is essential for good governance and critical for security provision and management. In this connection, the Nigerian political leadership needs to develop a culture of trust and promote a productive reform of the country’s security system. This has profound implications for effective security management in Nigeria.

While trust is a precondition for security, its absence, as already observed, stimulates non-state security outfits and undermines genuine reforms in public institution. Past outfits such as *Hisbah*, *Bakassi Boys*, Niger-Delta militants, and OPC emerged mostly against the inability of the state to cope with insecurity, repressive abuses—sometimes perpetrated by security officials themselves—and an unwillingness to reform security architecture.⁵² The question of brutality and lack of trust in the security forces is not new. In the structure of colonial Nigeria, the security agencies, particularly the police, behaved as occupational force. This implies that the colonial police were ruthless, brutal, corrupt, and dishonest.

In the post-colonial state, security architecture remained the same, such that national security equated state security.⁵³ This worsened when politicians used state security agencies to further their own interests.⁵⁴ Questions of security further complicated and trust eroded with the increasing decline of the social state and rise of the political state.⁵⁵ The decline culminated in the escalation of criminal activities and proliferation of non-state security outfits to fill the yawning gap created by the absence of state presence. As the security sector itself became the biggest threat against citizens, trust continually diminished and people lost confidence in the security architecture, resulting in public alienation.

Suggestively, corruption and public alienation have been major institutional challenges militating against governance and accountability of the security sector, particularly the police. In 2012, former Inspector General (IG) of Police, Mohammed Abubakar, acknowledged the profound nature of the rot:

The Nigeria Police Force has fallen to its lowest level and has indeed become a subject of ridicule within the law enforcement community and among members of the enlarged public. Police duties have become commercialized...Our men are

deployed to rich individuals and corporate entities such that we lack manpower to provide security for the common man.⁵⁶

The implication is that violent crime and all forms of insecurity are likely to abound with commercialization of security. This partly explains why the North-East remains volatile with insecurity unabated. Political interference, public alienation, and high-level corruption in the security sector continue to hinder community/security sector information sharing. This has in turn emboldened non-state armed groups and continued to reinforce the demand for alternative security outfits to guarantee public security. It is imperative to overhaul the entire security architecture and reform the sector. To rethink the security architecture and articulate holistic people-driven security reform, trust remains a crucial element in security governance.

Conclusion

This article interrogated growing questions of insecurity in the midst of highly centralized security architecture and the emergence of 'alternative' regional security organisations *Amotekun*, Eastern Security Network, and *Ebube Agu*. Nigeria's variant of federalism occasioned by long years of military dictatorship led to the concentration of security decision-making in central government. This continues to undermine Nigeria's security architecture and triggers debates over the devolution of security powers between central government and component states. The politics of the country – predominantly centered on identity groups: communal, ethnic, religious and regional – reflects in its security decision making. This pattern of politics undermines effective security and further underscores the importance of security sector reform.

Furthermore, the birth of *Amotekun*, ESN and *Ebube Agu* is symbolic in the sense of nudging a reluctant Nigeria towards a return to the principle and practice of federalism as before the advent of military rule with its centralizing ethos. Instructively, the collaboration of affected state governors in the formation of *Amotekun* and *Ebube Agu* for joint protection is an indication of the frustrations the federating units have with the defective federal arrangement. They also call attention to the need for genuine and holistic constitutional review that will lead to a peoples' constitution and a redefinition of the powers and responsibilities. The various partisan reactions and controversy generated by formation of regional security arrangements demonstrate the mistrust and tension between a central government intent on jealously guarding its sphere of constitutional influence and the state governments struggling to extract concessions on the one hand, and the antipathy and hostilities between rival ethnic formations in the country on the other hand. It also signposts the dearth of politics driven by a vision for collective security and nationbuilding. As Nwolise argued, "The achievements of *Amotekun* will not be measured by how many enemies of the people its operatives killed, but by how many of its people were prevented from being killed."⁵⁷ This overriding vision of collective security should drive the consideration of policy initiatives rather than conspiracy theories. Apart from reframing the centralized security structure, Nigeria's security sector needs greater transparency and better oversight.

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Notes

¹ Hendrickson & Karkoska 2001; Atelhe, Adams & Abunimye 2016; Detzner 2017; and Page 2019.

² Hendrickson & Karkoska 2001.

³ Chanaa 2002; Jackson & Albrecht 2011; and Heiduk 2014.

⁴ Buzan 1991; Sedra 2017; and Eickhoff 2020.

⁵ Fayemi 2003; Ibeanu & Momoh 2008; Olaleye 2012; Page 2019; and Siollun 2021.

⁶ Page 2019; Conflict Armament Research (CAR) 2020; and Siollun 2021.

⁷ Page 2019.

⁸ Onwuzuruigbo 2020.

⁹ Akinsanya and Hassan, 2017

¹⁰ Siollun 2021.

¹¹ Detzner 2017; Sedra 2017; and Eickhoff 2020.

¹² See Hendrickson and Karkoszka 2001:175.

¹³ Sedra 2017.

¹⁴ Audiopedia 2017.

¹⁵ Hendrickson and Karkoszka 2001.

¹⁶ Hendrickson and Karkaszka 2001; Jackson and Albrecht 2011; and Detzner 2017.

¹⁷ Chanaa 2002; and Eickhoff 2020.

¹⁸ Dempsey 2014.

¹⁹ Nnabuihe, Adebogun, Kosoko and George 2019; and Onwuzuruigbo 2020.

²⁰ Oshita and Ikelegbe 2019: 28.

²¹ Ibeanu and Momoh 2008: 8.

²² Page 2019.

²³ This draws from Sen 2006 who suggested that any identity that perceives itself as threatened as fights back to defend such identity.

²⁴ Aiyede 2009; and Oshita and Ikelegbe 2019.

²⁵ Kimani 2009.

²⁶ *Vanguard*, 7 July 2021.

²⁷ Interview with security expert – personal communication, 17 March 2022.

²⁸ Onwuzuruigbo 2020.

²⁹ See the Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended.

³⁰ Institute for Economics and Peace 2022.

³¹ Yake 2019.

- ³² Ashindorbe 2019.
- ³³ Adeniran 2017.
- ³⁴ Campbell 2020
- ³⁵ Ashindorbe, Afatakpa and Owonikoko 2021.
- ³⁶ *Vanguard*, 31 March 2021.
- ³⁷ *Vanguard*, 16 January 2020.
- ³⁸ Interview – personal communication, 21 February 2022.
- ³⁹ Adejumo 2021
- ⁴⁰ Nwokeoma 2021.
- ⁴¹ Wilson 2006
- ⁴² Agbo 2021.
- ⁴³ *Daily Post*, 23 April 2021.
- ⁴⁴ Felbab-Brown 2021.
- ⁴⁵ Interview with Ebube Agu operative – personal communication, 20 March 2022.
- ⁴⁶ Odoobo 2019.
- ⁴⁷ Agbo 2021.
- ⁴⁸ Interview – personal communication, 9 March 2022.
- ⁴⁹ Page 2020; Human Rights Watch 2011.
- ⁵⁰ Cross, Kentera, Nation and Vukadinovic 2013.
- ⁵¹ Crepaz 2008: 93.
- ⁵² Ibeanu and Momoh 2008.
- ⁵³ Ake 1996.
- ⁵⁴ Page 2018.
- ⁵⁵ Aiyede 2009.
- ⁵⁶ Cited in Okenyodo 2016, p. 1.
- ⁵⁷ Nwolise 2020, not paginated.