

Security Challenges in Nigeria and Decentralised Solutions: Qualitative Exploration of the Western Nigeria Security Network (*Amotekun*)

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's centralised security system, as outlined in the 1999 constitution, is a serious challenge. This article examined the complexities of policing in Nigeria, where state governors are establishing complementary security outfits in response to the challenges and inadequacy of the centralised system. This study explored the Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) "Operation *Amotekun*" as hybrid policing, where both state and non-state actors collaborate in providing security. This research drew on interviews with members of *Amotekun*, the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigerian Securities and Civil Defence Corps, local security organisations, political actors, and leaders of ethnic groups. The findings revealed that reduction in insecurity in southwestern Nigeria is due to the hybrid nature of *Amotekun* in policing the region. The findings put to test the notion of a single, highly centralised police force and highlights the potential of a more decentralised and collaborative approach, as argued by the subsidiarity principle. While Operation *Amotekun* has reduced various forms of crime, there are dangers in the proliferation of ethnic-based security outfits. This article contributes to the ongoing debate by providing an exploration of how hybrid policing, and the subsidiarity principle, can resolve the perennial conflicts between the central government and the federating units on security matters within the context of Nigerian federation. The study recommends the hybrid security model between state and non-state actors in securing a federal state than the centralised provision in the constitution, which is antithetical to security provision in a federation.

Keywords: Security, Centralised Security Policy, *Amotekun*, Hybrid Policing, Subsidiarity Principle.

INTRODUCTION

The under-development and poor-economic growth in Nigeria are attributable to insecurity. Insecurity has disrupted political stability, weakened state institutions, limited investment, and constrained socio-economic development. Historically, it truncated civilian rule in 1966, merely six years after the October 1, 1960 independence. Ethnic politics, tensions and sectarian violence then led to civil war between 1967 and 1970. In this, the regional police was misused (Vasseh & Ehinmore 2011; Adedeji, 2012; Oladejo, 2022). Consequently, policing has remained the exclusive preserve of the central government despite the return to civil rule. Nigeria has practiced civil rule since 1999, however with perennial challenges of internal insecurity. This widespread insecurity has exposed the inadequacy of the centralised security system within the country as provided in the 1999 constitution (as amended). According to section 214 of the 1999 constitution (as amended), there shall be one police force for the whole country. This implies only the Nigeria Police Force can enforce law in Nigeria (David & Salifu, 2020). The result is inadequate policing and proliferation of ungoverned spaces where crime and criminal elements have found haven in nefarious activities (Ojo, 2020). A place is ungoverned if there is a lack of security or the security provision is inadequate or not commensurate to the nature of the place and its population. In an interview with The Cable Newspaper (2023), the Inspector General of Police, Mr Egbetokun, confirmed that the NPF is understrength at 370 thousand personnel. Thus, the force lacks the required human resources to adequately police Nigerians estimated at 200 million people. Hence, while there might be visible police/security presence in urban areas such as state capitals and commercial centres, most rural areas suffer a dearth of security, therefore are categorised as ungoverned spaces.

The centralised internal security policy model has faced criticism. To Ikedinma (2018), it is a constitutional anomaly in a federation. In their views, Majekodunmi (2015) and Deribe (2023) both agreed that Nigeria runs a unitary structure disguised as federalism. In Nigeria's federal context, the federal government's powers dwarf the combined powers of the other 810 subnational governments (Odeyemi & Obiyan, 2017). Resultantly, there is lack of fluidity in governance (Odeyemi & Obiyan, 2017) especially in the provision of security due to over-centralisation (David & Salifu, 2020). The consequence is slow federal government responses to security threats and persistent insecurity across the country. Federal responses are ineffectual, haphazard and deficient in application due to the localisation of the threats (Moliki, Nkwede, & Dauda, 2020). Despite these problems, the central government has been reluctant to decentralise internal policing powers to address insecurity (Ikedinma, 2018; Bello et al., 2022; Ugwuoke et al., 2023).

In view of the security lop-sidedness, state governments are devising other means to provide security. Therefore, governors have formed or backed ethnic militias and vigilantes as auxiliary security forces (Obado-Joel, 2020; Adetumbi & Adedigba, 2021; Olubade & Ogunnoiki, 2020). Conversely, Western Nigeria Security Network "Operation *Amotekun*" is the response of governors of the south-western states of Ekiti, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Osun and Oyo to insecurity in the region (Obado-Joel, 2020; Olubade & Ogunnoiki, 2020). Kidnapping, armed robbery, ritual killings, arson, separatist agitations, cultism, and herder-farmers' clashes are some of the most predominant crimes in the region (Ogunbode et al., 2021; Olubade & Ogunnoiki, 2020). These crimes often have ethnic connotations especially kidnapping and farmer-herders clashes. Farming is a major occupation among southerners while cattle herding is more prominent among northerners. The indiscriminate grazing of cattle on cultivated farmland is a major catalyst in the clash between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. Accordingly, Ololajulo (2020) asserted that insecurity in the southwest is ethnic motivated.

Hence, the formation of *Amotekun* was criticised by northern elites who perceived the action of the governors as targeted against herders in the southwest (Oluwasuji & Oluduro, 2021; Nnabuihe, Ashinorbe & Odobo, 2023). This gives credence to the assertion of Campbell (2002) that there is politics to insecurity. To allay ethnic fears and downplay the ethnic undertone of *Amotekun*, Governor, Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti at the time touted *Amotekun* as "...a complement that gives our people hope that they are being looked after by the people they elected into office" (Olubade & Ogunnoiki, 2021.p. 8). The proliferation of ethnic militias pose danger to national unity (Obado-Joel, 2020), yet, *Amotekun* was a response to the failure of centralised police system (Nnabuihe et al., 2023), needed for improved local security (Agbaje et al., 2022).

Despite *Amotekun* been a child of necessity (Olubade & Ogunnoki, 2022), the formation and proliferation of ethnic based militias portends danger in a multi-ethnic federation. Adopting extra-judicial measures, these groups achieve early success in crime fighting, but often become perpetrators of crimes themselves (Felbab-Brown, 2021). Studies of the activities of Odua People's Congress and Bakaasi Boys (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Obado-Joel, 2020; Crisis Group, 2002; Felbab-Brown, 2021) have exposed the egregious crimes of these ethnic militias. These groups engage in tortures, extra-judicial killings, illegal detentions, political violence and ethnic motivated attacks. Therefore, Obado-Joel (2020) argued that ethnic militias adversely affect the stability and integration of multi-ethnic countries as they often have ethnic agendas. This corroborated Egbefo's (2015, p.78) that "Existence of ethnic and religious militias have multiple effects on society, especially in our quest for intergroup relations". The activities of these groups exacerbate ethnic tensions and widen the gap between ethnic groups by fostering "*in group and out group* "consciousness" (Shneiderman et. al, 2023).

Conversely, the southwest has witnessed improved security since *Amotekun* was formed on January 9, 2020 (Ayodel, Shittu & Balogun, 2024; Awotayo, Omitola & Oladokun, 2023). While the proponents of *Amotekun* and some scholars are quick to credit the security outfit for this improvement (Ogunnoki & Olubade, 2020; Ololajulo, 2021; Oluwasuji & Oluduro, 2021), others argued that *Amotekun* is ineffective (Abang & Adeyemi, 2022). However, these studies examined *Amotekun* as a single security outfit and not as part of a hybrid of security organisations performing complimentary security roles in the southwest region. Another aspect of *Amotekun* operations that has not been adequately explored in literature is how the operations of the security outfit is shaping ethnic relations in the southwest. Therefore, this paper seeks to fill this gaps by empirically investigating *Amotekun* operations through the prisms of hybrid policing and the subsidiarity principle. Conceptual and theoretical issues related to the subject matter will be analysed.

Conceptualisation

Federalism connotes a constitutional arrangement, of governmental powers distribution in a country (Obiyan, 2013). Such distribution of powers occurs between the central government and other administrative units. According to Adamolekun (1991), a federal system consists of higher and lower levels of government. The higher levels of government are the central government, which has jurisdiction over the whole country, while the lower levels of governments are states, regions or provinces with limited jurisdictions over clearly defined geographic areas and matters pertaining to them. Hence, Hague and Harrop (2010) observed that federalism produces shared sovereignty between the central government and provincial governments. These governments have continuous interactions due to overlapping responsibilities (concurrent functions). Thus, the two or more levels of “governments in a federation are expected to be coordinate and not subordinates” (Joseph, Ikedinma, Adeyemi, & Josephine, 2024). This follows Wheare’s (1964) classical conceptualisation of federalism of coordinate and independent tiers of government (Majekodunmi, 2015).

The existence of multiple levels of government in a federal polity often results in frictions. This is why Maddox (1941) called federalism a quest for balance between poles of unity and diversity. Federal systems are a product of prevailing milieus; hence, constitutional measures to ameliorate the prevalent centrifugal forces that precipitated the adoption of federalism should be put in place. Therefore, to attain the required equilibrium for stability in a federation, government powers might be unevenly distributed. Accordingly, constitutional power sharing in a federation can produce three trends, centralization, decentralization and de-concentration (Abdulmalik & Ishaku, 2022). Succinctly, centralization occurs when more powers are given as a matter of the constitution to the central government while the states or units are deprived powers to increase the policy scope of the central government. On the hand, De-concentration occurs in an atmosphere of increased interaction and participation of the federating units in the process of decision making between the central government and the federating units at the insistence of the central government. Hence, De-centralization is more of an informal arrangement or curtesy on the part of the federal government who retains its powers. Finally, Decentralization is the constitutional transfer of powers from the central government to the subordinate units (Rocher & Rouillard, 1997).

Subsidiarity Principle

The subsidiarity principle is distinct from federalism. Federalism as expostulated above is about the division of powers between different levels of government in a country. Subsidiarity principle on the other hand is about making sure that decisions are made at the most appropriate level of government concerning urgent matters. The subsidiarity principle is concerned about decentralised decision-making. This principle is traceable to the Catholic Church around 1891 and the writings of Pope Pius XI in 1931. According to Schutze (2009), subsidiarity originates from the Latin term “subsidium”, denoting aid or assistance and was first invoked by the church in late 19th century. Fundamentally, it emphasised that higher authorities should not interfere in the political affairs of lower units unless necessary (Schutze, 2009). However, government functions should be performed by the lowest level of government capable of doing so effectively (Aroney, 2016). Hence, only tasks that cannot be performed by local authorities should be performed by the central authorities. Thus, it promotes cooperative federalism (Brouillet, 2011), and participatory governance. Similarly, Gussen (2019) opined that the principle emphasises the role of cities as local governance centres, highlighting the importance of local decision making in addressing scale-related issues. In the context of this research, the subsidiarity principle will connote the decentralisation of policing and internal security in Nigeria for improved security outcomes.

Security

Security represents an essential prerequisite for development, with Baldwin (1997) characterizing it as a "challenged concept." The fundamental importance of security is underscored by numerous scholars. Waltz (1979) notes that states can only pursue "tranquillity, profit, and power" when safety provides assurance; Omoroje et al. (2021) assert that development activities cease without security; Nwolise (2019) maintains nothing worthwhile can be accomplished absent security; and Momodu (2019) argues no society develops without security because "where no security exists, nothing is given."

The conceptualization of security has evolved significantly. As Agbaje et al. (2022) observe, security and insecurity represent "different sides of one coin." Traditional state-centric approaches prioritized national security, which Morgenthau (1987) conceived as involving policymakers, security agencies, and international organizations protecting domestic interests from external threats. Nwolise (2006) emphasized military primacy in this paradigm.

Contemporary security scholarship has shifted toward human-centered approaches. Kufor (2010) argues that freedom from poverty, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation, and arbitrary governance constitute human security dimensions. Dunmoye (2021) identifies individuals, properties, basic human needs, and healthy environments as human security essentials. The UNDP CHS (2003) attributes this paradigm shift to two dynamics: the complexity of interconnected security threats (protracted conflicts, human trafficking, climate change, health pandemics, terrorism, economic downturns) and the recognition that addressing these threats requires holistic, innovative approaches.

Security has been further conceptualized as absence of threats and freedom from danger (Shepherd & Weldes, 2008; Dami, 2021). Kotovchevski and Kotovchevski (2018) expand this to encompass environmental considerations and the safety of all natural species, while both these scholars and Nwolise (2019) incorporate spiritual dimensions into comprehensive security frameworks.

Internal Security Policy under the 1999 Constitution

Nigeria's centralized internal security architecture evolved as a response to historical contingencies, particularly the perceived destabilizing role of regional police during the 1967-1970 Civil War (Saka & Oladejo, 2022). This structural transformation marked a significant departure from the previous model where federating units—regions—exercised substantial control over internal security apparatuses (Majekodunmi, 2015). The reconfiguration of Nigeria's federal structure from four regions to twelve states in 1967 represented a strategic intervention to preserve national cohesion during an impending conflict (Akinyele, 1996; Ota et al., 2020).

The subsequent decades witnessed a progressive power concentration at the federal level, creating a governance asymmetry that scholars argue undermines authentic federalism. Odeyemi and Obiyan (2017) observe that the federal government possesses greater constitutional authority than all 810 federating units combined. While proponents of devolution advocate for "true federalism," Odeyemi and Obiyan (2017) contend this represents an "elusive ideal." Elaigwu (2013) offers a contextual perspective, arguing that federal systems inevitably reflect distinctive historical trajectories and socio-political environments.

Despite theoretical justifications for centralized security governance, empirical evidence suggests this model has compromised effective protection of lives and property (Awotayo & Omitola, 2024). Escalating insecurity has exposed fundamental inadequacies in the Nigeria Police Force and the broader security architecture (Nwagboso, 2018; David & Salifu, 2020; Moliki, Nkwede; Deribe, 2023). Adetumbi and Adedigba (2021) characterize the situation starkly: "Nigeria is overwhelmingly crushed under the burden of insecurity" (p.20). Consequently, scholarly consensus increasingly advocates for internal security decentralization as a governance imperative (Ikedinma, 2018; Nwagboso, 2018; David & Salifu, 2020; Moliki, Nkwede & Dauda, 2020; Bello et al., 2022; Deribe, 2023; Ugwuoke et al., 2023).

Federalism and National Security Policy in Nigeria

Nigeria's federal system has significantly shaped its national security policy. Obasanjo (Tyoden, 2005, p. 172–173) stated that the primary objective of national security is to strengthen the Federal Republic of Nigeria, contain instability, control crime, eliminate corruption, and improve the welfare of citizens. However, historical factors have led to the centralization of national security, concentrating power in the central government and weakening local governance structures. This over-centralization has hindered Nigeria's achievement of the national security objectives outlined by Obasanjo, fueling calls for decentralization in line with the subsidiarity principle. Fakanbi and Raji (2013) criticized Nigerian federalism as having an "unfederal character."

Awotayo and Omitola (2024) argued that the over-centralization of security forces has alienated local communities, worsening insecurity. Similarly, Ola (2017) linked central control to the rise of domestic terrorism, particularly Boko Haram, which he attributed to political and economic marginalization. Ewetan, Ike, and Olurinola (2015) suggested that the absence of true fiscal federalism exacerbates ethnic tensions and insecurity. As a result, the centralized security framework has faced criticism for its inability to effectively address Nigeria's diverse security challenges, such as terrorism and intercommunal violence.

This highlights the urgent need to reassess Nigeria's federal system to strengthen local security mechanisms. Nwekede, Dauda, and Orija (2018) proposed a neo-federal paradigm as a potential solution. Ewan et al. (2015) argued that decentralizing fiscal control and empowering local governments could more effectively address security issues and promote peace. This would also impact state police, another solution suggested by Saka and Oladejo (2023) to combat insecurity. However, underlying factors such as corruption and governance failure may hinder federalism as the sole solution to Nigeria's security challenges.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings for this paper are subsidiarity principle and hybrid policing. Power distribution is the crux of the matter in the debate over which level of government should perform the function of security in a federation. Accordingly, Odeyemi and Obiyan (2017, p. 3) argued that the subsidiarity principle "offers a useful guide on power distribution among units of government in federations". The powers, authorities and duties of government must be delegated as to improve service delivery (Odeyemi & Obiyan, 2017). Therefore, the criteria of efficiency, suitability and interest should determine which level of government performs a function (Gamper, 2005). Additionally, (Gamper, 2005), asserted that expertise and familiarity with issues must be considered, hence, the capacity of local authorities must be improved.

Similarly, hybrid policing offers a typology of policing built on collaboration. This is most applicable in an atmosphere of plural policing. Although this concept was coined by Johnson (1992) but without any clear definition (Widagso & Hariyani, 2015), Johnson (1992) used this concept to qualify other agencies of state involved in providing security for the state. According to Alemika (2019), "plural policing refers to the existence of a plurality of institutions, organisations and groups delivering security and safety in a country or society. Hence, Alemika (2019) submitted that the collaboration, integration and coordination between these different agencies involved in security is hybrid policing. Hence, Wakefield and Button (2015, p.572) argued that "It is recognised, therefore, that policing is undertaken by the "public" police, other public policing bodies, "hybrid" policing bodies, private security, and by voluntary organisations." Similarly, Urane and Suryadi (2023) conceived of hybrid policing as an evolution in policing aimed at making the police current in a changing climate. Thus, hybrid policing combines traditional policing concepts and community policing concepts. Combining these two concepts results in more effective and responsive policing system (Urane & Suryadi, 2023). Widagso and Hariyani, 2015 included information system and technology as aspect of hybrid policing.

In this vein, Vladious (2014) explored the information technology aspect of hybrid policing, listing bodies involved to include government and its institutions, business community, academic community, and civil society. However, the original concept as postulated by Johnson (1992) mentioned bodies engaged in functions related to state security, special police forces, departments of state, municipal bodies, and miscellaneous regulatory and investigative bodies (p. 116-118).

Thus, Amotekun can be regarded as a municipal body since it operates at the sub-national level. Hence, its proximity to the people can facilitate quick response to security threats which was lacking with the prior centralised policing system in the country. Similarly, being members of the community also help Amotekun in information gathering, crime detection, prevention, and investigation. However, hybrid policing ensures that Amotekun can pass on information to the federal police in instances where the crime fighting might involve collaboration. Apart from this, the NPF are the only institution that can legally prosecute suspects in the law courts, hence the inevitability of collaboration either in confronting crime or in criminal justice. Hybrid policing and subsidiarity are thus emphasising the efficacy of institutions nearest to the people when it comes to handling certain functions of government, in this instance, security.

METHODOLOGY

This research is exploratory in design. Data for this study was from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was sourced through in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) on purposively selected respondents from six (6) Local Governments in Ondo and Oyo states. These states had characteristics considered integral to achieving the research aim and answering the research questions. In Ondo State, Akoko South-East, Owo, and Akure North local governments were purposively selected as areas that have reported high incidences of insecurity and fraught ethnic relations due to insecurity. Similarly, Orelope, Itesiwaju and Saki local governments in Oyo State were selected for data gathering. A total of forty-four (44) participants were sampled for semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews and two (2) FGDs. For semi-structured interviews thirty-seven (37) respondents were sampled while seven (7) respondents were sampled for key informant interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for six (6) Amotekun officers, eighteen (18) community leaders, and two (2) house of assembly members. While the respondents for the key informant interviews were a lecturer from the University of Ibadan, who was part of the *Amotekun* policy drafting committee. Also, two (2) representatives of (Developmental Agenda for Western Nigeria) DWAN commission, one Nigeria Police Force officer (PRO or representative) each from Ondo and Oyo States, and, one officer Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (PRO or representative) each from Ondo and Oyo State. Similarly, two (2) Lawmakers from state house of assemblies of Ondo and Oyo were also interviewed, one. In-depth interviews were conducted for eighteen (18) community leaders from both Ondo and Oyo States, making nine (9) each and three (3) per local government; two FGDs were organized with 14 participants (7 for each group) drawn from ethnic groups in Ondo and Oyo States. Data collected were content analyzed thematically.

This study adopts a qualitative design because the research questions concern meaning, relationships and lived experience of security, phenomena less accessible through structured surveys. This choice, together with the confinement of fieldwork to Ondo and Oyo States, limits the generalisability of the findings to the wider southwest and to Nigeria's federation as a whole. Reliance on interview and FGD testimony also raises the possibility of participant bias, given the political sensitivity of security matters in the region. To reduce this risk, accounts were triangulated across respondent categories, including Amotekun officers, community leaders, conventional security agencies and ethnic representatives, and were cross-checked against the independent quantitative and comparative evidence discussed later in this article.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Views on Amotekun presence and sense of security in Ondo and Oyo

Security is both perception and reality. Hence, the presence of security personnel might enhance people's sense of security. Conversely, too much security presence might result in over-militarisation, which can be perceived negatively by some people. As a result, the perception of the presence of security personnel is subjective. Consequently, respondents were asked how the presence of Amotekun operatives enhanced their sense of security. Majority of respondents opined that Amotekun patrols have improved security presence in their communities. This was most especially the case in rural areas without police presence. According to a respondent:

Amotekun members always patrol our roads around the community. This makes us feel safe... Because they are local boys from this area, they take the work of providing security serious (Respondent 34[Yoruba]. Isua-Akoko, Akoko-Southwest LG, Ondo, November 14, 2024).

Another interviewee also mentioned how recruiting Amotekun operatives from the communities they are to guide is a good strategy.

Since Amotekun officers are sons of the soil, they know some things about the communities that non-indigene police officers might not know. As natives of the community, who understands the local language, Amotekun members often hear things that help them in the discharge of their duties (Respondent 5, DAWN Commission, Ibadan, Oyo. November 7, 2024).

Conversely, respondents were asked if they witnessed any form of discrimination during Amotekun patrols or stop and search. Although the representatives of non-Yoruba ethnic groups stressed that they did not feel discriminated against, however, a contrary report was given during the Focus Group Discussion:

There was a day when I was driving towards a roadblock by Amotekun for stop and search. I noticed that while all Yoruba people were allowed to pass without searching their vehicles, all the Fulani vehicles were searched. I do not know if this was due to information that Amotekun had, yet it looked like discrimination to me (Participant 5, FGD, Igboho, Itesiwaju LG, January 15.2025).

The above exemplifies how the presence of security operatives might both be positive and negative.

Respondents in Ondo that were non-Yoruba were asked if there have been instances of discrimination and profiling against them or people they know by Amotekun operatives. The leader of Igbo people responded thus:

I am the leader of Igbo people association in Akoko-Southeast and I can tell you that none of our members have suffered any form of harassment in the hands of Amotekun operatives. We are free to move around and do our business here. The Iyengba people and other security including Amotekun do not give us any problem. We usually have meetings with them so all is peaceful in this town.

Similarly, representatives of the Hausa community were asked about harassments and discriminations, and one of them had this to say:

I have been living in Isua for over 15 years and have brought my brothers to this town to do business. If they did not welcome me, I will not go back to Adamawa to bring more people. The Amotekun people are providing security for us, and we are happy with the way they work.

These two excerpts from Isua, Akoko, in Ondo state had corroborations from Uso, Owo and Igede in Akure North LG. Hence, Amotekun operatives appear largely non-partial in the discharge of their duties. However, this was the product of deliberate moves by Amotekun. According to the representatives of DAWN Commission in Ibadan, Oyo state:

During one of our visits to the late Alaaḡin Adeyemi, Baba said we must make sure Fulani and non-Yoruba people are included in the operation of Amotekun. The Alaaḡin said these people have knowledge of the forests that can be invaluable to Amotekun operatives when they chase criminals into the forest areas. So Amotekun does not discriminate, in fact, Amotekun has arrested more Yoruba people than non-Yoruba people.

However, the presence of Amotekun is not only overt, but it can also be covert. Another DAWN Commission representative also related the experience of a plain cloth female Amotekun operative who was able to burst a drug ring in Ibadan because she was seen as just a member of the community and not a security operative. She was not perceived as a threat by the criminals.

Despite the formation of Amotekun to increase security presence and reduce ungoverned spaces, some respondents in Igede, Akure North LG and Uso, Owo LG complained of the lack of Amotekun presence in their communities. The traditional ruler of Igede, noted in an interview that no member of the community was recruited into Amotekun despite applying. The researcher also witnessed lack of security presence and ungoverned spaces along the deserted road leading to the town. In Uso, the community complained that the Amotekun operatives have refused to stay in the town:

We wrote to their office [Amotekun] in Akure, and they told us to build an office for them. We built it and installed solar panels for electricity because the area has no power supply. Yet, they only used it for a few weeks and left (Respondent 12, Uso, Owo LG, Ondo, November).

However, despite the lack of Amotekun presence, the respondents admitted that they are always in contact with Amotekun. This dearth of Amotekun operatives was also mentioned in Isua, during interviews and FGDs. A farmer speaking in Isua Akoko said:

I would say Amotekun is trying in the town but our farms are still largely unprotected. The Fulani herders are still attacking us physically and stealing our farm produce... Amotekun is powerless most times because the Fulani's disappear into the forest after committing criminal acts. Even when Amotekun confronts the Fulani, the Fulani have more sophisticated weapons. How do you expect Amotekun to confront AK 47 with hunters' gun?

Similarly, a respondent from Uso presented it thus:

I think the way federal government under president Buhari handled the Fulani embolden the Fulani. Sometimes when we apprehend them after destroying our farms, the Fulani herders will tell us that they are the owners of Nigeria.

An interviewee from Isua-Akoko noted in frustration: *"The Fulani are our problem"*. The impact of insecurity with ethnic colouration was obvious in the ethnic composition of Uso, Owo. Although there is a thriving Hausa community with recognised head and representatives, one of the village chiefs categorically said:

We do not sell lands to Fulani here. This is because of the evil things they do around here. All the kidnappings here are perpetrated by them [Fulani]... The people that are kidnapped here are taken to Ose. We know where the Fulani are in Ose, and that is where we go to rescue our people that they kidnapped. Nobody will sell lands to any Fulani here, we will not allow it.

The effectiveness of collaboration between Amotekun and other security agencies, and ethnic groups in its operations.

The complexities of security provision in a federal state makes collaboration inevitable. In the case of Amotekun, collaboration with conventional security outfits like Nigeria Police Force and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps forms part of their operational mandate. Amotekun lacks powers to prosecute cases in the court of law, hence, they must hand over criminal suspects to the NPF. Apart from this, Amotekun is made up of former NSCDC, soldiers and NPF officers. In Ondo state, the head of Amotekun retired as an NSCDC officer. This has made it easy for these security organisations to work together. Additionally, the NSCDC trained Amotekun operatives and they often work in patrols together. The cordial working relationship between these security agencies has produced good results in security such as the case of the example of the plain cloth female Amotekun operative cited above.

Although it might appear that Amotekun single-handedly handled this situation, further questions revealed that it was joint effort. According to the representative of Development Agenda for Western Nigeria:

After the plain cloth female operative had gathered enough actionable evidence against the drug gang members, her report was passed to members of NDLEA for action. It was the members of the NDLEA that arrested the culprits (Respondent 5, DAWN Commission, Ibadan, Oyo. November 7, 2024)

This instance represents both subsidiarity and hybrid policing. The core tenants of subsidiarity are making the most suitable, efficient and effective organ responsible for the provision of services. In this regard, Amotekun was most suitable for un-obstructive information gathering while the NDLEA arrested the criminals. The two security agencies working together in a form of hybrid policing resulted in the success of the operation.

Another example of good collaboration emerged during the interview held with the traditional ruler of Igede community. The traditional ruler narrated how his wife was kidnapped:

My wife was kidnapped 2 to 3 years ago. I was not at home at the time. When I was informed about, I quickly contacted security agents including Amotekun. The police, NSCDC, village hunters and Amotekun went into the forest, and we were able to rescue her.

Similarly, the respondents from Uso, Owo LG, Ondo also said the provision of security in the community is the joint efforts of Uso Security Network, NPF, NSCDC, the Nigerian Army and Amotekun. However, security

provision also involves collaboration with members of other ethnic groups. The representatives of DAWN Commission submitted that:

You will be surprised that the Fulani people help in security provision, especially in combing the forests. Amotekun operatives often must rely on them when there is need to carry out investigations into the forests.

Furthermore, involving non-Yoruba groups in security provision helps to give a sense of belonging to such groups. A Benue man who is residing in Uso, Owo, LG and another Benue man living in Igede, Akure North LG, Ondo both spoke of how participating in the security of their communities make them feel accepted. When Amotekun respondents were asked about specific strategies that Amotekun employed to carry out its functions in Ondo state, no specific framework was mentioned. However, an interviewee from Isua-Akoko, Akoko-Southeast local government area, who was speaking as a representative of *Iyengba* (village Police) said Amotekun operatives domiciled in the town did not recognise them as important players in the security of the community. Another interviewee during the FGD in Isua-Akoko corroborated it thus

When the military post a new head to Isua, the new head of the soldiers always come here to meet with us. Unfortunately, the Amotekun people don't do that. It's like they don't recognise that we are here to help them.

Conversely, when the claims of lack of collaboration between Amotekun and *Iyengba* was investigated further, it emerged that although Amotekun truly does not meet with the village security group, there is a monthly meeting held at the police station that brings together all security outfits in the town. Speaking on this meeting, a retired NSCDC operative from Isua-Akoko said:

I am aware that there is a security meeting that is hosted on the third Saturday of every month at the police station. Everyone involved in the security of Isua is always present. We always have the Nigerian Army, the NSCDC, and Iyengba in attendance.

Although the above might suggest cordiality in the relationship between the security outfits, the NPF perceived Amotekun as hinderance to their police work. When the NPF representative was asked if the police provide support for Amotekun, the NPF PRO in Ondo state asked rhetorically: who should support who? This position of the NPF can only be understood in the larger context of crime fighting. The NPF are the only nationally empowered body to provide internal security, hence, the tendency for them to see new outfits such as Amotekun operating at the state level as necessary nuisance or meddlesome interlopers.

However, when asked if Amotekun operations have resulted in ethnic tensions or disagreements in Ondo state, the NPF spokesperson replied in the negative. She said:

There has not been reports of ethnic tensions due to Operation of Amotekun activities. However, we believe that Amotekun has disciplinary procedures for their operatives, so we tend not to interfere unless necessary.

Respondents representing local security outfits such as *Iyengba* in Isua-Akoko and Uso Security Network were asked how NPF treats the suspects they apprehend and handover to the police. The response was that the NPF do not release such suspects unless for lack of evidence. The *Iyengba* representative said:

The police always tell us to make sure we have evidence when we arrest suspects. This is because without evidence, the police cannot keep the accused in detention. So, we try to make sure that there is evidence to show that a person actually committed the crime when we arrest them.

The above shows that the formal and informal actors in security collaborate in performing their functions. This further exemplifies the effectiveness of hybrid policing.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate Amotekun has improved residents' sense of security in Ondo and Oyo states, with interviews and FGDs revealing themes of acceptance and appreciation. While some instances of profiling against non-Yoruba residents exist, this wasn't a major concern. Previous studies on vigilante groups in Nigeria (Human

Rights Watch, 2002; 2003; Obado-Joel, 2020; Felbab-Brown; International Crisis Group, 2022) documented human rights abuses, extra-judicial killings, extortions, ethnic profiling, and other violations, but this study found these issues largely absent with Amotekun.

Two factors explain this positive outcome: Amotekun's formal legal structure ensuring accountability, unlike previous unregistered militias; and proper training of operatives by NSCDC and NPF, including human rights education. This represents a hybrid policing approach with knowledge flowing from national agencies to local security units.

Due to proximity, Amotekun operatives have become de facto first responders in rural areas, embodying the subsidiarity principle. Their visibility and patrols have enhanced residents' feeling of security, though some complained about insufficient presence on farms. Amotekun also mediates herder-farmer conflicts.

However, the relationship between Amotekun and other security agencies (conventional and unconventional) fluctuates. As Shittu and Oyekanmi (2022) noted, interactions between Amotekun and federal security agencies mix "cordial, cooperation, conflict, and confrontation" (p. 18). This inconsistency stems from supremacy contests between security outfits (Alemika, 2003; Omoigui, 2006; Odoma, 2014; Udoma & Aderinto, 2013) and Nigeria's over-centralized federal system (Eme, 2018).

Quantitative and Comparative Evidence on Amotekun's Effectiveness

The qualitative findings above find support in independently collected quantitative data. A mixed-methods study of Ondo State, combining a survey of 800 residents with forty-five key informant interviews, recorded a statistically significant reduction in crime following Amotekun's deployment ($p = 0.006$; $p = 0.026$), attributing the decline to strengthened community guardianship (Ojiezele & Abrifor, 2026). A separate survey of 381 residents across Oyo State communities likewise found broad acceptance of Amotekun and credited it with successful crime prevention, though resourcing and remuneration gaps persisted (Olupeka & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2026). At the national level, the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics' Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey recorded 6.9 million crime incidents in the southwest between May 2023 and April 2024, considerably below the 14.4 million recorded in the northwest and the 8.8 million recorded in the north-central zone, regions without a comparable state-backed hybrid outfit (Punch, 2025). This regional disparity is consistent with, though does not by itself prove, the localised deterrent effect reported by respondents in the present study. The picture is nonetheless one of partial rather than complete improvement: continued kidnapping and farm invasions in Isua-Akoko and Uso, corroborated by independent reporting from elsewhere in the southwest, indicate that Amotekun has reduced but not eliminated insecurity in the region (Premium Times, 2021).

Comparison with other state-backed outfits clarifies which features of Amotekun are transferable. Ebubeagu, established in the southeast in 2021, has struggled with legitimacy amid allegations of partisanship and human rights abuse, partly because federal security leadership in the zone is perceived as ethnically unrepresentative (Nextier, 2023; Blueprint, 2024). The Civilian Joint Task Force in the northeast has filled a similar gap against Boko Haram but remains informally structured and under-resourced. Against this backdrop, Amotekun's comparatively stronger public reception appears linked to its clearer legal backing, its formal NSCDC and NPF training partnership, and its deliberate inclusion of ethnic minorities in operations despite exclusion in recruitment, features less consistently present in these other outfits. A comparator from a similarly federal system outside Nigeria reinforces the point: South Africa's Community Policing Forums, statutorily established in 1995 to bridge police-community relations, have been found by several evaluations to remain inconsistently effective, hampered by weak resourcing, low volunteer retention and limited oversight (Rakubu, 2023). The comparison suggests that legal recognition alone does not guarantee hybrid policing success; sustained funding, training and institutional oversight determine whether decentralised security arrangements outperform, or merely duplicate, centralised policing.

CONCLUSION

Using Western Nigeria Security Network (Amotekun) as an example, this research examined hybrid policing's effectiveness in addressing Nigeria's security challenges. Findings reveal that Amotekun has significantly

enhanced citizens' sense of security in Ondo and Oyo states through its formal structure, accountability, and responsiveness. As first responders in rural areas, Amotekun exemplifies the subsidiarity principle of localized problem-solving. Regular training by national security agencies in human rights and gender sensitivity has improved Amotekun's legitimacy, distinguishing it from previous vigilante groups associated with human rights violations. Challenges persist due to Nigeria's over-centralized federal structure, creating occasional conflicts between Amotekun and federal security agencies. Rural areas, particularly farms, remain vulnerable due to insufficient Amotekun presence. The Amotekun model demonstrates how hybrid policing can resolve tensions between central governments and federating units in security policy development, challenging single centralized police models in favour of more inclusive, decentralised approaches. This research recommends implementing a hybrid security architecture that mitigates risks of ethnic bias while leveraging both state and non-state actors' advantages.

Policy Recommendations for Hybrid Security Governance

Evidence from the Amotekun experience suggests four critical interventions to enhance Nigeria's security architecture. First, institutionalise hybrid policing models nationwide within clear legal frameworks to ensure accountability while leveraging state and non-state synergies. Second, implement structured capacity development through NPF and NSCDC-coordinated training in human rights practices and conflict resolution methodologies. Third, establish formal inter-agency frameworks delineating jurisdictional boundaries and operational protocols to minimize institutional friction. Finally, a constitutional amendment of Nigeria's security architecture through measured decentralisation that balances state autonomy with federal oversight, allowing for contextually responsive security governance aligned with subsidiarity principles.

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