

PERCEPTIONS OF STATE POLICING AMONG TERTIARY STUDENTS IN ILORIN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

State policing has become a prominent topic in Nigeria's ongoing efforts to reform law enforcement and address security challenges. This study, therefore, investigated how students in some selected Nigerian tertiary institutions perceived state policing, with an emphasis on their knowledge of the concept, its efficiency in upholding law and order, and their reservations about its implementation. 32 undergraduate students majoring in criminology and security studies at the University of Ilorin and Kwara State Polytechnic Ilorin provided qualitative data through structured interviews. Analysis of the data showed that responses from 16 participants reached topic saturation. Thematic analysis revealed that students expressed worries over political meddling, corruption, and possible violations of human rights, even as the majority expressed cautious optimism about the ability of state policing to increase security. The paper stressed the necessity of addressing these challenges and offers recommendations for the effective implementation of state policing.

Keywords: Criminology, Nigeria, police, policing, state policing, undergraduate students.

1.0 Introduction

The police's role in crime control and public order has long been contested (Odekunle 1979; Reiner 1997; Alemika 1988; Ikuteyijo 2009; Balogun et al., 2021). In Nigeria, the recent rise in crime rates and increasingly complex security concerns have called into question the effectiveness of a centralised policing system (Adedeji, 2012; Odeh & Umoh, 2015). Terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts often demand local expertise and a quick response, which a centralised force may fail to provide (Ojo, 2019). The problems of the centralised policing system, such as a lack of police preparedness, public distrust, and inadequate community engagement during emergencies, underscore Nigeria's urgent need for state policing (Aborisae & Adeleke, 2024).

The call for the establishment of state policing has gained support in the recent time. Supporters maintain that the existing centralised system is ineffective in tackling Nigeria's security problems, and that state policing will foster more localised, responsible, and

responsive law enforcement (Odeh & Umoh, 2015; Agwanwo, 2014). Former President Goodluck Jonathan has also emphasised the necessity of state policing in addressing security issues such as commercial kidnapping, claiming that state police are critical for effective crime control if properly equipped and integrated with national security to prevent political abuse (Akpan, 2024). Critics, however, argue that state policing may result in power abuse by state governments, discrepancies in policing standards, and large financial burdens on states (Ehwarieme & Uju, 2016).

With rising concerns about centralised policing and its limitations in responding to localised security needs, state policing has been proposed as a potential solution to bridge the gap. However, the success of such reforms depends on public perception, understanding, and trust in this model. Among those engaging in this discourse are tertiary students, particularly criminology and security studies undergraduates, who possess an in-depth view of policing based on academic training and exposure to security issues. This study examined their perspectives, focusing on their knowledge of state policing, perceived effectiveness, and associated concerns, to contribute to a deeper understanding of how youth and future professionals perceive potential police reforms. Understanding their viewpoints is critical since they will have an impact on Nigeria's future security, policymaking, and law enforcement. This study intended to fill this gap of lack of empirical study among the Nigerian undergraduates on the ongoing debates about the implementation of state policing. The significance of this study, however, stems from the empirical insights it provides stakeholders and policymakers, giving a data-driven foundation for decisions on the implementation of state policing in Nigeria.

1.1 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. How do students studying criminology and security studies perceive the effectiveness of state policing in Nigeria in terms of maintaining law and order as well as managing and preventing crime?
- ii. What concerns do the students have about the implementation of state policing in Nigeria?

1.2 Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate how students studying criminology and security studies perceive the effectiveness of state policing in Nigeria in terms of maintaining law and order as well as managing and preventing crime.
2. To determine the students' concerns about the implementation of state policing in Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

Concepts of police and policing

The term "police" was originally used broadly to refer to the overall activity of maintaining social order through a variety of economic, social, and cultural policies (Rawlings, 1995, cited in Reiner, 1997, p. 997). In modern times, however, the police are simply one component of a larger framework of domestic governance and regulation that is critical for the management and control of crime and disturbance (Reiner, 1997). They are the legally permitted authority charged with carrying out the state's responsibilities to rule during public emergencies (Miller, 2023). The police have the capacity to stop citizens from engaging in practices that jeopardise the order they are meant to protect, discouraging not only criminal activity but also immorality and conspiratorial behaviour (Hess, 2009). According to Alemika (2009), the police play an important role in modern society since they connect directly with the people and serve as the first point of contact with the criminal justice system.

On the other hand, policing is a social control process involving various methods and institutions in order to maintain societal order (Reiner, 1997). Policing involves formal and informal actions by institutions and groups to regulate social interactions, protect society members, and enforce societal norms and values (Kasumu, 2017). Odekunle (2004) argued that the primary objective of policing is to ensure security or foster a sense of social and psychological security for most citizens. Mawby (2008) defined "policing" as the comprehensive approach to preventing and detecting crime, involving various agencies, individuals, and community organisations, beyond formal police. Reiner (1997) argued that policing's uniqueness lies in its combination of surveillance mechanisms and the threat of sanctions for deviance, either immediately or through legal processes.

Decentralised policing systems: The concept of state police

In several modern nations, police systems are decentralised, operating at the local, state, and national levels. The United States is the most notable instance of such a policing structure (Reid, 1999). Reid (1999) argued that the necessity for decentralised policing arises from historical distrust of national police agencies, as well as the disparities in law enforcement needs among nations. Agwanwo (2014) defined state policing as a system within a federal structure in which separate state governments engage their own police officers to manage law enforcement in their respective states. Aremu (2014) described state policing as "territorial policing"—a subnational practice in which security activities are delegated to federating states or regions. This policing approach involves state rather than federal authorities overseeing law enforcement management and logistics.

State police models allow states to establish, fund, and manage their own police forces, promoting effective, local-focused law enforcement and public trust, unlike the current federal system, which maintains central government control (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004; Agwanwo, 2014).

Empirical Review

Agwanwo's (2014) study on "State policing and police efficiency in Nigeria", "suggested decentralising the police structure to improve efficiency. The study argued that centralisation hinders effective crime management and suggests that establishing state police could rectify inefficiencies and alleviate crime challenges. Nwogwugwu and Kupoluyi (2015) analysed the debate on state police forces amid high crime rates and insecurity. In their work, "Interrogating the Desirability of State Policing in Nigeria", they argue that federal policing has not met expectations, and critics suggest constitutional and radical reforms are needed for effective policing in Nigeria. Adedeji's (2012) study on "State Police in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges" examined the debate on incorporating state police into Nigeria's policing structure. Supporters argue that state police can handle increasing security challenges and prevent crimes better than the federal system. Critics argue this may lead to a redundant system with overlapping duties. Bakare et al. (2018) in "State Policing in Nigeria: A Response to Emerging Trajectories of Conflict and Crime?" suggested a reform in Nigeria's state policing system, arguing that patron-client dynamics undermine efficiency. They propose a clear division of responsibilities between federal and state police forces, a more flexible system, and preventing political intimidation to improve peace and security. Nwogwugwu and Odedina (2018) in "Policy Framework for Community and State Policing in Combating Rising Security Challenges in Nigeria" highlighted the ineffectiveness of traditional security institutions in addressing Nigeria's security issues. Nwogwugwu and Odedina (2018) argued that a new policy framework decentralising policing, including legal measures allowing federal agencies to collaborate with state-level security outfits, is needed to create a more coordinated and effective security system.

3.0 Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design utilising a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the perceptions of state policing among Nigerian university students. The phenomenological approach was chosen to capture and analyse participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and in-depth understandings of the concept of state policing.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted among undergraduate students studying criminology and security studies at the University of Ilorin and Kwara State Polytechnic Ilorin. The choice of criminology students was deliberate, given their exposure to law enforcement concepts and security issues. The sample size for this study included 32 participants; however, data saturation was reached with the responses from the initial 16 participants. The decision to cease coding at the point of saturation is well-supported in qualitative methodology, as continuing data collection beyond saturation may lead to diminishing returns without substantially enriching the findings (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017). Data saturation, a critical concept in qualitative research, is achieved when no new themes, insights, or information emerge from additional data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015). According to

Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), data saturation often occurs within the first 12 interviews in studies with relatively homogeneous samples, suggesting that a smaller sample can be sufficient when the focus is on depth and detail of participants' experiences rather than breadth. In this study, the thematic patterns identified during coding were consistent across the responses of the initial 16 participants, indicating that further interviews were unlikely to introduce new variations or concepts. Therefore, while a larger sample of 32 participants was recruited to ensure diverse representation, data analysis focused on the point at which saturation was reached to ensure methodological rigour and resource efficiency.

Data Collection Methods

Data were gathered through structured interviews to ensure consistency while allowing for in-depth responses. The structured interview protocol was developed based on themes identified in the existing literature on state policing, covering areas such as knowledge of state policing, perceived benefits, and concerns.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the study's objectives, their right to participate voluntarily, and their right to withdraw at any point. Data collected was anonymised, and participants' identities were protected.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis approach was utilised to analyse the data collected. The analysis followed the stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include familiarisation with the data generated during the interviews, thoroughly reading them multiple times for in-depth understanding. This process was followed by generating the initial codes from the data to identify relevant patterns, phrases, and viewpoints expressed by the participants. We then identified themes by grouping the initial codes into broader themes based on their commonalities and relevance to the research questions. Themes were refined and checked against the data to ensure they accurately represented participants' perspectives. Each theme was clearly defined, and representative quotes were selected to illustrate participants' views.

4.0 Results

This section presents the results of the study.

Table 1:

Research Question 1: How do students studying criminology and security studies perceive the effectiveness of state policing in Nigeria in terms of maintaining law and order as well as managing and preventing crime?

S/N	Themes	Codes
1.	Awareness and understanding of State Policing	General awareness of state policing, differentiation from federal policing, knowledge of intended functions, historical background knowledge, recognition of constitutional context.
2.	Effectiveness of State Policing in maintaining law and order	Increased local responsiveness, enhanced community engagement, cultural and contextual sensitivity, tailored security solutions, accountability to local populations.
3.	Effectiveness of State Policing in crime prevention and control	Localised knowledge and closer ties with community members, understanding tailored crime, prevention strategies, faster response times, reduced burden on federal police.

Source: Survey Study 2024

Theme1: Awareness and understanding of State Policing

This aspect aimed to assess respondents' awareness and knowledge of state policing. The study found that formal education is the primary source of knowledge, with classroom learning being the first source. Online platforms and social media also play a significant role, suggesting that state policing is primarily an academic and digital discourse, with educational institutions playing a key role in public understanding. On the other hand, the analysis of where respondents usually get information about state policing reveals distinct patterns. The analysis reveals a significant reliance on digital platforms, social media, and academic environments for information about state policing, highlighting the growing importance of digital media in shaping public opinion.

Respondents displayed an intricate understanding of the concept of state police, providing diverse but interconnected meanings that reflect a decentralised approach to law enforcement. One prevalent trend in their comments was the decentralisation of authority to individual states, allowing them to solve localised security issues. One participant explained, *“State policing is a decentralised system where law enforcement authority is delegated to individual states, with each state having its own police force. The state government manages control, allowing local communities to focus on their peculiar needs and safety concerns”* (Participant 2). Similarly, another stated, *“I understand state policing as a decentralised system where states control their police forces instead of relying on the federal government”* (Participant 1).

Some respondents highlighted the distinction between state and federal policing systems, noting that state policing prioritises local issues and recruits officers from within the community. For instance, one participant remarked, *“State policing differs because it*

focuses on local issues with officers from the same community, unlike the federal system that is centralised” (Participant 10). Others elaborated on its purpose, stating, *“Its main purpose should be crime control and maintaining peace within the state, but tailored to the state’s specific security challenges”* (Participant 6). Furthermore, respondents acknowledged the ongoing argument surrounding state policing in Nigeria, with one participant observing, *“I know that there have been calls for state policing for years due to the perceived inefficiency of federal forces in handling local problems”* (Participant 3), and another noting, *“From what I have read, the constitution currently only allows for one central police force, but there is a push for change”* (Participant 11).

Theme 2: Effectiveness of State Policing in maintaining law and order

Most respondents acknowledged the effectiveness of state policing in Nigeria but recognised its associated merits and drawbacks. On the positive side, participants emphasised that state policing could promote law and order, enable faster responses to emergencies through collaboration with local agencies, and provide a more community-focused approach. For example, one respondent noted, *“State policing can be effective in maintaining law and order, enabling rapid response to emergencies with the assistance of local agencies”* (Participant 9). Others highlighted the advantages of localised knowledge and management, with one asserting, *“The effectiveness of state policing is largely due to its diversified staff, experience with the terrain, and easier funding and management when compared to the complex and bureaucratic Nigeria Police Force (NPF)”* (Participant 3). Similarly, another observed, *“Having local control can improve their response times since they are already familiar with the area”* (Participant 2).

Participants also pointed to the state police’s ability to improve community relations, stating, *“People are more likely to cooperate with officers they see as one of their own; that’s the advantage of state policing”* (Participant 13), and *“State police officers would know the community’s culture, making their approach more effective”* (Participant 8). They further emphasised the ability of state police forces to tackle localised challenges directly, as one respondent remarked, *“Each state has its unique challenges; having a state police force means addressing these specific problems directly”* (Participant 11). However, significant concerns were raised about political misuse and other systemic issues. Respondents expressed fears of state governments manipulating police forces for personal or political gain. One participant cautioned, *“State policing may be influenced by state governments, as state police chiefs may directly take orders from them, which may eventually lead to police being used for political intimidation”* (Participant 2). Others voiced scepticism about its implementation in a diverse and nepotistic system, with one stating, *“I think state policing will not be an effective tool in a Nigeria with a diverse ethnicity and a country ruled by nepotism”* (Participant 12). Another warned, *“State policing will be ineffective due to politicisation by State Governors who use it as a monopoly force to satisfy their selfish interests”* (Participant 6).

Furthermore, respondents stressed the need for sufficient funding, training, and mechanisms to prevent nepotism and politicisation. Accountability was also viewed as a critical factor, with one participant noting, *“State officers might be more accountable to*

people living in the community they serve” (Participant 14). These insights highlight the complexities of implementing state policing, which hinges on mitigating its challenges while leveraging its potential advantages.

Theme 3: Effectiveness of State Policing in crime prevention and control

Respondents believed that the effectiveness of state policing in preventing and controlling crime lies significantly in its proximity to local communities, enabling faster response times and fostering stronger relationships between law enforcement and the public. For instance, one participant noted, *“In Nigeria, if implemented correctly, state policing could be highly effective due to its rapid response to emergencies and crime reports”* (Participant 2). Another respondent highlighted the importance of direct funding and community relationships, stating, *“State policing would be effective due to direct funding and local community relationships, improving public opinion and trust... Since policing the state now rests on the shoulders of each state, security effectiveness will be a key argument during election campaigns, and regional security architecture like Amotekun can provide insight into the effectiveness of state police”* (Participant 7). Most participants agreed that state policing is beneficial because it allows for tailored strategies that address specific security concerns in individual communities or states. This approach boosts crime prevention efforts and strengthens trust and cooperation between law enforcement and residents, which is essential for creating a secure environment. As one participant noted, *“State officers might be more accountable to people living in the community they serve”* (Participant 16), while another remarked, *“State policing can significantly improve crime prevention and control by fostering a close relationship with local communities, enabling faster response and personalised strategies. This keeps the neighbourhoods safer”* (Participant 5).

Participants also emphasised that the success of state policing depends on swift response times to emergencies and crime reports, as well as adequate resources, proper training, and effective oversight. One respondent stressed, *“In crime prevention and control, one thing that is of essence is time and early intervention. The effectiveness of state policing would be measured by the extent to which it is able to prevent and control crime before its potential escalation”* (Participant 1). In addition, participants highlighted the capacity of state policing to deliver localised and context-specific responses to crime. Many respondents emphasised that state police, owing to their familiarity with the communities they serve, would be better equipped to provide tailored crime prevention strategies. For example, one participant remarked, *“State police will understand the community’s needs better than federal forces”* (Participant 16), underscoring a belief in the capacity of local enforcement to build trust and stronger connections within their jurisdiction. Similarly, another respondent observed, *“They can build trust with the community and increase cooperation”* (Participant 6), emphasising the collaborative advantage of state policing.

Moreover, the perceived efficiency of state policing was also linked to faster response times. As one respondent noted, *“State policing response times to crime should be quicker since they are closer to the areas they serve”* (Participant 10). Other participants echoed

this sentiment, emphasising the possibility of state police to offer solutions tailored to specific local issues. For instance, one participant asserted, *“Local issues need tailored solutions which state police can offer”* (Participant 12). Another added, *“It could free the federal police to handle broader national security issues”* (Participant 4).

Table 2:

Research Question 2: What concerns do the students have about the implementation of state policing in Nigeria?

S/N	Themes	Codes
1.	Concerns about state policing	Potential for corruption, insufficient training and professionalism, overlapping roles and jurisdictional conflicts.
2.	Risk of political influence	Potential for political control, election manipulation concerns, historical evidence of misuse, fear of state-level corruption, risk of undue influence from powerful individuals.
3.	Potential for human rights violations	Abuse of authority, discrimination against minorities, Insufficient training on rights protection, weak mechanisms for accountability, limited public trust in state authority.
4.	Overall support or opposition for implementation of state policing	Conditional support for implementation, opposition due to fear of misuse, hope for reform and efficiency, distrust due to historical precedents, calls for pilot programmes before nationwide implementation

Source: Survey Study 2024

Four themes emerged for research question 2, which include concerns about state policing; risk of political influence; potential for human rights violations; overall support or opposition for implementation of state policing:

Theme 1: Concerns about State Policing

Respondents expressed various concerns about state policing, particularly the risks of increased police brutality, militarisation, corruption, and political interference. One respondent warned, *“State policing may lead to excessive force and police brutality due to the police's perceived power. Also, militarisation of police will be the order of the day because so much power has been given to them”* (Respondent 4). Another noted, *“My major concerns about state policing include those things that are already happening with the federal police, such as corruption, mismanagement of funds, and interference by the government, particularly when dealing with political allies or enemies”* (Respondent 10). Political interference was a recurring theme, with one participant asserting, *“It [State Policing] will highly be marred by political interference, as state governors will use the state police to achieve their political ambition”* (Respondent 1), while another argued, *“The government in return might take chances in using them against opposition parties or individuals; similarly, they can be used for intimidation during elections”* (Respondent 2). Further concerns included partisanship and lack of independence, with one respondent observing, *“My major concern is that state police may be partisan as they may tend to be*

loyal to the government in power because the government will do their pay, promotions, and provisions of needed equipment” (Respondent 6).

Moreover, respondents raised issues about operational challenges and jurisdictional limitations. One respondent stated, *“State policing may face potential corruption, political interference, and resource disparities, which may affect their overall effectiveness”* (Respondent 12), while another noted, *“State policing have limited authority, which makes it hard for law enforcement agency to arrest or apprehend criminals who flee to other states. It may also be influenced by local politics, potentially affecting their independence and effectiveness”* (Respondent 5). Furthermore, the respondents raised concerns about inconsistent standards and training across states, arguing that state police forces could lead to disparities in law enforcement quality. Wealthier states may have better training, while fewer resources may struggle, resulting in unequal treatment of citizens. According to one respondent, *“State police forces may cause disparities in law enforcement quality due to limited resources, budgets, and infrastructure. This could result in uneven protection and service, and confusion in cases involving multiple states or requiring coordination between jurisdictions”* (Respondent 13).

Theme 2: Risk of Political Influence

Despite recognising potential advantages, participants voiced serious concerns about political influence over state policing. This theme emerged strongly, with numerous respondents fearful of state police becoming “tools of the state government” for political gain. Such concerns reflect historical challenges in Nigeria, where state institutions have occasionally been co-opted for political purposes. The apprehension that state police could be misused for election manipulation or suppressing political opposition was particularly pronounced, indicating mistrust rooted in past misuse of authority by local officials. Worries about the potential for state-level corruption to permeate state policing were widely expressed by respondents. One participant warned, *“There is a risk that state police will become tools of the state government”* (Respondent 11). Another noted, *“They could be used to rig elections or suppress opposition”* (Respondent 3). Reflecting on past experiences, one respondent argued, *“We’ve seen state officials misuse other institutions; why would state police be different?”* (Respondent 6). In addition, respondents highlighted the potential for corruption to undermine the system, with comments such as, *“State corruption could trickle down into their policing”* (Respondents 10), and *“We worry that wealthy individuals could influence state police for personal agenda”* (Respondent 16). These perceptions highlight the necessity of implementing safeguards to protect state policing from external interference for it to be effective.

Theme 3: Potential for Human Rights Violations

Concerns about human rights violations were widely expressed, with fears that state police might misuse their authority, engage in discriminatory practices, and lack adequate training to protect citizens' rights. Some participants highlighted these issues, stating that *“state police might use excessive force without adequate oversight”* (Respondent 4) and *“they*

might target certain groups unfairly” (Respondent 13). Others emphasised the risks posed by insufficient training, warning that *“without training, abuses might go unchecked”* (Respondent 10) and *“there may not be enough safeguards in place”* (Respondent 14). In addition, distrust in state officials was noted, with one respondent observing that *“people already don’t trust state officials”* (Respondent 5). These concerns are consistent with prevailing criticisms of Nigeria's federal police, implying that students expect such issues to persist or worsen under state policing. However, they emphasised the importance of strong accountability measures, adequate training, and independent oversight, without which the state policing would reproduce the federal system's systemic problems, eroding trust among marginalised groups and the public.

Theme 4: Overall support or opposition for implementation of State Policing

Respondents expressed diverse opinions on the concept of state policing. Supporters advocate for effective law enforcement, financial autonomy, anti-corruption measures, and establishing independent oversight mechanisms to prevent political interference. One participant asserted, *“I support state policing and any law that will allow the police to receive their funding directly without any conditions attached, as this would provide them more independence, freedom, and discretion in their jobs”* (Respondent 2). Another stated, *“I definitely support state police, as it will be more effective in tackling Nigeria’s internal security problems”* (Respondent 4). Similarly, a respondent emphasised the community-oriented benefits, noting, *“I passionately advocate for the establishment of state police in Nigeria. Through state police, we can bring law enforcement closer to the people, fostering a sense of community and trust”* (Respondent 8). Furthermore, another respondent stressed that:

I strongly support the idea of state policing in Nigeria because it has the potential to address the unique security challenges faced by different states. With state governments overseeing police operations, there could be better understanding and handling of local issues. For example, community policing strategies would become more effective since officers would likely be from or familiar with the communities they serve. However, it’s crucial that safeguards are in place to prevent political interference and abuse of power by state authorities (Respondent 16).

On the other hand, critics of state policing raised significant concerns regarding political interference, misuse of force, and insufficient financial and logistical resources to sustain the system effectively. One respondent argued, *“In my own opinion, I totally disagreed with state policing because it will lead to monopoly use of force, lack of adequate resources to make their work effective and efficient, and recruitment process will be politicised”* (Respondent 10). Another respondent expressed conditional opposition, stating, *“I oppose state policing in Nigeria. In addition, I would only support if there is not going to be any form of political influence from state governors”* (Respondent 12). Similarly, a participant

emphasised the need for reforming the existing police structure instead, noting, *“I oppose the motion for state policing. A better training of our current police force and appropriate checks and balances would be better than state policing. Nigeria is not ready for state policing yet”* (Respondent 7). Moreover, one respondent maintain that:

I support the concept of state policing in Nigeria, but I’m cautious about its implementation. While it could decentralise the force and make law enforcement more effective, there’s a real risk of misuse by politicians. In states where political leaders are not accountable, state police might become tools for oppression rather than protection. To succeed, Nigeria would need strong legal frameworks and oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability and professionalism (Respondent 15).

A group of respondents expressed conditional support for state policing, stressing the importance of implementing strict oversight mechanisms, ensuring consistent standards across states, and fostering improved coordination with federal agencies. They highlighted the need for enhanced training and infrastructure at the state level to address concerns raised by opponents. One participant stated, *“I am in support of state policing, but I would be more supportive if the following safeguards are implemented: anti-corruption measures; implementing independent oversight bodies at the state level with the power to investigate and punish corruption within the police force is crucial. These bodies should operate transparently and be insulated from political pressures”* (Respondent 5).

Another respondent remarked, *“I tentatively support state policing but would be more supportive if there were strong oversight to prevent corruption and political interference, consistent standards across all states, and improved coordination with federal agencies. Ensuring fair resource distribution to all states would also help maintain effective policing nationwide”* (Respondent 10). Similarly, another participant suggested, *“I support state policing, and the following are recommended actions that would make me support it more: trainings and recruitment should be carried out at state levels; investment in security at all levels must be prioritised, and resources be made available for state structures to sustain the state policing system”* (Respondent 2). Some of the participants expressed that:

I am on the fence about state policing. On one hand, it could improve security by empowering states to tackle their specific challenges. On the other hand, I worry about the risks of ethnic bias and lack of uniformity in law enforcement practices. If implemented, there must be a balance between state and federal oversight to maintain national standards and prevent the emergence of regional conflicts (Respondent 13).

I don’t think Nigeria is ready for state policing at this stage. The current issues with the Nigerian Police Force, such as corruption and lack of accountability, might only multiply at the state level. States with weak institutions might struggle to manage a police force effectively, leading to more human rights abuses and insecurity. It

might be better to reform the existing structure first and focus on equipping the current police force to meet modern challenges (respondent 11).

4.1 Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study provide useful insights into respondents' knowledge levels, information sources, and overall perceptions of state police, particularly among Criminology and Security Studies students. Results show that classroom learning emerged as the dominant source of information regarding state police. Digital media, particularly social media, serves as a secondary source, demonstrating the expanding power of online platforms in shaping public opinion. However, traditional media has a limited role as a primary information source. In addition, the responders exhibited a high level of understanding of state policing. This awareness is most likely influenced by an academic focus and the availability of information through multiple media. In addition, the respondents' understanding of state policing aligns with the broader definition of the concept as a decentralised law enforcement system that allows for localised control.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of state policing in maintaining order and mitigating crime is of paramount importance. While respondents are somewhat optimistic about its benefits, such as rapid emergency responses, improved community bonds, and targeted security initiatives, they also express significant concerns. The possibility of political abuse by state governors is a frequently occurring matter, as are concerns about using state police for personal or political advantages, which could lead to political intimidation and criminal activities. Corruption, resource disparities and varying standards among states are perceived as major obstacles to successful implementation of state policing. These findings are in agreement with previously published studies (Agwanwo, 2014; Adedeji, 2012; Bakare et al., 2018; Nwogwugwu & Odedina, 2018; Nwogwugwu & Kupoluyi, 2015).

5.0 Conclusion

State policing is a decentralised system that gives state governments control over law enforcement and crime prevention within their territories. While this approach offers potential benefits, such as localised law enforcement and improved community engagement, it also poses significant risks, including political interference, corruption, and abuse of authority. Therefore, it is essential to carefully consider both the merits and demerits of state policing before its implementation.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are proposed:

- i. Establishment of Independent Oversight Body: An independent oversight body should be established to investigate and prosecute police misconduct, ensuring transparency and accountability, and operating autonomously to combat political interference and corruption.

- ii. Standardised Training and Recruitment Processes: Implementing uniform training and recruitment processes can enhance professionalism in state police forces by prioritising community policing, human rights, and ethical conduct.
- iii. Financial Autonomy for State Police Forces: State governments should establish State Police Trust Funds to ensure adequate financial resources for operations.
- iv. Community Engagement Initiatives: State police forces should regularly engage with communities through outreach programmes, focusing on understanding concerns, educating the public about their rights, and fostering collaboration in crime prevention.
- v. Implementing Anti-Corruption Measures: The importance of prioritising anti-corruption measures within the state police is paramount in fostering public trust.
- vi. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: Periodic performance reviews of state police forces should be conducted using robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

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