Introduction

Since 2011, North-Central Nigeria has emerged as a focal point of escalating violence, resulting from the intersection of resource-based conflicts, ethno-religious tensions, and organized criminal activity. The region has witnessed increased incidents of terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, and farmer-herder clashes, which have displaced thousands and severely impacted rural livelihoods (Ogbozor 2019; Akinwotu, 2020; Okoli and Ugwu, 2019). These insecurity patterns reflect a broader failure of state capacity, particularly in policing and civil protection. In contexts where state presence is limited, absent, or perceived as abusive, law enforcement agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) experience significant challenges to their legitimacy (Amnesty International, 2018).

The legitimacy crisis is further exacerbated by institutional and operational challenges that hinder the effective implementation of security measures. Chronic underfunding, personnel shortages, inadequate welfare provisions, and inflexible bureaucratic structures have significantly weakened the operational capacity of both the NPF and NSCDC (Madueke, 2019). While recent scholarship examined structural drivers of insecurity, such as ungoverned spaces, centralized authority, and relative deprivation (Babalola and Seiyefa, 2025), a critical gap persists in literature. Although some studies (Alao & Olufemi, 2020; Dimejesi et al., 2019) have addressed interagency rivalry and conflict, few have analyzed the operational strategies and tactical responses of law enforcement agencies. Attributing security failures primarily to structural inefficiencies overlooks how these agencies adapt, respond, and interact with local communities. This study examines how the cooperation and combined efforts of the NPF and NSCDC have developed over time, and how this partnership functions as a strategy to tackle long-lasting conflict and insecurity in Nigeria.

The study contends that an important but understudied aspect of security governance in conflict-affected areas of North-Central Nigeria is the development of new operational models within law enforcement. Specifically, it examines the integration of conflict mitigation strategies into community policing frameworks by the NPF and NSCDC. This integrated approach recognizes that coercive policing alone is insufficient to address deeply rooted communal tensions. Instead, it prioritizes collaborative security, trust-building, local legitimacy, and inclusive engagement as essential components of effective policing in fragile

contexts (Ekhomu, 2009). When adapted to local conditions, community policing combined with conflict mitigation strategies can stabilize communities by facilitating early warning systems, strengthening community resilience, and fostering institutional collaboration (Oshita et al., 2019).

However, implementing this integrated model requires a substantial shift from traditional, command-driven approaches to policing. It demands a more participatory, demand-driven partnership and an adaptive form of security governance that addresses interagency competition, institutional fragmentation, and the tension between centralized mandates and local expectations (Abiodun, 2000). Without resolving these internal contradictions, reform efforts are unlikely to produce sustainable improvements in policing and public safety. This study addresses these challenges by analyzing the evolving policing practices of the NPF and NSCDC in managing violent conflict in Nigeria's North-Central region, with a particular focus on Niger State.

Three interrelated objectives guide this study:

- To analyze the conflict context and examine how NPF and the NSCDC respond to farmer–herder violence, ethno-religious tensions, and organized banditry.
- To assess the institutional, structural, and operational factors that influence the effectiveness of these responses, including early warning systems, inter-agency coordination, personnel welfare, and resource and capacity constraints.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of integrated policing approaches that combine community policing and conflict mitigation strategies, with a focus on local partnerships, inclusive community engagement, and relevant policy or legal reforms.

These objectives structure the study and define its contribution to debates on security sector reform, local peacebuilding, and participatory policing in conflict-prone societies. Through grounding the analysis in empirical data from field interviews and focus group discussions, the study provides a detailed understanding of the constraints and opportunities within Nigeria's internal security architecture. The research suggests a more coherent, inclusive, and adaptive model of community policing that prioritizes local agency, enhances institutional coordination, and restores public trust in state security institutions. This approach advances the argument that transformative security governance in Nigeria's

Middle Belt requires both structural reform and operational innovation rooted in community-driven practice.

Literature Review

Banditry has re-emerged as a significant security threat in Africa, particularly in the Sahel and West Africa (Ojewale, 2024). In Nigeria, the escalation of banditry over the past decade demonstrates persistent state fragility, ineffective rural governance, and insufficient security infrastructure (Onyia et al., 2024). Armed groups, identified as bandits, have capitalized on the limited presence of security forces to expand their activities. Their operations have expanded from Zamfara State to neighboring North-Western States, including Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, and Kebbi, and are increasingly present in North-Central Nigeria, including Niger, Kogi, and Plateau States. In certain instances, community groups originally established for self-defense have transformed into predatory armed actors, perpetrating extortion and violence (Ojewale, 2024). This transformation has obscured the distinction between protectors and perpetrators, thereby complicating security interventions in states such as Niger, Plateau, and Kaduna States.

These affected areas have experienced persistent violent banditry characterized by cattle rustling, ransom kidnappings, targeted killings, sexual violence, and the coercive control of rural economies (Barnett and Rufai, 2022). The crisis in Nigeria's North-Central region is exacerbated by underlying ethno-religious tensions and competition for land and political influence. Banditry frequently intersects with existing communal grievances, complicating efforts to distinguish criminal activity from broader socio-political conflict (Okoli and Ugwu, 2019). Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project indicates a steady increase in attacks by bandit groups from 2018 to 2023, with a significant escalation in 2024 (ACLED, 2024). The bandits have further transitioned from raiding opposition parties to de facto authorities in some rural areas, establishing parallel systems of taxation and justice and regulating access to markets and mobility (Aina et al., 2023).

In response to these threats, the Nigerian government designated the Yan Bindiga and Yan Ta'adda groups as terrorist organizations under the Terrorism (Prevention) Proscription Order Notice of 2021(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021). This legal action was intended to enable more assertive security interventions and expand the prosecution of support

networks, including financiers and sympathizers. Nigeria's approach has combined military operations with non-military measures, such as social protection programs designed to address the root causes of violence and reduce the recruitment appeal of armed groups (Oshita et al. 2021). The NPF and NSCDC also implemented community-oriented strategies to strengthen relationships between state security forces and at-risk populations. These initiatives focus on building trust, engaging local stakeholders, and collaboratively developing local policing plans (Ekhomu, 2017). However, institutional limitations, such as insufficient capacity, accountability issues, and coordination failures, have impeded the effectiveness of these efforts.

The NPF, established under Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution, serves as the country's principal law enforcement agency. It currently comprises approximately 371,800 officers deployed across national, zonal, and state commands.[1] The NPF operates under a centralized command structure that reports to the Presidency through the Inspector General of Police. Its core responsibilities include maintaining internal security, protecting life and property, and preventing crime. However, this centralized structure has been criticized for disconnecting policing priorities from local needs and for facilitating excessive use of force and politicization of security (Terrill, 1995; Ekiyor, 2022).

In comparison, the NSCDC, established under the NSCDC Act No. 2 of 2003 and revised in 2007, is a paramilitary institution mandated to protect critical infrastructure, regulate private security operators, and support disaster and conflict management. The NSCDC employs an estimated 80,000 regular officers and over 100,000 community-based volunteers (NSCDC, 2025), thereby making a significant contribution to grassroots security.[2] The 2007 amendment to its legislation expanded the NSCDC's mandate to include arrest, investigation, prosecution, and the creation of an armed unit to strengthen its operations.[3]

Although the NSCDC has fewer personnel than the police, its integration within local communities and capacity to mediate minor disputes provide a comparative advantage in early warning and rapid response, particularly in under-policed rural areas (Onuoha and Momoh, 2021). Despite this advantage, both the NPF and NSCDC encounter persistent challenges in coordination, strategic planning, and operational integration. Their hierarchical and centrally controlled structures limit local adaptation and delay response times.

Additionally, overlapping mandates and competition for scarce resources have impeded inter-agency collaboration, especially in conflict-prone regions where unified action is essential. Nigeria's population is approximately 235 million, and its police-to-citizen ratio is 1:634, which is below the United Nations recommended ratio of 1:450. Nevertheless, existing research indicates that effective community policing depends not only on personnel numbers but also on context-specific strategies, local legitimacy, and responsiveness to changing conflict dynamics (Ekhomu, 2017). As insecurity evolves in both form and location, the NPF and NSCDC need to implement integrated, accountable, and community-based conflict mitigation strategies that address local conditions and empower affected communities.

Analytical Framework and Methodology

This study employs the Evidence-Based Policing (EBP) framework as its analytical foundation. EBP provides a rigorous and systematic approach to evaluating the strategies implemented by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) to address communal violence, banditry, and broader security challenges in North-Central Nigeria. Evidence-Based Policing is defined as a decision-making process that integrates the best available empirical evidence, professional judgment, and community values, preferences, and circumstances (Klose, 2024). Within this framework, policing strategies are assessed on the basis of their demonstrated effectiveness rather than tradition, assumptions, or political pressures.

The application of the EBP framework aligns this study with global best practices in contemporary policing research. The framework underscores the necessity of empirical evidence, experiential learning, and the integration of professional expertise with local knowledge systems (Lum and Koper, 2017; Weisburd and Neyroud, 2011). This methodological approach facilitates a comprehensive assessment of the NPF and NSCDC responses to the security requirements of conflict-affected communities, emphasizing adaptability and community responsiveness. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of policy-relevant research, ensuring that findings inform operational decisions and reforms within Nigeria's security sector.

This research integrates qualitative data collection with thematic analysis to evaluate the

operational capacities of the NPF and NSCDC in implementing conflict-prevention and community-policing strategies. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews (SSI) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with security personnel from both the NPF and NSCDC. Ninety individual interviews were conducted, comprising 45 participants from each agency, selected to represent various operational, tactical, and strategic command levels. This purposive sampling strategy ensured representation from field officers, mid-level supervisors, and senior decision-makers engaged in community engagement and internal security operations.

Three focus group discussions were conducted, each involving 30 participants from both agencies. These sessions facilitated data validation and interactive analysis, enabling participants to reflect on shared experiences, discuss operational challenges, and propose practical solutions informed by field realities. The FGDs also corroborated the interview data by collaboratively examining emerging themes. To supplement the primary data, secondary sources were reviewed, including peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, operational reports, media publications, and legal materials related to community policing, rural banditry, and conflict management in Nigeria. These documents provided historical context for policing strategies and reinforced the empirical findings.

All qualitative data, including interview transcripts, FGD notes, and document reviews, were subjected to thematic content analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). This process entailed systematic coding and categorization of recurring patterns and themes across all data sources. The coding process deepened the analysis by identifying institutional practices, operational challenges, and opportunities for strategic reform. The analysis is structured to concentrate on three primary thematic areas aligned with the study's objective: understanding the context of insecurity and communal conflict; identifying gaps in institutional and procedural responses; assessing the effectiveness of current interventions; and exploring opportunities for inclusive, collaborative, and community-based security governance.

Multiple strategies were employed to enhance the study's credibility and trustworthiness. First, triangulation was applied by comparing data across three sources: literature review, SSI, and FGD, thereby reducing reliance on a single dataset and enhancing analytic validity (Denzin, 2017). Second, inter-coder reliability checks ensured consistency in qualitative

analysis, as independent coding and collaborative reconciliation minimized subjective bias. Third, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with a subset of participants, who provided feedback on the accuracy and resonance of interpretations. This process, widely regarded as one of the most robust strategies for enhancing qualitative validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), ensured a more substantial alignment between the researcher's interpretations and participants' lived experiences. Positioning the research within the evidence-based policing framework and employing a qualitative approach enhanced the assessment of Nigeria's internal security institutions. The findings contribute to broader debates on security governance, institutional accountability, and community-oriented policing in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Findings and Analysis

This section examines the practical environment and the organizational conditions that affect how well the NPF and NSCDC carry out conflict-prevention and community-policing activities.

Conflict Context and Operational Dynamics of NPF and NSCDC in Niger State

Niger State is one of the largest states in Nigeria by landmass. It borders the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and holds significant strategic and economic importance. Its designation as Nigeria's "power state" reflects the presence of major hydroelectric dams, which are crucial to the country's national energy production. Despite these advantages, Niger State experiences persistent insecurity, including farmer-herder conflicts, communal disputes, illegal mining, and banditry (Hamza et. al., 2022; Mohammed et al., 2021; Ndalada and Peter, 2023; Mohammed and Oyinloye, 2023a; 2023b). These security challenges have severely disrupted agricultural output, displaced rural populations, and compromised national security by extending instability into the FCT (International Crisis Group, 2017; Odalonu, 2023).

Findings from the FGD indicate that Niger State is characterized by significant diversity and complexity, with variations in the pattern of violence between rural and urban areas. While conflict in the rural areas arises from land disputes, chieftaincy contests, and the use of violent proxies, including kidnappers, in the urban areas, violence is primarily driven by

youth unrest, perceived marginalization, and injustice.[4] The major violence hotspots such as Shiroro, Rafi, Mariga, and Mokwa have experienced increased illegal mining-related violence, while Bida and Lapai contend with disputes over traditional authority (ICG, 2017; Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). Although violence is common in Niger communities, the NPF and NSCDC report that their efforts are often met with hostility, such as stone-throwing, physical attacks, and armed resistance.[5] This hostility makes law enforcement interventions challenging, forcing officers to prioritize their own safety and that of victims.

A key party to the conflict is the Fulani pastoralist community, which comprises nomadic, semi-nomadic, and settled groups, and plays a significant role in the clashes between herders and farmers. The pastoralist groups are affiliated with the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders' Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), an umbrella organization representing Fulani herders. MACBAN reported violent encounters with farmers and the imposition of increasing restrictions on grazing land due to agricultural expansion, urbanization, and environmental pressures, including desertification and drought (Seiyefa, 2019). These demographic and environmental changes have intensified competition for resources and escalated violence between herders and farmers. Although herders are often depicted as aggressors, they often justify their actions as retaliation for livestock killings or cattle theft by farming communities (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016).

The increasing militarization of conflicts in Niger State has shifted them from sporadic communal disputes to highly organized violent campaigns. Whereas earlier clashes involved rudimentary weapons, current conflicts frequently feature automatic firearms, including AK-47 rifles, and coordinated attacks on entire villages. According to the Global Terrorism Index, Fulani herdsmen have been classified as the fourth deadliest terrorist group worldwide, responsible for over 1,200 deaths in 2014 (GTI, 2015, P.16). Since mid-2015, attacks from the Fulani herdsmen have increased significantly. These attacks now encompass ethnic and religious dimensions, particularly in Christian-majority regions of North-Central Nigeria such as Plateau, Nasarawa, and Southern Kaduna (Nwangwu et al., 2020).

In addition to the farmer-herder crisis, Niger State faces extensive armed banditry. What began as local disputes over land and livestock has developed into a complex and profitable criminal enterprise. Armed groups, estimated at over 30,000 members, operate throughout

North-West Nigeria, engaging in mass kidnappings, extortion, illegal mining, and arms trafficking. While Zamfara remains the primary center of these activities, their effects extend to Niger, Kaduna, and Katsina States. Between 2018 and 2020, banditry resulted in more than 4,900 deaths and displaced over 200,000 individuals (Ejiofor, 2022; Ojo et al., 2023, p.320).

In response to the increasing violence, the Nigerian government enacted the Terrorism (Prevention) Proscription Order Notice 2021, declaring the activities of the Yan Bindiga Group, Yan Ta'adda Group, and similar organizations to be terrorist and illegal, particularly in the North-West and North-Central regions. This action is based on the Terrorism (Prevention) Act 2011, which introduces stricter law enforcement and sanctions against individuals or groups involved with or supporting these organizations, including those providing financial support. The NPC and NSCDC responded by deploying both direct and indirect security measures, such as increasing the presence of Anti-terrorism and MOPOL (mobile police officers) in affected communities and conducting frequent patrols in urban areas. They also promoted collaboration with communities to foster shared responsibility for local policing. However, both agencies faced challenges in establishing effective and accountable systems for early intervention and strategic policing that address community needs.

Analysis of operational evidence reveals significant structural, strategic, and institutional weaknesses within the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in Niger State. These weaknesses reflect broader disjunctions in Nigeria's security architecture. Although both agencies recognize their mandates to address violence, their structural and administrative arrangements present persistent challenges. The NPF is organized into the Force Headquarters, zonal commands, and state commands, with 371,800 personnel deployed across Nigeria's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.[6] State commands are further divided into area commands, police divisions, stations, and outposts. The NPF is statutorily responsible for internal security and serves as the primary law enforcement agency, tasked with protecting lives and property, maintaining order, and preventing and detecting crime.

In contrast, the NSCDC is a paramilitary organization established under the NSCDC Act No. 2 of 2003 and amended in 2007. The NSCDC's core mandates include protecting national

assets, collaborating with private security providers to enhance local safety, and managing natural and man-made disasters. It also includes monitoring the activities of some religious, ethnic, and militia groups, which are accused of contributing to insecurity or instability, and supporting the communities affected by environmental, humanitarian, or other problems.[7] The NSCDC also provides intelligence to the police and military and mediates minor disputes. Prior to 2007, the NSCDC could arrest but not prosecute, transferring suspects to the police. The 2007 amendment empowered the NSCDC to arrest, investigate, prosecute, and establish an armed squad. Several studies have identified this expanded mandate as a source of interagency rivalry and conflict between the NPF and NSCDC (Poroma and Oparaka, 2025; Dimejesi et al., 2019; Oladimeji et al., 2019).

With a national population of 220 million (Angell et al., 2022), the NPF remains significantly understaffed (Madueke, 2025), falling well below the United Nations' recommended ratio of 1:460 civilians. As of September 2023, more than 80 percent of NPF officers were assigned to protect high-profile individuals, including politicians, religious leaders, and business elites, leaving less than 20 percent available for general public security (Uzuegbu-Wilson, 2020). The NSCDC, with a staff strength of 80,000 and an estimated 100,000 community volunteers, faces similar manpower constraints.[8] As a result, rural and peri-urban communities, which are most affected by violence, remain inadequately policed and highly vulnerable. While personnel numbers are relevant for local policing, effectiveness depends more on strategic deployment than on sheer numbers. Interviews with agency personnel indicate that the complementary roles of the NPF and NSCDC are not fully leveraged to achieve a unified security strategy.

Centralization presents a significant operational challenge for both the NPF and the NSCDC. In this centralized model, both agencies are externally controlled by the presidency through a top-down structure (Terrill, 1995). The Ministry of Interior supervises both organizations, with the Inspector General and Commandant General serving as the central chain of command. This arrangement has been criticized for enabling abuse of power, excessive use of force, and unregulated command decisions. The conduct of security personnel compounds these structural issues. Community testimonies and interviews with NPF and NSCDC show that excessive force, arbitrary arrests, political interference, and delayed responses frequently escalate tensions into violence.[9] In locations such as Dama and Shiroro, military interventions intended to restore order have instead intensified

conflict due to indiscriminate operations and civilian casualties (Ojo et al., 2023). It can be inferred that without comprehensive reforms to recruitment, training, interagency collaboration, and community engagement, Niger State will remain vulnerable to escalating insecurity and state fragility.

Analysis of the institutional, Structural, Procedural Factors and Gaps that Define NPF and NSCDC Operations

Findings suggest that persistent insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in Niger State, is closely linked to institutional, structural, and procedural inefficiencies within the NPF and the NSCDC. These inefficiencies stem from colonial-era centralization, insufficient resources, weak inter-agency coordination, and limited mechanisms for community engagement. Collectively, these factors undermine Nigeria's security framework and hinder effective conflict mitigation and public safety.

The primary institutional dysfunction in Nigerian policing is its over-centralized structure. Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution prohibits the creation of any police force other than the NPF, reinforcing a command hierarchy in which recruitment, deployment, and promotions are determined at the federal level. This structure, inherited from colonial administration, is not well-suited to a federated and geographically expansive nation such as Nigeria (Uzuegbu-Wilson, 2020). Effective policing requires local knowledge, trust, and rapid responsiveness, which centralized command structures frequently fail to provide. Consequently, the security agencies remain structurally disconnected from the communities they are intended to serve, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions.

The consequences of this centralized, detached policing model are most evident in the NPF's human resource crisis. The International Crisis Group (2017) noted that with a national force of about 370,000 officers tasked with policing a population of over 220 million, Nigeria falls dramatically short of the UN-recommended ratio and is incapable of protecting Nigerians. This problem is particularly acute in conflict-affected areas, where vast territories and rugged terrains demand a robust presence. However, most officers are deployed to urban centers or assigned to VIP protection duties, leaving rural communities exposed and under-policed (Olaniyan and Yahaya, 2016).

The challenges facing Nigeria's police institutions are exacerbated by inadequate personnel welfare. Although Nigeria is one of Africa's largest economies, its police force receives among the lowest salaries on the continent. In 2024, entry-level officers earned approximately ₦70,000 ($46) per month, which is insufficient to meet basic living expenses, particularly in the context of rising costs. In comparison, police officers in countries with fewer security challenges, such as South Africa ($414) and Senegal ($172), receive substantially higher wages (World Bank, 2025). Low salaries and poor working conditions contribute to corruption, diminished morale, and inefficiency among officers.[10]

Also, budgetary allocations to the police remain insufficient. In 2024, the NPF received ₦969.6 billion (about $808 million), a 3.3% increase from 2023[11]. However, this amount is inadequate given the magnitude of Nigeria's security challenges. In comparison, South Africa, with a population one-quarter the size of Nigeria's, allocated $5.6 billion to policing in the same year, while Egypt spent $8.7 billion (Ojo et al., 2023, p.337). Insufficient funding restricts the procurement of essential weapons, surveillance technologies, and mobility resources required for effective law enforcement.

Both the NPF and the NSCDC implement early warning and response mechanisms, including joint patrols, deployments to conflict-prone areas, and the engagement of paid community informants. However, these activities lack formalized institutional processes.[12] Most initiatives are ad hoc and led by individual commands rather than coordinated through a national strategy.[13] Although joint patrols have reportedly reduced vandalism, youth unrest, and communal clashes, the absence of standardized procedures for data collection and feedback undermines their long-term effectiveness (Seiyefa, 2019). Additionally, both agencies assess success primarily by crime frequency rather than by community satisfaction or perceived safety, thereby limiting the evaluation of the overall impact of their interventions.

Community engagement mechanisms, such as town hall meetings and public demonstrations of force, are applied inconsistently and often lack systematic feedback or accountability processes.[14] The NSCDC operates a Conflict Resolution Unit to address community complaints, whereas the NPF relies on the Public Complaint Rapid Response Unit (PCRRU) and the Police Service Commission (PSC), which do not serve as direct early-warning systems (Uzuegbu-Wilson, 2016). These platforms are limited in their capacity for

real-time monitoring and response, reducing their effectiveness in violence prevention and in addressing escalating tensions.

Additionally, participants in conflict-prone communities cited structural barriers to effective law enforcement. Internally, both the NPF and the NSCDC face unclear information-sharing protocols, limited feedback mechanisms, and inconsistent intelligence-gathering practices. Externally, non-state actors, including vigilante groups and informants, sometimes leak intelligence to criminal organizations, which undermines early response strategies. Furthermore, institutional trust is often weak, as communities may perceive law enforcement as complicit in abuses or as inconsistently responsive, which complicates cooperation on intelligence matters. Operation through joint task forces, monthly security meetings, and community-based conflict resolution initiatives offer promising models. Yet these efforts are undermined during crises by breakdowns in communication, role duplication, and disputes over authority. Participants in field interviews described how, in emergencies, agencies retreat into silos, often acting independently and occasionally in conflict with one another (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Effective interagency collaboration requires more than joint patrols; it necessitates formalized structures for cooperation, integrated intelligence sharing, and joint training programs, according to FGD participants. Notable practices include the involvement of youth leaders, traditional authorities, and local officials in dialogue forums and peace initiatives. These community-driven activities are essential for establishing legitimacy and preventing violence. Furthermore, participation in social events, recreational activities, and community gatherings has been observed to improve interagency relationships and strengthen trust with local populations (Nwangwu et al., 2020).

Institutional, structural, and procedural shortcomings within the NPF and NSCDC significantly impede effective policing in Nigeria. Centralized command, inadequate welfare and funding, fragmented early warning systems, and weak interagency cooperation collectively contribute to a dysfunctional security system. To address escalating security challenges, particularly in Niger State, there is a need for a decentralized policing structure, formalized interagency collaboration, and investment in personnel welfare and technological infrastructure. Crucially, law enforcement agencies must establish authentic partnerships with communities, founded on mutual trust, accountability, and ongoing

engagement.

Efficacy of Conflict Mitigation and Community Policing as an Integrated Model of NPF and NSCDC

The integration of conflict mitigation strategies and community policing initiatives by the NPF and the NSCDC demonstrates a consensus regarding the necessity of community engagement for public safety and the prevention of communal conflict. Both institutions recognize that sustainable security outcomes require trust-building, institutional responsiveness, and the establishment of localized conflict resolution mechanisms.[15]

The integrated model prioritizes establishing strong relationships with community leaders, youth groups, and traditional authorities. The NPF maintains regular engagement with stakeholders, including women's groups, trade unions, religious leaders, and retirees, to uphold law and order.[16] These relationships facilitate the identification of underlying causes of conflict, particularly those related to traditional practices such as marriage, inheritance, and local leadership disputes. Land conflicts and farmer-herder tensions, which are typically mediated by traditional rulers (Blench, 2004), highlight the necessity for law enforcement personnel to participate in local dispute-resolution processes.[17]

Community leaders and youth groups collaborate to identify incidents of farmland encroachment or destruction. This cooperation reinforces shared responsibility for peacebuilding initiatives. Trust-building remains a central component of the integrated model. The NPF promotes trust through accessibility, neutrality, and participatory decision-making. Regular dialogues, community visits, and open communication channels foster mutual understanding.[18] The NSCDC supports these efforts by recruiting respected local residents into voluntary policing groups that patrol areas vulnerable to illegal mining and pipeline vandalism.[19] Cadet Inspectors are tasked with liaising with traditional rulers, youth representatives, and herding or farming communities. Dialogue across ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups is essential for mitigating ideologically motivated conflicts (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004).

Institutional and structural challenges persist despite proactive engagement efforts. Legal and procedural constraints, particularly the absence of a coherent national framework for

communal conflict resolution, constrain the operational capacity of both agencies. NPF Commissioners have identified the absence of structured mediation mechanisms and advocate for the decentralization of security governance and the establishment of local mediation agencies.[20] They further argue that community policing should be legally embedded within local government structures to ensure effective implementation.

Constitutional ambiguities and human rights obligations further complicate law enforcement. An NPF Inspector referenced Chapter IV of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, noting how the requirement to uphold suspects' rights can sometimes conflict with community expectations of justice (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).[21] For instance, a known informant was released on human rights grounds and subsequently lynched by youths in Kagara, exemplifying the breakdown of trust in the formal justice system.[22]

The NSCDC acknowledges that gaps between legislation and enforcement erode public confidence. Although the Kidnapping and Cattle Rustling Law were amended in 2021 to address informants and accomplices[23], poor implementation continues to hinder its deterrent effect. NSCDC officers emphasized the importance of arrests and convictions in reinforcing the credibility of state security institutions.[24] Political interference is another critical concern, as judicial processes are often subverted to protect political interests, undermining both law enforcement and prosecutorial efforts (HRW, 2020).

Both agencies emphasize the urgency of judicial reforms. These include establishing specialized courts to expedite communal cases, reviewing customary laws (particularly land tenure and inheritance), and enacting new laws tailored to emerging crimes such as cybercrime, banditry, and kidnapping for ransom.[25] The slow pace of justice in communal disputes can be deadly—as illustrated by the Gaba village incident, where litigants who won a court case were ambushed and murdered on the disputed land.[26]

The integrated conflict mitigation and community policing model offers significant potential. However, its effectiveness is contingent upon comprehensive legal and structural reforms. Community engagement initiatives by the NPF and NSCDC indicate a transition toward participatory security governance. Without consistent law enforcement, judicial independence, and legislative support, these initiatives remain vulnerable to impunity,

political interference, and erosion of public trust.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study analyzed the conflict management strategies employed by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in response to escalating insecurity in Niger State, North-Central Nigeria. Applying the Evidence-Based Policing (EBP) framework, the analysis demonstrated the importance of integrating community policing with conflict-reduction strategies in fragile and violence-prone regions. The research identified three primary factors influencing the effectiveness of security interventions: the conflict context and operational dynamics of both agencies, institutional and procedural barriers to policing, and the potential for an integrated community policing model to achieve sustainable conflict reduction.

The findings indicate significant deficiencies in the current security framework. Overlapping responsibilities, inadequate coordination, insufficient resources, and limited public trust characterize the operational structures of the NPF and NSCDC. These shortcomings constrain the agencies' capacity to deliver effective, accountable, and preventive security services in conflict-affected regions such as Niger State. Comprehensive reforms in recruitment, training, command structures, and operational accountability are necessary for these agencies to address the underlying causes of violence.

The study highlights the need to address systemic institutional and procedural deficiencies. Centralized command structures, ineffective early warning systems, inadequate funding, and inter-agency rivalry undermine proactive policing initiatives. To address these challenges, Nigeria should decentralize its policing framework, establish enforceable protocols for inter-agency collaboration, and prioritize investments in personnel welfare, technology, and intelligence sharing. Enhancing public trust requires law enforcement agencies to implement community partnership models that emphasize transparency, responsiveness, and accountability.

Integrating conflict reduction with community policing strategies represents a significant development in Nigeria's internal security governance. However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on comprehensive structural and legal reforms. The initiatives by the

NPF and NSCDC to incorporate community-based dialogue platforms, voluntary policing groups, and participatory approaches are positive steps. Nevertheless, these measures will remain limited in impact without consistent law enforcement practices, judicial independence, and legislative backing. Persistent challenges, such as impunity, political interference, and the erosion of public trust in state institutions, threaten to undermine progress.

In conclusion, achieving sustainable security in Niger State requires a transformative strategy. This strategy should extend beyond reactive law enforcement to encompass conflict-sensitive, community-driven, and evidence-based practices within a restructured, decentralized policing system. The integration of Evidence-Based Policing (EBP) principles into security governance offers a viable pathway for reform, contingent upon political will, institutional commitment, and broad public engagement.

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Endnotes

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[3] NSCDC Act, 2007

[4] FGD – NPF and NSCDC Participants, Minna, Niger State, 2024

[5] FGD – NPF and NSCDC Participants, Minna, Niger State, 2024

[6] Police Service Commission (PSC) Annual Report 2008, p.12.

[7] NSCDC Act No. 2 of 2003 and amended by Act 6 of June 4, 2007.

[8] NSCDC 2025 Data, provided by NSCDC FGD participant

[9] NPF and NSCDC Participants, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

[10] FGD – NPF and NSCDC Participants, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

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[14] FGD – NPF and NSCDC Participants, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

[15] FGD – NPF and NSCDC Participants, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

[16] SSI – NPF Superintendent, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

[17] SSI – NPF Commissioner, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

[18] SSI – NPF Commissioner, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

[19] SSI – NSCDC Commander, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

[20] SSI – NPF Commissioner, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

[21] SSI – NPF Superintendent, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

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[24] SSI – NSCDC Commander, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

[25] SSI – NPF Commissioner, Minna, Niger State, March 2024

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