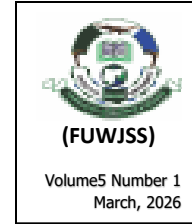


DYNAMICS OF DISMISSED SECURITY PERSONNEL AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper provides a critical inquiry into the paradoxical transformation of dismissed Nigerian security personnel from state protectors into architects of national insecurity. It investigates the transformation of Nigerian security personnel from national assets into potential security threats following dismissal. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Labeling Theory and Institutional Betrayal Theory, and comparative global practices, the study analyses the causes, patterns, and consequences of security personnel dismissals in Nigeria. Findings reveal systemic institutional failures, procedural opacity, and inadequate reintegration strategies as the root causes of insecurity perpetrated by dismissed officers. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for policy reform, emphasizing the necessity of structured exit, support and reintegration mechanisms to prevent the recycling of security liabilities.

Keywords: dismissal, security personnel, reintegration, insecurity, institutional betrayal, Nigeria

Introduction

The integrity of a nation's security architecture is fundamentally tested not by its capacity to recruit and train personnel, but by its mechanisms for justly and securely managing their exit. Globally, security personnel comprising the military, police, and intelligence services are central to

safeguarding national sovereignty, public order, and international peacekeeping missions (SIPRI, 2023). In advanced Western democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, mechanisms for handling errant officers are well-regulated through structured disciplinary systems, independent oversight bodies, and post-service support programmes (Bayley, 2018; Pate, 2022). When dismissals are necessary, they are executed transparently and are often accompanied by rehabilitative or reintegration options, particularly for those affected by trauma or systemic failures. However, even in these countries, abrupt or poorly managed dismissals have occasionally led to the radicalisation or criminal behaviour of ex-security officers (Miller & Hess, 2020). The global concern, therefore, is not merely about purging individuals but about ensuring that dismissal processes do not turn trained security professionals into future threats.

Across much of Africa, the national security sector operates under fragile institutional norms, where dismissals are frequently driven by political patronage, factionalism, or inadequate oversight. In countries like Sudan, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe, purges within the military and police have been used as tools to suppress dissent or consolidate power, often resulting in instability or defections (Adebayo, 2023; Ngoma, 2021). Moreover, the absence of social safety nets for dismissed personnel heightens their vulnerability to recruitment by insurgent groups or criminal networks. Scholars have observed that dismissed soldiers from war-torn countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia often become mercenaries or join rebel factions due to economic desperation and institutional betrayal (Olonisakin, 2019). These dynamics highlight a pressing continental challenge: the need to reform dismissal and disengagement protocols within Africa's security governance frameworks.

Nigeria presents a particularly salient case where the consequences of poorly managed dismissals of security personnel demonstrably contribute to national insecurity. The country's security architecture encompassing the military, Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Department of State Services (DSS), and paramilitary agencies has been marred by increasing cases of dismissal due to allegations of corruption, human rights abuses, insubordination, and criminal collaboration (Ajayi & Ojo, 2021). Procedural opacity, the lack of appeal structures, and the absence of psychosocial support often leave dismissed officers disillusioned and alienated. This disenchantment is exacerbated by poor welfare conditions and political interference in the disciplinary process, rendering former officers susceptible to radicalisation or integration into criminal networks (Alemika, 2020). Reports indicate that some dismissed Special Anti-

Robbery Squad (SARS) officers, following the EndSARS movement in 2020, allegedly joined cult groups, kidnapping rings, and armed robbery syndicates (HRW, 2021).

The transition of security personnel from state protectors to security threats is not merely a function of individual deviance but a symptom of systemic dysfunction. In Nigeria, poorly documented dismissals, a lack of centralised tracking, and non-existent reintegration strategies have created a pool of highly skilled, embittered individuals who retain intimate knowledge of state operations (Okereke, 2022). These individuals are increasingly implicated in insurgent attacks, oil theft, political thuggery, and transborder criminality (Nwachukwu & Odiegwu, 2023). The dismissal process in Nigeria lacks transparency and often fails to distinguish between criminal conduct and structural failure. This raises critical ethical and strategic concerns: is Nigeria breeding enemies out of disillusioned patriots? How can the state ensure that dismissals serve justice without endangering future security?

A growing consensus among security experts and scholars holds that the current approach to managing dismissed personnel in Nigeria requires urgent reform. Dismissals must be informed by transparent disciplinary frameworks, mental health assessments, legal safeguards, and post-service support mechanisms (Omotola & Adeniyi, 2022). Without a shift in policy, Nigeria risks perpetuating a dangerous cycle wherein today's protector becomes tomorrow's adversary.

It is following from here, that this paper analyses the dynamics surrounding the dismissal of security personnel in Nigeria, assesses the structural gaps, and proposes actionable recommendations to transform current liabilities into potential contributors to peace and security.

Statutory Responsibilities of Security Personnel in Nigeria

Security personnel are individuals employed by state-authorized institutions with the responsibility of protecting life, property, territorial integrity, and national sovereignty. In Nigeria, the statutory responsibilities of security personnel are anchored in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) and specific enabling Acts. Literature in this field emphasizes that while the primary purpose of the state is the "security and welfare of the people" (Section 14(2)(b)), the specific duties of various agencies often overlap, necessitating a clear understanding of their legal mandates as given below.

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF)

The NPF is the primary agency for internal security. Recent literature highlights the transition from the old Police Act to the **Nigeria Police Act**

2020, which aims to provide a more human-rights-centered approach to policing.

Mandate: According to Section 4 of the Police Act 2020, the NPF is responsible for the prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders, preservation of law and order, and protection of life and property (Adebayo, 2024).

- **Human Rights and Enforcement:** Scholars note that the 2020 Act explicitly mandates police personnel to uphold the fundamental rights of citizens as enshrined in the Constitution. However, Edet et al. (2024) argue that despite these statutory improvements, implementation remains marred by systemic challenges like extrajudicial actions and arbitrary arrests.
- **Judicial Collaboration:** Statutory duties also include the prosecution of offenders and assisting in the administration of justice (Nigeria Police Act, 2020).

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)

Originally established for civil protection during emergencies, the NSCDC's statutory role has expanded significantly under the NSCDC (Amendment) Act 2007.

- **Critical Infrastructure Protection:** A core statutory responsibility is the protection of "critical national assets," particularly against the vandalism of oil pipelines and power installations (Antai, 2024).
- **Civilian Protection and Disaster Management:** The NSCDC is mandated to manage shelters and assist in rescue operations during periods of emergency or disaster (Abolurin, 2022).
- **Regulation of Private Security:** The Corps holds the statutory power to recommend, license, and monitor the activities of **Private Guard Companies (PGCs)** in Nigeria (NSCDC Amendment Act, 2007).

The Nigerian Armed Forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force)

While the military's primary role is external defense, their involvement in internal security has become a focal point of recent legal scholarship.

- **Internal Security Operations (ISOPs):** Under Section 217 of the Constitution, the military can be deployed to suppress insurrection and act in aid of civil authorities when called upon by the President (Ogah, 2023).

- **Territorial Integrity:** Statutory duties include defending Nigeria from external aggression and maintaining its territorial integrity by land, sea, and air (Armed Forces Act, 2004).
- **Legal Constraints:** Recent studies emphasize that military personnel acting in "aid of civil authority" are still bound by the **Rules of Engagement (ROE)** and international humanitarian law (Kejawa, 2023).

Private Security Organizations (PSCs)

Private security is governed primarily by the **Private Guard Companies Act (1986)**.

- **Supplementary Role:** Literature describes private security as a "complementary" force that fills gaps left by overstretched public agencies. Their statutory duties are limited to asset protection, surveillance, and access control within contractual boundaries (Thomas Adewumi University, 2024).
- **Non-Firearm Limitation:** A significant point of discussion in recent literature is the statutory prohibition of private guards from bearing firearms, which many scholars argue limits their effectiveness against modern high-intensity crimes like kidnapping and banditry (Olaniyan, 2024)

Table of Statutory Frameworks

Agency	Primary Enabling Statute	Core Responsibility
Nigeria Police Force	Police Act 2020	Crime prevention, law enforcement, and prosecution.
NSCDC	NSCDC (Amendment) Act 2007	Protection of critical infrastructure and PGC regulation.
Armed Forces	Armed Forces Act (LFN 2004)	External defense and suppression of insurrection.
Private Security	Private Guard Companies Act 1986	Contractual asset protection and surveillance.

Security personnel are considered 'assets' to the state not only for their strategic skills but also because of their access to classified information, arms, and critical decision-making processes (Alemika, 2020). However, their transformation into liabilities, as this study interrogates, often stems

from post-service grievances, dismissal-related trauma, or institutional failures to manage their transition responsibly (Ekhomu, 2019).

Dismissal refers to the involuntary termination of employment of security personnel by a competent authority, typically resulting from disciplinary breaches, dereliction of duty, corruption, insubordination, mental instability, or criminal offences. In Nigeria, dismissals are usually enacted through internal panels or boards of inquiry and formalized under service laws such as the Police Act (2020), the Armed Forces Act, and other disciplinary codes.

Nevertheless, concerns have been raised regarding the fairness, transparency, and politicisation of dismissal processes. Scholars argue that many dismissals lack procedural justice, denying affected officers access to a fair hearing, legal representation, or post-dismissal reintegration support (Ajayi & Ojo, 2021). Without appropriate legal safeguards or social reintegration mechanisms, dismissed personnel often face stigmatisation, loss of income, psychological breakdown, and sometimes radicalisation (Okereke, 2022).

Summary of Statistical Data

76 police officers were dismissed between 2021 to Q1 2024 in response to misconduct (Newsonlineng.com 2025).

A notable mass dismissal occurred in mid-2021 when over 3,040 soldiers were reportedly discharged for misconduct, including desertion, absence without leave (AWOL), theft, fraud, and insubordination (Newsonlineng.com 2025).

115 personnel were dismissed in 2025 due to different reasons (Newsonlineng.com 2025).

38 personnel were dismissed by NSCDC in 2025 (Newsonlineng.com 2026).

Within security governance, an 'asset' refers to a valuable, dependable, and strategic individual or resource that enhances the efficiency, integrity, and responsiveness of a state's security apparatus. A security operative qualifies as an asset when their skills, knowledge, loyalty, and operational discipline positively contribute to maintaining public order and safeguarding the national interest (Adebayo, 2023).

From a criminological perspective, assets also represent the human capital investment a state makes in recruiting, training, and deploying its personnel (Miller & Hess, 2020). When such investments are not adequately nurtured—especially concerning mental health, welfare, and ethics personnel may deviate, becoming threats to the very system they swore to protect.

Conversely, a 'liability' in this context refers to a person or condition that imposes risk, cost, or damage to an organisation, institution, or nation. A dismissed or alienated security operative becomes a liability when their skills and insider knowledge are repurposed for criminal, insurgent, or subversive activities (Olonisakin, 2019).

Liabilities within security institutions can arise both internally, when compromised personnel engage in sabotage, extortion, or espionage, and externally, when dismissed individuals actively collude with or join organised crime, militant groups, or terrorist organisations. These liabilities are exacerbated by institutional neglect, the absence of aftercare systems, and the failure to monitor disengaged officers (Ngoma, 2021).

Although not a primary concept in the title, security governance is implicitly central to the analysis. It refers to the frameworks, policies, institutions, and norms that regulate the operation, accountability, and welfare of security personnel. Effective security governance ensures that dismissals are handled professionally, justly, and with due consideration for human rights, national security, and societal reintegration (Omotola & Adeniyi, 2022). When governance is weak or politically manipulated, it breeds resentment, injustice, and potential threats from dismissed operatives.

The central argument of this paper is that the transformation of security personnel from 'assets' to 'liabilities' is not a natural progression but a consequence of institutional failures in security governance, justice administration, and human resource management. This conceptual analysis establishes a foundational understanding that guides the broader theoretical and empirical inquiry into the dismissal crisis among Nigerian security forces.

Patterns and Causes of Security Personnel Dismissals in Nigeria

The existing literature on the dismissal of security personnel in Nigeria intersects criminology, security studies, public administration, and sociology. Recent scholarly works and empirical investigations have illuminated the causes, consequences, and systemic implications of dismissals within Nigeria's security institutions. This section categorises and synthesises relevant literature under key thematic areas directly tied to the transformation of dismissed operatives from national assets to potential threats.

Recent studies highlight that dismissals in Nigeria's security institutions are driven by a combination of factors, including professional misconduct, corruption, insubordination, and political victimization. According to Ajayi and Ojo (2021), internal disciplinary processes within the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) have intensified since 2018, with over

2,000 officers dismissed within five years—mostly for extortion, extrajudicial killings, and aiding criminal enterprises. However, the authors note that many dismissals are executed without due process, raising significant concerns about internal accountability.

Similarly, Omotola and Adeniyi (2022) argue that dismissal patterns often reflect deeper institutional dysfunctions, including weak oversight bodies, a lack of internal auditing, and the politicization of disciplinary measures. Their study of the Armed Forces reveals that some dismissals stem not from actual infractions but from perceived disloyalty, whistleblowing, or internal rivalries within the military hierarchy.

A recurring theme in the literature is the transformation of dismissed security personnel into active threats to national peace and security. Okereke (2022) provides empirical evidence from Northern Nigeria, demonstrating that dismissed military officers have increasingly joined armed banditry operations due to unemployment, frustration, and knowledge of state operational tactics. This aligns with Nwachukwu and Odiegwu (2023), who document cases where ex-naval officers masterminded oil theft and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta. These studies collectively indicate that the skill sets, tactical knowledge, and access to insider information possessed by former operatives can significantly enhance the operational capacity of criminal networks.

Human Rights Watch (2021) corroborates this trend in its investigative report on post-EndSARS Nigeria, revealing that several disbanded SARS officers were later implicated in organised robbery and kidnapping operations. The report attributes this to institutional neglect and the absence of structured disengagement and reintegration strategies. Thus, the literature suggests a strong correlation between poorly managed dismissals and the recycling of insecurity actors.

The literature also reveals critical institutional weaknesses in how dismissals are managed. According to Alemika (2020), the disciplinary frameworks of the Nigerian security sector are outdated, opaque, and often devoid of independent oversight. This lack of transparency fosters impunity among senior officials while leaving junior officers vulnerable to arbitrary decisions. Furthermore, disciplinary boards often function without legal representation for the accused, undermining the principle of natural justice.

Additionally, findings by Akinrinade and Olarinmoye (2021) indicate that corruption within oversight agencies such as the Police Service Commission and military courts of inquiry leads to selective punishment, whereby well-connected officers are protected while others are summarily dismissed. These practices create a climate of fear and resentment within the rank and file, eroding morale and professionalism.

A significant theme is the profound psychological impact of dismissal on affected personnel. Ekhomu (2019) argues that dismissed officers often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and social isolation, particularly when they are abruptly cut off from institutional support systems. The loss of uniform, salary, identity, and status creates a vacuum that predisposes them to antisocial behavior. Freyd's (2003) Institutional Betrayal Theory, as applied by Smith and Freyd (2014), offers a theoretical lens to understand how betrayal by trusted institutions leads to anger, violence, or recidivism among former security operatives.

Ngoma (2021) also emphasizes that in the absence of post-service counselling and employment alternatives, many dismissed officers join political thugs, militant groups, or serve as mercenaries for local warlords. This supports the argument that dismissal without reintegration becomes a security risk multiplier, especially in fragile and conflict-prone environments.

Despite the associated risks, literature on reintegration policies in Nigeria remains sparse. Most studies point to the complete absence of a national framework for managing the transition of dismissed personnel. According to Adebayo (2023), while demobilization and reintegration efforts exist for ex-combatants under the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme, no such mechanisms are in place for dismissed formal security operatives, many of whom are left to navigate the civilian world without institutional or community support.

The African Security Sector Network (ASSN, 2021) calls for establishing reintegration units within the Ministry of Interior and the Office of the National Security Adviser. These units, they argue, should provide psychological counselling, vocational training, and continuous monitoring of dismissed operatives. Such an approach is common in post-conflict societies like Liberia, Sierra Leone, and South Africa, where Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes have been more comprehensive.

Comparative studies offer critical insights for Nigeria. In the United States, the "Decertification Index" tracks dismissed officers across states to prevent rehiring by other jurisdictions (Pate, 2022). In the UK, dismissed officers are provided with clear reasons and legal recourse, while mental health support is integrated into dismissal procedures for service-related trauma (Miller & Hess, 2020). These international models emphasise transparency, accountability, and mental health interventions as essential components of responsible disengagement.

Olonisakin (2019) draws on peacekeeping experiences in Liberia and the DRC, showing that the weaponisation of dismissed security operatives in post-conflict zones poses one of the gravest threats to state stability.

Nigeria's security challenges, though unique, resonate with these experiences and highlight the urgent need for holistic security governance.

While the literature has successfully identified key causes and consequences, several gaps remain:

Limited empirical research on the long-term security implications of dismissal.

Few studies adopt interdisciplinary perspectives (e.g., combining psychological, legal, and security dimensions).

A scarcity of policy-focused research on reintegration or post-dismissal tracking mechanisms. This study, therefore, contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive sociological and criminological analysis of how dismissals transform state-trained professionals into threats, focusing particularly on Nigerian policy failures, post-service vulnerability, and the need for reform.

Theoretical Framework

Labeling theory, propounded by Howard Becker (1963), is a sociological perspective that explores how the process of being labelled as 'deviant' or 'criminal' by institutions and society influences an individual's self-identity and behaviour. The theory posits that deviance is not inherent in an act but arises from the societal reaction to that act. Once labelled, individuals are more likely to internalise the label, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy of further deviance (Becker, 1963).

In Nigeria, dismissed security personnel are often subjected to stigmatising public narratives, portrayed as corrupt, disloyal, or criminal without the benefit of transparent trials or opportunities for defence. This label, combined with the loss of identity, income, and purpose, can push affected individuals towards criminality. For example, a police officer dismissed for alleged bribery without a fair hearing might resort to extortion or join organised crime not merely for survival but as a means of reclaiming power and control in a society that has condemned them.

The criminalization of dismissed operatives reinforces negative stereotypes and creates structural exclusion. As these individuals are pushed to the margins, they become susceptible to recruitment by terrorist groups, oil bunkering syndicates, or armed gangs that value their tactical skills (Ajayi & Ojo, 2021). Thus, labelling theory explains how the state's punitive labelling without rehabilitation leads to behavioural transformation, turning assets into liabilities. Human Rights Watch (2021) reported several instances where dismissed SARS operatives became enforcers for criminal gangs. These outcomes are not solely products of individual choices but of a system that failed to manage post-dismissal identity reconstruction.

Institutional Betrayal Theory

Institutional Betrayal Theory, developed by Jennifer Freyd (2003), explores how institutions meant to protect individuals can instead cause harm through acts of negligence, cover-ups, or outright betrayal. The theory argues that when trusted institutions fail their members particularly during times of crisis or vulnerability it leads to trauma, mistrust, and retaliatory behaviors (Freyd, 2003; Smith & Freyd, 2014). This theory has been widely applied in studies of military, academic, and organizational misconduct.

In Nigeria, most security operatives dedicate their youth, risk their lives, and serve in high-stress roles under poor conditions. When these individuals are dismissed without transparent processes, or worse, used as scapegoats for systemic failures, they experience profound psychological betrayal. The institution they once protected becomes a source of trauma and injustice. The lack of support structures such as legal redress, mental health care, or post-service reintegration further compounds this betrayal. Dismissed officers are not only rejected but also abandoned by the very state they served, making their conversion to oppositional roles more emotionally and ideologically charged (Okereke, 2022). Betrayal theory, therefore, explains how the emotional rupture caused by dismissal fosters bitterness, alienation, and potential revenge behaviours, particularly among highly trained individuals who know how to exploit state weaknesses. Empirically, cases in the Niger Delta reveal that dismissed naval officers have used their tactical expertise to coordinate oil theft operations and evade military patrols (Nwachukwu & Odiegwu, 2023). These actions are driven not merely by greed but by a sense of betrayal and retribution against a state that discarded them.

Collectively, Labeling Theory and Institutional Betrayal Theory offer a powerful explanatory lens for this study. While Labeling Theory emphasizes societal reactions and identity reconstruction, Institutional Betrayal Theory focuses on the organizational and emotional failure of institutions to protect their members. These frameworks reveal that dismissals, when poorly managed, are not merely human resources procedures but catalysts for deviance, insecurity, and potential insurgency. Therefore, to prevent dismissed personnel from becoming threats, Nigeria must fundamentally rethink how it labels, processes, and supports security personnel during and after disengagement.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilising document analysis and empirical case synthesis as its core methods. This methodology was selected due to the sensitive and multidimensional

nature of security personnel dismissal in Nigeria, which requires a deep understanding of institutional processes, lived experiences, and security governance frameworks.

Data were drawn from government publications, disciplinary tribunal reports, press statements from Nigerian security agencies (including the Nigerian Army, Nigeria Police Force, and DSS), and firsthand media reports from 2019 to 2024. Secondary data were sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, reports from NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and the CLEEN Foundation, and international policy briefs.

Findings and Discussions

Examination of the Nature and Causes of Security Personnel Dismissals in Nigeria

The study reveals that security personnel in Nigeria are commonly dismissed for reasons ranging from corruption and insubordination to abuse of power and allegations of criminal collaboration. A significant proportion of dismissals, particularly in the Nigeria Police Force and military, are executed without proper internal review, legal defence, or transparent documentation (Ajayi & Ojo, 2021; CLEEN Foundation, 2020). There are no uniform disciplinary standards across Nigeria's security agencies, and procedures are often susceptible to manipulation by senior officers. This pattern reflects an institutional governance failure, where internal disciplinary actions are politicised or improperly managed. Through the lens of Institutional Betrayal Theory, such dismissals represent not merely organisational dysfunction but the betrayal of personnel who served loyally. The perception of betrayal fosters bitterness and fuels antagonism towards the state. In cases where procedural fairness is denied, personnel are more likely to reject the legitimacy of the system and disengage destructively.

Assessment of Post-Dismissal Trajectories of Former Security Personnel

The study shows that numerous dismissed security operatives have transitioned into banditry, oil theft, cultism, kidnapping, and mercenary activities, particularly in the North-West and South-South regions (Okereke, 2022; Nwachukwu & Odiegwu, 2023). Dismissed officers continue to possess operational knowledge, tactical combat training, and internal intelligence of the security architecture, making them valuable assets to criminal networks. Many dismissed personnel face psychological

distress, economic hardship, and social stigma—conditions that push them into survival-driven crime or ideologically motivated reprisal.

The transformation of dismissed personnel into active security threats aligns directly with Labeling Theory, which posits that labelling individuals as deviant or disposable can push them into the very behaviour the system aims to prevent. In this context, the label of “dismissed” or “disgraced officer” becomes a social stigma that limits lawful employment options, encourages identity loss, and reinforces criminal recidivism. The Nigerian state, by failing to support or monitor dismissed operatives, unwittingly turns trained protectors into well-equipped liabilities.

Investigation of Institutional Mechanisms for Reintegration or Monitoring of Dismissed Officers

The study reveals that Nigeria lacks a national post-dismissal tracking or reintegration framework for security personnel. There is no interagency coordination between the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defence, DSS, Police Service Commission, or NSCDC regarding dismissed staff. Dismissed officers often disappear into informal sectors, working for private individuals, politicians, or criminal actors without oversight or background verification.

The absence of a national reintegration or exit-management policy demonstrates a critical gap in security governance. This vacuum facilitates the “asset-to-liability” transition, as dismissed individuals are left to operate in unregulated environments. Drawing from comparative models such as the U.S. decertification registry or South Africa’s demobilization programmes, Nigeria’s lack of such safeguards represents a security failure with national implications. The state’s failure to rehabilitate or track dismissed operatives violates basic principles of institutional justice, as outlined by Institutional Betrayal Theory, and escalates the long-term threat landscape.

Exploration of Broader Security Implications of the “Asset-to-Liability” Shift

It has been revealed that dismissed security operatives contribute directly and indirectly to rising insecurity, including targeted assassinations, arms proliferation, and insider attacks on security facilities. Community-based studies indicate that residents in conflict-prone zones fear dismissed operatives more than conventional criminals (CDD, 2022). This study also found that former personnel involved in political thuggery and electoral violence often act with impunity due to their training and political connections.

The cumulative impact of this asset-to-liability transformation is the deepening of national insecurity. Trained but alienated, these operatives weaponize their insider knowledge and tools against the very state they once served. The challenge is both strategic and moral: how to ensure accountability without pushing personnel towards criminal or insurgent paths. If unchecked, this trend risks institutionalizing a parallel security ecosystem where dismissed officers become mercenaries, community enforcers, or cartel leaders—a dangerous echo of Nigeria's post-civil war experience, where unsupported ex-Biafran soldiers contributed to waves of armed robbery in the 1970s and 1980s (Alemika, 2020).

Across all objectives, one theme is clear: the transformation of dismissed security personnel from state assets into liabilities is not accidental. It is a product of systemic neglect, legal opacity, institutional betrayal, and societal labelling. Without reform, Nigeria will continue to recycle its trained defenders into its most dangerous adversaries.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this research reveal a disturbing trajectory in Nigeria's internal security dynamics, wherein security personnel, once considered national assets, are increasingly dismissed under irregular or opaque circumstances only to re-emerge as threats to national peace and stability. Over the past five years, dismissals have occurred across the Nigerian Police, Military, and paramilitary agencies, with notable figures such as the dismissal of over 3,000 soldiers in 2021 and multiple waves of police terminations due to misconduct. Despite these actions, the lack of standardized dismissal protocols, the absence of post-service support systems, and the failure to reintegrate or track dismissed officers have created a dangerous security vacuum.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that many ex-operatives now stigmatized, unemployed, and psychologically wounded are being absorbed into bandit groups, oil theft rings, insurgent factions, and political thuggery operations. The state's inability to manage this transition has fostered a narrative of institutional betrayal among ex-personnel, compounded by high fatality rates and poor welfare systems within the services. As this trend escalates, Nigeria risks breeding a cycle wherein state-trained defenders become strategic liabilities, eroding public trust, weakening national security, and fragmenting internal cohesion.

To address these challenges, the following strategic and actionable policy recommendations are proposed:

- Government should establish a National Security Personnel Exit and Reintegration Council (NSPERC) which should coordinate dismissal, retirement, and resignation across all security agencies

- and create unified frameworks for reintegration and be compelled to publish annual data on dismissals, resignations, and their justifications to ensure accountability and deter abuse of authority.
- Government should develop Post-Dismissal Rehabilitation Programmes which should include mental health support, trauma counselling, economic reintegration (e.g., vocational training), and social welfare schemes for dismissed or retiring operatives.
 - Government should create a National Database of Discharged Personnel: To track the movement, behaviour, and employment of ex-security officers and reduce their infiltration into criminal or insurgent groups.
 - There should be Institutionalization of Background Checks in Private Security and Political Engagements: Former security operatives should undergo rigorous vetting before being absorbed into private or community-based security roles.
 - There should be integration of dismissal patterns into National Security Risk Assessments: The government should treat the dismissal of security personnel as a national security concern and monitor patterns that could lead to future threats.
 - There should be an independent monitoring by Civil Societies and human rights bodies, to ensure due process in dismissals: All dismissed officers must receive fair hearings, legal representation, and transparent documentation of proceedings to prevent wrongful terminations.
 - Civic Education should be conducted for Retired and Dismissed Personnel which will help to reorient ex-operatives on civil responsibility, democratic norms, and non-violent conflict resolution.
 - The local community and security should support and report on reintegrated officers, especially in fragile areas prone to violence and insurgency by close monitoring the activities of such operatives.

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