The prevention of inter-communal conflict in cities where multiple religious and secular norms and processes affect the delivery of security and justice is a major challenge for governments and residents. Most analyses of conflict prevention focus on the part played by traditional authorities or civil society associations, downplaying the role of public police forces. Yet fieldwork in Kano, northern Nigeria, suggests that locally appropriate forms of conventional policing can be highly effective in lowering tension. While the need to negotiate with Kano’s semi-state and informal policing actors has not reconfigured the Nigerian police’s authority practices, Kano’s relative stability owes much to the political and technical skills with which senior police officers manage the city’s competitive environment.

In 1995, Murray Last asked ‘how a society as plural as Nigeria can handle widely differing perceptions of violence and the legitimacy of violence in such a way that the tensions engendered by memories of violence do not reproduce further violence’.¹ Last’s question raises significant issues about the articulation and operationalization of different understandings of security and justice both for Nigeria and for societies with comparable histories. It is especially relevant for Kano, the biggest city in Kano State and Nigeria’s Islamic north, which provides a major example of such community plurality. Not only are there diverse definitions and actors influencing the provision of security and justice, but Kano also has a history of communal conflict, which in 2005 prompted the New York-based group Human Rights Watch (HRW) to warn that ‘Kano

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remains one of the more volatile towns in the north’. Yet by 2011 it no longer seems to be a city ‘where violence is most likely to erupt when there are tensions elsewhere in the country’. What explains this relative stability?

Kano presents a suitable test for my adaptation of Last’s question: how can Nigeria handle differing perceptions of security and justice so as to restrain violence, and what is the role of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) in this? Admittedly, police are often implicated in security’s breakdown. Indeed, HRW’s observation after the 2005 riots remains apposite: the dozens of extra-judicial killings carried out by police ‘were typical of their response to inter-communal violence’. Further, the apparent failure of the NPF to provide adequate security and justice has encouraged the activities of alternative providers such as self-help vigilantes and Shari’a enforcement guards. Despite this, my answer is organized around the NPF, rather than traditional authorities or civil society associations, because the NPF is the critical actor and accounts of state–society issues that underplay its legitimacy and capacity are incomplete.

In this article I explore how the NPF helps to make Kano function for the benefit of both its officers and residents, and how it handles the interface between Kano’s secular and religious rationalities, structures, and processes. These lines of enquiry help me to test the premise that the NPF’s approach to policing represents a locally appropriate form of conflict prevention, albeit conducted in a style that makes few allowances for moderation or partnership. While I agree with the International Crisis Group (ICG) that Nigeria’s north is not the hotbed of Islamic extremism some

3. Ibid.
7. Hard data are difficult to obtain in this area, but evidence can be found in informal and/or alternative sources. The account offered here is based on informal discussions and a small number of semi-structured interviews with senior and mid-ranking Nigerian officers, officials and academics in Nigeria and the UK during the autumn and winter of 2010–11. This is supplemented by discussions with UK and US officials in Nigeria, and with senior officers from the police, Civil Defence Corps, Hisba, and vigilantes at an ESRC-sponsored workshop in Kano, January 2011. Triangulating the views of officers against those of other ranks or residents proved problematic, so local perspectives are gleaned from popular newspapers such as the Kano-based Daily Triumph and the national Daily Sun.
fear, my interpretation of the ‘reinforced community-level peacebuilding’ and ‘more subtle security response’ they advocate differs,8 just as it differs from an emerging international policy trend that police should collaborate actively with non-state providers.9 Instead, I emphasize the role of political skills, intelligence networks, anti-crime operations, and coexistence. This approach offers insight into the NPF’s understanding of the predicament that Kano’s political and religious significance poses for the federal police force. It permits an assessment of the relative strengths of the structurally determined and contingent choices affecting policing, which in turn suggests areas accessible to change from within the police institution.

The discussion develops as follows. I begin by noting that Kano is an ancient city with a preference for settling disputes and policing problems informally, whereas the NPF is a hierarchical institution with a reputation for brutal operations. Despite this, the NPF has to date mitigated many of Kano’s underlying tensions. In order to test the NPF’s activities as a locally appropriate form of conflict prevention, its approach is explored by reference to intelligence collection and proactive policing, and is elaborated in terms of officers’ relations with Kano’s alternative policing providers. The NPF’s record suggests that violence is best managed by effective leadership, actionable intelligence, and informal liaison, rather than a formal scheme of mixed policing.

Metropolitan Kano

At first glance, the policing of metropolitan Kano (hereafter Kano) reflects a secular federal police’s engagement with an Islamic urban society. However, while this issue is present it cannot explain fully the nature and style of the city’s policing, which is moulded by Kano’s history, social and ethnic environment, and political and religious significance.

9. That policing is a multi-layered activity, and police should cooperate with informal providers such as community groups is an emergent, rather than established policy orthodoxy that is increasingly influential in the UN and amongst donors such as DfID. It links to but is separate from the international trend towards community policing. For advocacy see Peter Albrecht and Helene Maria Kyed, ‘Justice and security – when the state isn’t the main provider’ (Danish Institute for International Studies Policy Brief, December 2010); Bruce Baker, Security in Post-conflict Africa: The role of non-state policing (CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2009); Eric Scheye and Louise Andersen, ‘Conclusion: Towards a multi-layered approach to security’ in Louise Andersen, Bjørn Møller, and Finn Stepputat (eds), Fragile States and Insecure People? Violence, security, and statehood in the twenty-first century (Palgrave, New York, NY, 2007). Contrast David Bayley, ‘The morphing of peacekeeping: competing approaches to public safety’, International Peacekeeping 18, 1 (2011), pp. 52–63. Compare Mike Brogden and Preeti Nijhar, Community Policing: National and international models and approaches (Willan, Cullompton, 2005); Mark Findlay and Uglješa Zveki (eds), Alternative Policing Styles: Cross-cultural perspectives (UNICRI and Kluwer, Deventer, 1993).
The key challenges of Kano, a sprawling, densely populated city of angular low-rise buildings, include population growth, inadequate infrastructure, youth unemployment, and volatile politics. The city has existed for many centuries, but its population has increased tenfold in the last 50 years, from 250,000 in 1961 to more than 2.8 million according to the 2006 census, 95 per cent of whom are Hausa-speaking Muslims, with the majority Sunni. Despite being in relative decline as a market, Kano remains the economic and cultural metropolis of the Hausa-speaking world, attracting young migrants from the countryside, seasonal workers from northern Nigeria and Niger, Igbo and Yoruba incomers from beyond Hausaland, and a floating population of economic marginals, as well as third-generation Indian and Lebanese businessmen. As a result, it is Nigeria’s largest city after Lagos, covering 499 sq km and administered by eight local government authorities (LGAs). It has pockets of wealth (though cultural norms mean that conspicuous consumption is avoided), but most people lack easy access to potable water, sanitation, medicine, and education. In the absence of public transport, an estimated two million unregulated commercial motorcycle riders compete for road space with cars, buses, lorries, and three-wheeled ‘tuk tuks’.

International accounts of Kano focus typically on the experience of indigenes living in the partially walled old city, or on the incomers in the nearby new town (Sabon Gari) who challenge the city’s established morality. Kano’s other sectors receive less attention, but several miles to the east, for example, there is a leafy Government Reserve Area (GRA) where professionals, businessmen, and government officials live, though even here roads are potholed, drains blocked, and verges covered with rubbish. Adjoining commercial, industrial, and residential sectors (such as Hotoro to the south-east) are characterized by overcrowding, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and drug abuse, and are recruiting grounds for the youth gangs politicians use to mobilize rallies, and intimidate and harass opponents. And politics is a greater

source of tension than religion or ethnicity, reflecting political divisions between and within the state’s dominant parties, rather than, as in northern towns such as Kaduna and Zaria, religious rivalries. Governor Ibrahim Shekarau’s description of his opponents in the dominant People’s Democratic Party (PDP) as ‘devils’ gives a flavour of the tamer public pronouncements of powerful officials, who are, moreover, keen to harness religious enthusiasm. As Kano’s Daily Triumph newspaper notes, Shekarau believes ‘strongly in the will of Allah in achieving whatever he set out for, particularly when it has to do with seeking political power’.

The NPF’s ability to police this environment is limited, so low-level policing is provided by actors with diverse objectives. However, there is no coherent overall scheme whereby the various practices ‘intersect to form [the] consistent system of action’ required for publicly recognized plural policing. Thus the NPF retains its constitutional role even as it fails to provide adequate security, and is complemented or supplemented by the state-sponsored Islamic guards known as Hisba, and by self-help community protection groups such as vigilantes and trade associations. Traditional forms of dispute resolution and intelligence gathering (both of which may be described as policing) are provided by the Emir of Kano’s administration. As this implies, policing is an ambiguous term that refers to the problem-solving activities that groups (which may be federal, state-sponsored, neighbourhood-based, or commercial) engage in to facilitate their preferred forms of security and justice. It should really be distinguished from police or law-enforcement work, which concerns what public police are required to do, but in practice boundaries blur because both may deal with the low-level crime, disturbances, and traffic control that are police work in the West.

Three consequences follow. First, Kano’s policing providers divide into constitutionally legitimate forces (such as the NPF) and culturally legitimate groups (such as Hisba), rather than state and non-state groups. Second, the informal and opaque nature of Kano’s traditional approach to policing and dispute resolution challenges international preferences for transparently accountable procedures and equitable forms of governance.

13. There are more registered voters in Kano State than anywhere except Lagos. ‘Lagos leads with 2.6m as INEC registers 22m’, The Nation (Lagos), 27 January 2011.
14. ‘Shekarau: Devils have taken over PDP’, Compass (Isheri), 20 December 2010. Even so, Shekarau contributed to Kano’s stability before he lost his governorship in the April 2011 elections.
16. Peter Manning, quoted in Wood and Dupont, ‘Understanding the governance of security’ in Wood and Dupont (eds), Democracy, p. 4.
and conflict prevention. Third, maintaining Kano’s current level of stability requires the NPF to operate across the city’s policing boundaries.

In practice, the NPF has proved adept at handling Kano’s decision makers and policing providers. Despite its inherent weaknesses, it contributes to stability by exploiting the dynamics and flexibilities of Kano’s environment, rather than by partnering stakeholders with whom it shares a common understanding or agenda;\(^17\) senior officers must manage tensions and threats while acknowledging the legitimate demands of Islamic groups, delivering the NPF’s objectives (such as crime reduction),\(^18\) accommodating its internal politics, and protecting themselves (job security is minimal). Consequently, the ways in which the NPF handles Kano’s alternative policing providers offers insight into its assessment of policing, governance, and conflict prevention.

**Police business**

Metropolitan Kano is policed as part of Kano State Command, and its headquarters in the central area of Bompai are adjacent to that of the Zone 1 Command, which comprises the state commands of Kano, Katsina, and Jigawa, and is headed by an assistant inspector general (AIG).\(^19\) There are 12 zonal commands and Zone 1 is ‘one of the biggest and most violent commands in the country’.\(^20\) Armed robbery is the dominant serious crime, with robbery the most common and kidnapping a major problem,\(^21\) but newspapers also report drug abuse (especially of traditional drugs such as Indian hemp),\(^22\) and gender-based violent crime

17. This is the definition used in UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, ‘A new partnership agenda’ (UNDPKO, New York, 2009), p. i.
19. The NPF maintains a three-tier structure of department, zone, and state commands. Its inspector general (or chief officer) is supported at the police’s federal headquarters by six deputy inspector generals (DIGs). Each zone is headed by an AIG whose responsibilities include supervising the commissioners of police (CPs) in charge of state commands within the zones.
(girls selling snacks and goods on the streets are particularly vulnerable). Meanwhile, police patrols speak of black spots in commercial areas where women are assaulted, and pick-pocketing and shoplifting occur. Police and public alike believe densely populated areas with bad lighting to be dangerous because they attract youths who supplement shoe-shining, nail cutting, and hawk ing with petty crime and drug-taking. Sabon Gari’s inhabitants are widely regarded as quarrelsome, violent, and prone to abuse alcohol, drugs, and sex, whereas Kano’s Islamic nature raises specific crime issues, such as the under-reporting of domestic violence.

Four features affecting the way the NPF does business deserve note. First, the NPF is an occupation force – albeit a constitutionally legitimate one – that relies on coercion to achieve its aims. Further, force policy is that officers should work away from their home area, and while many come from Kano and Kaduna states, most arrive knowing little about the city. This affects the ways in which the police’s federal-based power is translated and perceived in some everyday local settings; senior officers must rely on their uniforms to establish their authority.

There are no publicly available statistics on officers’ nominal religion or places of origin, though senior officers refer to 60 percent of the force as Muslim and 40 percent Christian, and northerners dominate the NPF’s senior ranks. Being Hausa does not necessarily mean being Muslim, though there are a number of practising Muslims in the senior ranks judging from frequent references to Alhaji, a title given to West African Muslim men who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Thus in June 2011 the Kano State Commissioner of Police (CP) was Alhaji Tambari Yabo Muhammad, the AIG in charge of Zone 1 was Alhaji Abubakar Muhammed, while the NPF’s chief officer, Inspector General (IG) Hafiz Ringim, is a devout Muslim who was born in Zamfara, and has links to Kano (in 1990 he commanded the 9th Police Mobile Force (PMF) Squadron, whose barracks are on Kano’s Maiduguri Road).

Second, Kano has a shortage of manpower, vehicles, and communications equipment, which impacts on operational efficiency and morale. The Kano command’s combined population of 5–6 million is policed by

25. Interview, senior officer, Kano, 2 December 2010.
27. Kano was allocated N63,058,792 for the financial year 2007/8 (Zone 1 was awarded N24,118,146). In January 2011, N240 approximated to £1. NPF, ‘2008 Annual Report’, p. 179.
approximately 6,000 officers, none of whom have access to the equivalent technology of, for example, Abuja’s Geographic and Information System (AGIS), or Lagos’s crime-mapping projects. Instead, the NPF must rely on the experience of long-serving officers.

Third, this means that the NPF’s activities cannot be understood in isolation from those of other policing providers. This is partly because its failure to provide neighbourhood security has encouraged vigilantes and commercial companies to proliferate, and partly because it depends on information collected by local officials and informants. The flexibility and discretion permitted to officers managing the resultant networks is unclear, but while it must be affected by the hierarchical nature of the police institution and Kano’s sensitivities, the political skills of the commissioner (the city’s senior officer) play a critical part. Just as significant improvements in police–public relations in Lagos in 2009–10 were widely attributed to Commissioner Marvel Akpoyivo, so similar trends are evident in Kano, where in early 2011 Commissioner Tambari Yabo Muhammad introduced the policing style that had enabled him to reduce crime and violence in Kaduna, 150 miles to the south-west.

Fourth, discretion and political skill may be central to the NPF’s role in managing Kano’s complex, cosmopolitan, and competitive environment, but the regular police are backed by the paramilitary Police Mobile Force (PMF), which was established as an anti-riot squad capable of countering communal disturbances, banditry, religious insurrection, and militants when regular police cannot cope. The PMF keep a low profile in Kano, but it is sometimes suggested that the populace regard them as the real police. The two are visibly distinct: the PMF wear khaki and black uniforms made of military-quality cloth that takes razor-sharp creases, whereas regular police wear black and blue uniforms, which do not. Also, the PMF receive special public-order training, which is popularly thought to make them ‘agile, alert, serious, colourful, and attractive’ to a public concerned by Kano’s crime and insecurity. This, combined with their operational effectiveness, encourages people to regard them with respect and confidence, as well as distrust and fear; they act quickly if brutally, and are called on for help by victims in distress during, for

28. Interview, senior officer, Kano, 2 December 2010. The NPF’s estimated total strength is 377,000-400,000 sworn officers. Senior officers refer to 400,000 officers whereas the consultants engaged by the Ministry of Police Affairs to set up an e-payment platform quote 297,000. According to newspaper reports in late 2010, NPF accounts include some 20,000 ghost officers. The overall police ratio for Nigeria is 1:377. Interview, senior officer, Kano, 2 December 2010.
29. Muhammad held this post from December 2010 to July 2011.
30. Personal communication, indigene, Kano, 2 December 2010.
31. PMF officers recruited from Katab (58 miles west of Jos) are reputed to take pleasure in shooting Hausa in revenge for earlier inter-ethnic conflict (Last, ‘The search for security’,
example, armed robberies or gang fights. Even so, only regular police officers can join their ranks.

The key environmental challenges confronting the NPF as it seeks to police Kano include the volatility of local politics and the legacy of earlier violence. Sectarian divisions play a part, too, as does the presence of the militant Islamist group Boko Haram in Wudil, 26 miles from Kano. Indeed, in November 2010 Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Alhaji Abubakar Sardauna said that his greatest challenge while in command of Zone 1 was Boko Haram’s insurgency in Wudil.32 Similar concerns are expressed by Kano’s current commissioner, Ibrahim Kpotun Idris.33 But many commentators (and many officers) regard the depth of public mistrust as more fundamental. The extent to which this matters is, however, difficult to judge. On the one hand, inter-personal trust is low throughout Nigeria. On the other hand, a degree of trust is essential if officers are to receive the information they need to police effectively. And this does occur. In December 2010, residents in Kano’s commercial areas commended the police for cracking down on the gangs known as ‘Yan Daba’,34 while people in poor neighbourhoods find patrols reassuring.35 Nevertheless, officers of all ranks acknowledge the need to improve police–public relations.

There is a sharper division of opinion regarding the NPF’s internal challenges: officers emphasize delivery and working conditions, whereas donors and NGOs focus on normative or management issues. Yet logistics cannot be dismissed as trivial when senior officers at headquarters wishing to call LGAs must use personal mobiles. Ironically, the resources needed for more effective policing – and conflict prevention – are not expensive. In December 2010, a senior officer claimed that one extra dog would enable him to prevent violence escalating out of control; 9 dogs were available, but 10 dogs – and 20 horses – would make a major difference to his ability to control crowds.36 Similarly problematic are training, accommodation, and pay. Training for general officers in the lower ranks

p. 44), though an indigene dismissed the comment as inaccurate. Private communication, Kano, 30 November 2010.


34. ‘Residents commend police’, Next (Lagos), 9 December 2010.

35. Radda et al., ‘A study of the nature of police patrol’. The officers involved consider them dangerous.

36. Interview, senior officer, Kano, 2 December 2010. Officers argue that Muslims do not find the use of dogs offensive: Fulani herders keep them.
is non-existent, while the barracks for regular police in Bompai and Gabon Sari range from inadequate to disgusting, even though officers up to the rank of inspector (and in some cases assistant superintendents) live there. The average monthly income of a low-ranking patrol officer living in barracks is N60,000 (£246),\(^{37}\) while an assistant superintendent earns between N75,000 and N80,000, and a chief superintendent approximately N180,000 monthly (£739). Income depends on rank regardless of years of service, with most serving between 10 and 34 years.

The NPF does not enforce Kano’s Sharia criminal code, but, given the communal conflict that occurred when Sharia was introduced in 2000, it might be thought that Sharia is an additional challenge. This is not the case; senior officers say that it has simplified, rather than complicated, policing. Although the law does not distinguish between religious and secular issues – something is an offence or it is not, and Sharia’s distinctions between desirable and forbidden acts are irrelevant – Sharia enables officers to leave the enforcement of certain unpopular or troublesome legal rulings to Hisba. Thus Hisba, which was formally created in 2000 by Governor Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso as a means to monitor the implementation of Sharia in Kano state, deals with alcohol and adultery more willingly than the NPF.\(^{38}\)

In practice, managing Kano requires a range of solutions. Improved logistics are necessary but not sufficient to improve the NPF’s effectiveness, which in turn affects the quality of the intelligence it receives, the political skill with which it manages local actors, and its development of long-term strategies.\(^{39}\) More importantly, the constraints under which the NPF operates have, in combination with Kano’s traditional preference for informal negotiation,\(^{40}\) encouraged senior officers to develop a style of


\(^{38}\) Compare Rasheed Olaniyi, ‘Hisba and the Sharia law enforcement in metropolitan Kano’ (IFRA, ‘Conflict and violence in Nigeria’, Zaria, 2009), <www.ifra-nigeria.org> (4 September 2010); Philip Ostien, Jamila Nasir, and Franz Kogelmann (eds), Comparative Perspectives on Shari’ah in Nigeria (Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 2005); Gunnar Weimann, Islamic Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria: Politics, Religion, and Judicial Practice (University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, 2007).


\(^{40}\) Ehrhardt, Authoritative Voices.
policing that enables them to prevent, mitigate, or manage many tensions before they reach the dangerous stage. How, then, does the NPF ensure that Kano functions relatively peacefully?

**Pragmatic approaches**

The NPF’s room for manoeuvre is limited by its remit, resources, and internal politics, and by Kano’s position as the Mecca of the Muslim North, which gives it bargaining power with the federal authorities. Consequently, the NPF is advised to work amicably with Kano’s traditional and religious enforcement bodies. But even if it were not, senior officers wish to prevent conflict because it complicates their job, attracts the attention of national and international media (thereby potentially threatening their careers), and may challenge their personal moral standards. Hence DIG Sardauna advised his successor in Zone 1 to ‘work closely with traditional rulers, members of the public, commissioners of police under his command, and the press to guarantee success’. He argued that this worked during his two years in Zone 1 in that ‘religious crises, political instability and criminal activities … were brought down to the barest minimum’.

Significantly, Sardauna emphasized the value of the press in managing police–public relations. Chief and senior officers do not receive media training, and some are more skilled than others, but the attention now paid to managing the media – and the workload of NPF press officers – offers evidence of the seriousness with which public concerns are sometimes taken; the dismissal and trial in December 2010 of three policemen from Kano’s Kwalli division convicted of kidnapping and raping a girl is illustrative. Increasingly, commissioners give press conferences, high-profile operations have newsletters, and there are phone-in or crime-stopper radio programmes. The result is a pragmatic approach based on intelligence assessments, proactive policing, and bargaining that exploits the flexibilities of the environment. But to make Kano function in the first instance, the NPF needs actionable intelligence.

**Intelligence’s critical role**

Frequently, violence erupts or escalates because officers misinterpret early warning signals, or fail to share knowledge. As IG Ringim argued in
December 2010, ‘most conflicts erupt ... due to neglect of early warning signals by politicians and government officials’.\textsuperscript{44} Also, the NPF sees conflict prevention as a by-product of more immediate objectives (like crime reduction), but both conflict prevention and proficient police work depend on timely intelligence and accurate risk assessment.

The reliability of the NPF’s intelligence capabilities is difficult to assess, but Kano’s combination of established networks, informal liaison arrangements, and leadership partly explain why it has been able to overcome Nigeria’s flawed intelligence arrangements and avoid the violence seen in cities such as Maiduguri, the capital of the north-eastern state of Borno, where the police are unable to identify Boko Haram’s members. As Ringim notes, not only is actionable intelligence missing in Maiduguri, but also officers’ ‘corruption, negligence, carelessness in handling arms and ammunitions, and ... poor attitude to work’ militate against effective policing.\textsuperscript{45} In a similar vein, Alhaji Aliyu Attah, IG under General Babangida’s military regime, blamed increased crime on the failure of Nigeria’s security agencies to cooperate.\textsuperscript{46} He argued that the NPF, State Security Service (SSS), Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), and the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) should ‘close ranks and embark on a well-coordinated approach to intelligence gathering and sharing’. Likewise, \textit{Tribune} believes that the federal government should ‘re-engineer the intelligence mechanism’ of the NPF, SSS, DMI, and the NIA ‘to make them alive to their responsibilities’.\textsuperscript{47}

Kano’s intelligence arrangements are far from perfect, as a critical British Council report delivered in the summer of 2010 emphasized.\textsuperscript{48} In a similar vein, Last argues that in comparison with the city he knew in 1961, today’s intelligence networks have broken down.\textsuperscript{49} However, Last refers to the Emirate’s intelligence and surveillance networks, rather than the NPF’s, and his views are at at odds with those of UK officials familiar with Kano’s security politics who claim that while the NPF’s intelligence is flawed and the Emir’s limited, that of the SSS is efficient and effective.\textsuperscript{50} Whatever the case, the NPF is able to draw on information from an

\textsuperscript{44} ‘IG carpets govt officials on early conflict signals’, \textit{Daily Trust}, 7 December 2010.
\textsuperscript{45} ‘IG reads riot act to policemen over Boko Haram attack’, \textit{Guardian (Lagos)}, 17 December 2010.
\textsuperscript{46} Compare ‘Terrorist attacks: it’ll be tough, rough – Onovo, Attah warn security agencies’, \textit{Sun}, 3 January 2010.
\textsuperscript{47} ‘Jonathan holds emergency meeting on security’, \textit{Tribune (Ibadan)}, 4 January 2011.
\textsuperscript{50} Private communications, UK officials, Kano, November 2010. For background see Basil Ugochukwu, ‘The State Security Service and human rights in Nigeria’, \textit{Third World
Emirate system based on resilient Islamic institutions and monitoring by hereditary ward and district heads; ward heads, for example, report disturbances and the presence of strangers to the 44 district heads responsible for Kano’s territory and administrative departments.

The Emirate’s record of intelligence gathering is one aspect of a broader picture, but it suggests the extent to which the NPF must rely on information collected by others to supplement its paid informants. It also emphasizes that despite the NPF’s success at exploiting the flexibilities of Kano’s environment, its failure to develop a coherent intelligence strategy for dealing with the city leaves it vulnerable to contingencies. As Ringim notes of the NPF more generally, ‘What is required is not some ad hoc measures or ill-considered populist steps, but a comprehensive plan that carefully considers such issues as training, equipping and completely re-orienting the mentality of the… Nigerian police.’ However, while the NPF remains a reactive force with a tendency to go in late and heavily (especially in public order situations), it is increasingly common to hear reform-minded officers argue that the police must be proactive and must pay more attention to international policing models. Hence the emphasis now placed by ambitious officers on intelligence-led policing, anti-crime initiatives, and community policing.

Proactive policing Kano-style

On arrival in Kano in December 2010, Commissioner Muhammad promised to introduce a proactive style of policing that effectively exemplifies a locally acceptable form of conflict prevention. He stressed his commitment to community policing and an ‘open door’ policy (the telephone numbers of senior officers are publicly available), but specifically promised to introduce anti-crime initiatives similar to those he had pioneered in Kaduna State in 2008 with Operation Yaki (‘Terror’). Describing Yaki as ‘the beginning of wisdom’, as Muhammad’s successor in Kaduna (Ballah Magaji Nasarawa) did, may be seen as undesirable by donors, but Nasarawa’s mission statement reflects local priorities: ‘to reduce crime to the barest minimum and to ensure that the rule of law and fundamental rights of citizens are adequately protected’. He planned to do this by ‘aggressive raids’, ‘constant patrols’ and ‘vigorously pursuing


52. Private communication, senior officer, Kano, 13 January 2011.
community policing’,\(^54\) and NPF press conferences suggest that similar approaches are to be implemented in Kano too. Significantly, Kaduna-style community policing is about residents giving information to officers, rather than officers providing a service to residents.

In practice, Yaki cannot be transferred easily. Not only is Yaki’s paramilitarism inappropriate for a city with Kano’s political and religious sensitivities, but also its level of resourcing is unlikely to be equalled. That Kaduna is home to many retired senior officers and officials helps to explain why, in 2008, 700 policemen and 500 PMF were deployed with military personnel ‘to create a highly mobile responsive and flexible police force to phase out crime in the state’.\(^55\) Yaki received an initial 70 Toyota Hilux trucks, 200 motor cycles and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to link them, supplemented later in the year by 30 additional Hilux, 250 motor cycles, and 1,000 bullet proof vests donated by the US ambassador. Further, in addition to their normal salaries and entitlements, Yaki officers receive special allowances, insurance, compensation for death during duty, medical care, allowances, and perks that regular police can only dream of. According to the state’s commissioner for information, this is financed by the governor’s security votes – that is, it comes at no extra cost to Abuja. But for most people, Yaki’s attraction is that it works; crime has fallen and ethno-religious crises have ceased for now. It is as yet too early to say whether this approach will work in Kano, but it has been widely welcomed.

Managing relationships

Regardless of public perceptions, Kano’s relative stability owes more to the professional and political skills of the NPF’s senior officers than to aggressive raids. To navigate between Kano’s power brokers and policing providers, the NPF relies on liaison arrangements that are developed in the light of its requirements and vary according to the status of the group concerned. And the boundaries between the various actors are unambiguous. The NPF’s clarity comes from knowing that its remit is non-negotiable (something is either legal or it is illegal), the SSS focuses on national security, Hisba pursues an Islamic agenda, and vigilantes protect their property. Bargaining may be necessary, but compromise is not seen as strength, and the various actors tolerate or accommodate each other’s rationalities only when forced to do so. There are no formal parallel

policing systems (as in a complex and connected whole), policing has not been reconfigured fundamentally, and while coexistence is a strong theme, Kano’s policing remains best understood in relation to the NPF. The ways in which the NPF handles points of interface between the various actors is consequently informative.

**Competition, collaboration, and coexistence:** The NPF’s relations with federal enforcement agencies are particularly fraught; all compete for scarce resources, and in some cases responsibilities overlap. For example, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), a paramilitary agency established in 2007 to guard against threats to national infrastructure, openly challenges the role of the NPF at the national level, while the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), whose Kano base is on Hajj Camp Road, challenges officers’ conduct. Against this, some officers see agencies such as the EFCC as specialist allies with whom they can collaborate. Further, while EFCC activities do not affect Kano’s populace, its interest in money laundering and terrorism-related funding is directly relevant to the NPF. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) is another agency with which it must reach an understanding. In practice, the current security situation ensures that senior officers from such agencies meet frequently. The structure of a meeting in Kaduna in May 2010 is indicative. After an open session in which the need for cooperation in solving ethno-religious conflicts was emphasized, the meeting went into closed session with the commissioner, SSS director, military commanders (Army and Air Force), security advisers to the governors and officials from the Jama’at Nasrîl Islam (JNI) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and other security advisers. (The army and air force are background presences but have minimal involvement in routine policing.)

The police has a more collaborative relationship with the professional bodies present in Kano. These include the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), and also the private sector such as Jaiz International Bank, Nigeria’s first Islamic bank. Although they do not police, the NPF is interested in their professional base, which can be used


58. ‘From Plateau to Kaduna, in search of peace’, This Day (Lagos), 12 May 2010.
for or against it. Consequently, senior officers court their support, attending their functions and inviting them to contribute to press communiqués. On occasions, they collaborate with civil society organizations and strategic interest groups which police their own members or environment, too. These include the Market Traders Association, Okada Riders Association, Farmers Association, Cattle Traders Association, Kano State Butchers, Yam Traders Association, Students Union, and local leaders of, for example, the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria. But relations between these groups and the NPF are often strained, partly because they exist because of police inadequacies, and partly because they do not have the influence of professional bodies; middle-cadre officers deal with them.

Similar considerations apply to Kano’s long-established Police Community Relations Committees (PCRCs) whose memberships include village and ward heads and Islamic scholars, and which can play a critical role in patrolling. In the interests of better police–community relations, Commissioner Muhammad instructed superintendents to attend PCRC meetings in some LGAs, though this is unlikely to increase the PCRCs’ influence.59

The NPF must also deal with Kano’s ethnic and religious groups, and in particular with Hisba which challenges the NPF’s secular understanding of policing and community security.60 Anecdotal evidence suggests that an informal system of communication and understanding exists between the NPF and Kano’s religious authorities whereby sensitive or potentially controversial issues are dealt with unofficially whenever possible;61 the NPF enforces secular aspects of the law by virtue of its statutory backing, while Hisba handles religious matters on the basis of its religious authority. When there is stalemate concerning the categorization of issues, an ad hoc committee meets to resolve the issue before it becomes public knowledge.

It would be inaccurate to describe this approach as a conflict prevention strategy, not least because the NPF’s responses are typically ad hoc and short-term, and are intended to address immediate goals such as crime reduction. On the other hand, many senior officers are articulate, and

61. Private communication, mid-ranking officer, 14 November 2010.
professionally and politically adept, and are more than capable of developing such a strategy; some have international experience and knowledge of management trends. On balance, this suggests that discretion and political skill, rather than strategy, are more critical for effective police management in Kano’s competitive environment, and that co-existence, association, and contestation are more typical than cooperation.

High- and low-level coexistence are best seen in the light of the NPF’s dealings with the Emirate Council and the Kano command of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria, while contestation characterizes its relations with Hisba.

**Cultivation:** The NPF interacts with the Emir, Alhaji Ado Bayero, and his administration in a variety of ways. The Emir has had no formal influence over policing since independence, but senior officers pay courtesy visits to solicit his support and blessing, as when the newly posted AIG in charge of Zone I, Alhaji Abubakar Muhammad, stressed his readiness to work with the Emirate Council, and spoke of their joint commitment to promoting peace, unity, law and order. The Emir responded that the Emirate Council (over which he presides) would support the NPF in maintaining law and order, but that officers must ‘adhere strictly to the ethics of their profession’ and achieve success ‘by protecting lives and property’. The NPF’s presence at court is otherwise limited to a small number of constables and sergeants seconded to the Emir’s security detail, and a police orderly attached to the Emir. Policing problems are forwarded to Kwalli division, in which the palace lies.

The Emirate receives five percent of all funds given to local government (total annual government receipts are unknown), but the Emir’s influence owes more to his ambiguous position between state and society. His authority is reinforced by his control of the Emirate’s intelligence and monitoring system, oversight of the Shari’a court system, and close links to the state government through the Emirate Council, and the state and local government security committees; he is a valuable ally. However, while the Emirate Council supports moves that promote Islam and the social order associated with it, it also displays a strong preference for disputes within communities, and between communities and the state, to be resolved informally, rather than through the formal law enforcement channels of a federal state that fails to provide the justice, mediation, and

63. The Emir has a reputation for pragmatism, but his award of a traditional title to Governor Shekarau in 2009 arguably weakened his apolitical position. ‘Emir confers Sardauna title on Shekarau’, *Daily Trust*, 5 November 2009.
reconciliation services that Islam advocates. Nonetheless, the Emir and the NPF appear to have developed a wary understanding.

**Toleration:** The Emirate Council sits at the apex of Kano’s traditional Islamic communities, and its role as adviser to the state government allows it institutional access to the federal government. In contrast, the Kano command of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria – of which the Emir is patron – is an established, legitimate, and popular security organization that supplements the NPF’s work, but receives minimal support in return. Created in 1982, and registered as a company in 1999, it numbers 19,000 men aged between 18 and 60 years, and 320 women; ten thousand are unpaid volunteers but 9,000 are ‘special guards’, whose salaries from protecting banks, restaurants, and the like are tithed. Vigilantes, who must buy their own red uniforms, join ‘to protect others, save life, save property, save the future’ according to the Kano State commander, Alhaji Kamselem Mohammad.

Kano’s vigilantes receive nominal police support. Thus applicants, who must fill out a four-page form requiring references, are theoretically subject to a police check. The 60 percent that pass are given operational guidelines and drill training by the police, and register at police posts before going out on their (mainly night) shifts. Nevertheless, the group’s aims and objectives are framed in relation to the police – which confirms the NPF’s formal role while simultaneously rebutting its performance and effectiveness. Their goals are (1) ‘to assist the Police and other law enforcement agencies to curb crime’; (2) ‘To protect and preserve public property’; and (3) to ‘Assist the Police in crowd control and maintenance of peace at public functions when the need arises’.

Significantly, the value of information collection is acknowledged: ‘To give information to the Police and other security groups of criminals or wanted resided in the Ward or Local Government’ (their information goes to the village head who gives it to the police). Information and

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68. Ibid.
assistance is also given to the Emirate Council, Hisba, NDLEA, immigration, criminal justice, and the fire service.

In practice, vigilantes rely on the NPF for everything beyond the routine. They carry routinely only a korkara (a long wooden stick that costs N500), and cannot enter houses (only police can obtain search warrants), but they arrest suspects on the basis of section 313 of the constitution, which permits citizen’s arrests. The entrance hall of Hotoro’s headquarters substantiates this, displaying photos of approximately 20 wanted or captured criminals with tokens of their crimes (drug dealing, armed robbery, livestock theft, and chicken killing). Of the 943 arrests made in 2009, 899 cases were taken to the police, 96 went to court proceedings, and 10 were abandoned (forms are filled out and records are available, though their accuracy cannot easily be verified). A further 388 cases were taken to organizations such as immigration. Thirty-four cases were pending in 2010.

**Contestation:** Hisba has the highest profile of Kano’s policing groups, and is currently an important actor by virtue of its religious significance, access to state decision makers, and popularity as a provider of quick and affordable justice. Its role and import may yet prove temporary, but for now it cannot be dismissed.69

In 2006, IG Ehindero accused Kano State authorities of trying to make Hisba a parallel police, but this has not happened. Indeed, the Director General of the Hisba Board, Dr Sa’id Ahmad Dukawa, insists that Hisba ‘supervises’, rather than polices.70 However, while Hisba’s community interests mean that it works amicably with the NDLEA and the Human Trafficking Agency, its relations with the NPF are often strained. Disagreement typically focuses on alcohol, as when in 2009 Hisba’s legal director reportedly claimed that Hisba had authority to operate throughout the state whereas other commentators argued that ‘the federal constitution, which permits the sale of alcohol, has priority’ over Hisba’s mandate.71 Public perceptions are evident from a newspaper report that in December 2010 a police patrol failed to stop ‘Islamic policemen’ destroying lorries carrying soft drinks because of past conflict ‘between the two law enforcement agencies’.72

70. Interview, Hisba Board, Kano, 1 December 2010.
But regardless of whether relations are cordial or, as Dr Dukawa describes them, ‘frosty’, influential NPF and Hisba officers know where the boundaries between the two organizations are non-negotiable and where there is room for manoeuvre. Further, although Hisba is less significant in towns such as Karaye, Rogo and Wudil, let alone in other Shari’a states, the NPF knows that for now coexistence is necessary. When Mohammed visited the Hisba Board as part of his familiarization tour, he said that the NPF is willing to partner Hisba in combating crime and making the state a peaceful place: ‘I want to see Hisbah and the police working together, going for patrols together and doing all other things in harmony for a more secure Kano State.’ He recognized that while ‘the constitution has mandated the federal government to enact laws for the country … states and local governments are also empowered to come up with laws that is in conformity with the culture of the people. … Given this, Hisbah is a lawful agency.’ Nevertheless, he warned against excess in the pursuit of Islam.

In his response, Dr Dukawa described the commissioner’s visit as a milestone toward solving ‘the problem’ between the police and Hisba. But tensions remain. Non-Muslim officers are not trained to enforce Shari’a, for which they may see no need, while different funding ensures that there is no sharing of resources; the NPF’s funding is federal while Hisba’s comes from the state government. Further, the federal state retains its coercive authority in that the NPF is backed by the PMF, army, and SSS, even as Kano State government sponsors Hisba; the federal state is the formal guarantor of the public interest even though Kano’s Islamic nature allows state authorities to claim a similar role.

In other words, Kano has a mixed system that is defined in relation to the NPF. It is not a ‘fluid interpenetration of additional and residual security in which forms of state, municipal, private and voluntary policing coalesce in a mixed economy’ so much as a series of activities and groups that are defined by reference to the NPF. The NPF is the secular outsider in an Islamic environment, but it is an outsider that is able to operate across Kano’s various vested interests and thereby help to keep the city stable. Its experience provides insight into the consensual and confrontational dimensions of policing practice in a significant African city.

74. Ibid.
75. Adam Crawford, ‘Policing and security as “club goods”: the new enclosures?’, in Wood and Dupont (eds), Democracy, pp. 111–38, p. 111.
Implications and conclusions

This article shows that Kano’s fragmentation of provision has not resulted in a fundamentally reconfigured field of policing; not only are the roles of Hisba and the vigilantes understood in relation to the NPF, but the NPF’s core position is reinforced by the PMF, army, and SSS. Nevertheless the NPF currently pursues a pragmatic and proactive style of policing which facilitates a locally appropriate form of conflict prevention. This is made possible by Kano’s relative stability (which is in part a result of the NPF’s approach to policing), by the NPF’s access to knowledge collected and assessed by the intelligence networks of the Emirate and the SSS, and by the pragmatism and political skills of senior figures in the groups concerned. Contrast the atmosphere of suspicion and surveillance in Maiduguri, where casualties are high, but neither the security agencies nor the majority of people know who belongs to Boko Haram.76

Policing in Kano concerns working relationships and coexistence, rather than partnership or conflict prevention as such. Thus the NPF exploits the ability of Kano’s web of authorities to deal with conflicting interests because it makes for efficient policing. But its approach does not include ‘interventions that [explicitly] support the promotion of a culture of justice, truth and reconciliation’,77 not least because organizations that claim to do this (like Hisba) are often destabilizing. Also, community security is affected primarily by crime, politics, and contingencies, rather than exclusion or extremism. Addressing structural violence and injustice may be necessary for enhancing a society’s long-term capacity to reduce or prevent conflict, but most people want immediate results. Hence the popularity of Yaki-style operations.

In summary, Kano’s experience suggests that locally appropriate forms of conventional policing can be highly effective in lowering tension. While the basis for Kano’s policing arrangements are to be found in the character of its social and political organization, its place within the federal system, and the political and cultural legitimating choices that have been made in relation to it, the city’s relative stability owes much to the political and technical skills with which senior NPF officers manage its competitive environment. Even so, theories of conflict prevention that begin in Kano emphasize the need for clarity of purpose, actionable intelligence, and robust operations, rather than moderation or partnership.