

We Cannot Work Together Except We Agree': Inter-Agency Collaboration Between NSCDC and Private Security Organisations in Lagos and Oyo States

¹Ajibola Olayinka AWOSEYI and ²Oludayo TADE

¹Department of Behavioural Sciences, Criminology and Security Studies Unit, Lead City University, Ibadan.

²Department of Sociology, Criminology and Security Studies Unit, University of Ibadan.

¹ jibolaawoseyi@gmail.com +2348033247752

²dotad2003@yahoo.com +2348116164291

Abstract

This study investigates the benefits of interagency cooperation between the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and Private Security Organisations (PSOs) in addressing Nigeria's complicated security challenges. The research aims to evaluate the benefits of such cooperation, explore institutional arrangements necessary for collaboration, and identify challenges hindering these partnerships. This study bridges a significant research gap by applying the Collaborative Theory and Rational Choice Theory to the Nigerian security landscape, offering a novel perspective on enhancing interagency collaboration. The study employed an exploratory research design, focusing on in-depth interviews with 45 purposively selected participants, including NSCDC personnel and representatives from six private security organisations in Lagos and Ibadan. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed through content analysis, enabling a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. Key findings reveal that interagency cooperation enhances intelligence sharing, resource pooling, and specialization, which are critical for effective crime prevention. However, systemic barriers such as resource constraints, regulatory gaps, trust deficits, and cultural differences significantly impede collaboration. The study concludes that fostering effective partnerships requires well-structured institutional arrangements, including role clarity, joint training programs, and standardized frameworks. To address these challenges, the study recommends prioritizing trust-building initiatives, enhancing resource-sharing mechanisms, and developing inclusive policies that involve private security organisations in decision-making processes. By aligning incentives and creating a foundation of trust and mutual respect, both entities can contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's security architecture. This research contributes to the body of knowledge by providing actionable insights into interagency collaboration in developing countries. It underscores the importance of leveraging complementary strengths and aligning organisational incentives to create a cohesive and resilient security framework.

Keywords: Interagency cooperation, NSCDC, private security organisations, collaborative theory and rational choice theory.

Introduction

The responsibility of ensuring the safety and welfare of citizens lies squarely with the government, as enshrined in Section 14(1)(c) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Yet, the country continues to grapple with widespread insecurity which are ranging from insurgency and kidnapping to communal violence, banditry, and oil theft (Oladoyin et al., 2024). Despite having a range of security agencies including the Army, Police, and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), these problems remain deeply rooted (Johnson, 2019). Part of the challenge lies not in the absence of security actors but in the way they operate often in isolation from each other, with minimal cooperation or shared strategy. (Ikeanyibe et al., 2023). One of the most significant obstacles to effective security in Nigeria today is the lack of inter-agency collaboration (Tukura & Tukura, 2024). Security institutions frequently operate in silos, with little or no coordination (Ogbu et al. 2023). This dysfunction has led to missed opportunities for synergy, ineffective joint operations, and growing public mistrust in state security mechanisms (Abioye, & Alao 2020). There have been tragic consequences of this disjointed approach.

Incidents such as the killing of local security operatives by army personnel in Enugu State (Ugwuozor et al., 2022) and deadly clashes between the police and military in Zamfara and Adamawa states (Channels TV, 2024, 2023; The Sun, 2025) highlight the dangerous gaps that exist between agencies supposedly working toward the same goal. In parallel with state security bodies, Private Security Organisations (PSOs) have grown in number and influence, particularly in urban areas such as Lagos and Oyo States (Oladele, 2020). These organisations are often embedded within communities and provide flexible, rapid-response services (Bello, 2023). Yet, they are rarely included in formal security planning or intelligence networks (Whelan, C., & Dupont, B. (2020). This exclusion undermines their potential to make meaningful contributions to public safety and security, especially in contexts where state resources are overstretched. Private Security Organisations (PSOs) are central to this study for several reasons. They represent the fastest-growing segment of Nigeria's security sector, with thousands of registered firms employing a workforce that, in many states, equals or even surpasses that of public security agencies (Oladele, 2020; Nwokolo, 2020). Their widespread presence in cities, residential estates, and business districts places them at the forefront as first responders to many security challenges (Chinwokwu, 2022). PSOs are also legally recognised under the Private Guard Companies Decree of 1986 and formally regulated by the NSCDC, providing a statutory but often underused platform for collaboration (Nwachukwu et al., 2024; Suchia, 2017). With their community networks and local knowledge, they play a vital role in intelligence gathering and grassroots crime prevention (Abiodun, 2022). However, despite these contributions, PSOs remain sidelined in national security discussions and are often excluded from interagency collaborations (Asangausung et al., 2025).

The purpose of this study is to explore the possibility and practicality of improving inter-agency collaboration between the NSCDC and PSOs in Lagos and Oyo States. Understanding how these two groups can work together more effectively may offer insights into improving Nigeria's overall security architecture. This study seeks to identify the benefits of such collaboration, the institutional arrangements that would support it, and the challenges

currently standing in the way. In doing so, the study seeks to ask about the potential benefits of inter-agency cooperation between NSCDC and PSOs in Southwest Nigeria, the institutional frameworks necessary to promote sustained cooperation between these entities and the major challenges impeding effective collaboration. This study is geographically focused on Southwest Nigeria, with specific attention to Lagos and Oyo States. Institutionally, the study is limited to the NSCDC and selected PSOs operating within these states. While every effort was made to ensure accuracy and objectivity, the study acknowledges certain limitations, particularly the difficulty in accessing sensitive security data and the potential for bias in respondent narratives, especially when discussing inter-agency conflict or rivalry. This study aims to move the conversation on security beyond individual agency efforts toward a more unified, cooperative approach that is better suited to address the complex threats facing Nigeria today.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Interagency Collaboration in Security Governance

Interagency collaboration has become an important topic in discussions about security and public administration, especially in places where a single agency cannot effectively handle today's complex and changing security issues (Agyekum et al., 2024). At its core, interagency collaboration means structured and goal-driven cooperation between different organizations, both government and private with different roles and strengths (Griffiths, 2022). For such cooperation to work well, certain conditions need to be present: trust between parties, common goals, clear and open communication, and mutual respect for each other's roles and expertise (Ahmadi, 2024). In Nigeria, the need for cooperation between the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and Private Security Organisations (PSOs) is becoming more urgent (Egodo et al., 2024). As government agencies face challenges like limited personnel, inadequate resources, and gaps in local intelligence, PSOs have stepped in as supportive players, especially in cities and semi-urban areas (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). However, despite their growing presence, PSOs are not yet fully woven into the official security system. Their involvement is often patchy and loosely regulated, which reduces their ability to make a bigger impact on community safety. Security itself is about more than just stopping violence or crime. It also involves the systems, institutions, and rules put in place to protect people's lives, their property, and the country's sovereignty (Kośmider, 2021). This means that keeping Nigeria secure requires more than just state security forces, it calls for a broader approach that includes both official government agencies and trusted non-state actors like PSOs (Sowale, 2025). Understanding crime in this context also means going beyond the legal definitions. While Nigeria's Criminal Code Act describes crime as actions or failures to act that are punishable by law, crime is also shaped by society. It reflects local beliefs, power structures, and social norms. Because of this, efforts to prevent or reduce crime must be tailored to fit the specific needs and realities of different communities. This is where PSOs can play a vital role. Being close to the communities they serve, they often understand the local dynamics better and can offer more grounded, culturally appropriate solutions.

Empirical Insight from the Nigerian Context

Cockayne, and Mikulaschek (2008) explain that poor collaboration among security agencies is often caused by overlapping mandates, weak leadership coordination, and institutional turf wars. These issues prevent agencies from working together effectively and undermine national security efforts. Real-life examples, such as violent clashes between the military and police in Imo and Adamawa States, clearly show the dangers of poor inter-agency cooperation (Channels TV, 2024). Aljebori (2024) adds that these incidents are usually triggered by power struggles, unclear roles, and the absence of a unified command structure. When security agencies fight each other instead of working together, their operations suffer, and public trust in their ability to keep the country safe declines. Despite being present in almost every part of the country, Private Security Organisations (PSOs) are still largely left out of formal security plans. Gilbert (2024) points out that criminal gangs often coordinate better than the agencies trying to stop them. This observation raises serious concerns about the country's security strategy. Akintayo (2024) argues that Nigeria needs a centralized body such as the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) to lead and manage cooperation among security actors, including PSOs. Socio-economic factors also play a big role in the country's security challenges. Musa (2025) argues that poverty, unemployment, and exclusion are key drivers of insecurity. He suggests that inter-agency strategies should not only focus on force and intelligence but also include community-level approaches that address these root causes. In this regard, PSOs can serve as useful partners. Their deep community ties and operational flexibility make them ideal for gathering local intelligence and supporting preventive actions.

International Perspectives on Private Security Integration

Around the world, the inclusion of private security actors in national security planning is still a debated issue. Nøkleberg (2020) introduces the idea of a "middle ground," where both public and private security providers work together to keep communities safe. This model has seen success in places where strong laws, proper regulation, and clear roles guide the relationship between both sides. However, Akinsola and Liang (2025) point out that these conditions are usually present in countries with well-established legal systems and firm government oversight. In Nigeria, these enabling conditions are not yet fully in place. While the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) is officially responsible for regulating and supervising Private Security Organisations (PSOs), the actual enforcement of this role is often weak and tends to happen only after problems arise (Afolabi et al., 2024). This lack of proactive regulation creates a gap in accountability and coordination. Another major issue is trust or the lack of it. According to a study by Idris and Fagbemi (2025), collaboration between NSCDC and PSOs in Kaduna State depends more on personal relationships between officers than on official policy or institutional frameworks. This makes any cooperation fragile and inconsistent. Technical challenges also get in the way. For example, different communication systems, lack of platforms for sharing intelligence, and unequal access to vital information make it hard for public and private actors to work smoothly together.

In the United States, fusion centers serve as formal platforms for real-time intelligence sharing among federal, state, and private security actors, helping to coordinate efforts and avoid

duplication (Gill, 2022). In the United Kingdom and across much of Europe, PSOs operate within highly regulated frameworks where licensing, contractual oversight, and accountability systems ensure consistent and professional collaboration with state agencies (Stiernstedt et al., 2021). By contrast, Nigeria's regulatory environment remains weak, with NSCDC oversight of PSOs often fragmented and poorly enforced, leaving cooperation dependent on informal networks and ad hoc arrangements (Nwokolo, 2020). In Asia, particularly Singapore, PSOs are integrated into broader community policing frameworks, supporting law enforcement through patrols, surveillance, and event security, all under close state supervision (Nemeth, 2022). Nigeria's case differs: PSOs frequently act as first responders in urban communities but remain excluded from formal policing strategies. While this grassroots role gives them unique contextual knowledge, it also exposes systemic gaps caused by limited interagency coordination (Chinwokwu, 2022), which makes these global comparisons reveal both opportunities and challenges for Nigeria, because the international examples emphasise the value of legal clarity, structured training, and robust communication systems. Yet, Nigeria's reality is distinct: PSOs are often deeply rooted in community structures but remain underutilised due to mistrust, weak regulation, and institutional rivalry.

From the reviewed literature, it's clear that there is a gap between what policies say and what actually happens on the ground. Although there are laws and guidelines that support collaboration between security agencies, real-world implementation is often blocked by competition between institutions, lack of trust, and weak infrastructure. Most of the existing research also focuses mainly on public agencies working together, leaving out the role of Private Security Organisations (PSOs). Additionally, studies rarely explore how these issues manifest in specific regions, such as Southwest Nigeria. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the collaboration between the NSCDC and PSOs in Lagos and Oyo States. It offers practical insights into how security cooperation can be enhanced through legal updates, improved institutional arrangements, and more efficient operations. In doing so, the research adds to the conversation on how both public and private actors can be part of a more effective and inclusive approach to managing security at both the national and local levels.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical models: **Collaborative Theory** and **Rational Choice Theory**.

Collaborative Theory

Collaborative Theory, as developed by Elliot and Scholz and expanded by scholars like Emerson (2012), offers a useful way to understand how institutions can work together effectively. The theory suggests that real collaboration is only possible when the involved organizations share similar goals, trust each other, depend on one another, and are open in their communication. In Nigeria's security environment, this theory is especially important, considering the long-standing rivalries between key agencies like the NSCDC, the Nigeria Police Force, and the military. One of the main obstacles to collaboration in Nigeria has been what many describe as institutional ego where each agency seeks to protect its own turf rather than cooperate. This is often made worse by unclear command structures during joint

operations and poor communication across agencies. Collaborative Theory helps explain why these problems keep recurring: real partnership is not just about agreeing to work together, it requires a change in how agencies see themselves and each other. For collaboration to work, institutions must stop viewing themselves as competitors and instead see themselves as parts of a larger team with a shared purpose ensuring the safety and stability of the country. This is where Private Security Organisations (PSOs) also come in. Although they are often left out of official security strategies, this theory suggests that PSOs should be brought in as serious partners. They are not just extra hands; they can play meaningful roles when treated as equal and valued contributors to national security goals.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory, originally developed by Cesare Beccaria and later expanded by Jeremy Bentham, explains how individuals and institutions make decisions based on weighing the potential benefits against the possible costs (Proctor, 2021). When applied to interagency collaboration, the theory suggests that organizations will only choose to work together if they believe the advantages such as shared intelligence, wider coverage, or greater legitimacy are more valuable than the downsides, like losing autonomy, competing for resources, or giving up authority (Williams & Fedorowicz, 2012). This way of thinking helps to make sense of why cooperation between the NSCDC and Private Security Organisations (PSOs) in Nigeria has often been patchy and inconsistent. Many agencies are hesitant to enter partnerships because they worry about losing control over their operations, overlapping mandates, or having to share limited resources (Ostrom, 1991). However, when the benefits of collaboration are clear such as better access to local communities, faster response times, or stronger intelligence networks these same agencies are more willing to work together (Bérubé, 2010). Rational Choice Theory, therefore, offers useful insight into both the reluctance and the motivation behind interagency collaboration. It shows that security agencies are more likely to cooperate when doing so aligns with their own interests and goals.

Intersection between the Two Theories – Interagency Cooperation

Collaborative Theory highlights the importance of trust, shared goals, and institutional culture in building lasting partnerships (Costumato, 2021). It shows that cooperation is not just about formal agreements but about creating mutual respect and interdependence. On the other hand, Rational Choice Theory explains behaviour through cost–benefit calculations, where agencies weigh potential gains, such as better intelligence and broader coverage, against risks like reduced autonomy or stretched resources (Feiock, 2007; Jang & Feiock, 2007). *Figure 2.1* brings these perspectives together. It illustrates that while Collaborative Theory provides the social foundation for cooperation, Rational Choice Theory explains the incentives that keep it going. In practice, collaboration between the NSCDC and PSOs works best when trust and shared culture are backed by clear, tangible benefits, such as pooled resources, mutual recognition, and greater efficiency. The figure therefore stresses that sustainable collaboration in Nigeria depends on linking trust with rational incentives, bridging both cultural and structural dimensions. Similarly, the overlap between the two theories demonstrates that effective interagency collaboration is not sustained by goodwill alone, nor by incentives in

isolation. Rather, successful partnerships emerge when trust and shared values (collaborative theory) are reinforced by clear incentives and reduced risks (rational choice theory). This dual framework provides a balanced explanation of why interagency cooperation succeeds in some contexts and fails in others, particularly within Nigeria's security environment.

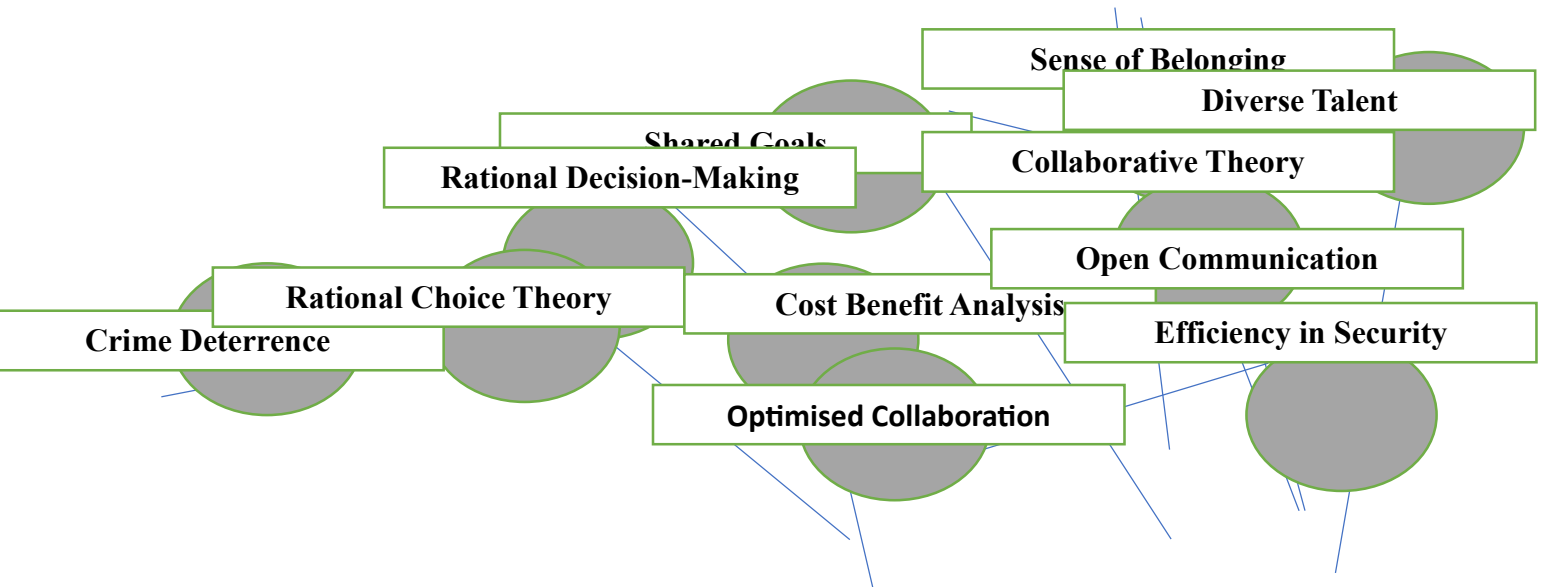


Figure 2.1: Collaborative Theory and Rational Choice Theory

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2025

Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory research design within a qualitative research approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of inter-agency collaboration between the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and private security organisations (PSOs) in Southwest Nigeria. The qualitative approach was selected for its ability to uncover contextualized insights and lived experiences, facilitating a grounded understanding of the dynamics shaping public-private security cooperation. The focus states which are Lagos and Oyo were chosen due to their strategic importance: Lagos as Nigeria's commercial and security hub with a high density of PSOs, and Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, as a significant urban center with active security operations. The study's population comprised NSCDC personnel and PSO executives or senior operatives in both states. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 45 participants based on their positions, experience, and direct involvement in security operations and interagency interactions. For the NSCDC, only officers with responsibilities related to community operations, supervision of PSOs, or intelligence sharing were chosen. For PSOs, Chief Executives and senior managers of licensed firms were included to ensure representation of decision-making perspectives. The purposive sampling ensured that participants were well-positioned to provide meaningful insights into the study's objectives. Specifically, 20 NSCDC officers (10 per state) and 25 representatives from six PSOs, including Nisco, PG Security Guards, Bemil, Proton, Close Watch, and Segatol, were interviewed. This sample ensured a diversity of perspectives from both institutional and operational standpoints. In-depth interviews (IDIs) were the primary data collection tool, guided by a semi-structured interview

schedule. While keeping discussions focused on key themes, participants were asked to share their personal experiences of interagency collaboration, particularly between the NSCDC and private security organisations (PSOs). They reflected on both the benefits and challenges of such partnerships, offering insights into what works and what does not. The conversations also explored institutional arrangements, examining the rules, structures, and practices that either support or hinder collaboration. Participants were also encouraged to suggest practical steps for strengthening cooperation. To prompt discussion and to allow consistency across interviews while enabling flexibility for participants, guiding questions were posed. For example, participants were asked to describe their experiences working with the NSCDC or PSOs, identify the key benefits of collaboration, and outline the challenges they had faced in working with other security actors. They were also invited to recommend institutional changes that could make interagency partnerships more effective and sustainable. Interviews were conducted in person, ensuring confidentiality and creating a safe space for open discourse. Prior to the main study, the interview instrument was validated by the research supervisor and pre-tested to enhance clarity, reliability, and alignment with the study's objectives. Content analysis was employed to examine the interview transcripts, involving systematic coding, theme identification, and interpretation of recurring patterns. Ethical approval was secured through informed consent, anonymity protocols, and adherence to research ethics standards. The methodological choices in this study ensured robust, credible, and contextually grounded findings on the institutional, cultural, and operational dimensions of NSCDC–PSO collaboration in Nigeria.

Findings

...It is important for all of us to work together: Benefits of Interagency Cooperation

The findings highlight that cooperation between the NSCDC and private security companies provides tangible benefits for addressing Nigeria's complex security environment. Participants consistently pointed to improved intelligence sharing, wider coverage, and resource pooling as central outcomes of collaboration. These benefits are particularly significant given the persistent manpower and logistical gaps that limit the reach of state security agencies. In this sense, private security actors serve as frontline responders in areas where public presence is thin, while the NSCDC provides the statutory authority and legitimacy that private actors lack, even from a theoretical standpoint, these outcomes resonate with Collaborative Theory, which stresses the value of trust and complementary strengths in sustaining partnerships. Rational Choice Theory also helps explain why cooperation persists: for the NSCDC, partnerships extend limited resources, while for private security organisations, collaboration offers legitimacy and access to official intelligence networks. Thus, working together is not only a matter of goodwill but also a rational strategy for mutual gain. As one NSCDC participant asserted:

The both of us must join forces to tackle these securities challenges, because, if we team up, we can share important information and combine our resources and it will make it

easier for us to stop crimes and keep people safe. IDI, Male, NSCDC, 42, Ibadan.

Participants consistently highlighted teamwork between the NSCDC and private security companies as central to addressing Nigeria's complex security challenges. A recurring theme was the importance of information sharing, which they viewed as the foundation of an effective security system. This emphasis reflects broader insights from Collaborative Theory, which underscores the role of trust and communication in sustaining partnerships. By exchanging intelligence, both parties reduce uncertainty, anticipate threats earlier, and strengthen collective capacity. Information sharing also offers practical benefits, enabling agencies to extend coverage and avoid duplication at minimal cost. A female participant from Closewatch Limited explained that timely intelligence exchange is what transforms cooperation from a formality into a functional security strategy. She avers:

when you look at partnership between the two of us and the factors that determine this collaboration, it will have to generally be the need for information. There is no security infrastructure that will work to the fullest of benefit without information sharing. IDI, Female, Closewatch, 38, Lagos.

Another important benefit identified was the transfer of technical expertise. Participants noted that private security firms often possess more advanced technologies and specialised know-how, which public agencies could leverage through collaboration. This suggests that cooperation is not only about manpower and coverage but also about bridging capability gaps that weaken Nigeria's security system. Sharing technical skills fosters interdependence and reinforces trust, as each side brings unique value to the partnership and why such collaboration is attractive: public agencies gain access to tools and expertise they lack, while private firms benefit from state recognition and legitimacy. Participants also stressed that joint efforts against crime are most effective when technical resources and operational strategies are pooled, creating a synergy that neither side could achieve alone. A male private security expert observed:

The private sector has advanced technical capabilities and skills, while the public sector often lacks these resources, tapping into our expertise is important to strengthening collective security capacity. IDI, Male, Segatol, 58, Lagos.

Private security firms bring a sizable and skilled workforce that could complement overstretched public agencies. Participants observed that government agencies often operate with limited funding and personnel, making collaboration with the private sector a strategic way to close capacity gaps. This highlights the structural imbalance within Nigeria's security sector, where demand for protection far exceeds the manpower available to state actors. From an analytical standpoint, collaboration offers a cost-effective solution: the state leverages private labour without fully shouldering its financial burden, while private security organisations gain legitimacy and operational relevance. Pooling human resources reduces

duplication and encourages role specialization and rational choice theory explains why both sides see workforce sharing as mutually beneficial. Rather than a stopgap, this form of cooperation could provide a sustainable model for strengthening Nigeria's broader security architecture. One officer captured this sentiment, explaining:

Private security organisations like ours have a lot of resources and funds, including a large workforce and by collaborating, public law enforcement can tap into these resources and we will be able to tackle criminal networks.

IDI, Male, Nisco, 47, Lagos.

Collaboration between the NSCDC and private security firms emerged as particularly important in safeguarding vital infrastructure. While the NSCDC focuses on national assets, private firms extend coverage to private and semi-public spaces, creating a layered system of protection. Participants noted that this complementary arrangement reduces blind spots and strengthens resilience against threats to critical resources. However, this reflects the principle of interdependence in Collaborative Theory, where each actor contributes unique strengths to achieve a shared goal. Similarly, Rational Choice Theory also helps explain the dynamic: public agencies extend their reach without incurring prohibitive costs, while private firms gain legitimacy and operational relevance. In this way, cooperation around infrastructure protection is not just about filling gaps but about creating a more integrated and cost-efficient security architecture. An officer of the NSCDC underscored this point, stating:

We focus on national and public assets, while the private guards take care of private and semi-public properties. But I know that if we join forces, we will build a stronger security network that reduces risks and keeps essential resources safe, ensuring the country's economic and social stability.

IDI, Male, NSCDC, 53, Ibadan.

Cost efficiency was consistently highlighted as a strategic advantage of NSCDC-PSO cooperation. Participants explained that partnerships help public agencies mitigate chronic budget and staffing shortages by leveraging the financial and technological capacities of private firms. This does more than ease fiscal pressure; it creates a more sustainable security model where costs and responsibilities are distributed across actors. From a Rational Choice perspective, this reflects a clear incentive for cooperation, as both sides achieve greater coverage and effectiveness without proportionally increasing expenditure. In this way, cost-sharing becomes not just a practical necessity but also a rational driver of interagency collaboration. An officer of the NSCDC emphasized this point, stating:

Our partnership with private security groups will help us save money and work better. We usually have limited budgets and staff, but with their support, we can extend our resources and reach. They bring extra funds and technology, letting us do more without raising government costs. **IDI, Female, NSCDC, 47, Ibadan.**

Interagency cooperation emerged as a critical mechanism for strengthening Nigeria's security system. Participants stressed that pooling resources, expertise, and infrastructure creates outcomes neither NSCDC nor PSOs could achieve independently. This aligns with Collaborative Theory, which argues that complex challenges demand shared solutions built on interdependence. Beyond operational gains such as crime prevention and infrastructure protection, cooperation also enhances efficiency by distributing costs and responsibilities across actors. Public agencies contribute legitimacy and statutory authority, while private firms provide grassroots intelligence and adaptive capacity. The findings therefore suggest that collaboration is not merely advantageous but essential for addressing Nigeria's increasingly complex security threats.

...There should be a clear plan that defines who does what and how: Institutional arrangements for promoting inter-agency cooperation

The findings revealed that role clarity is central to sustaining effective cooperation between the NSCDC and private security organisations. Participants stressed that without clearly defined mandates, duplication and rivalry become inevitable, reducing efficiency and trust. Ambiguous responsibilities undermine Nigerian interagency coordination. Clarity fosters mutual trust by making interdependence explicit and it lowers uncertainty and perceived risks, making cooperation more attractive. Thus, institutionalizing clear frameworks not only streamlines operations but also creates the structural and psychological conditions needed for durable collaboration. An expert of PG Security Guards Nigeria confirmed that:

We need to know who is to do what, when and how and to whom to do them to. This will prevent overlapping duties and help us focus on working toward a shared goal. IDI, Male, PGSG, 51, Ibadan.

The findings further identified trust as a critical barrier to effective collaboration between the NSCDC and private security organisations. Participants highlighted how doubts about government efficiency and concerns over private firms' reliability weaken cooperative efforts. Trust is the foundation of durable partnerships. Without trust, role boundaries remain contested, accountability is weakened, and communication breaks down, ultimately eroding collective capacity. In environments of low trust, agencies are less likely to invest in cooperation due to perceived risks. Building trust, therefore, requires institutionalized accountability mechanisms, transparent communication, and recognition of mutual contributions. An officer of the NSCDC confirmed this concern:

People doubt government security agencies because they feel nothing happens when crimes are reported to us, we all know that trust issues are everywhere, not just here, it's a worldwide problem and that's why open communication is important. IDI, Male, NSCDC, 40, Lagos.

A robust collaborative framework must incorporate advanced tools such as cybersecurity systems and electronic surveillance, areas where private firms often have a comparative advantage. Leveraging these capabilities allows public agencies to concentrate on broader

national security priorities while still benefiting from technological innovation. International experiences, such as in India and Mexico, show that collaboration models must be adaptive, continuously reviewed, and responsive to changing threats. For Nigeria, this underscores the need to embed modern technology into interagency arrangements, ensuring that cooperation is not only reactive but also future-oriented. A participant from Bemil Security Limited avers:

We can learn from countries like India, Mexico, and Colombia, where private security handles smaller tasks like local patrols, leaving public agencies to focus on bigger issues. IDI, Male, BEMIL, 58, Lagos.

The participants highlighted training together as a pivotal mechanism for building sustainable cooperation between the NSCDC and private security organisations. Beyond improving technical competence, training creates a platform for aligning institutional cultures and reinforcing shared goals, which reduces the risks of rivalry and miscommunication. Such programs foster trust and interdependence and they lower uncertainty by clarifying roles and standardizing procedures, which makes these dynamics enhance collective capacity to respond to Nigeria's complex security challenges. A participant from Proton Security Services Limited underscored this view:

When we regularly train together it will keep us up to date with the skills and tools needed to handle today's security challenges. IDI, Male, PROTON, 37, IBADAN.

Localized recruitment was identified as a strategic enabler of stronger collaboration between public law enforcement agencies and private security organisations. By deploying personnel with pre-existing community ties, agencies reduce social distance, which builds trust and facilitates intelligence sharing. From a Collaborative Theory perspective, local recruits strengthen interdependence by bridging institutional actors and community stakeholders. Rational Choice Theory further suggests that such recruitment minimizes operational risks by leveraging contextual knowledge that reduces uncertainty in security responses. Thus, localized hiring not only fosters cooperation but also enhances the efficiency and legitimacy of interagency security efforts. Segatol Private Security Company expert explained:

When an officer comes from the area, they understand the language, culture, and specific needs of the people. This makes it easier to communicate and build good relationships and trust. IDI, Male, SEGATOL, 62, LAGOS.

A female participant from Close Watch Private Security Limited emphasized that structured engagements such as regular meetings, workshops, and seminars are not merely symbolic but function as institutional mechanisms for collaboration. These platforms institutionalize communication, reduce rivalry, and provide opportunities for joint problem-solving. These platforms further foster trust, shared culture, and they lower the transaction costs of cooperation by clarifying expectations and aligning strategies. In this sense, structured engagements do

more than facilitate dialogue; they create the organizational conditions necessary for sustained interagency cooperation in Nigeria's security sector. She explained:

Having regular meetings, workshops, and seminars is important for bringing us together, because it will create a space to share ideas, solve problems, and align strategies. It will also help clear up misunderstandings and reduce competition by encouraging us to see each other as partners with the same goal. IDI, Female, Closewatch, 38, Lagos.

The findings demonstrate that interagency cooperation between the NSCDC and private security companies is not only useful but structurally necessary for addressing Nigeria's evolving security landscape. Intelligence sharing, joint training, and community engagement illustrate how complementary strengths which are statutory authority from the NSCDC and grassroots knowledge from PSOs can be combined to address complex threats. Collaboration reduces duplication, improves efficiency, and enhances public trust, but its sustainability depends on structured mechanisms such as regular meetings, shared platforms, and clear role definitions. These mechanisms will make institutionalize trust and interdependence cooperation to persist making both actors secure tangible benefits, making collaboration both normatively desirable and strategically rational.

...we cannot work together except we agree: Challenges of interagency cooperation

A critical challenge identified was the exclusion of private security practitioners from policymaking. Participants stressed that policies developed without their input often overlook operational realities, producing weak implementation and encouraging non-compliance. This exclusion reinforces perceptions of marginalisation, erodes trust, and undermines cooperation with public agencies like the NSCDC. Analytically, the findings highlight how structural imbalances in policy design create friction in interagency relations. Effective collaboration requires inclusive frameworks where both sectors share ownership of security policies, ensuring rules are practical, legitimate, and more widely observed. A participant from Nisco Security Company noted:

Government agencies create regulations that affect our operations without consulting us, which often results in impractical policies that don't reflect the realities of our work. IDI, Male, NISCO, 47, Lagos.

A key barrier to cooperation lies in the lack of formal recognition and documentation of private security firms' contributions. Participants emphasised that when their efforts are overlooked, it erodes morale and weakens trust, thereby reducing their willingness to engage in sustained collaboration. This signals a broader legitimacy gap: without acknowledgment, private actors feel marginalised within the security architecture, which undermines collective action. Recognition, by contrast, not only validates their role but also institutionalises accountability and reciprocity, creating stronger incentives for partnership. Such acknowledgment can

transform cooperation from an ad hoc arrangement into a more durable and equitable framework. A participant from PG Security Guards Nigeria noted:

There is lack of proper documentation and recognition for our contributions during joint operations. Even when we take on critical roles, such as providing intelligence or logistical support, these efforts are often left out of official reports. IDI, Male, PGSG, 51, Ibadan.

Confidentiality breaches emerged as a significant barrier to trust between public law enforcement and private security organisations. Participants stressed that when sensitive data or the identities of informants are mishandled, private security personnel are exposed to risks, making firms reluctant to share intelligence and this reflects a breakdown in the institutional safeguards necessary for effective collaboration: without clear protocols and robust protections, the transaction costs of cooperation increase, and actors default to self-preservation. Strengthening confidentiality measures is therefore not merely a technical adjustment but a precondition for sustaining intelligence-sharing arrangements and building durable trust. A participant from Segatol Private Security Company noted:

When the sensitive information we share is mishandled, it puts our personnel at risk of retaliation, making us wary of sharing intelligence in the future. IDI, Male, Segatol, 58, Lagos.

Perceptions of private security as unskilled or unprofessional emerged as a significant barrier to effective cooperation. Such views not only diminish morale within private firms but also delegitimize their contributions, reinforcing hierarchical divides that obstruct partnership. Analytically, this reflects a failure to establish role parity, which Collaborative Theory identifies as essential for sustaining mutual trust and interdependence. When public agencies do not regard private security organisations as equal partners, the asymmetry undermines their willingness to share resources and information, thereby weakening joint security efforts. A participant from Nisco Security Company shared:

Public law enforcement always questions our training and professionalism. This negative perception fosters a culture of disrespect and inequality, which discourages us from fully engaging in collaborative efforts. IDI, Male, Nisco, 47, Lagos.

Unequal blame attribution emerged as a recurring challenge in public–private security relations. Participants noted that private security firms are often singled out when joint operations face difficulties, while public agencies rarely share responsibility. This asymmetry erodes morale, fosters resentment, and discourages private firms from committing fully to collaboration, which makes this one-sided accountability undermines the reciprocity and fairness that Collaborative Theory highlights as central to building trust. Establishing transparent accountability frameworks would therefore not only improve trust but also create

the institutional balance necessary for sustainable interagency cooperation. A participant from PG Security Guards Nigeria explained:

When things go wrong, we are often unfairly blamed, even if we weren't directly involved. This creates frustration and a feeling of unfairness in our sector. IDI, Male, PGSG, 51, Ibadan.

Cultural and operational differences between the NSCDC and private security firms emerged as a critical barrier to effective collaboration. The NSCDC's reliance on rigid bureaucratic protocols contrasts with the flexible, client-oriented practices of private firms. This divergence reflects a deeper tension between public accountability and market responsiveness, which, if unmanaged, generates friction and delays in joint decision-making. However, sustained collaboration depends on both sides reaching agreement on how to work together and without mechanisms to reconcile these institutional logics, collaboration risks becoming fragmented and inefficient. Similarly, shared operational frameworks offer a pathway for aligning expectations, harmonising procedures, and fostering mutual trust, thereby reducing the transaction costs associated with these structural differences. An officer of the NSCDC explained:

As a government agency, we follow strict protocols and prioritise accountability and national security, but private security organisations focus more on profitability and operate with greater flexibility. 'All these differences often create friction between us when our expectations do not align, because, we cannot work together except we agree to certain terms and for us to work well together, there must be mutual understanding and common ground'. IDI, Male, NSCDC, 53, Ibadan

Political interference and bureaucratic red tape are significant institutional barriers to NSCDC–PSO collaboration. Participants highlighted how delays, favoritism, and rigid approval processes reduce operational flexibility and weaken trust between partners. This interference distorts accountability and undermines the neutrality required for effective cooperation. Bureaucratic inefficiencies increase transaction costs, while political capture shifts collaboration away from shared security goals toward competing interests. Addressing these challenges requires transparent policy frameworks and streamlined processes that insulate collaboration from undue influence, thereby enhancing both efficiency and legitimacy. A female officer of the NSCDC explained:

Decisions are often delayed or influenced by political interests, making it harder to act quickly and work with the most capable private firms. IDI, Female, NSCDC, 47, Ibadan.

Cooperation between NSCDC and private security firms faces major challenges like poor funding, unclear roles, lack of trust, and political interference. These issues cause friction, weaken teamwork, and limit their ability to fight crime effectively. Misunderstandings, unequal treatment, and different work styles make it harder to build strong partnerships. Fixing this will require clear rules, regular training, better equipment, and mutual respect. Reducing political and bureaucratic pressure is also important. If both sides commit to working together, they can create a stronger, more united security system that better protects lives and property across Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

One of the clearest insights from this study is that collaboration between the NSCDC and private security organisations (PSOs) brings tangible benefits. Participants repeatedly pointed to better intelligence sharing, pooling of resources, and the ability to tap into specialised skills as the most visible outcomes. These findings support earlier research that positions PSOs as vital in supplementing state security capacity (Nwokolo, 2020; Oladele, 2020). On the ground, PSOs are often the first to respond to incidents in estates, business districts, and peri-urban communities where state presence is thin. This confirms Chinwokwu's (2022) argument that PSOs act as frontline agents in intelligence gathering and crime prevention. Theoretically, these outcomes illustrate the strength of Collaborative Theory. When both parties agree and work together, they generate a form of synergy: the NSCDC brings statutory authority and enforcement powers, while PSOs contribute local knowledge and community reach. Together, they create a stronger collective force than either could achieve alone. Furthermore, Rational Choice Theory adds another layer of explanation. For the NSCDC, collaboration allows them to stretch limited resources. For PSOs, working with the NSCDC enhances their legitimacy and gives them access to intelligence networks. This shows that cooperation is not driven by goodwill alone, but also by clear calculations of mutual benefit. Despite that, the Nigerian experience stands in contrast to global practices. In places like Europe and North America, collaboration is anchored in clear contracts, licensing systems, and robust regulation (Stiernstedt, Button, Prenzler, & Sarre, 2021). In Nigeria, partnerships are largely informal, inconsistent, and often dependent on personal relationships rather than institutional frameworks. While collaboration is evidently beneficial, its long-term sustainability is threatened by these systemic weaknesses.

Another key finding from the study is the importance of structured institutional arrangements in shaping collaboration between the NSCDC and PSOs. Participants repeatedly stressed that clarity of roles, standardized frameworks, and opportunities for joint training are essential for reducing conflict and building stronger partnerships. This echoes Abioye and Alao's (2020) observation that overlapping mandates and weak accountability remain a recurring barrier to interagency coordination in Nigeria. Role clarity stood out as particularly significant. Where responsibilities are vague, duplication of effort and rivalry are almost inevitable. Collaborative Theory helps explain this, showing that cooperation thrives when partners recognize their interdependence and trust one another. Similarly, Rational Choice Theory adds a practical layer, suggesting that clear roles reduce uncertainty and lower the risks associated with collaboration. Joint training was also highlighted as a vital tool. Beyond

harmonizing procedures, it builds interpersonal trust, allowing personnel from both the NSCDC and PSOs to see one another as allies rather than competitors. Participants suggested that such training could bridge cultural and structural divides, creating a more cohesive working relationship. International experience reinforces this point. In the United States, fusion centers depend on standardized training and shared protocols to maintain consistency (Gill, 2022). In South Africa, collaborative training has become part of community policing models, fostering stronger police–community ties. By contrast, Nigeria has yet to make such practices routine. Instead, collaboration often depends on the discretion of individual commanders or PSO managers, making outcomes uneven and unsustainable. While the benefits of collaboration are clear, participants also drew attention to persistent challenges that weaken the partnership between the NSCDC and PSOs. Chief among these were trust deficits, limited resources, weak regulation, and political interference. These concerns echo earlier Nigerian studies that documented rivalry and mistrust between security actors (Cockayne & Mikulaschek 2008), and they align with global scholarship that points to trust as a recurring obstacle in public–private security collaboration (Abiodun, 2022). The trust gap stood out as particularly damaging. Participants described instances of breached confidentiality, dismissive attitudes, and unequal recognition, all of which discouraged meaningful cooperation. From a Collaborative Theory lens, this erosion of trust undermines the very foundation of partnership, while Rational Choice Theory shows how perceived risks such as leaked intelligence or loss of credit can outweigh potential benefits, making collaboration less appealing. Resource limitations were another recurring theme. Both NSCDC and PSOs operate under significant constraints, including funding shortages, inadequate equipment, and staffing gaps. Although in theory joint efforts should ease these burdens, in practice they often generate friction over who contributes what and who receives recognition. This reflects broader underinvestment in Nigeria’s security sector and the fragility of partnerships built on informal arrangements. Similarly, weak regulation and legal ambiguity further complicate matters. Even though PSOs are formally recognized under the Private Guard Companies Decree of 1986 and overseen by the NSCDC, participants noted that enforcement is inconsistent and often symbolic (Nwachukwu et al., 2024). This leaves PSOs sidelined in planning and intelligence-sharing processes. By contrast, in Europe and North America, strong licensing regimes and clear accountability frameworks give PSOs a more structured and respected role in interagency collaboration (Stiernstedt, Button, Prenzler, & Sarre, 2021).

Implications for policy and practice

The findings of this study hold important lessons for strengthening Nigeria’s security sector. A clear priority is the development of a comprehensive regulatory framework that defines the roles, responsibilities, and accountability of both the NSCDC and PSOs. Such clarity would reduce duplication, ease tensions, and provide a firm legal basis for collaboration. Equally important is the deliberate cultivation of trust. Participants made it clear that trust cannot be assumed, it must be built. Protecting the confidentiality of shared intelligence, creating systems that formally acknowledge PSO contributions, and encouraging transparent communication are critical steps toward achieving this. Joint training also emerged as a practical way forward. Standardized programs on intelligence sharing, surveillance, and emergency response would

not only harmonize procedures but also nurture the mutual understanding needed for effective teamwork. Leadership training is particularly vital, equipping managers with the skills to coordinate interagency operations in complex environments. Resource investment forms another cornerstone. Without adequate funding, staffing, and infrastructure, collaboration risks becoming more symbolic than real. Policymakers must ensure that both NSCDC and PSOs have the capacity to deliver on their responsibilities within a collaborative framework. Nigeria can draw inspiration from global models. Fusion centers in the United States, strict regulatory oversight in Europe, and South Africa's community-oriented approaches offer valuable lessons. Yet these examples must be adapted, not copied. Nigeria's context is unique: PSOs are deeply embedded in communities and often serve as the first line of response. Building on that strength while addressing systemic weaknesses will be key to creating a more effective and resilient security architecture.

Conclusion

This study examined interagency cooperation between the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and private security organisations (PSOs), highlighting its benefits, institutional structures, and challenges. The findings confirm that collaboration is critical to strengthening Nigeria's internal security framework in the face of terrorism, kidnapping, and organized crime. Benefits identified include enhanced intelligence sharing, resource pooling, and operational specialization, which together improve responsiveness and community safety. When roles are clearly defined and supported by standardized frameworks and joint training, cooperation becomes more effective and less prone to conflict. Despite these advantages, significant barriers persist. Limited funding, inadequate staffing, breaches of confidentiality, and unequal recognition of contributions undermine trust. Weak legal frameworks further complicate collaboration, creating ambiguity in roles and accountability, while political interference and cultural differences fuel operational friction. Using Collaborative Theory and Rational Choice Theory, the study explains that sustainable cooperation requires both trust and shared goals, as well as tangible incentives that outweigh perceived risks. Overall, NSCDC–PSO collaboration holds great potential for improving national security in Nigeria. Realizing this potential demands clear legal guidelines, capacity-building initiatives, and deliberate trust-building. Strengthening these partnerships will enhance effectiveness, protect infrastructure, and foster public confidence in the country's security system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical steps are necessary to improve cooperation between the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and private security organisations (PSOs). These measures aim to strengthen joint efforts in addressing insecurity and enhancing public safety in Nigeria. First, there is an urgent need for a clear and comprehensive legal framework to guide public–private security relations. At present, the absence of structured guidelines often leads to confusion, overlapping responsibilities, and inefficiencies. Government agencies, working closely with private security stakeholders, should establish policies that clearly define roles, accountability mechanisms, information-sharing procedures, and crisis response protocols. Including PSO representatives in this process

will ensure that regulations are realistic, practical, and widely accepted. Second, joint training programs should be institutionalized. Training in intelligence gathering, emergency response, community engagement, and the use of modern surveillance tools would enable both NSCDC and PSOs to operate on compatible standards. Leadership and management training for senior officers is equally important for coordinating teams and overseeing joint initiatives. Regular training sessions would improve preparedness and foster operational harmony. Third, building trust is central to sustainable collaboration. Confidentiality of shared intelligence must be respected, and the contributions of PSOs should be formally acknowledged. Regular planning meetings, shared debriefings, and recognition mechanisms would reduce suspicion and promote mutual respect. Continuous dialogue through workshops, forums, and evaluations can also address misunderstandings and nurture a culture of cooperation. Fourth, Nigeria can adapt lessons from successful models elsewhere. The United States' fusion centers for real-time intelligence sharing and South Africa's integration of community resources into national security provide useful templates. Contextualizing such practices to Nigeria would help close gaps in intelligence and operational coordination. Finally, public support is vital. Awareness campaigns should educate citizens on the importance of public-private security partnerships and encourage reporting of suspicious activities. Community trust enhances legitimacy, strengthens partnerships, and contributes to a safer society. Improving NSCDC-PSO collaboration requires legal reforms, institutional capacity-building, trust-based relationships, and active public participation. Implementing these steps will help build a resilient and coordinated security framework capable of responding effectively to Nigeria's evolving threats.

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