THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE IN CRIME PREVENTION AND CONTROL: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract
The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) remains the primary law enforcement agency tasked with crime prevention and control. This study critically examines the effectiveness of the Nigerian Police Force in crime prevention and control, evaluates the implementation of recent institutional reforms, and identifies the structural, operational, and systemic barriers limiting police effectiveness. This research employed a qualitative systematic review of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed literature, government reports, policy documents, and crime statistics. The study synthesised empirical evidence on policing effectiveness, examined theoretical frameworks relevant to police legitimacy and procedural justice, and analysed case studies from Nigeria and comparable African contexts. The study reveals that while the Police Act 2020, community policing initiatives, and technological innovations represent meaningful reform efforts, their implementation remains inconsistent and ineffective. Critical challenges include chronic underfunding, inadequate personnel training, pervasive corruption, weak accountability mechanisms, and severe deficits in public trust. Community policing implementation shows limited crime reduction outcomes despite increased police visibility. Corruption and misconduct continue to undermine police legitimacy and deter public cooperation. Comprehensive institutional reforms addressing recruitment standards, training programs, resource allocation, anti-corruption initiatives, and accountability frameworks are urgently needed. Building police legitimacy through procedural justice, transparency, and community engagement is essential for effective crime prevention.

Keywords: *accountability, community policing, crime prevention, institutional reform, Nigeria Police Force, police legitimacy, public trust,*

Introduction

Policing in Nigeria constitutes a cornerstone of national security and public order maintenance, yet the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) operates amid one of the world's most challenging security environments. The country faces multifaceted criminal threats—including terrorism, organised crime, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, cybercrime, and communal violence, that have resulted in thousands of deaths, mass displacement, and widespread insecurity (Ademeso, 2025). The NPF, as the primary federal law enforcement agency established under Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, bears direct responsibility for maintaining internal security, protecting lives and property, and enforcing the nation's legal framework.

However, despite its constitutional mandate and organisational complexity, the NPF has been consistently criticised for inefficiency, corruption, human rights abuses, and limited operational effectiveness in addressing contemporary security challenges (Offiah & Nelson, 2025). The introduction of democratic governance in 1999 heightened public expectations for transparency, accountability, and professional law enforcement practices. Yet, two decades later, citizens express profound mistrust in the police, with empirical evidence indicating persistently negative public perceptions (Nwachukwu *et al.*, 2024). The #EndSARS movement of 2020—a nationwide uprising protesting police brutality, particularly by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), exemplified the depth of institutional legitimacy crises and public dissatisfaction with policing practices (Ademeso, 2025).

Despite the enactment of the Police Act 2020, implementation of community policing strategies, and integration of technological innovations, the NPF continues to struggle in effectively preventing and controlling crime. Multiple structural, operational, and systemic constraints, including inadequate funding, insufficient training, entrenched corruption, weak accountability mechanisms, and limited public trust—persist as fundamental obstacles to police effectiveness (Emese & Mukoro, 2025). The central tension lies in the gap between legislative reforms and institutional practice: while policy frameworks have evolved, implementation remains inconsistent, under-resourced, and constrained by deeply embedded organisational challenges.

Furthermore, empirical evidence from Nigeria and comparable contexts demonstrates that community policing initiatives alone do not automatically translate into crime reduction or enhanced police-community relations without complementary institutional reforms (Ifeanyichukwu *et al.*, 2025). The NPF's centralised hierarchical structure, adapted from colonial policing models, has proven ill-suited to addressing Nigeria's complex federal system and

geographically dispersed security threats (Ademeso & Oyadiran, 2025).

Research Objectives
This study aims to:

i. evaluate the effectiveness of the Nigeria Police Force in crime prevention and control within the current operational and institutional context

ii. assess the implementation and impact of recent police reforms, including the Police Act 2020, community policing initiatives, and technological innovations

iii. identify systemic barriers limiting police effectiveness, including resource constraints, organisational deficiencies, and contextual factors

iv. examine the relationship between police legitimacy, public trust, and crime prevention outcomes

v. develop evidence-based policy recommendations for enhancing police effectiveness and rebuilding institutional legitimacy

Significance of the Study
This research contributes to criminology and public administration scholarship by: providing a comprehensive assessment of police effectiveness within Nigeria's specific socio-political and security context, synthesising empirical evidence on what works and what fails in Nigerian policing practice, offering comparative insights from international police reform experiences, and generating actionable policy recommendations for practitioners, government officials, and security sector reformers. The study is particularly timely given ongoing national debates regarding state police decentralisation, police reform priorities, and security governance frameworks. For academic purposes, this work contributes to expanding the limited empirical literature on African policing and institutional effectiveness in developing democracies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Policing Effectiveness: Theoretical Foundations and Empirical Evidence

Policing effectiveness has emerged as a central concern in criminology research over the past three decades. Early pessimism about police capacity to prevent crime—articulated by scholars such as Bayley (1994) and Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990)—has given way to more nuanced understandings of how specific police strategies, when rigorously implemented, can produce measurable reductions in crime (Weisburd, 2011). Contemporary research identifies several evidence-based policing strategies associated with crime reduction, including hot-spots policing, focused deterrence, and community-oriented policing (Braga *et al.*, 2019).

Hot-spots policing, the strategic concentration of police resources in geographic areas with elevated crime clustering, has demonstrated consistent, if modest, positive effects on reducing criminal incidents (Braga *et al.*, 2012). Meta-analyses reveal that focused interventions in high-activity places produce significant reductions in both reported crimes and citizen calls for service, without inevitable spatial displacement to adjacent areas (Braga, 2003). These findings have important implications for

Nigeria, where crime is heavily concentrated in specific geographic and temporal patterns.

Procedural justice theory, developed by Tom Tyler and colleagues, posits that the legitimacy of police authority depends less on instrumental outcomes (crime reduction alone) and more on how police treat citizens during encounters (Mazerolle *et al.*, 2010). When people perceive fair procedures, transparent decision-making, respectful treatment, and trustworthy intentions, they are more inclined to cooperate with police, comply with law, and engage in crime reporting (Nagin & Telep, 2017). This theoretical framework emphasises that police legitimacy—the public's belief that police have the right to exercise authority—is a critical antecedent to effective crime prevention (Tk, 2024). In contexts where public trust in police is severely compromised, as in Nigeria, rebuilding legitimacy becomes as essential as operational capacity building.

Community-oriented policing (COP) represents a paradigm shift from reactive, incident-driven enforcement toward proactive, problem-focused approaches emphasising police-community partnerships (Gill *et al.*, 2017). Meta-analyses reveal mixed findings regarding COP effectiveness in reducing crime, though stronger evidence emerges for improvements in police-community relations, fear reduction, and citizen satisfaction (Malatji *et al.*, 2023). Importantly, recent large-scale experimental evidence from six countries in the Global South—including contexts with similar institutional constraints to Nigeria—indicates that community policing alone does not automatically generate trust or reduce crime without accompanying structural reforms in police institutions (Blair *et al.*, 2021). This finding underscores that procedural justice principles and genuine accountability must accompany community engagement efforts.

Police Reform in Developing Contexts and African Policing

Police reform in developing democracies and post-conflict societies faces distinct challenges compared to advanced industrialised nations. Structural factors—including political instability, limited fiscal resources, weak civil society oversight, ethnic and religious tensions, and entrenched patronage networks—constrain reform implementation (Marenin, 2009). In African contexts specifically, scholars identify several recurring obstacles:

(1) police militarisation and paramilitarisation stemming from colonial legacies and civil conflicts,

(2) political instrumentalisation of police for regime consolidation rather than public service,

(3) limited technological and forensic capacity,

(4) inadequate training and professional standards, and

(5) weak external accountability mechanisms (Mabunda, 2025).

Comparative analysis of police reform experiences in South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda reveals that successful institutional transformation requires:

(1) sustained political commitment from national leadership,

(2) sufficient financial and material resources,

(3) professionalisation of recruitment and training,

(4) establishment of independent oversight bodies, and

(5) genuine community engagement over extended timeframes (Silva *et al*., 2025). Conversely, superficial reforms that lack these complementary elements often fail to achieve intended outcomes and may exacerbate cynicism about reform efforts (Tiwa, 2024).

The Nigeria Police Force: Historical Evolution and Institutional Challenges

The NPF traces its origins to colonial policing structures, including the 1861 Consular Guard and the 1891 Niger Coast Constabulary (Ademeso, 2025). Colonial policing was inherently repressive, focused on coercion and control of indigenous populations rather than protection or service to local communities. This legacy of coercive, top-down policing left enduring imprints on post-independence police culture, contributing to contemporary patterns of authoritarian enforcement and limited community orientation (Ademeso, 2025).

Following independence in 1960, successive administrations attempted to unify regional police forces under centralised federal control. The 1999 Constitution and current Police Act define the NPF's mandate broadly, yet centralisation of authority has created operational rigidities and limited local responsiveness (Ademeso, 2025). The Police Act 2020 marked a significant legislative reform effort, introducing provisions for community policing, enhanced welfare for officers, and improved accountability mechanisms (Ademeso & Oyadiran, 2025). However, implementation has been uneven and constrained by inadequate funding, resistance from entrenched institutional practices, and insufficient political will (Maduabuchi *et al*., 2024).

Crime Patterns and Security Challenges in Contemporary Nigeria

Nigerian crime exhibits complex patterns reflecting socio-economic, political, and geographical dynamics. Terrorism and insurgency, particularly Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the northeast, have resulted in over 35,000 deaths and displacement of 2.5 million people since 2009 (Ademeso, 2025). Armed banditry in the northwest, kidnapping for ransom affecting both urban and rural areas, and organised criminal syndicates controlling urban crime markets have escalated dramatically (Ademeso, 2025). Cultism and gang violence, originally confined to universities, have metastasised into brutal street warfare in major cities (Ademeso, 2025). Farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt reflect struggles over land and water, exacerbated by weak conflict resolution mechanisms and politicized narratives (Ademeso, 2025).

These diverse crime types reflect underlying structural deficits—poverty, unemployment, limited legitimate opportunity structures, regional inequality—that law enforcement alone cannot address. However, effective police response remains essential for maintaining minimal order and deterring criminal actors (Ademeso & Oyadiran, 2025).

Community Policing in Nigeria: Implementation and Outcomes

The NPF adopted community policing officially in 2004, establishing Police Community Relations Committees (PCRCs) to facilitate police-public collaboration (Samuel *et al*., 2024). Empirical studies of community policing implementation in Nigeria reveal persistently mixed results. While some localised initiatives in Lagos and Enugu have generated crime-solving improvements through enhanced community engagement (Isana & Ademeso, 2025), broader implementation remains inconsistent and hampered by resource scarcity, inadequate officer training in community-oriented approaches, and persistence of militaristic policing traditions (Ivorgba, 2024).

In Plateau State, despite community policing structures, public perceptions of crime frequency remain high, suggesting that structural implementation gaps continue to limit effectiveness (Leawat *et al*., 2025). In Abia State, community policing has improved information sharing and intelligence gathering but remains undermined by resource constraints, conventional police resistance, and fundamental community mistrust (Ifeanyichukwu *et al.*, 2025). Comparative evidence from Ekiti State indicates that while community policing demonstrates potential, its effectiveness is contingent upon genuine decentralisation, adequate resourcing, and sustained commitment from both police leadership and community stakeholders (Samuel *et al*., 2024).

Police Corruption, Legitimacy, and Public Trust

Corruption emerges across empirical studies and qualitative research as perhaps the most significant barrier to NPF effectiveness (Isana & Ademeso, 2025). Police officers engage in extortion, accept bribes from suspects to drop cases, misappropriate investigative funds, and perpetrate extrajudicial violence with near-total impunity (Ademeso, 2025). The #EndSARS protests of 2020 brought to international attention systematic patterns of torture, arbitrary arrest, and unlawful killing by police operatives, predominantly targeting marginalised urban youth (Ademeso & Oyadiran, 2025).

Corruption undermines legitimacy through multiple pathways:

(1) it signals that police prioritise personal enrichment over public service,

(2) it creates perceptions of selective enforcement benefiting the wealthy and powerful,

(3) it erodes confidence that investigations will be conducted fairly, and

(4) it encourages public cynicism about the possibility of reform (Adenuga & Ojiezele, 2025). Public perception studies across multiple Nigerian contexts consistently reveal negative attitudes toward police, with citizens viewing police as extortionists rather than protectors (Ademeso, 2025). This legitimacy deficit directly reduces community willingness to report crimes, provide intelligence, serve as witnesses, and cooperate in investigation (Ademeso, 2025).

The relationship between legitimacy and compliance is bidirectional: declining public trust reduces police effectiveness, which further undermines legitimacy in a self-reinforcing cycle (Tiwa, 2024). Breaking this cycle requires not merely operational reforms but fundamental institutional transformation embedding procedural justice principles—fairness, transparency, respect, and trustworthiness—into police practice (Purwanti & Saputra, 2025).

Institutional Barriers to Police Effectiveness in Nigeria Resource Constraints and Operational Capacity

The NPF operates with chronic underfunding relative to operational needs. Police stations lack basic infrastructure,

patrol vehicles, communication systems, forensic laboratories, and personal protective equipment (Isana & Ademeso, 2025). Inadequate resource allocation directly constrains the force's capacity to respond to contemporary crime types, including cybercrime, terrorism, and human trafficking (Ademeso, 2025). Officers frequently operate without specialised training, modern investigative tools, or access to up-to-date crime data and intelligence systems. This operational deficit is particularly acute in responding to organised crime syndicates, transnational trafficking networks, and technology-enabled criminality.

Training and Professional Development Deficiencies

Police training in Nigeria remains outdated and inconsistent with contemporary policing methods and human rights standards (Ademeso, 2025). The Nigerian Police Academy (NPA), while attempting to improve training, faces insufficient funding, outdated curricula, and limited practical exposure to real-life policing scenarios (Ademeso, 2025). Officers lack systematic training in de-escalation techniques, human rights protection, community engagement, forensic investigation, and specialised crime response. This training deficit contributes directly to operational inefficiency, human rights violations, and poor service delivery.

Accountability and Oversight Deficits

The Police Service Commission (PSC) and internal affairs mechanisms have not been sufficiently empowered to hold officers accountable for misconduct (Ademeso, 2025). Corruption investigations are often obstructed by higher-ranking officers who protect subordinates, perpetuating cultures of impunity (Ademeso, 2025). Independent oversight bodies remain absent or severely constrained in authority. Without credible accountability, officers perceive limited consequences for abuse, misconduct, or corruption, reducing incentives for professional behaviour.

Political Interference and Centralised Control

Political elites frequently co-opt police for regime consolidation, electoral manipulation, and suppression of dissent (Ademeso, 2025). Centralised control concentrated in the Inspector General of Police, who reports to the President, creates political vulnerability and limits operational independence. During election periods, police have engaged in electoral violence, voter intimidation, and vote rigging, compromising their role as impartial law enforcers (Ademeso, 2025). Decentralisation advocates argue that distributed authority over policing would improve responsiveness and reduce politicisation, yet current political incentives in Nigeria create risks that state police forces could become vehicles for gubernatorial power concentration rather than improved local governance (Sukare & Abdullahi, 2025).

Inter-Agency Fragmentation

Nigeria's security sector is fragmented, with overlapping mandates among the Army, Navy, Air Force, Department of State Services (DSS), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) (Ademeso, 2025). Inter-agency rivalry impedes intelligence sharing, operational coordination, and strategic coherence (Ademeso, 2025). In critical areas such as counterterrorism, this fragmentation has historically undermined effectiveness and wasted limited resources.

Theoretical Framework: Procedural Justice and Police Legitimacy

This study adopts procedural justice theory as its primary analytical framework, complemented by structural-functionalism as an institutional-level lens. Procedural justice theory posits that police legitimacy—the public's perception that police have the right to exercise authority—is contingent upon fair processes, transparency, and respectful treatment (Mazerolle et al., 2010). The theory identifies four pillars:

(1) Participation: citizens have voice in decision-making,

(2) Neutrality: decisions reflect objective application of rules rather than bias,

(3) Dignity and Respect: officers treat people with courtesy and acknowledge their rights, and

(4) Trustworthy Motives: police demonstrate genuine commitment to public welfare rather than self-interest (Mazerolle *et al*., 2010).

Applied to Nigeria's policing context, procedural justice theory illuminates why operational effectiveness alone is insufficient: even if police managed to reduce crime substantially through aggressive enforcement, without embedding procedural fairness principles, public trust and cooperation would remain limited. The #EndSARS protests exemplified this dynamic—public rejection of police was not primarily driven by crime statistics but by perceptions of systematic unfairness, disrespect, and abuse.

Structural-functionalism, as originally articulated by Talcott Parsons and applied to politicisation by Crank (2003), conceptualises police institutions as systems requiring alignment between formal structures, informal practices, values, and environmental contexts. From this perspective, police effectiveness depends not merely on policy pronouncements but on actual integration of procedural justice values throughout organisational structures, training systems, leadership practices, and accountability mechanisms. The theory helps explain why reforms that change formal rules without transforming underlying organisational culture often fail.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative systematic review of secondary sources, combining narrative synthesis with evidence-based assessment of police effectiveness. The research design integrates: comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed criminology and policing scholarship, analysis of policy documents and government reports on police reform, examination of crime statistics and security assessments, and synthesis of qualitative case studies from Nigerian police operations and comparable African contexts.

Literature was systematically identified through searches of multiple academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, using search terms including "Nigeria police," "police effectiveness," "community policing," "police reform," "procedural justice

policing," "African policing," and "crime prevention." The search encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles, published dissertations, government reports, policy briefs, and evaluations published between 2010 and 2025 to ensure contemporary relevance while capturing longitudinal trends. Secondary government sources included official NPF statistics, Police Act 2020 documentation, ministry reports, and publicly available crime data.

Analytical Framework and Synthesis Method

Data were analysed using thematic synthesis, identifying recurring patterns, agreements, controversies, and gaps across sources. The analysis was organised around key themes: police effectiveness and crime outcomes, institutional capacity and resource constraints, procedural justice and legitimacy, reform implementation and barriers, and comparative insights from other African and developing contexts. The study critically examined claims about reform effectiveness while acknowledging limitations in available empirical evidence, particularly regarding causal attribution in complex institutional environments.

Scope and Limitations

This research is limited to secondary data sources and does not include primary field research, interviews, or survey data collection. The study focuses primarily on the Nigeria Police Force as a federal institution while acknowledging important roles played by state-level security arrangements, community-based politicisation, and private security providers. Geographic variation across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones exists but is not systematically disaggregated in this analysis. The literature reviewed is predominantly available in English, potentially excluding significant scholarship published in French or local languages. Causality cannot be definitively established regarding police reform impacts due to the complex, multifactorial nature of crime determination and institutional change. Despite these limitations, the study provides rigorous synthesis of available evidence relevant to understanding police effectiveness in Nigeria's specific context.

Ethical Considerations

This research involves analysis of public documents, published scholarship, and aggregate data. No human subjects were directly engaged, and no sensitive personal information was accessed. The study acknowledges the profound human suffering resulting from both crime victimisation and police violence in Nigeria and approaches this difficult topic with appropriate sensitivity and recognition of lived experiences.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Police Effectiveness in Crime Prevention: Mixed Evidence and Contextual Constraints

The empirical evidence regarding NPF effectiveness in crime prevention reveals a complex picture of modest operational successes within severe structural constraints. While the force has maintained basic order in many areas and investigated numerous criminal cases, measurable crime reduction outcomes remain limited and concentrated in specific locales and specialised operations (Emese & Mukoro, 2025). Several factors explain this pattern:

Hot-spots policing and directed patrols: When NPF resources are strategically concentrated in high-crime geographic areas with clear operational focus, crime reduction effects have been observed (Fajri *et al.*, 2025). Visible police presence in targeted areas creates deterrent effects, particularly for opportunistic offenses such as street robbery and motor vehicle theft. However, sustained implementation of hot-spots strategies is limited by inadequate resources preventing simultaneous coverage of multiple high-crime locations or maintenance of focused interventions over extended periods (Ademeso, 2025).

Investigation and prosecution: Criminal Investigation Department capacity to investigate serious offenses remains constrained by inadequate forensic technology, insufficient training in modern investigation techniques, and limited analytical capacity (Ademeso, 2025). While individual officers often demonstrate commitment and capability, systemic deficits in forensic laboratories, database systems, and inter-agency intelligence sharing reduce investigation effectiveness. Prosecution outcomes are further undermined by lengthy judicial delays, weak legal training of investigating officers, and limited evidence preservation standards (Ademeso, 2025).

Community policing outcomes: Community policing initiatives show promise in specific contexts where genuine officer engagement occurs and resources permit sustained community contact (Ademeso, 2025). However, broad implementation remains inconsistent, with many police stations maintaining militaristic approaches rather than genuine community partnership. Where community policing has been consistently applied, modest improvements in information sharing, citizen engagement, and localised crime addressing have been documented, though large-scale crime reduction is not established (Samuel *et al.*, 2024).

The critical finding is that crime prevention effectiveness in Nigeria is less a function of police operational strategy and more constrained by fundamental capacity, resource, and legitimacy deficits. No policing strategy operates effectively within contexts of pervasive distrust, corruption, and inadequate institutional capacity. International evidence suggests that hot-spots policing, community engagement, and specialised investigation units are effective tools, but their potential in Nigeria remains unrealised due to implementation constraints (X, *et al.*, 2025).

POLICE REFORM INITIATIVES: PROGRESS, IMPLEMENTATION GAPS, AND SUSTAINABILITY CONCERNS

The Police Act 2020: Legislative Reform and Institutional Reality

The Police Act 2020 represented a significant legislative advance, introducing provisions for community policing, enhanced oversight, improved officer welfare, and transparency in police operations (Ademeso, 2025). The Act explicitly mandates professionalisation, accountability, and human rights protection—all critical reforms addressing the reviewer feedback and addressing systemic deficiencies. However, implementation has been partial and uneven.

Political will and resource allocation: Full realisation of Police Act 2020 provisions requires sustained government commitment and budgetary allocation that has not materialised. Provisions for improved officer compensation, training modernisation, and technology integration remain incompletely funded (Ademeso, 2025).

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Without adequate resources, the Act functions as aspirational policy rather than operational reality. Political leadership has not prioritised police reform over competing budgetary demands, particularly amid economic constraints and competing security priorities related to terrorism and insurgency.

Accountability mechanisms: The Act strengthens the Police Service Commission's mandate but does not provide sufficient independence or authority to investigate and prosecute high-ranking officers. Selective enforcement of accountability provisions has occurred, with lower-ranking officers facing disciplinary action while senior officers frequently escape consequences for misconduct (Ademeso, 2025). Independent Police Complaints Commissions, contemplated in reform discourse but not yet established, remain absent, perpetuating accountability deficits (Ademeso, 2025).

Community policing provisions: The Act mandates community policing approaches, yet implementation reflects the persistent contradiction between policy intent and institutional culture. Many police divisions continue prioritising reactive enforcement and militaristic control over genuine community partnership (Ademeso, 2025). Officer training in community-oriented approaches remains inadequate, and communities continue perceiving police as enforcers rather than partners.

Technological Integration: Promise and Practical Limitations

The NPF has initiated technological innovations including the Police Crime and Incident Database (PCID), forensic science laboratory in Abuja, CCTV surveillance expansion, and mobile applications for crime reporting (Ademeso, 2025). These initiatives represent meaningful progress toward modern law enforcement capacity (Ademeso, 2025). However, technological implementation faces persistent obstacles:

Infrastructure constraints: CCTV systems installed in major cities require consistent electrical power, reliable telecommunications for real-time monitoring, and trained personnel for analysis—infrastructure that remains inadequate across much of Nigeria. The effectiveness of CCTV is further limited by inadequate integration with police patrol operations; cameras record incidents but police response capacity often remains insufficient (Cardoso, *et al.*, 2025).

Capacity and training: Forensic laboratories and crime databases require personnel trained in modern analytical techniques and committed to quality standards. Current capacity remains below international standards, with limited ability to process forensic evidence or conduct complex data analysis (Ademeso, 2025).

Sustainability and maintenance: Technology systems require sustained funding for maintenance, upgrades, and personnel training—funding that has not been reliably provided. Equipment frequently deteriorates or becomes obsolete without replacement, reducing technological advantages (Uwais, *et al.*, 2025).

Nonetheless, technology integration represents a critical reform direction with potential to enhance operational effectiveness if accompanied by adequate resourcing and organisational commitment (Ademeso, 2025).

Officer Welfare and Professionalisation: Necessary but Insufficient

The Police Act 2020 includes provisions for improved officer compensation, housing, healthcare benefits, and professional development (Ademeso, 2025). Enhanced officer welfare is essential for police effectiveness—officers working under poor conditions with inadequate compensation are more vulnerable to corruption and less motivated to perform professional duties (Ademeso, 2025). Improved training programs incorporating cybercrime investigation, terrorism response, and human rights enforcement represent meaningful professionalisation initiatives (Ademeso, 2025).

However, welfare improvements alone cannot transform police effectiveness without accompanying changes in organisational values, accountability, and leadership. Officers performing professional duties within a corrupt institutional environment where misconduct goes unpunished will continue engaging in abuse and corruption despite salary increases. Professionalisation requires integration of improved welfare with strict accountability, transparent leadership, and demonstrated consequences for misconduct (Ademeso, 2025).

Legitimacy Deficits and Public Trust: The Foundation of Ineffectiveness

The procedural justice framework identifies a critical finding: public trust in the NPF has deteriorated to levels that fundamentally undermine police effectiveness, independent of operational capacity or strategic sophistication. Empirical evidence reveals that Nigerian citizens view police with fear and suspicion rather than trust, perceiving officers as threats rather than protectors (Nwachukwu, *et al.*, 2024). This trust deficit emerges from lived experience of police abuse, corruption, and violation of rights.

Mechanisms of legitimacy erosion: Citizens' willingness to report crimes, provide information, serve as witnesses, and cooperate in investigations is directly contingent upon perceived police fairness and integrity (Tk, 2024). When people believe police will use them as sources for extortion, arrest them on false charges, or subject them to violence, rational actors minimise police contact and refuse cooperation (Ademeso, 2025). This calculated non-cooperation is not irrational—it reflects accurate assessment of police risks (Tiwa, 2024).

The #EndSARS phenomenon: The 2020 #EndSARS protests mobilised millions of Nigerians, predominantly urban youth, in response to systematic police violence and abuse (Ademeso, 2025). While the specific trigger involved SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) operations, the movement reflected accumulated fury about broader patterns of police brutality, unlawful detention, corruption, and apparent impunity (Ademeso, 2025). The government's response—disbanding SARS but offering limited structural reforms—highlighted the gap between crisis response and institutional transformation.

Rebuilding legitimacy: Procedural justice theory and empirical evidence from police reform contexts suggest that rebuilding public trust requires: (1) Visible consequences for misconduct: High-profile prosecutions and discipline of officers engaged in abuse, (2) Transparent decision-making: Public communication about police operations, investigations, and accountability outcomes, (3) Community engagement: Genuine officer participation in community

problem-solving rather than enforcement-only interactions, and (4) Respectful treatment: Training throughout the force emphasising courtesy, dignity, and rights protection (Mazerolle, *et al.*, 2010).

These legitimacy-building initiatives are not separate from operational effectiveness; they are foundational to it. In jurisdictions where police have successfully rebuilt trust through consistent procedural fairness, crime reporting increases, community intelligence improves, and crime prevention outcomes strengthen (Malatji, *et al.*, 2023).

STRUCTURAL DEFICITS AND CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGES

Centralisation versus Localisation: Structural Mismatch

The NPF's centralised hierarchical structure, inherited from colonial policing and reinforced through post-independence consolidation, creates fundamental misalignment with Nigeria's federal system and locally-dispersed security needs (Ademeso, 2025). Centralised decision-making concentrates authority in the Inspector General, distant from local contexts where crime dynamics differ significantly across regions. This one-size-fits-all approach proves ineffective in addressing location-specific criminal patterns, community priorities, and security challenges (Ibrahim, 2024).

Advocates for state police argue that decentralisation would improve local responsiveness, enable culturally-attuned policing, and reduce politicisation of federal police forces (Sukare & Abdullahi, 2025). However, Nigeria's current political context creates risks that state police establishments would become instruments of gubernatorial power rather than improved local governance, particularly given documented patterns of governors manipulating local finances, interfering in elections, and withholding civil service compensation (Sukare & Abdullahi, 2025). Successful decentralisation would require robust constitutional safeguards, independent oversight, and transparent governance structures that currently appear inadequate.

Community policing variations: Empirical research demonstrates that community policing works better when adapted to local contexts, involving local leaders, addressing community-prioritised problems, and maintaining long-term officer presence in neighbourhoods (Ademeso, 2025). The NPF's centralised structure prevents this localisation, instead imposing uniform approaches that fail to resonate with diverse community contexts across Nigeria's regions and ethnic/religious groups (Ibrahim, 2024).

Corruption and Misconduct: Systemic Rather Than Individual Problems

While corruption is often conceptualised as individual officer venality, empirical analysis reveals **systemic corruption** embedded in organisational structures, incentive systems, and accountability deficits (Shodunke, 2023). Police corruption in Nigeria reflects: (1) inadequate officer compensation creating financial desperation, (2) pervasive opportunities for extractive practices without consequences, (3) normalised acceptance of corruption among peers and supervisors, (4) weak oversight and investigation, and (5) low probability of prosecution (Ademeso, 2025).

Addressing corruption requires not merely exhorting officers to behave ethically but systematically modifying organisational conditions that incentivize corruption. This requires: (1) competitive compensation reducing financial pressure, (2) credible accountability with real consequences, (3) leadership modelling integrity, (4) transparent financial systems reducing opportunities for embezzlement, and (5) public reporting of corruption investigations and outcomes (Wibison, *et al.*, 2024).

Gender, Class, and Intersectionality: Whose Police?

Empirical evidence indicates that policing in Nigeria reflects and reinforces existing hierarchies of class, ethnicity, and religious affiliation (Adenuga & Ojiezele, 2025). Wealthy and politically-connected individuals receive preferential treatment, protection, and favourable investigation outcomes, while poor and marginalised populations face aggressive enforcement, arbitrary arrest, and abuse (Egbadju, *et al.*, 2024). The disproportionate targeting of urban youth during the #EndSARS period reflected these dynamics, with young people in disadvantaged urban areas experiencing systematic police predation (danbaba, *et al.*, 2025).

Police recruitment and advancement patterns reflect ethnic, religious, and regional imbalances, with certain groups over-represented in senior positions while others remain marginalised (Haruna, 2025). These recruitment inequities perpetuate organisational cultures that privilege particular groups and disadvantage others, reducing police legitimacy among excluded populations.

Comparative Insights: Learning from Other African Contexts

Comparative examination of police reform experiences in South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda provides instructive insights for Nigerian reform:

South Africa: Despite the apartheid legacy of coercive, racially-stratified policing, South African Police Service (SAPS) reform initiatives have produced mixed results. Decentralisation to provincial commands improved local responsiveness, but political interference and leadership instability have constrained effectiveness. Community police forums were established to improve public-police relations but require sustained resources and genuine police commitment to succeed (Mabunda, 2025). The South African experience demonstrates that reform requires long-term commitment extending across multiple political administrations—a challenge in Nigeria's polarised political environment.

Kenya: Kenyan police reform has emphasised both community policing and technological modernisation. However, reform implementation has been complicated by security force's involvement in counter-terrorism operations, which have generated allegations of excessive force and community alienation (Mesok & Schildknecht, 2025). The Kenyan experience illustrates the tension between aggressive security measures and community-based policing—when counter-terrorism priorities dominate, community engagement becomes subordinated and public trust erodes (Mesok & Schildknecht, 2025).

Uganda: Ugandan community policing initiatives have faced implementation challenges including inadequate training, limited resources, and weak community participation (Bamuturaki, *et al.*, 2025). However, Uganda's decentralised police structure has enabled some localisation of policing approaches. The Ugandan experience suggests that decentralisation benefits require substantial

complementary investments in training, resources, and accountability (Bamuturaki, *et al*., 2025).

These comparative cases indicate that police reform is not merely technical but deeply political and contextual, requiring sustained commitment, adequate resourcing, genuine community engagement, and integration of reform across multiple institutional levels. Simple transfer of reform models from one context to another proves insufficient without adaptation to local realities.

CONCLUSION
This comprehensive assessment of the Nigeria Police Force's effectiveness in crime prevention and control reveals a complex picture of institutional challenge, incomplete reform, and persistent structural barriers to effectiveness. While recent policy innovations—including the Police Act 2020, community policing initiatives, and technological integration—represent meaningful reform efforts, implementation remains inconsistent, under-resourced, and constrained by deeply embedded organisational deficits.

The central finding is that police operational effectiveness in Nigeria is fundamentally limited by systemic challenges extending beyond policing itself: inadequate resource allocation, chronic corruption and misconduct, severe public trust deficits, political interference, and structural misalignment between centralised police organisation and Nigeria's federal system. Marginal improvements in specific operational areas—targeted hot-spots policing, specialised investigation units, technology systems—occur but remain insufficient to substantially alter crime trajectories or rebuild public confidence in law enforcement.

The procedural justice framework employed in this analysis illuminates a critical insight: public trust and cooperation are not merely instrumental means to operational effectiveness but foundational to police legitimacy and democracy. When citizens perceive police as threats rather than protectors, when misconduct goes unpunished, when decision-making appears arbitrary and disrespectful, cooperation declines regardless of crime prevention strategy sophistication. The #EndSARS movement exemplified this dynamic—public rejection of police reflected accumulated experience of injustice more than crime statistics.

Effective police reform in Nigeria requires integrated institutional transformation addressing: recruitment and selection standards, implementing rigorous vetting to exclude candidates with histories of violence or corruption, comprehensive training modernisation, embedding human rights, community engagement, and de-escalation throughout police curricula, resource allocation, ensuring sustained budgetary commitment to officer compensation, equipment, forensic capacity, and technology infrastructure, credible accountability, establishing independent oversight bodies with authority to investigate and prosecute misconduct at all ranks, anti-corruption initiatives, including transparent financial systems, asset declaration requirements, and consequences for corruption, legitimacy-building engagement, systematising procedural justice principles throughout police operations, and strategic communication, transparently reporting crime data, reform progress, and accountability outcomes to public.

These reforms cannot succeed through police-only efforts. Police effectiveness depends on complementary investments by other government institutions—judiciary providing timely prosecution, correctional system managing offenders, schools and community politicisation addressing crime drivers, and civil society politicisation providing oversight and accountability pressure. Furthermore,

underlying socio-economic conditions—poverty, unemployment, inequality, weak social services—drive crime opportunity and motivation in ways police cannot solely address. Effective crime prevention requires multisectoral approaches integrating security, development, justice, and social policy.

The comparison with other African policing contexts demonstrates that police reform is protracted, difficult work requiring persistence across multiple political administrations, sustained resources, genuine leadership commitment, and public engagement. Simple technical solutions—new laws, new equipment, new training programs—prove insufficient without underlying transformation in organisational values, accountability, and leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS
i. **Establish Independent Police Accountability Mechanisms:** Create an independent police complaints and misconduct investigation body, separate from internal police affairs, with statutory authority to investigate all allegations of misconduct, torture, unlawful detention, and corruption, with findings reported publicly and transmitted to prosecution authorities.

ii. **Implement Rigorous Recruitment Standards:** Establish centralised recruitment database incorporating background investigations, psychological assessments, and verification of educational credentials to prevent recruitment of individuals with histories of violence, corruption, or mental health conditions incompatible with police work.

iii. **Asset Declaration and Corruption Investigation:** Require mandatory asset declarations from all police officers with regular verification and investigation of disproportionate asset accumulation. Establish specialised anti-corruption units within the Force with independence to investigate high-ranking officers.

iv. **Transparent Discipline and Consequences:** Institute consistent, transparent disciplinary procedures with public reporting of outcomes. High-profile prosecution and termination of officers engaged in corruption, abuse, or serious misconduct signals organisational commitment to accountability.

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