

**PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE IN EGOR LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by ORAKWUEMMA FAVOUR CHUKWUDIMMA under my supervision in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin.

Prof. Ochuko Iduemre
(Project Supervisor)

Date

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(Ag. Head of Department)

Date.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project first and foremost to Almighty God, whose infinite mercies and love sustained me through all the struggles and obstacles of my academic journey.

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I am profoundly grateful to Almighty God for His infinite wisdom, guidance, and grace that have sustained me throughout the course of my studies and the successful completion of this research project.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the public perception of the Nigerian police force in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Guided by the system theory, it explores how residents assess the performance, behavior and relationship of the police with the community. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 100 randomly selected respondents from the age range of 18 years to 46 years and above through structured questionnaire and analyzed using simple percentages and frequency tables.

Findings shows that while the police force holds a vital role in the maintenance order, public -perception remains largely negative due to corruption, bribery, poor response to distress calls and police brutality. Respondents also identified inadequate training and low motivation as factors affecting police effectiveness. This study concluded that bridging the gap between police force and the community requires improved welfare, accountability and enhanced community policing initiatives to restore trust and credibility in the Nigerian Police Force.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background of the Study

The police force is widely acknowledged as one of the most important institutions of the state, charged with preserving lives, ensuring public safety, and protecting the integrity of the nation. Their work involves fighting crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, cybercrime, and terrorism, as well as recovering stolen property, investigating criminal incidences, and resolving cases of violence. With Nigeria facing increasing insecurity, including insurgency in the North-East, banditry in the North-West, separatist violence in the South-East, and cult-related clashes in the South-South, the duties of the police have become even more critical (CLEEN Foundation, 2022; ISS, 2023). Recent surveys, however, reveal a crisis of trust: less than 30% of Nigerians express confidence in the police, citing corruption, brutality, and inefficiency as key barriers to legitimacy (Afrobarometer, 2022). By virtue of their constitutional responsibility, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) remains the closest security institution to the public, and citizens continue to rely on them for protection despite these trust deficits. Consequently, people expect a personalized police service, demonstrated through professionalism, empathy, tolerance, and courtesy in interactions with officers (Olutola, 2023). Where such qualities are absent, public hostility towards the police deepens, fueling civil unrest, as witnessed during the 2020 #EndSARS protests (Amnesty International, 2021).

Over the years, societies have sought to combat crime through both formal and informal mechanisms. The formal mechanisms include law enforcement agencies such as the Police, the Department of State Services (DSS), the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, and other state-backed security institutions. Informal mechanisms, on the other hand,

include the rise of community-based vigilante groups and private security outfits, which have become increasingly common in Nigeria due to gaps in formal policing (Eze, 2022; Akinlabi & Murphy, 2021). For example, in many rural and semi-urban communities, groups such as the Bakassi Boys in the South-East, the Amotekun Corps in the South-West, and Edo State's Community Vigilante Network have gained strong legitimacy because of their perceived swiftness and responsiveness compared to the police (International Crisis Group, 2022). However, the reliance on vigilantes also raises concerns about accountability, excessive use of force, and human rights abuses, especially in areas where they operate with minimal state oversight (Human Rights Watch, 2023). In response to these challenges, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended) and the Nigeria Police Act (2020 revision) reaffirm the role of the Nigeria Police Force as the primary law enforcement agency responsible for protecting lives and property, preventing and detecting crime, apprehending offenders, preserving law and order, and enforcing all laws within its jurisdiction (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020). Thus, the effectiveness of the NPF remains central to national security and to public confidence in governance at large.

The attitude of the police and the way it carries out its activities therefore form part of the criteria by which they are judged. According to Karimu (2019), instruments of government require public assessment for three reasons: their need to account for the huge sums of money budgeted for them, in terms of adequate delivery of services; second ineffective performance of the important duty committed to them has debilitating consequence on the system and three, such assessment has the benefit of unveiling the state of affairs that can make room for suggestions for improvement. Unfortunately public opinion about the police has always portrayed them in bad light. The high rate of violent

crime in the towns and cities is often cited as evidence of police inefficiency. The police has no good rapport with members of the public whose support and co-operation is necessary for effective law enforcement. There is also the problem of widespread corruption. It is commonly believed that the Nigerian Police performs their lawful duties to members of the public only after they have been bribed or paid to do so. One dangerous consequence of this is the frequent perversion of justice through the suppression of cases of persons who are unable or unwilling to settle them. The police is accused of extra-judicial killings, abuse of human rights, falsification of evidence, extortion, bribery, and non-challance toward the public (Eleonu,2019; Onwunyirimadu, 2022; Afolabi, et al, 2021). Human Rights Watch (2010) identifies other corrupt acts and abuses of the Nigerian police to include arbitrary arrests and detention, mass arrests and detention or raiding, prolonged unlawful detention, extortion using threats and intimidation, sexual assault associated with extortion, killing for failing to pay a bribe, sale of justice, turning cases against complainants, requiring victims to fund criminal investigation offering unequal protection under the law, high level embezzlement of police funds, etc. One common act of police misconduct that has been observed nation-wide is the indiscriminate setting up of road blocks. Though the stated purpose of the check points are to curb crime on highways, the police is accused of using them for extorting drivers and bribe taking (Onwunyirimadu, 2022). In Delta State, these roadblocks are prominent features within and between major towns like Warri, Sapele road, Ugbowo, Sokponba, Uselu, Ikpoba Hill, Aruogba and and environs. Besides obstructing free flow of traffic, police use these checkpoints openly to extort money from motorists (Oluku,1999 p. 2). The police is also accused of torturing suspects, intimidating and forcibly extorting members of the public, indiscriminate arrest of innocent people, conniving with

criminals to commit crimes and general high-handedness in dealing with civilians. These practices of the police are in sharp contrast to the expectations of the members of the public. The interest of this study of the public image of the Nigeria police has arisen within the context of this disparity between police official mandate and their conduct on the job. The aim is to find out the extent to which the public dislike the police, the reasons for such dislike and the general consequences of such dislike on police-public relations and law enforcement.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian police force has historically played a very role in maintaining law and order; however, recent reports, media coverage, and public perceptions indicate that the force has engaged itself with various vices such as corruption, illegal break in on private properties, abuse of power, extortion, unlawful arrests and lack of accountability. There exists a strained relationship between the police and the public which affects police image and credibility in preventing crime and their overall performance.

Scholars have attested to the fact that there is much to be desired in the effectiveness and efficiency of the Nigeria police force in relation to combating crimes. Odekunle (2014) observed that despite the enabling statutory backing that the police has, it has rather displayed and generated a great deal of controversies with regards to the maintenance of public peace, safety, security and crime prevention and detection. Various factors have been blamed as constituting challenges to effective and efficient policing in Nigeria. In fact, these challenges are cumulative and range from material to human and external. One of the major obstacles which greatly hinder the police in its effort to curb kidnapping in Nigeria is the widespread corruption among its rank and file (officers and men). The stigma of corruption

in the Nigeria police force is damning and includes the taking of bribe from suspects as well as complainants before carrying out its statutory functions.

Obarisiagbon (2017) further attested to the fact that the police connives with kidnapping offenders to help them out of police custody after collecting money from them and their relations and subsequently closing the case file or writing a report in favour of the offender. Closely associated with the label of corruption that has been placed on the Nigeria police force is the poor perception the public has of it. The cankerworm of corruption has deeply affected the social image of the public as public opinion regarding the integrity of police officers is that of “dirty Harry” (Onyeozili, 2005). In his study, Ugwulebo (2011) notes that the police force has been criticized for aiding and abetting kidnappers, resulting in the public being unwilling to report incidence of the crime to the police. Rather, they prefer to pay the ransom to the kidnappers so that their relations or friends can regain their freedom.

Inadequate training, materials and poor remuneration for both officers and men of the Nigeria police force are notable factors that have created abysmal performance for the police in carrying out their statutory functions of crime prevention and detection. The training of policemen is a sine qua non to effective performance but regrettably, there is little or none presently and where any exist, it is very poor as the men are not thoroughly exposed to modern policing (Adegoke, 2014). Besides, there is a paucity of equipment. The few ones which are available are obsolete, crying for replacement and yet have none in sight. A major equipment that has handicapped the police in its quest to curb kidnapping in Nigeria, is its lack of tracking devices and as such, they are not able to track down kidnappers. To worsen the situation is the very uncooperative attitude of the GSM operators who are either unwilling to give call details of suspected kidnappers or claim that their

equipment is faulty (Obarisiagbon, 2017). This unwholesome situation has greatly impacted on the performance of the police in relation to the curbing of kidnapping.

The role of the police in maintaining law and order as often been questioned by the public. The public negative attitude of the police is informed by the involvement of policemen with partiality of the police in cases to favor the rich, police brutality, and taking of bribe as well the poor response to distress call to mention but a few. These negative behaviors have significantly damaged the reputation and integrity of the police force among Nigerian citizens, leading to widespread distrust, fear, and societal discontent. Despite efforts at reform, there remains a gap in understanding the depth and nature of public perceptions towards the police, as well as the factors influencing these views. This study seeks to explore and analyze the perspectives of the Nigerian public regarding the police force's conduct, with particular focus on how these perceptions impact societal trust and cooperation with law enforcement agencies. Understanding these perceptions is vital for informing policy reforms aimed at restoring public confidence and improving police-community relations in Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to ascertain the influence of the Nigerian police force on the public and to analyze the responses, attitudes, and perceptions of the people toward the Nigerian police force, using Egor local government area of Benin city as the case study. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the level of public trust and confidence in the Nigerian police force in Egor local government area.

2. To assess the experiences of residents in Egor local government area with the Nigerian police force. This will involve exploring citizens' personal encounters with police officers in areas such as crime reporting, patrol visibility, arrest procedures, and conflict resolution.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of police-community engagement initiatives in Egor local government area. This will help determine whether community policing, public sensitization, and partnerships have improved citizens' perceptions of the police.
4. To recommend strategies for improving public perception and strengthening trust between the Nigerian police force and the residents of Egor local government area.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to meet the above objectives, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of public trust and confidence in the Nigerian police force among residents of Egor Local Government Area of Benin City?
2. What are the experiences of residents in Egor Local Government Area with the Nigerian police?
3. How effective are police-community engagement initiatives in Egor Local Government Area?
4. What strategies can be recommended to improve public perception and strengthen trust between the Nigerian police force and the residents of Egor Local Government Area?

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study shall be limited to the citizens of Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. We shall also look into how the duties and engagements of the Nigerian Police Force has shaped and influenced the public's perception

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides a deeper understanding of how the Nigerian Police Force is perceived by the public within Egor Local Government Area of Benin City. Public perception of the police is a crucial indicator of trust, legitimacy, and effectiveness of law enforcement in any democratic society. By investigating this subject, the study contributes to both academic knowledge and practical policy development in contribution to knowledge as the study adds to the growing body of literature on police-community relations in Nigeria, provide valuable insights for policy makers, security experts and government authorities, to examine the level of public trust and confidence in the Nigerian police force.

1.7 Operational Definition of Concept

I. Public Perception:

Public perception refers to the general opinion, belief or attitude that members of the public holds about a person, group or institution based on their experiences, interactions or observations. In this study, public perception refers specifically to how residents of Egor L.G.A of Edo State view and assesses the performance, attitude and credibility of the Nigerian police force. It represents the level of trust, confidence and satisfaction that the people have toward police officers and their operations.

II. The Nigerian Police Force

The Nigerian police force (NPF) is the principal law enforcement agency in Nigeria, established under section 214 of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. It's primary goal or responsibilities is to maintain peace and order, protect the lives and property of the citizens and state, and enforce the laws of the country. This research mainly refers to the police officers and divisions of the NPF operating on Egor L.G.A of Edo State.

III. Community Policing

This is a strategy that helps build partnership and promotion between the police force and the community members to jointly identify and resolve problems related to crime and social order. In this study, community policing is viewed as a tool that can enhance and rebuild public confidence and cooperation between the police force and residents of Egor.

IV. Policing

Policing is the process of maintaining public order and enforcing laws by authorized officers of the state. Policing involves crime prevention, investigation, patrol duties and ensuring public safety.

V. Community Relations

Community relations refer to the interactions and cooperation between the police and the members of the public (community). In this study, it describes the rate of mutual understanding, interactions and partnership that exists between the police and the residents of Egor Local Government Area.

VI. Law Enforcement

Law enforcement is the act of commanding obedience to the laws, ensuring justice through legal authorities. In this research, law enforcement refers to the constitutional duties of the

Nigerian police force to prevent and detect crimes within Egor Local Government Area Of Edo State.

VII. Public Image

This refers to the overall reputation or impression that the general public has about an organization or constitution. In this study, it shows how the Nigerian police force are seen by the public in terms of professionalism, effectiveness and in the cause of discharging their duties and interacting with the public.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception is the process by which individuals interpret and give meaning to social phenomena, influenced by social contexts, experiences, and cultural norms (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It serves as the interpretive lens through which individuals experience and understand social reality, thereby influencing social consciousness. According to Williams (2003) and Nwosu (2021), perception is the means by which information gathered through the sense organs is recognized and interpreted. Public perception, therefore, may be seen as the difference between an absolute truth based on facts and a virtual truth shaped by popular opinion, media coverage, and reputation (Idowu, 2012; 2021). In this sense, it reflects the collective opinions, views, and knowledge of the public about an institution such as the police. Consequently, positive or negative public perception has direct implications on police performance, as public support or disapproval can either enhance or hinder police effectiveness (Miller et al., 2004).

In Nigeria, studies have consistently highlighted the image crisis of the police. Iringe-Koko and Wagbara (2019) examined the role of public relations in addressing corruption within the Nigeria Police. Their findings revealed that while the public relations department of the police created awareness in the fight against corruption, much more was needed in terms of training, retraining, and proactive engagement. This suggests that the Nigerian Police must invest in professional communication strategies to restore public trust.

Despite such efforts, the public's perception of the police has largely remained negative. Umoru (2019) reported widespread feelings of distrust and despair among citizens regarding the police. Similarly, Dalhatu (2013, in Omoru, 2019) described the police as

perceived harbingers of corruption, instruments of the ruling class, and frequent latecomers to crime scenes. More recently, Human Angle (2023) found that public confidence in the Nigerian police remains low and unfavorable, reflecting long-standing dissatisfaction with service delivery.

National surveys reinforce this perception. A Chatham House/National Bureau of Statistics (2025) report showed that 46% of Nigerians “greatly distrust” the police, while only 7% expressed strong trust. Such findings highlight a legitimacy crisis that goes beyond everyday policing to questions of fairness, accountability, and institutional credibility. Similarly, a report by NOI Polls (2022) revealed that 73% of Nigerians believe most or all police officers are corrupt, further confirming that issues of integrity and misconduct are central to negative perceptions. Research has also shown that perceptions of police misconduct reduce public satisfaction indirectly through diminished confidence and legitimacy (Nwalozie, 2023).

Another critical factor shaping perception is police welfare and motivation. Studies have linked poor welfare conditions, inadequate pay, and lack of promotion opportunities with low morale among officers, which in turn affects their effectiveness and the public’s trust (Ogunlana & Aremu, 2024). This implies that public dissatisfaction with the police is not solely based on bias but reflects the structural challenges officers face in delivering quality service.

Emerging trends in digital policing (e-policing) also play a role in shaping perception. Okon and Danjuma (2023) found that user satisfaction with e-policing platforms in Nigeria is strongly influenced by system quality, service quality, and the reliability of information provided. In local government areas such as Egor, however, limited access to such

technologies means residents rely more heavily on physical policing, where inefficiencies are more visible and directly affect perception.

Public perception is also shaped by broader security conditions. The National Bureau of Statistics' Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey (CESPS, 2024) reported increasing levels of insecurity and violent crimes, with declining confidence in the police's ability to protect citizens. In Benin City, residents have sometimes praised visible police interventions such as clampdowns on cultism, but these are often accompanied by concerns about professionalism, fairness, and excessive use of force (Nigerian Observer, 2023). Similarly, a survey by Chatham House (2025) found that the police remain one of the most distrusted institutions in Nigeria, with 46% of citizens expressing strong distrust, linking these sentiments to rising crime levels and perceived failure of police responsiveness.

Furthermore, the prevalence of corruption, extortion, and abuse of power at police checkpoints has been reported as a major driver of public hostility. A NOI Polls (2022) report revealed that 73% of Nigerians perceive most police officers as corrupt, noting that direct experiences with bribery significantly erode trust. In Edo State, civil society groups have repeatedly criticized the police for harassment of commercial drivers and youth, further fueling negative sentiment (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The slow response time to crime incidents also undermines public confidence. According to Adebayo and Salisu (2023), delays in police arrival at crime scenes create an impression of inefficiency and leave communities feeling vulnerable. This is particularly evident in urban areas such as Benin City, where residents report that police often arrive after crimes have escalated or perpetrators have escaped.

In contrast, visible community-oriented policing initiatives tend to generate positive perceptions. A study by Nwachukwu et al. (2024) found that when police officers engage communities through patrols, dialogue forums, and partnerships with local leaders, trust and cooperation improve significantly. Such findings suggest that proactive visibility, rather than reactive force, is key to reshaping public opinion.

The rise of social media reporting of police misconduct has amplified negative perceptions. Viral videos of extortion or brutality often spark outrage and protests, as witnessed during and after the #EndSARS movement, further damaging the institution's reputation (Amnesty International, 2022). However, social media has also provided opportunities for citizens to commend positive interventions, showing that digital platforms have become an important space where perception is both damaged and repaired.

Taken together, the literature suggests that public perception of the Nigerian Police Force, including in Egor Local Government Area, is largely negative due to corruption, misconduct, poor welfare conditions, and a legitimacy deficit. However, opportunities exist to rebuild trust through improved welfare, professional reforms, digital policing innovations, and visible, accountable service delivery.

2.1 History of the Nigerian Police

Before the arrival of the British into Nigerian society, law and order were maintained through indigenous systems. Local chiefs, traditional rulers, age grades, and community vigilante groups functioned as custodians of peace and justice (Tamuno, 1970; Ahire, 1991). These traditional institutions relied heavily on communal values, restorative justice, and moral persuasion, which often made them more responsive to the people they served.

However, these decentralized forms of policing were gradually displaced by centralized colonial policing structures imposed by the British (Onyeozili, 2005; Ikuteyijo, 2019).

When the British established their presence, their principal motivation was commercial interest. Colonial policing thus evolved primarily as an instrument for protecting trade routes, suppressing local resistance, and safeguarding the economic interests of the colonial state (Alemika, 2021). In 1861, following the annexation of Lagos, William McCoskry, the Acting Governor, established a small constabulary to enforce law and order and protect colonial officials (The Guardian, 2016). This laid the foundation for modern policing in Nigeria.

By 1930, regional constabularies—including the Lagos Colony Police, the Hausa Constabulary in the North, and the Niger Coast Constabulary—were amalgamated into a unified Nigeria Police Force (Tamuno, 1985; Ahire, 1991). This unification gave the NPF a national outlook but retained its colonial DNA as an institution designed for control rather than service. Scholars argue that the NPF inherited authoritarian practices, coercion, and alienation from the local population because its primary loyalty was to the colonial administration, not the people (Onyeozili, 2005; Alemika, 2021).

Section 4 of the Police Act (Cap P19, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004, updated 2020) codified the roles of the police: prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders, preservation of public order, protection of life and property, and enforcement of laws. These provisions place the police at the core of Nigeria's criminal justice system, often referred to as its "gatekeepers" (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). Yet, historically, the police have been criticized for emphasizing order maintenance and regime protection over citizen security (Hills, 2008).

During the post-independence era, successive military regimes further militarized the police, using it to suppress political dissent and enforce authoritarian rule (Odekunle, 2004; Hills, 2012). The police became closely associated with repression, brutality, and corruption, eroding public trust (Odinkalu, 2020). Even under civilian rule, these patterns have persisted, with the police frequently accused of serving as instruments of political intimidation and electoral malpractice (Iwilade, 2018; CLEEN Foundation, 2019).

Globally, policing is anchored in crime prevention, law enforcement, and community service. In Nigeria, however, the NPF has struggled to balance its statutory responsibilities with public expectations. Public perception has been shaped not only by historical legacies but also by contemporary realities such as corruption, inadequate training, poor welfare, and systemic abuse of human rights (Amnesty International, 2020; Ibrahim & Eboibi, 2021). A major turning point in the history of the NPF was the 2020 #EndSARS protests, which drew global attention to systemic police brutality, extrajudicial killings, and lack of accountability in the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). These protests revealed the depth of public mistrust and underscored the urgent need for reform (Amnesty International, 2020; HRW, 2020). Despite government promises of restructuring, many Nigerians still view the NPF as an institution resistant to change and transparency (Okeke-Uzodike & Uzodike, 2021).

Contemporary reform efforts, including the Police Act 2020, sought to modernize the force by enhancing accountability, restructuring recruitment processes, and embedding community policing principles (FRN, 2020). However, implementation has been weak due to limited political will, resource constraints, and entrenched corruption (Alemika, 2021; Akinlabi, 2023). Studies show that effective policing in Nigeria requires not only legal reforms but also a cultural shift from force-centered policing to community-centered

policing that emphasizes service delivery, respect for human rights, and partnership with civil society (CLEEN Foundation, 2022; Akinlabi & Murphy, 2023).

Ultimately, the historical evolution of the NPF—from colonial constabulary, through militarized policing, to contemporary reform struggles—illustrates how legacies of coercion and authoritarianism continue to shape its structure, practices, and public perception. The police remain the most visible face of government authority, and their integrity, professionalism, and accountability directly affect citizens' trust in the state (Odekunle, 2004; Odinkalu, 2020; Ikuteyijo, 2019).

2.2 Public Perception of the Nigeria Police

There is no doubt that the effectiveness and efficiency of the Nigeria Police have been under stress and adversely affected by various problems such as inappropriate policing orientation and strategies with emphasis on reactive instead of proactive/preventive measures, brutality against citizens, including extra-judicial killing, corruption and extortion, poor performance in the areas of intelligence analysis and utilization as well as investigation and perversion of the course of justice etc [Jike, 2003; Ekpeyong, 1987 Alemika, 1993; Onoge, 1993]. Onoge [1993] observed that the sloganeering “Police is your friend” in present-day Nigeria notwithstanding, the rival popular image of the police as corrupt “kill and go” squad has not abated. Onoge wondered that despite three decades after independence Nigeria still quests for a social order based not on brute force but on just and moral consensus. Violence inter-communal and religious conflicts remain, corrupt looting of the national treasury continues to occur, all sorts of violent crime are committed with reckless abandon in the full glare of the police statutorily charged with public peace and order maintenance; all of these signal the lack of commitment to orderly development of the

Nigeria socio-political space [Onoge, 1993]. Till date, it is somehow very disturbing that despite the constitutional powers granted the police to maintain public peace, safety and general security in Nigeria the quality of security has nothing to be proud of and it has no doubt generated a great deal of controversies [Odekunle, 2004]. Odekunle declared “Nigeria Police Force falls short of optimum performance”.

This is manifest in the widespread inefficiencies, corruption, unfairness in dealing with suspects, occasional over-use of legitimate force, bad temper, bullying, and other abuses of citizen’s rights with impunity. The Apo six killings in Abuja by the police in, 2005 is an example [Brewier, Gueke, Hwne, Moxon-Browne and Wilford, 1996]. Perception according to Williams (2003) and Nwosu, (2021) is a way to recognize and interpret information one has gathered through the sense organs viz. the eyes, ears nose, skin and tongue. On the other hand, public perception can be seen as the difference between an absolute truth based on facts and a virtual truth shaped by popular opinion, media coverage and reputation (Idowu, 2012; 2021). It is the overall opinions, views and knowledge of the public about the police. It becomes vital therefore, to note that positive or negative public perception and support about or of the police will either influence or mar its performance (Miller, J., et al, 2004).

In Nigeria, recent events have shown that there is a wide feeling of distrust and despair among members of the society in issues regarding to the police (Umoru, 2019). Furthermore, the Nigerian police force has a very serious image problem in the eyes of the public which it is meant to protect and serve, having been perceived as harbinger of corruption, instrument in the hand of the ruling class, terror inducers and late or non-comers to crime scenes (Dalhatu, 2013 in Omoru, 2019). Public perception of the police is on the

negative side, and the public confidence in the Nigerian police is low and unfavorable (Human Angle,2023)

The Nigeria Police Force, as a law enforcement institution, plays a critical role in maintaining law and order, ensuring public safety, and upholding the rule of law. However, in recent years, the Force has faced intense scrutiny and criticism over allegations of human rights abuses, corruption, and inefficiency (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2022). The #EndSARS movement, which gained momentum in 2020, highlighted the deep-seated frustrations and mistrust that many Nigerians have towards the Police, particularly the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The protests led to widespread calls for police reform, and the subsequent disbandment of SARS. Despite these efforts, the Police Force still grapples with public perception issues, undermining its effectiveness and legitimacy (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2023). By the nature of their operations, the Police are ubiquitous; meaning that they are everywhere in the society. They relate and mingle with individuals and groups at all levels in the society. This is why they are loved and hated depending on circumstances. Perhaps, this is why Pate, Abdullahi & Umar (2014) asserted that the Police are popularly called “friends to all” or as the saying goes in Hausa, ‘Dansanda Abokin Kowa’ and unlike the other security outfits, the Police are supposed to be the closest and perhaps, the most trusted ally to the ordinary citizens. Although, because of the regularity of interaction between the two sides and the firmness of the Police in the maintenance of law and order, the Police and the Public are bound to experience occasional turbulence in their relationships (Pate, Abdullahi & Umar, 2014). As indicated earlier, the Nigeria Police is the most visible security outfit in the country. The media always feature them; the people always talk about them; the government is always referring to them; in fact stories about the Police bother

from the serious, truthful to that of the ridiculous and stupid. You hear stories of bravery as well as jokes of cowardice and the absurd about the Police. In other words, the relationship they have with the society is a relationship of mixed feelings

2.3 Problems of Police Public Relationship

By the nature of their mandate, the Police have the statutory powers to investigate crimes, to interrogate and prosecute suspects, to grant bail to suspects pending completion of 70 investigations or prior to court arraignment, to serve summons, and to regulate or disperse processions and assemblies. Police are also empowered to seize and search properties suspected to be stolen or associated with crime and to take and record for purpose of identification (Alemika, 2003). In the process of carrying out their responsibilities, officers and men of the Police Force are bound to be popular as well as unpopular in the society. While they are good guys to a victim of a crime, they would conversely remain enemies to the criminal; such is the world of the Police. They are trained to serve and keep the society safe. However, in order to understand the perception of the people towards the police, Pate et al, (2014) listed the following indices as problems that birthed the negative perception of the public:

1. Police Brutality: Police brutality is a common issue that the public worry about in their relationship with the Police. There are numerous allegations of extra-judicial killings, excessive brutalities in dealing with suspects, intimidation, harassment, etc. Stories of accidental discharge, kicking and beating of citizens, arbitrary detention, etc are commonly associated with the Police. Equally, they are often accused of blind support for brutal leaders and their policies at the various levels of governments.

2. Corruption: Corruption is a disease that has permeated the entire fabric of the Nigerian society. Hardly can one mention any sector in the country that the virus of corruption has not affected. It comes in different forms, shapes and ramifications. But perhaps, because of the public trust in the police and the belief that one of the major duties of the police is to investigate cases of corruption and corrupt activities, the dust is often raised when it involves the police. They expect the police to live above board to be able to investigate corruption in society. There is a notion that the involvement of the Police in corruption undermines their moral authority and basis for fairness in dealing with conflicting parties and handling offenders of the law. The Nigeria Police and, bribery and corruption are two inseparable fellows. This menace is plausible institutionalized among and between members of the Police force. It has eaten extremely deep into soul of police. It has become Nigerian Police second nature. This is no prejudice to the Nigeria Police but rather an ostensible and pragmatic reality (Ajibade, 2011).

3. Extortion: Third, police corruption is often tantamount to extortion, a form of robbery or demand with force. These dimensions of Police corruption explain why the public is threatened by such practices. In fact, it is the most significant source of police brutality. In many circumstances, police brutality is a means of coercing individuals to succumb to demands for bribes, and at some other time, it is punishment for not cooperating with the police in their demand for gratification. The issue of extortion is also commonly associated with the Police. A common trend is the one faced by motorists and commercial drivers on how they drop the popular N200 note or even more, depending on the location at check points, when they existed.

4. Resource and Management inadequacies: The general public sympathizes with the Nigeria Police on the glaring difficulties bothering on deficiencies that undermine their efficiency. The system can sometimes frustrate the efforts of individual officers.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Two major theories will be adopted for this study. These theories include ‘System Theory and Control Theory’. The System Theory was propounded by an Austrian biologist and a philosopher of science Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1901-1972) in which he introduced the theory in 1950. The system theory provides an analytical scheme for understanding complexity and interdependence among parts of an organization and between the organization and its environment. In contemporary research, systems thinking is increasingly used to explain how institutions adapt to uncertainty, external pressure, and social expectations (Jackson, 2022). According to Besio & Tacke (2024), modern organizations are not isolated entities but open systems that must interact with their environment for survival. They argue that the stability of any social system depends on its ability to process feedback from its external environment while maintaining internal coherence.

In the context of policing, systems thinking has been applied to show how the police function as a dynamic system that responds to crime, public expectations, political directives, and institutional constraints. Johnson, Fortune, Bromley & Davies (2022) demonstrated how systems approaches in policing enable officers to understand the ripple effects of their actions, where small operational changes (e.g., community outreach or improved complaint-handling mechanisms) can trigger larger impacts on public trust and legitimacy. Similarly, Pérez Durán (2023) stresses that social systems must be understood not merely as

collections of individuals but as structured organizations with necessary and sufficient elements that sustain their operations.

For the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), systems theory is particularly relevant because the institution operates as an interconnected entity composed of various subsystems—such as divisions, units, community policing forums, command structures, and oversight mechanisms. These subsystems interact with each other internally but are also shaped by external pressures such as public expectations, crime rates, government reforms, and media scrutiny (CLEEN Foundation, 2022). Public perception, therefore, functions as an important feedback loop: when trust is low, citizens may withdraw cooperation, refuse to report crimes, or even resort to self-help security, thereby weakening the system’s effectiveness. Conversely, when citizens perceive fairness, accountability, and professionalism, the legitimacy of the police system is strengthened.

Furthermore, systems theory emphasizes that failure in one part of the system can compromise the whole. For instance, widespread corruption or brutality within a small unit of the police (such as the defunct SARS) can delegitimize the entire force in the eyes of the public (Amnesty International, 2020; Okeke-Uzodike & Uzodike, 2021). This resonates strongly with the case study of Egor Local Government Area, where community interactions with the police are shaped not only by local experiences but also by national events, reforms, and narratives. The NPF’s legitimacy, therefore, cannot be divorced from how its different parts interact with each other and with the public environment.

In this light, the Nigeria Police Force is best understood as a social system where officers, policies, structures, and the public environment continuously interact. Only by

recognizing these interdependencies can effective reforms be designed to improve performance and reshape public perception in Egor LGA and beyond

The **Control Theory** developed by Hirschi (1969) was used to explain why individuals tend to act in deviant ways. From his point of view, humans are naturally self-interested beings, who make decisions based on which choice offers the greatest personal benefit. Control theory therefore posits that people, by nature, are motivated to and capable of committing crime, although the social costs of committing crimes can deter would-be offenders from deviance (Nickerson, 2023). The theory claims that it is unnecessary to ask why people commit delinquent acts; instead, delinquency results from the weakening or absence of effective social bonds and controls. According to Hirschi, deviant behavior does not necessarily emerge from the presence of deviant beliefs but rather from the absence of effective beliefs and constraints that forbid delinquency.

The basic argument of control theory is that deviance flourishes where there is an absence of adequate social control mechanisms that prevent individuals from violating societal rules and regulations. It assumes that life is full of temptations and that deviant acts are attractive because they provide immediate rewards for those who engage in them. Without strong mechanisms of control, individuals are more likely to pursue such rewards (Paternoster & Bachman, 2023). In the policing context, this means that when officers operate in weakly regulated environments—where accountability systems are ineffective—they are more likely to engage in behaviors such as extortion, bribery, illegal arrests, and harassment.

For instance, Amnesty International (2022) noted that one of the driving forces behind police brutality in Nigeria is the lack of strong institutional oversight and

accountability, which aligns with Hirschi's claim that deviance thrives in the absence of effective control. Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2023) observed that law enforcement officers often justify rights violations, such as torture or coercive interrogations, by arguing that such actions produce quick investigative results. This reflects the control theory perspective that individuals weigh the perceived benefits of misconduct (e.g., financial gain, quicker information gathering) against the minimal risk of punishment.

Recent studies also show that effective internal and external control mechanisms, such as strict disciplinary systems, community oversight, and transparent accountability structures, reduce the likelihood of misconduct. For example, Nwalozie (2023) found that police misconduct in Nigeria is often linked to weak monitoring institutions and poor enforcement of disciplinary measures. Likewise, Nwachukwu et al. (2024) emphasized that strengthening police–community partnerships and internal ethics boards provides stronger informal and formal control measures that deter deviant practices.

Therefore, applying control theory to law enforcement helps explain why some police officers engage in human rights violations and corruption. These actions are not simply because officers inherently value deviance but because inadequate social and institutional control mechanisms fail to deter such practices. Effective oversight, stronger internal disciplinary measures, and greater public accountability are, according to control theory, essential in curbing these behaviors and restoring trust in law enforcement institutions

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter focuses on the various methods and procedures that were used in this study. It contains research design, population of the study, sampling techniques, instrument of data collection, validity and reliability and method of data analysis

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with the mixed method of quantitative and qualitative research method. This study shall adopt this design to properly obtain data on public perception of Nigerian police force, it will be administered to the people who live in Egor L.G.A of Benin city within the range of 20 and above.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of youths between the age of 18 to 35 years of age which is the targeted population for the study who resides in Egor local government area, irrespective of sex, age, marital status and educational background. According to City Population Statistics, there are about three hundred and forty thousand, two hundred and eighty-seven (340,287) people living in Egor local Government Area. The targeted population for the study ranges from 20 years and above.

3.3 Sample Size and Sample Techniques

A sample size is a smaller unit of individual's that accurately represents the larger population by retaining its essential characteristics in the study. Specific sample size was adopted because it's not feasible to investigate the entire population. Therefore, the sample size for this study was 100 respondents and the sampling technique adopted was simple random sampling techniques due to it's representativeness transparency, and applicability.

3.4 Instrument for Data Collection

The questionnaire and in-dept interview were used in this study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; section A deals with Bio-Data of respondents, while Section B deals with the issues relating to the topic under investigation

3.5 Method of Data Collection

The study adopted a one- time survey method as the researcher went to the field to engage the respondents and interviewers without having to go back to the same population for additional information after the first contact with them.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

The research question was subjected to face validity test to ascertain whether questions in the questionnaire and interview schedule were adequate to address what they are intended to address in the research. The research instrument was scrutinized by the supervisor. All these were to help in determining the representation of the items in the questionnaire. Both item validity and sampling validity were observed. Item validity represents measurement in the intended content areas whereas sampling validity is concerned with how the total content areas of the study were incorporated.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using the statistical package for social science version 22.0. descriptive statistics like percentages and tables were used to describe and interpret the data collected from respondents. Qualitative data were transcribed thematically and analysed using the content analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

The result of the data collected and analyzed in the study is presented in the tables below for each research questions.

4.1 Presentation of data

Section A: Socio- Demographic data of respondents

Variables in respondents in respect of demography such as age, sex, marital status, educational background and religious affiliation were measured by requesting respondent to fill the questionnaire in response to their Bio data.

Table 4.1: Distribution of respondents by Age.

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
18-25 Years	25	25%
26-36 years	35	35%
36-45 years	25	25%
46 years and above	15	15%
Total	100	100%

SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY, 2025.

The table above reveals that most respondents (35%) fall between 26-35 years, representing active working-age individuals who are more likely to have interactions with the Nigerian police.

Table 4.2: Distribution of respondents by sex

Gender	Frequency	Percentage%
Male	60	60%
Female	40	40%
Total	100	100%

Source: field survey, 2025.

The above table reveals that 60% of respondents are male, while 40% are female.

This implies that both genders participated, with male slightly dominating

Table 4.3: Distribution of respondents by Educational Level

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage%
Secondary	20	20%
OND/NCE	25	25%
HND/B.Sc	40	40%
Postgraduate	15	15%
Total	100	100%

Source: field survey, 2025

From the above table, a total of 80% have tertiary education, indicating that the sample population is literate and capable of expressing informed opinions on police activities

SECTION B: ISSUES RELATING TO PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

A: Role and Effectiveness of the Nigerian Police force

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1	The Nigerian police force plays an important role in maintaining law and order in Egor L.G.A	45	35	15	5	100
2	The police in Egor respond promptly to distress calls and emergencies.	8	12	45	35	100
3	The police handle crime investigation professionally and fairly.	20	25	35	20	100
4	Lack of proper training and equipment affects police effectiveness.	55	30	10	5	100

Source: field survey, 2025

From the responses, 80% of respondents agree that the Nigerian police force plays a key role in maintaining law and order, but only 20% believe that the police respond promptly to distress calls. Also, 85% agree that lack of training and equipment affects their performance. This implies that while the public recognizes their importance, inefficiency and poor resources affects their effectiveness

B. Conduct and Attitude of police officers

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total
5	Police officers in Egor treat citizens with respect and fairness.	10	15	50	25	100
6	Cases of bribery and extortion are common among police officers in the area.	55	30	10	5	100
7	The Nigerian police engage in unlawful use of force or brutality.	40	35	15	10	100
8	The attitude of police officers affects the public's trust in them.	60	30	7	3	100
9	Police officers are transparent and accountable in their duties.	12	18	45	25	100

Source: field survey, 2025

The above table reveals that 85% of respondents believes that bribery and extortion are common among police officers, 75% agree to the fact that police brutality exists in Egor L.G.A. About 90% of respondents has the believe that the attitude of officers strongly affects public trust. These findings highlighted the poor behavior and conduct, lack of experts and professionalism and low accountability as some major issues affecting the police image.

C. Public Trust and Relationship with the Police

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
10	I feel safe and protected under the presence of the Nigerian police.	15	20	40	25	100
11	The community has a good working relationship with the police.	18	22	35	25	100
12	The image of the Nigerian police force has improved in recent years	20	25	30	25	100
13	Public cooperation with the police can improve security in Egor L.G.A	50	35	10	5	100

Source: field survey, 2025

The above table reveals that 35% respondents feel safe under the police presence while 60% believe the relationship between police and the community is poor. However, 85% agree that public cooperation with the police could improve the security level of the society. This suggests that rebuilding trust and collaboration is essential for effective policing.

D. Institutional and external influences

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
14	The Nigerian police force in Egor L.G.A is free from corruption	5	10	55	30	100
15	Political interference affects the performance of the police	45	35	15	5	100

Source: field survey, 2025

Only 15% respondents believe the Nigerian police is free from corruption while 80% agree that political interference affects police performance. This indicates that corruption and external influences are major institutional problems affecting public confidence on the police force.

It can be concluded from the data analyzed from this research that the Nigerian police force is recognized as a major force in maintaining law and order in Egor Local Government Area. Major respondents view the police force to be corrupt, poorly equipped and trained, poor or non-responsiveness to distress calls and lacking expert officials. The public trust in the police force is very low due to bribery, brutality and misconduct. Also, it was observed by majority of the respondents that political interference and lack of accountability contribute to inefficiency within the police. However, the public believes that improved training, community partnership and discipline could help rebuild the police image.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Summary

This study examined the public perception of the Nigerian police force in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The research was carried out to understand how residents view the operations, conduct and effectiveness of the police within their communities. This study adopted a descriptive research design and utilized a simple random sampling technique to select one hundred (100) respondents from various wards in Egor Local Government Area. Data were collected through the use of structured questionnaires divided into two sections; section A containing the Bio-Data of respondents and Section B showcasing the questions relating to the research topic.

The findings of the study reveals that while the Nigerian police force plays an essential role in maintaining peace and order, the public's perception of the police force remains largely negative. Many respondents agreed that the police are not living up to the expectations of the people they are meant to protect. The study discovered that the level of trust and confidence that the residents have in the police is relatively low due to issues such as corruption, delay to distress calls and unprofessional behavior exhibited by some police officers. It was also observed that the police officers are often accused of taking bribes, intimidating innocent citizens and engaging in extortion by some police officers especially at roadblocks and during investigations.

On the other hand, few respondents acknowledged that the police force is gradually improving, especially with the introduction of community policing and public awareness campaigns. However, the majority still believes that meaningful change can only be

achieved through systematic reforms, adequate funding, strong accountability mechanisms within the police institution.

Overall, the data analysed shows that large number of respondents agreed that the Nigerian police force requires serious reformations terms of discipline, training, welfare and community engagement to regain public trust and operate effectively as an agent of security and peace.

5.2 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the perception of the Nigerian police force among residence in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State is largely unfavorable. The police, who are constitutionally mandated to maintain law and order are often seen as agents of harassment, intimidation and corruption rather than protectors of the people. This negative image has eroded the confidence of the public and weakened the relationship between the police and the citizens.

It is evident backed up from the results of this research that the Nigerian police force is constrained by multiple factors which includes poor working conditions, inadequate funding, lack of proper operational training and low morale among officers. Furthermore, the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation systems has encouraged misconduct and abuse of power by some officers without meaningful punishment. Consequently, these issues have made it difficult for the force to effectively and adequately discharge their constitutional functions and win the cooperation of the public.

However, it is important to note that the Nigerian police force remains an indispensable institution in national development. Without a functional and trusted police force, social order and public safety will be difficult to achieve. Therefore, efforts must be

made by both the government and the public to rebuild the credibility and operational capacities of the police force. Strengthening community-police relations, improving welfare packages and enhancing training and accountability will help change the negative perception that currently exists.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained from the investigations, this study recommends that:

1. There should be continuous, improved and training and retraining of police officers on modern policing techniques, human rights, ethics and community engagements. The training should emphasis professionalism, discipline and respect for citizens right.
2. There should be continuous public and police Sensitization campaigns on their rights and responsibilities, citizens should be encouraged to make reports of any misconduct of police officers they encounter and also participate actively in community security efforts.
3. The Nigerian police force must ensure to operate independently and remain apolitical in discharging their duties. Police officers should refrain from political interference and influence to ensure unbiased execution of their duties and build public confidence in their impartiality.
4. Strict disciplinary measures and actions should be established against officers found guilty of corruption and misconducts, extortions or abuse of power. The police service commission and civil service organization should collaborate to ensure transperancy in police operations.

5. The government should improve the salaries, allowances and welfare package of police personnel. They should be the provision of insurance, adequate housing, and healthcare services to motivate officers and reduce their involvements in corruptions and misconduct.
6. The government should revisit the structure of the Nigerian police force by decentralizing operations and improving coordination between federal, state and local commands as it will make policing more effective at the grassroots level.

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