PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION IN THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE AND ITS EFFECT ON CRIME CONTROL

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Abstract
Corruption within the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) remains a critical barrier to effective crime control, manifesting through bribery, extortion, unlawful detention, and selective law enforcement. Such practices erode public trust and undermine the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions. This study examines public perceptions of corruption in the NPF and its effect on crime control. Employing a quantitative descriptive survey design, data were collected from 200 respondents and analyzed using SPSS with frequencies, tables, and charts. The study is grounded in Structural Functionalism, which emphasizes how institutions maintain social cohesion, stability, and order through clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Findings indicate that both actual and perceived corruption reduce the deterrent effect of policing, discourage crime reporting, encourage underreporting, and distort official crime statistics. The study concludes that systemic corruption significantly impairs crime control in Nigeria and recommends structural reforms, strengthened internal accountability, and enhanced procedural justice to restore public trust and improve policing effectiveness.

Key words: *Accountability, Corruption, Crime control, Nigeria Police, Public trust*

Introduction

The issue of corruption is a matter that has a negative effect on any area it is found. It affects every facet of life, and the police are no different. Given the important position that the police play in society, corruption in the Nigerian police force is a major issue that requires immediate response. Society will suffer if corruption permeates the Police Force because it will alter their methods of operation. A broad definition of corruption is a distortion or a shift from good to bad. Specifically, corruption or corrupt behavior involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit (Sen, 1999 cited in Dike, 2005). Likewise, corruption involves the giving of bribe to an official, the embezzlement of public fund for personal use and any act which is considered to be a criminal act according to the law of a particular society (Uzochukwu, 2018). Nigerian police conduct is a significant political issue, and the police have emerged as significant political players as a result of their increased unionization attempts and partisan political participation. Conservatives who have publicly shown their strong support for

the police and criticized anyone who questions police behavior are their vociferous allies. However, several other people especially minority groups, opposition parties and civil libertarians have strongly criticised police behaviour (Aghemelo, et al, 2003). The police officers are sometimes charged with extrajudicial killings, bribery, corruption, violent crimes, and violations of fundamental human rights.

The police have an obligation to maintain order and combat crime in society, yet there are concerns about how well they are doing their job of preventing crime in society. Many believe that rather than resolving the issue, the cops are making it worse. People frequently complain that police officers are involved in illegal activities, extort money from drivers on the side of the road, and ignore distress calls. The Nigerian police have been blamed for these and numerous more incidents. In comparison to what it takes to sacrifice one's life, the force's compensation and reward system is likewise uninspiring. The police who are supposed to deal with criminals are frequently not passionate in their zeal of serving the country because of cheap and inadequate compensation, delayed promotions, the use of federal character in promotions, and the low public opinion of force members. In the eyes of the public, the image of the Nigerian Police is low at present and there is very little trust in the integrity of the police (Gwindah, 2023, Oluwasola, 2016). The police are meant to be seen as a sign of safety and security and a beacon of hope for the general public, but their inability to fulfill these duties has made Nigeria's crime control issues worse. The police are meant to be seen as a sign of safety and security and a beacon of hope for the general public, but their inability to fulfill these duties has made Nigeria's crime control issues worse.

Statement of the Problem

Widespread corruption has drawn further attention to the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), which is constitutionally required to uphold law and order, prevent and investigate crimes, and guarantee the safety of people and property. According to a number of publications and popular opinions, police corruption has spread throughout the force and taken several forms, including bribery, extortion, wrongful arrest, misuse of authority, and cooperation with criminals (Transparency International, 2019). The police's ability to carry out their duties is compromised by these corrupt tactics, which also seriously hinder Nigeria's judicial system. The negative impact that police corruption has on crime control is among its most serious repercussions.

Corrupt officials may fail to react correctly to criminal activities, jeopardize investigations, or release convicts in exchange for bribes. Such acts give criminal elements more confidence and fuel the growing instability in many regions of the nation. Additionally, public trust is damaged by the police's lack of accountability and openness, which discourages community participation and discourages people from

reporting crimes (CLEEN Foundation, 2020). Effective crime prevention and control are hampered by the division between the police and the people they serve. Examining the level of corruption in the Nigerian Police Force and assessing its effect on efforts to curb crime are crucial in light of these difficulties. Such a study is required to guide policy reforms intended to restore integrity, professionalism, and public confidence in the police system, in addition to adding to the body of existing material.

Objectives

1. To determine the perception of Police corruption on crime control in Benin City.
2. To ascertain the effects of Police corruption on crime control in Benin City.

Literature Review

Perception of the Nigeria Police Corruption on Crime Control

Aluyor (2005) believes that the public's awareness of high-ranking police officials' involvement in helping and abetting crime in Nigeria has severely harmed the perception of the Nigerian police. Recent events have shown that some police officers directly participate in violent crime of armed robbery and assassinations (Raphael, 2021). They typically form lethal alliances with armed robbers by aiding their evasion of the law and endangering the lives of victims who attempt to reclaim their stolen goods. It has also been shown that very senior police personnel, who profit from corruption, do not want to see the police improve. For example, police checkpoints that were initially created by the government to identify and apprehend criminals have been converted into toll collection locations. Junior officers report back to their superiors on a weekly basis as well as during holidays like Christmas and Sallah. This explains the police force's lack of discipline. The current structure of the police force and its negative reputation have led to both its subpar performance and the rise in crime in Nigeria.

Almost everyone thinks that the Nigeria Police Force is crooked, inept, and complicit in a substantial portion of the crime that afflicts Nigeria's big cities. Experts agree that the NPF is understaffed and that its employees receive very low pay, little training, and inadequate equipment. Given these factors, it is not unexpected that police frequently use vehicle stops and roadblocks to gather dash information from a large number of residents. Nor is it surprising that they are largely ineffective in investigating crimes or even in policing their areas (Pike, 2005). Can we honestly say that the low salaries of Nigerian police officers are the cause of the country's extortion of motorists? Despite earning low wages, many Nigerians choose not to commit crimes. They manage it as best they can, making do with what they have. Pike (2005) said “The root of these problems lie in the funding, staffing, training, and pay issues noted above, but also in what most respondents describe as an utterly failed formal judicial system, where ‘justice’ is available to whoever pays the most. They lie as well in the misuse of the

police for political purposes and the obvious gross corruption of the 20years of military rule. As a result, professionalism, morale, and ethics have all collapsed in the Nigeria Police Force".

If employees of other organizations commit corruption at all, they may do so cautiously but police misconduct is more often carried out in full front of the public Adebayo and Ojo (2009). The public's perception of the police has been severely damaged by this display of corrupt behaviors in the Nigerian police. Despite being a proclaimed ally of the community, the Nigerian police are, if anything, an institution that no Nigerian enjoys dealing with. The traffic duty is the one corrupt activity that exposes the police the most out of all of them. Police officers are stationed on highways to manage traffic, inspect vehicle information, and carry out other police tasks as needed. Officers and corps, however, are constantly occupied with extorting money from drivers rather than carrying out this task correctly. To avoid unnecessary delays, most commercial truck drivers actually play ball quickly at times without the policemen's demands. The fact that this behavior is carried out in public on the roadways makes the cops a laughing stock.

Adebayo and Ojo (2009) claim that unlawful bail charges are another instance of corruption that causes the police to be mocked when interacting with the people. The police would not let the suspect or suspects to be released on free bond in cases reported at police stations, particularly those involving offences that are subject to bail. Each suspect has a different bail amount, which is determined by their social standing, degree of involvement in the crime, and the type of offense. Even though no suspect should be detained in a police cell for longer than twenty-four hours unless the offense is one that is not subject to bail, defendants who are unable to pay bail remain there for as long as feasible. The police will purposefully make things difficult for suspects, even if they are aware of their rights and try to assert them.When these atrocities reached their height a few years ago, Mr. Etim Iyang, the Inspector-General of Police at the time, issued an order requiring posters bearing the phrase "Bail is free" to be displayed in every police station across the nation. Despite this, police officers do not follow the law. They continue to negotiate the bail charges just prior to the poster.

The Nigeria Police Force has a bad reputation in Nigerian society as a result of corruption. According to some, every society receives what it deserves, and the corruption in the Nigerian police is a mirror of the socioeconomic ills that plague Nigerian society. As a first step toward the force's professionalization, the new chief cop must act on his promises and wage a complete war on police corruption. Since controlling police corruption will make it much easier to deal with the hydra-headed monster (crime) engulfing the society as a whole, the new police Czar should make

corruption reduction a major cardinal point of his tenure (Onyeozili, 2005). The Nigeria Police Force was named the nation's most corrupt governmental entity by Transparency International in 2019. This impression is supported by more recent surveys. For example, according to the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2022), 73% of Nigerians think that most police officers are dishonest. According to the CLEEN Foundation (2023), bribery frequently occurs during regular checks, investigations, and bail processes.

The rise of internet extortion is a new aspect of police corruption. Instead of using traditional cash transactions, officers increasingly extract bribes through mobile banking systems (Olumide & Adeyemo, 2023). The sophistication of corrupt practices within the force is demonstrated by this modification. Numerous academics have connected low pay, a lack of accountability, insufficient training, and political meddling with the Nigeria Police Force's ongoing corruption (Okiro, 2013; SERAP, 2022). With little repercussions for violators, corrupt activities might thrive in the absence of a robust disciplinary framework. Effective crime control is severely hampered by police corruption. It results in corrupted investigations, the sheltering of criminal elements, and the release of suspects for bribery.

Ekhomu (2023) claims that internal corruption and resource mismanagement are frequently the cause of the police's incapacity to investigate violent crimes. This fosters an atmosphere in which justice is thwarted and crime flourishes. The public's waning trust in the police has been a recurrent subject in recent surveys. Afrobarometer (2022) and Ajayi (2012) highlighted that the public's impression of corruption causes them to be reluctant to report crimes. According to the CLEEN Foundation (2023), there has been a breakdown in traditional security ties as many citizens now resort to vigilante groups or community leaders rather than the police. Reforms including community policing and human rights training were introduced under the Police Act of 2020, however their implementation has mostly failed. According to SERAP (2022), significant reform has been halted by the persistence of corrupt leadership structures and the lack of independent scrutiny. Public calls for reform were brought to light by the #EndSARS movement (Akinlabi & Raimi, 2022), yet accountability is still elusive.

A multifaceted approach involving legal, institutional, and societal reforms is necessary to address the issues of systemic corruption, public mistrust, and weak accountability, which continue to undermine police legitimacy despite multiple reform attempts. The literature makes it abundantly evident that corruption in the Nigeria Police Force is a major obstacle to effective crime control. It should be regularly purged and weeded out as soon as it is discovered. However, this needs to be handled carefully to avoid becoming witch-hunting. To prevent spreading the infection, a rotten egg should be thrown out if it smells (Ayilara, 2011).

The Effect of Police Corruption on Crime Control in Nigeria

The abuse of power by law enforcement officers for their own benefit is a common definition of police corruption. One of the most harmful types of institutional malfeasance, according to Punch (2009), is corruption in law enforcement since it erodes public confidence and the rule of law. Bribery, extortion, authority abuse, and cooperation with criminals are some of the ways that Nigerian police corruption has taken on a systematic form (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004). A well-known issue that threatens the nation's criminal justice system and makes it more difficult to effectively regulate crime is corruption in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). Numerous studies, policy reports, and empirical surveys have demonstrated that police corruption in Nigeria takes many different forms, including selective law enforcement, bribery, extortion, and abuse of power, and that it has a major impact on public safety outcomes.

This review looks at recent research (2020–2024) that investigates the effects of police corruption on crime prevention in Nigeria. The decline in public confidence in law enforcement as a result of ongoing corruption is a major issue in the literature. According to Akinlabi and Murphy (2020), people are much less inclined to report crimes, ask for police help, or assist with investigations if they believe that the police are dishonest. In the end, this lack of collaboration weakens efforts to control crime by undermining the police's ability to prevent and investigate. Effective community policing is predicated on public trust, which is undermined by dishonest behavior, which disengages the populace. In a similar vein, Onyeozili and Ebbe (2023) point out that pervasive corruption undermines police credibility, leading the people to turn to vigilante organizations or unofficial legal systems. This further undermines the rule of law by frequently resulting in uncontrolled and occasionally violent methods of crime control. The underreporting of crime in Nigeria is also largely caused by police corruption. A significant portion of Nigerians refrain from reporting crimes out of fear of police extortion, inaction, or victimization, according to the UNODC's Second National Corruption Survey (2021). Official crime data are therefore inaccurate, which makes it challenging for decision-makers to evaluate crime patterns or distribute funds efficiently. According to the survey, almost 47% of people who interacted with police were solicited to pay a bribe, underscoring the pervasiveness of corruption in interactions between the police and the public.

Selective law enforcement, when laws are administered differently based on the bribe offered or the offender's social standing, is another effect of NPF corruption. Police personnel who take bribes or conspire with criminals, according to Okeshola and Mudiare (2021), give criminals more confidence, which increases criminal activity and weakens deterrence. In addition to encouraging impunity, this selective justice lowers the perceived risks of committing crimes, which makes crime rates worse. The Nigerian

police's internal accountability systems are either nonexistent or very inadequate, according to a number of academics. The CLEEN Foundation (2022) claims that because oversight organizations like the Police Service Commission frequently lack resources and independence, there is little disciplinary action taken against dishonest police. Because officials feel they will not be held accountable for their immoral actions, corruption thrives in this environment of institutional impunity. It is challenging to create long-term gains in crime control performance without strong internal controls.

Curiously, some research has also looked at how police corruption impacts the morale of law-abiding cops. According to Adegoke (2020), police officers who oppose corrupt practices frequently experience threats, marginalization, or internal pressure. This lowers incentive for aggressive crime prevention and creates a poisonous work atmosphere. The police force's professionalism is further undermined by its internal culture of collusion and silence. Broadly speaking, the Nigerian police force is routinely listed as one of the most corrupt in the nation, according to Transparency International (2023). This view has an impact on international cooperation, donor funding for security sector reforms, and domestic crime control. The reluctance of international actors to assist institutions with ingrained corruption restricts the availability of external finance and technical aid.

Theoretical Framework

The Structural Functionalism Theory, which serves as the basis for this investigation, offers a fundamental perspective on how institutions function in society to preserve cohesiveness, stability, and order. Structural functionalism, which was developed by Talcott Parsons after Emile Durkheim's writings, sees society as a complex system with interdependent components that work together to maintain social equilibrium (Parsons, 1951). According to this view, every organization in society, including the police, has defined tasks and responsibilities meant to support the smooth running of the wider social system. In this situation, the police are responsible for protecting citizens, preventing and controlling crime, upholding law and order, and enforcing the law. Harmony in society is maintained when these institutions operate well. Any systemic malfunction, such as police corruption, upsets this equilibrium and causes social issues like a rise in crime, a decline in public confidence, and a collapse of moral and legal order.

The Nigeria Police Force's ongoing corruption is a major institutional dysfunction in the country's environment. Power abuse, extortion, bribery, and protecting criminals are signs that the police are not carrying out their supposed societal duties. The legitimacy of the police is undermined and crime control is jeopardized when they do not enforce the law impartially. The social order may become even more unstable if

citizens turn to self-help or vigilante justice after losing faith in official enforcement institutions. Therefore, structural functionalism aids in the explanation of how police corruption warps the anticipated functional role of law enforcement and how this dysfunction fuels social unrest and the growth of crime. The theory emphasizes how important institutional responsibility and integrity are to attaining stable society and efficient crime management.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This method was suitable since it makes it possible to get information from a sample of people in order to ascertain their beliefs, attitudes, and actions concerning police corruption and how it affects crime prevention. It was helpful for obtaining accurate data and extrapolating results to a broader population. Residents, law enforcement personnel, and civic leaders in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State made up the study's population. Because they had direct contact with law enforcement and are either victims, witnesses, or participants in the crime control process, these groups were important. For the study, a sample of 200 respondents was chosen, and they were administered questionnaires to elicit the necessary data. Purposive and basic random sampling were combined in the sampling process. Police officers and community leaders who had firsthand knowledge or experience of the problem under investigation were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling. To guarantee equity and equitable representation, community members were chosen by simple random selection.

Table1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Police Officers and Respondents

Items	**Response**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender	Male	114	57
	Female	86	43
	Total	**200**	**100**
Age	Below 25yrs	12	6
	25 – 34yrs	91	45.5
	35 – 44yrs	52	26
	45 – 54yrs	24	12
	55 – 65yrs	19	9.5
	65yrs & above	2	1
	Total	**200**	**100**
Marital Status	Single	62	31
	Married	133	66.5
	Divorced	2	1
	Widowed	0	0
	Separated	3	1.5
	Total	**200**	**100**

Religion	Christianity	181	90.5
	Islam	19	9.5
	Others	0	0
	Total	**200**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2025

The results of Table 1 show that male made up the majority of the respondents. These respondents made up the active age group, which spans from 25 to 54 years old and accounts for 83.5 percent of the population overall. The majority of these sampled population were married and majority of sampled population were Christians.

Table 2: Perception of Police Corruption

Items	**Response**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Police officers in Nigeria often demand bribes before performing their duties.	Strongly Disagree	39	19.5
	Disagree	36	18
	Undecided	1	0.5
	Agree	33	16.5
	Strongly Agree	91	45.5
	Total	**200**	**100**
Corruption is widespread among officers at all levels of the police force	Strongly Disagree	21	10.5
	Disagree	43	21.5
	Undecided	8	4
	Agree	74	37
	Strongly Agree	54	27
	Total	**200**	**100**
Poor salary is a major reason for police corruption.	Strongly Disagree	57	28.5
	Disagree	61	30.5
	Undecided	3	1.5
	Agree	42	21
	Strongly Agree	31	15.5
	Total	**200**	**100**
Corrupt police officers are rarely punished in Nigeria.	Strongly Disagree	23	11.5
	Disagree	44	22
	Undecided	7	3.5
	Agree	102	51
	Strongly Agree	24	12
	Total	**200**	**100**
Reporting police corruption is difficult and dangerous.	Strongly Disagree	52	26
	Disagree	36	18
	Undecided	2	1
	Agree	51	25.5
	Strongly Agree	59	29.5
	Total	**200**	**100**
	Strongly Disagree	42	21

The public has lost trust in the Nigeria Police due to corruption.	Disagree	22	11
	Undecided	0	0
	Agree	64	32
	Strongly Agree	72	36
	Total	**200**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2025

Table 2 reveals that police officers collects bribe before performing their duties. Also, majority of the respondents were of the view that corruption was widespread among officers at all levels of the police force with a percentage of 37 and 27 respectively. The respondents were also of the opinion that poor salary was not a major reason for police corruption. A percentage of 51and 12 strongly agreed that corrupt police officers are rarely punished in Nigeria, making it a total of 63 percent. Likewise, most of the respondents with a percentage of 25.5 and 29.5 are of the opinion that reporting police corruption is difficult and dangerous. The result from the table shows that the general public has lost trust in the Nigeria Police due to corrupt practices.

Table 3: Effect of Police Corruption on Crime Control

Items	**Response**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Corruption in the police force makes it harder to control crime.	Strongly Disagree	11	5.5
	Disagree	19	9.5
	Undecided	12	6
	Agree	126	63
	Strongly Agree	32	16
	Total	**200**	**100**
Criminals can escape justice by bribing police officers.	Strongly Disagree	65	32.5
	Disagree	88	44
	Undecided	1	0.5
	Agree	27	13.5
	Strongly Agree	18	9
	Total	**200**	**100**
Police corruption contributes to rising crime rates in Nigeria.	Strongly Disagree	41	20.5
	Disagree	30	15
	Undecided	8	4
	Agree	49	24.5
	Strongly Agree	72	36
	Total	**200**	**100**
The police often fail to investigate crimes thoroughly due to corruption	Strongly Disagree	52	26
	Disagree	18	9
	Undecided	35	17.5
	Agree	58	29
	Strongly Agree	37	18.5
	Total	**200**	**100**

	Strongly Disagree	8	4
There is a need for urgent police reform to combat corruption	Disagree	16	16
	Undecided	0	0
	Agree	96	48
	Strongly Agree	80	40
	Total	**200**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2025

The result from table 3 reveals that corruption in the police force makes it harder to control crime. The result also reveals that criminals can escape justice by bribing police officers. Accordingly, majority of the respondents with 24.5 and 36 percent agreed and strongly agree that police corruption is a contributing factor to rising crime rates in Nigeria. Furthermore, the result from the table 3 shows that the police often fail to investigate crimes thoroughly due to corruption. It therefore means that there was a need for urgent police reform in other to combat corruption within the force.

Complementing the quantitative data, the interview conducted reveals that corruption in the society has affected the police performance in crime control. According to an interviewee "The police take bribes from people and criminals during police check points without being checked properly; simply because they settled the police. This has affected crime control because people believe they can get away with criminal act once they give money to the police and this is has affected the image of the police in particular and the country in general.".

Discussion of Findings

The study reveals that corruption is pervasive throughout the nation and affects every facet, including the Nigeria Police Force, which affects how effectively crime is controlled there. Consequently, study, also affirmed that the poor remuneration of the officers and men of police command was a propelling factor for police corruption. The finding was supported by Arase (2016) who asserted that corrupt practices undermine police performance and effective policing. The study further discovered that the police image in the eye of the average Nigerians is low because as a result high level corruption. The public hardly co-operate with the police, police officer on duty are often insulted, resisted and treated with contempt by the public. This finding aligned with Goldsmith (2005) who opined that negative public perception has impeded the ability of the police to function effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigerian society is deeply ingrained with corruption, which is a canker worm. There is still a tidal wave of corruption that continues to deprive the economy of resources for the eradication of poverty and meaningful human development, despite all the efforts made by the federal government since May 1999 in its anti-corruption campaign, including the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), which was created to investigate corrupt practices and other related offenses. It is obvious that corruption in the public and private sectors of a society will inevitably impact the police force, which is also a component of the community. We must address societal corruption from the top down, meaning that people in positions of power will not be excluded, before we can eradicate corruption in the Nigeria Police Force.

The study recommends among others, a thorough reform within the Police Force and other security organizations. This reforms will address systemic and longtime decay in the Nigeria Police Force, thereby repositioning Force for effective policing. Emphasis should be placed on the welfare of the officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force.

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