#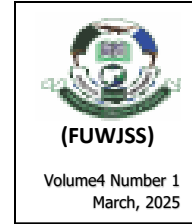 ASSESSING NIGERIA POLICE FORCE'S EFFECTIVENESS IN COMBATING CRIME IN WUKARI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The persistent ineffectiveness of the Nigeria Police Force in combating crime in Wukari Local Government Area, driven by systemic issues such as public distrust, inadequate officer remuneration, and limited victim support, undermines efforts to ensure community safety and crime prevention. The study used a descriptive, cross-sectional survey research design. A sample size of 400 respondents was selected from the total population of 374,800 using the Taro Yamane formula. At the same time, key informant interviews were also conducted with five key informants to complement the data gathered from the questionnaires. Responses from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages. Qualitative data were analyzed while outlining the key point presented by the key informant. The findings of the study revealed that the Nigeria Police Force in Wukari relies heavily on reactive measures like arrest, prosecution, and patrol while neglecting victim protection and proactive strategies, a gap compounded by systemic issues such as a significant public trust deficit and poor officer remuneration, both of which undermine community collaboration and effective crime prevention. The study concludes that arrest, prosecution and patrol emerge as the most prominent approaches use by the police in Wukari; and these methods underscore a law enforcement strategy heavily reliant on reactive measures and visible policing. The study recommends that the Nigeria Police Force should prioritize victim support, adopt community policing initiatives to rebuild trust and improve officer welfare through adequate compensation and incentives to enhance morale and reduce corruption.

Keywords: Effectiveness, police, crime, combating, victims, remuneration

Introduction

Crime and security challenges remain pivotal issues in Nigeria, affecting various aspects of the country's socio-economic and political stability. Nigeria, being the most populous country in Africa, faces a plethora of security issues ranging from armed robbery, kidnapping, and terrorism to communal clashes and cybercrime (Eze & Udeh, 2020; Obaro, 2021). These challenges are not only indicative of systemic lapses in governance but also highlight the interplay of socio-economic inequalities, political instability, and weak institutional frameworks. The nation's vast geography, coupled with its ethnic and religious diversity, complicates efforts to maintain law and order, as criminal activities often take on regional and sectarian dimensions. For instance, the northern part of Nigeria frequently grapples with insurgencies and banditry, while the southern region is plagued by oil-related crimes and cultism (Ogbo, Onwumere & Adekunle, 2019). This landscape underscores the critical need for an effective and adaptive policing strategy to address the multifaceted nature of crime in Nigeria.

Nigeria is not the only place in the globe where crime occurs. Even with its advanced policing, the United States of America continues to have an unparalleled crime rate (Alemika, (2013). Criminally inclined individuals were discovered to be involved in illegal human trafficking to Europe in France and other European countries. However, because of Nigeria's unique diversity, it is regrettable that crime in Nigeria has taken on different forms than in other nations (Alemika, (2013). Nigeria's recent spike in violent crime has raised serious concerns about societal stability in general as well as the safety of people's lives and property (Nasiru, Adams & Alumbugu, 2017).

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is constitutionally mandated to ensure the safety and security of lives and property within the nation. As the primary law enforcement agency, the NPF plays a crucial role in crime prevention and control by engaging in activities such as intelligence gathering, crime investigation, and public order maintenance (Otu & Elechi, 2015; Adebanjo & Mohammed, 2022). Despite its pivotal role, the effectiveness of the NPF has often been called into question due to challenges such as inadequate funding, corruption, and a lack of modern equipment and training. According to Adebayo (2021), the NPF's inability to combat rising crime rates effectively is partly attributed to systemic corruption, which erodes public trust and hinders effective community engagement. Furthermore, political interference and the centralization of police operations exacerbate the inefficiencies within the system, creating a significant gap between law enforcement and the communities they serve. It was in this light that Karimu (2014) and Ogundipe (2021) assert that, wealthy Nigerians have turned to

employing private security systems, which were previously foreign to the nation, to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their property because crime has escalated to such an alarming level. The criminal situation has also significantly reduced the trust that the public once had in the police, particularly in crime prevention and control.

Focusing on Wukari Local Government Area in Taraba State provides an insightful case study into the dynamics of crime and security in Nigeria. Wukari, a region marked by its rich cultural heritage and socio-political complexities, has been a hotspot for communal clashes, armed robbery, and kidnapping in recent years (Cinjel, Aboki & Danjuma, 2021). The area's ethnic diversity, dominated by the Jukun, Tiv, and other minority groups, often leads to inter-ethnic tensions, which criminals exploit to perpetuate violence and unrest (Ngbacha, 2020). Additionally, the region's agrarian economy makes it vulnerable to land disputes and resource-based conflicts, further complicating the security situation. These challenges necessitate tailored policing strategies that account for the unique socio-political and cultural dynamics of Wukari.

The interplay of security challenges and the role of the NPF in Wukari underscores the urgent need for community-oriented policing approaches. Unlike urban centers with relatively structured security frameworks, rural areas like Wukari require grassroots engagement to build trust and foster collaboration between the police and local residents. The NPF's conventional top-down approach has proven inadequate in addressing the localized nature of crime in Wukari, necessitating a paradigm shift towards more decentralized and inclusive strategies. By addressing these issues, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the NPF in combating crime in Wukari, examine the methods and strategies employed by the police and identify challenges as well as propose solutions by offering insights that could inform broader policy and operational reforms to enhance security across Nigeria.

Overview of Policing in Nigeria

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) originated during the colonial era, with its roots tracing back to the establishment of the Hausa Constabulary in 1861. Over time, various regional police units were consolidated, culminating in the establishment of a unified national force in 1930. This centralized structure was solidified after Nigeria's independence in 1960, creating a federal police system under the control of the central government (Otu & Elechi, 2015). Despite its centralized nature, the NPF faces criticism for its inefficiency in addressing local security issues. "The historical evolution of the Nigerian Police Force reflects a legacy of centralized control, which,

while intended to unify operations, often hinders responsiveness to local crime dynamics" (Otu & Elechi, 2015, p. 340).

The NPF's primary mandate is to ensure the safety and security of citizens, enforce laws, and maintain public order. These responsibilities encompass crime prevention, investigation, and prosecution of offenders. In practice, however, the NPF often struggles to fulfill these roles due to inadequate resources, poor training, and systemic corruption. Eze and Udeh (2020) argue that "effective crime control hinges on the ability of law enforcement to preempt criminal activities through proactive measures such as intelligence gathering and community collaboration" (p. 32). The NPF's traditional reliance on reactive measures rather than preventive strategies undermines its effectiveness.

The effectiveness of the NPF is often evaluated using metrics such as response time, crime resolution rates, and public trust. In many cases, response times are slow due to logistical constraints, while crime resolution rates remain low due to inadequate investigative capacity. Adebayo (2021) states that "effective policing requires timely response and a robust capacity to investigate and resolve crimes, both of which remain challenges for the Nigerian Police Force" (p. 47). Public trust in the police is also low, with many citizens perceiving the force as corrupt and inefficient. Effective law enforcement depends on the public's faith in the police since community collaboration greatly improves crime prevention and investigation. Nonetheless, the NPF is often viewed negatively by a significant percentage of the population. According to a survey by Obaro (2021), more than 70% of participants thought the police were ineffective and corrupt. Reported cases of bribery, power abuse, and extrajudicial executions frequently feed this mistrust (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Widespread discontent with the NPF, especially the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which was charged with violating human rights, was further highlighted by the 2020 #EndSARS demonstrations. People become less willing to work with law enforcement as a result of such instances, which damage public trust. To increase the NPF's efficacy, this trust must be restored.

The effectiveness of the Nigerian Police Force is severely hampered by its structural design. The NPF's centralized structure restricts its ability to respond to local security threats. Eze and Obioha (2019) point out that a one-size-fits-all policy strategy is insufficient to meet the various security requirements of Nigeria's geopolitical zones. For example, the security issues in the Niger Delta, which are distinguished by oil theft and insurgency, are very different from the Middle Belt's herder-farmer clashes. Furthermore, the police force's independence and professionalism are threatened by its politicization and misallocation of resources and manpower results from officers being deployed frequently for political reasons rather

than security requirements (Alemika, 2013). The basic goal of crime prevention and control is undermined by this political meddling.

To increase the NPF's efficacy, several reforms have been proposed, such as the 2019 Police Trust Fund Act and the creation of community policing programs. To improve information collection and crime prevention, community policing seeks to strengthen links between the police and nearby communities. Pilot community policing initiatives in Lagos and Kano states have produced some minor achievements, including a decrease in petty crimes and an improvement in police-community interactions (Onifade, Okafor & Ajayi, 2020). The Police Trust Fund Act aims to fill funding shortages by allocating more funds for welfare initiatives, equipment purchases, and training. However, analysts such as Chukwu (2021) argue that these reforms are yet to produce significant results due to poor implementation and lack of accountability. Without a comprehensive strategy to address underlying issues such as corruption and political interference, the impact of these reforms remains limited.

Technology integration in law enforcement has been recognized as a potentially revolutionary approach to combating crime. Cutting-edge equipment like data analytics, forensic labs, and surveillance cameras can greatly improve the NPF's operability. Studies, however, show that the NPF is still in the early stages of adopting technology. According to a report by Oluwadare (2020), for instance, less than 30% of Nigerian police divisions have operational ICT units. Technology-based projects, like the Police Biometric Identification System, have encountered obstacles in the form of money, technical know-how, and change-averseness. It will cost a lot of money to improve the NPF's technological capabilities, and staff members must be trained to use these tools efficiently.

The NPF's struggles and achievements in fighting crime are demonstrated by several case studies. The 2019 Operation Puff Adder campaign, for example, addressed armed robbery and kidnapping along major routes. The arrest of well-known criminal suspects was one of the operation's early triumphs, but sustainability concerns caused its influence to decline (Ejiofor, 2020). Comparably, the battle against terrorism in the northeast, especially against Boko Haram, exposes the NPF's shortcomings in handling significant security risks. The police have mostly been involved in post-conflict stabilization rather than proactive crime prevention, notwithstanding some successes in joint operations with the military (Amnesty International, 2021).

Crime Trends in Nigeria

Nigeria faces a wide spectrum of criminal activities, including armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, cybercrime, and communal conflicts. Urban

centers like Lagos and Abuja often contend with armed robbery and cybercrime, while rural areas, particularly in the North, grapple with terrorism and banditry. Communal clashes over land and resources frequently occur in regions like the Middle Belt. In this light Ogbo et al (2019) were of the opinion that "the prevalence of violent crimes across Nigeria highlights the interplay of economic deprivation, political instability, and weak law enforcement mechanisms" (p. 125).

Socio-economic disparities significantly influence crime trends in Nigeria. High unemployment rates, poverty, and illiteracy create a conducive environment for criminal activities. For example, youth unemployment drives many into armed robbery or cyber fraud. In rural areas, inadequate infrastructure and limited economic opportunities exacerbate communal violence (Eze & Udeh, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The Rotten Apple Theory (RAT) attributes organizational misbehaviour to a small number of morally deficient people, commonly known as "rotten apples." It assumes that while most members of an organization are capable and moral, a small percentage of them engage in misconduct or inefficiency. This hypothesis, which contends that eliminating these troublesome individuals restores the organization's integrity and effectiveness, has long been used to explain corruption in law enforcement (Felson, 2006). By emphasizing individual behaviour, RAT offers a framework for dealing with particular misconduct incidents without examining more general structural problems.

According to RAT, issues like corruption, incompetence, or power abuse are caused by a small number of dishonest police personnel in the Wukari Local Government Area, which affects how well the force fights crime. According to this viewpoint, among other things, identifying, expelling, or reforming these people and promoting moral behaviour are necessary to increase police efficiency. To stop "bad apples" from infiltrating or persisting, RAT can help guide measures like more stringent hiring procedures, ethical education, and frequent performance reviews. Regarding this, the theory highlights how crucial individual responsibility is to creating a more competent and efficient police force (Felson, 2006).

The Rotten Apple Theory is useful, but it falls short of tackling Wukari's larger crime control issues. It provides a clear-cut method for handling misbehaviour, but it ignores structural problems such as a lack of funding, subpar leadership, and the impact of social and political tensions on police effectiveness. A completely RAT-based strategy might result in flimsy solutions in places like Wukari, where resource limitations and social conflicts make crime control measures more difficult. To produce long-

lasting increases in the police force's ability to effectively battle crime, a more all-encompassing approach that tackles both personal responsibility and structural issues is required.

Research Methodology

The study used a descriptive, cross-sectional survey research design. A sample size of 400 respondents was selected from the total population of 374,800 using the Taro Yamane formula. Questionnaires were distributed to 400 respondents who were randomly selected across Wukari LGA. Key informant interviews were also conducted with five key informants to complement the data gathered from the questionnaires. Responses from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages. Qualitative data were analyzed while outlining the key point presented by the key informant.

Results and Discussion
Table 1: Distribution of respondents by ways Nigeria Police Force used in Combating Crime in Wukari LGA, N=395

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Arrest and prosecution	108	27.3
Participating in Court Presiding	80	20.3
Investigation	75	18.9
Protection of victim	25	6.3
Patrol	107	27.1
Total	**395**	**100**

Source: **Field Work, 2024**

The table provides an overview of the methods employed by the Nigeria Police Force in combating crime in the Wukari Local Government Area, as perceived by 395 respondents. The findings highlight that the most prominent approaches are arrest and prosecution (27.3%) and patrol (27.1%), which were nearly equally identified by respondents. These two strategies reflect a focus on reactive measures and crime prevention through visible law enforcement presence. Participation in court proceedings was cited by 20.3% of respondents, indicating the police's active role in the judicial process to ensure that offenders face legal consequences. The investigation, a critical component of effective crime-solving, was acknowledged by 18.9% of respondents, suggesting some level of police effort in uncovering facts to address criminal activities. However, the protection of victims was notably underrepresented, with only 6.3% of

respondents identifying it as a key activity. This indicates a potential gap in the police's approach to safeguarding victims, which is an essential aspect of community-oriented policing and building public trust. In summary, the data reveals a heavy reliance on enforcement-oriented strategies such as arrests, prosecutions, and patrols, while aspects like victim protection receive less attention. The findings suggest the need for a more balanced approach that integrates proactive crime prevention, robust investigations, and enhanced victim support to improve public perception and trust in the police force's effectiveness in combating crime. Findings from the key informant interview added flare to the finding One of the interviewees expressed that:

> As part of our crime-fighting strategies in Wukari, the Nigeria Police Force places significant emphasis on arresting and prosecuting offenders. This approach ensures that criminals are held accountable for their actions and serves as a deterrent to others. Additionally, we actively participate in court proceedings to support justice delivery, conduct thorough investigations to uncover the facts of cases and patrol the area to prevent crimes before they occur. While protecting victims is also part of our responsibilities, limited resources sometimes constrain this effort. Nonetheless, arrest, prosecution, and regular patrols remain the cornerstone of our crime prevention and control activities in this area (NPF, Hospital Ward Division, Wukari, 2024).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by public trust in the Police Force for Combating Crime in Wukari LGA N=395

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	107	27.1
No	288	72.9
Total	**395**	**100**

Source: **Field Work, 2024**

The table highlights the level of public trust in the Nigeria Police Force for combating crime in the Wukari Local Government Area, based on responses from 395 participants. The data reveals that only 27.1% of respondents indicated trust in the police, while a significant majority, 72.9%, expressed a lack of trust. This finding indicates a serious trust deficit between the public and the police in Wukari. Such a lack of confidence can hinder collaboration, information-sharing, and community engagement, which are essential for effective crime prevention and control. Without trust, citizens may hesitate to report crimes or cooperate with law enforcement, thereby exacerbating crime-related challenges. In summary, the data underscores the critical need for the Nigeria Police Force to rebuild

public trust in Wukari. Efforts such as improving transparency, addressing misconduct, enhancing service delivery, and fostering community engagement are vital to bridging the trust gap and improving the effectiveness of crime control initiatives. Findings from the key informant interview added flare to the finding One of the interviewees expressed that:

> The issue of public trust in the Nigeria Police Force is a significant challenge in Wukari. Many community members do not trust the police to effectively combat crime, which affects our collaboration with the public in addressing criminal activities. Some of this distrust stems from past incidents of misconduct, delays in responding to crime, or perceptions of bias. However, we are working hard to rebuild this trust through community engagement, improving our response time, and being transparent in our operations. Trust is essential for effective policing, and we recognize the need to strengthen our relationship with the people we serve. (NPF, Avyi ward, Wukari, 2024).

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by factors responsible for police ineffectiveness in combating crime in Wukari LGA, N=395

Factors	Rating (%)	
	Yes	**No**
Lack of public trust	318 (80.5)	77 (19.5)
Inducement by criminals	208 (52.7)	187 (57.3)
Bribery and extortion		
Bribery on highways	140 (35.44)	225 (64.56)
Bribery during bail	125 (31.65)	270 (68.35)
Bribery during patrol	92 (23.29)	303 (76.71)
Bribery during recruitment	38 (9.62)	357 (90.38)
Poor enumeration	298 (75.4)	97 (24.6)

Source: **Field Work, 2024**

The table provides insight into factors contributing to police ineffectiveness in combating crime in Wukari Local Government Area, as perceived by 395 respondents. The most significant factor identified is the lack of public trust, with 80.5% of respondents highlighting it as a major impediment. This underscores a serious disconnect between the police and the community, which likely affects collaboration and information-sharing, both of which are critical for effective policing. Poor enumeration was identified by 75.4% of respondents as another major factor. Inadequate compensation can demotivate officers, reduce their commitment to duty, and potentially lead to corrupt practices. This issue is compounded by 52.7% of respondents indicating that inducement by criminals is also a contributing factor, reflecting the challenges of maintaining integrity in a financially constrained environment. In contrast, various forms of bribery (on highways, during bail,

patrols, and recruitment) were perceived as less impactful, with most respondents dismissing them as significant contributors to ineffectiveness. This suggests that systemic issues, such as trust and remuneration, overshadow isolated cases of bribery in undermining police efficiency. Overall, the findings emphasize the urgent need to rebuild public trust and improve officer compensation to enhance the Nigerian Police Force's effectiveness in combating crime in Wukari. The KII section corroborates the finding. One of the key informants indicated that:

> The challenges affecting police effectiveness in combating crime in Wukari are multifaceted, but the most pressing issues are the lack of public trust and poor enumeration. Public trust is crucial for effective policing, as it fosters cooperation and information-sharing, yet many community members are reluctant to engage with us due to past experiences or perceived inefficiencies. Additionally, inadequate remuneration significantly impacts the morale and performance of officers, making it difficult to sustain motivation and commitment to duty. While issues like bribery on highways or during bail and patrols are sometimes raised, they are not as pervasive or impactful as the broader systemic problems of trust and compensation. Addressing these core issues would go a long way in improving our capacity to combat crime effectively (NPF, Bantaje ward, Wukari, 2024).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Arrest prosecution and patrol emerge as the most prominent approaches use by the police in Wukari. These methods underscore a law enforcement strategy heavily reliant on reactive measures and visible policing. Although participation in court proceedings and investigations also features prominently, the minimal attention given to victim protection raises concerns about the NPF's community-oriented policing priorities. Neglecting victim protection undermines efforts to build community trust and safety, which are critical in modern policing frameworks. Public trust affects police efficiency. This trust deficit undermines effective policing, as community cooperation and information-sharing critical components of crime prevention are diminished. Public trust is essential for effective policing, as it directly affects the willingness of citizens to report crimes and assist investigations. Factors such as police misconduct, delays in response, and perceived bias further exacerbate this issue. The key factors hindering police effectiveness in Wukari LGA are the lack of public trust and poor remuneration. These factors affect officer motivation and community collaboration, which are essential for crime control. Criminal inducement also poses a challenge, reflecting the vulnerability of police officers in a financially constrained environment.

The following recommendations are made to improve the effectiveness of the NPF in crime control:

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) should prioritize the protection and support of crime victims by establishing specialized units trained to address victim needs. This approach aligns with global best practices in community-oriented policing and would improve public trust and perceptions of police effectiveness. To rebuild trust, the NPF should adopt community policing initiatives that encourage collaboration between law enforcement and residents. Activities such as town hall meetings, regular engagement with community leaders, and neighbourhood patrols by officers familiar with the community can bridge the trust gap. Adequate compensation and welfare for police officers should be prioritized to improve morale and reduce susceptibility to corruption. Policymakers should consider revising salaries and benefits to meet contemporary economic standards and provide incentives for outstanding performance. The NPF must implement measures to improve transparency and accountability in its operations. Introducing body cameras, improving record-keeping for arrests and investigations, and establishing independent oversight bodies can help mitigate perceptions of bias and misconduct. Regular training programs focusing on investigative skills, ethics, and effective communication should be provided to officers. Capacity-building initiatives would enhance their ability to address crimes proactively and strengthen their engagement with the public, fostering a more efficient and trustworthy force.

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