

STRENGTHENING MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM AND GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES IN NIGERIAN ARMED FORCES

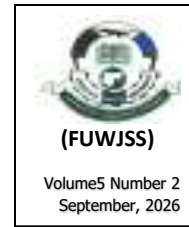
Kolade Gabriel Olubiyo

History & International Studies Programme,
College of Liberal Studies

Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria

Email: kolade.olubiyo@bowen.edu.ng,

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2984-7735>



Bamidele Babatunde Popoola

Department of Political Science and Public Administration

Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria

Email: bamidele.popoola0904@gmail.com

Abstract

Military professionalism is built on key principles, including subordinate military authority to democratic civilian leadership, loyalty to the state, and a commitment to political neutrality, all upheld by an ethical institutional culture. These principles are reflected in the core values guiding soldiers' actions, such as discipline, integrity, honour, commitment, service, sacrifice, and duty. For these values to flourish, military organizations need a clear mission, well-defined lines of authority, accountability, and adherence to protocol. Ironically, in many African countries, professional military conduct often falls short of these principles, marked by frequent coups, mutinies, desertions, human rights abuses against civilians, corruption, and involvement in illegal activities. The Nigerian Armed Forces are vital to maintaining national security; however, ongoing security challenges highlight the need for improved military professionalism. Despite efforts to professionalize under democratic governance, significant challenges remain, emphasizing the importance of learning from global best practices to implement meaningful reforms. Therefore, this study provides a comprehensive review of international best practices in military professionalism, using civil-military theories to assess their relevance and potential application in strengthening the Nigerian Armed Forces in the 21st century. This qualitative study uses critical discourse analysis of existing literature to identify key components of military professionalism, including integrity and honour, respect and discipline, merit-based promotion, strong training programmes, and accountability mechanisms, all driven by strong leadership. The paper concludes by recommending realignment of military mandate, support for soldier development, prioritization of education and training, depoliticization of military environment, and institutionalization of ethics and accountability. Hence, strong military professionalism is crucial for improving security operations in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigerian Armed Forces, Military professionalism, Global best practices, Security

Creating a culture of military professionalism requires instilling core societal values within all members of the armed forces. Such shared values have a powerful unifying effect on a military, amplifying force cohesion. - Africa Center for Strategic Studies, December 20, 2022

Introduction

The democratic experience in some African states, including Nigeria, is filled with frequent political instability, homegrown armed non-state actors, terrorism and violence. The insecurity has led to significant destruction of lives and properties, while nations are committing huge national resources to curtail it (Olabode, 2024). Individual nations often respond to these security challenges through various strategies using their security agencies. According to Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, "the Nigeria Police Force shall be the principal law enforcement agency in the country" (Constitution, 1999). This implies that law enforcement and internal security management in Nigeria are primarily the responsibility of the Nigeria Police Force.

However, the police force is overwhelmed by the magnitude of violence and threats posed by armed groups (Musa, 2019). The Nigerian police lack capacity in terms of equipment and personnel, and their credibility is compromised due to endemic bribery, extortion, and corruption, which are phenomena rated as the worst among police agencies in Africa (Ojo, 2006). As a result, public trust in the police is low, and civilians are often unwilling to report or provide useful security information, fearing it would put them at risk.

To augment the capacity of the police, Nigeria has consistently deployed the military internally to suppress insurrections and disorderliness, leveraging their superior coercive power to de-escalate violence and achieve victory over belligerents (Musa, 2019; Olubiyo, 2020). According to Sun, Sung and Chu (2007), the military's effectiveness relies on the use of maximum force, which is shaped by the culture, socialization, and habitus of its personnel. This is characterized by four key elements: authoritarianism (emphasizing discipline and subordination), hypermasculinity (reflecting the profession of arms and military ethos), formalism (manifesting in ceremonial display and etiquette), and a siege mentality (fostering cohesion and esprit de corps). However, deploying the military in an internal capacity poses significant challenges. Such challenges include the use of excessive force, militarism, and the militarization of society, as well as the restriction of citizens' civil liberties (Ivey, 2024).

Since Nigeria's Fourth Republic began, the armed forces' involvement in multiple internal security operations (ISOs) has been marred by reports of human rights abuses, impunity, corruption and other unethical behaviours by the military personnel as reported in the media (Musa and Heineken, 2022). Although this is not only peculiar to Nigeria, but in most African militaries under democratic governance, the sickening situation led Ouédraogo (2014) to describe the development as an indication of weak military professionalism. While defence and national security are core mandates of the military, the discharge of their duties is guided by ethical standards that should not be compromised.

The military's human rights abuses and mistreatment of civilians have eroded public trust, despite citizens' cooperation being vital for effective internal security operations. Critics such as Joshua, Gberevbie; and Onor (2021) argue that the military's involvement in internal security has worsened the crisis, citing its unprofessional tactics and intentional targeting of the very civilians it is supposed to safeguard. Against this background, this study examines the state of eroded military professionalism among the Nigerian Armed Forces. It draws lessons from global best practices to enhance performance amid the numerous challenges facing the country. This study recognizes that military organizations in any nation emerged as a necessity for defence and national security, but must be guided by core principles of professionalism for effectiveness and efficiency.

The study is structured into nine sections. Section one introduces the background to the study, section two conceptualizes the concept of military professionalism, while section three provides theoretical frameworks underpinning an ideal military professionalism in a democratic setting. Section four discusses the methodology; section five examines the statutory responsibility of the Nigerian Armed Forces, while section six highlights the core principles of the military profession by gauging the extent to which these are upheld in the Nigerian military. Section seven discusses the obstacles to the professionalization of the military, section eight highlights the lessons for the Nigerian military, and section nine concludes.

Conceptualizing Military Professionalism

A plethora of studies have provided deep insights into the professionalism of the military globally, considering its security roles. Samuel P. Huntington's '*The Soldier and the State*' sparked the debate on the professionalism of the military in the mid-twentieth century. According to Huntington (1981), professionalism in the military encompasses mastering the art and science of warfare, technical expertise, and overall military conduct. He describes the military as a peculiar functional group with highly specialized characteristics in the management of violence. This

perspective is supported by Janowitz (1960; 270) when he posits that professional officers are responsible for "directing the application of violence under certain prescribed conditions. Even though the central argument of Huntington is that soldiers have a social responsibility to serve society as experts, bound by oaths and high ethical standards. He underplayed the importance of public service ethos, skill structure, and internal cohesion in military professionalism. The proficiency to achieve and maintain a high standard is through strict discipline, dedication, and the skills required in warfare, along with ongoing training and professional military education to keep soldiers proficient in their field.

In modern times, military professionalism has transcended beyond technical expertise to values, principles, and standards of behaviour. Professional military personnel aspire to uphold specific norms and ideals, which shape officer/soldier identity and guide behaviour. These norms evolve through shared understandings within the military field and dictate appropriate conduct. They establish expectations for men and officers' behaviour, defining what it means to act professionally and shaping individual identity. While these norms are broadly shared, they may not always be explicitly articulated, yet they influence behaviour and decision-making.

In line with values and norms, Ouédraogo (2014) defines military professionalism as the standards of conduct upheld by armed forces members committed to serving the public, to subordination to democratic civilian authority, to allegiance to the constitution, to political neutrality, and to respect for the rule of law and human rights. Therefore, professionalism is essential in the military, where discipline, commitment, and skill are vital for effective performance. Military professionalism not only involves specialized knowledge, ongoing training, and practice but also the upholding of standards and values, which are important for providing high-quality service and maintaining a strong reputation. Globally, military professionalism rests on three pillars: character development, fighting power, and professional military education.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical constructs on military professionalism are largely based on Civil-Military Relations (CMR) and institutional frameworks. Two scholars whose works gained wider currency in this field of study are Samuel P. Huntington and Morris Janowitz. Samuel P. Huntington propounded the theory of Objective Civilian Control in his work: *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military* (1957). The central focus of his construct is to limit the power and authority of the military-to-military matters. Simultaneously, it also requires civilians to stay out of the military

realm, voluntarily self-limiting themselves to their domain. This creates an impermeable layer between the two domains, demarcating the division between civilians and the military, thereby balancing liberal politics and military professionalism. On the other hand, Morris Janowitz in *The Professional Soldier* (1960) popularized Convergence Theory, which seeks to establish civilian control but by blurring the distinctions between military and civilian realms, without erasing their inherent differences. Janowitz stresses the need for military leadership that shares civilian values, which could lead to civilian dominance through shared values.

Although Huntington and Janowitz presented their theories over half a century ago, much has changed in contemporary times, making the question of professionalism more complex. Scholars like Rebecca L. Schiff, Michael Desch, and Peter Feaver offer new perspectives on civil-military relations and military effectiveness in democratic regimes, providing alternative approaches to military professionalism in post-Cold War Western democracies. This study draws on two constructs: Concordance Theory and Civilian Control of the Military. The survey highlights key aspects of CMR in strengthening military professionalism, and analyzing these theoretical models is crucial for drawing relevant lessons. Each is discussed briefly below:

Rebecca L. Schiff popularized Concordance Theory in her works “Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance (1995) and *The Military and Domestic Politics: A Concordance Civil-Military Relations* (1998). Schiff’s Concordance theory offers an alternative perspective on civil-military relations, challenging the assumption that civilian and military worlds must be separate. Focusing on the conditions that prevent military intervention in domestic politics, Schiff argues that three key institutions - the military, political elites, and citizenry - should aim for cooperative arrangements on four indicators, which are social composition of the officer corps, political decision-making processes, military recruitment methods, and Military style (Schiff, 2009). She contends that when these institutions agree on these indicators, domestic military intervention is less likely. In her opinion, cooperation can be fostered through dialogue, accommodation, and shared values among the military, political elites, and society, which can effectively discourage military interference in politics. Schiff applies this theory to six case studies, including the US, Israel, Argentina, India, and Pakistan. Concordance Theory has also been applied to emerging democracies, where coup threats are more immediate, offering a nuanced understanding of civil-military relations beyond the traditional separation model.

Michael Desch, in his work *Civilian Control of the Military* (1999) formulates a structural theory of civil-military relations that makes

predictions about the strength of civilian control based on the degree of internal and external threat faced by a given society (Desch, 1999). He introduced a nuanced approach to civil-military relations when he propounded civilian control of the military. He suggests a thin, permeable layer between political structures and military instruments, challenging the notion that military autonomy and professionalism are inherently virtuous. Instead, it advocates for institutional mechanisms and proactive civilian interventions to ensure civilian dominance in shaping, managing, and implementing military policy. This model allows for substantial military autonomy in technical and operational spheres (how to fight wars) in exchange for complete subordination to civilian control over politics and grand strategy (when, and whether, to fight). The layer between the two domains is thin and permeable, permitting exceptional civilian intervention in the military realm and vice versa, while envisioning a limited scope for the military to act politically.

In democratic governments, civilian control of the armed forces is non-negotiable. However, the global trend is shifting towards incorporating military opinion through increased representation, interfaces, and tolerating dissent in policy formulation, while civilians acquire domain expertise. In the post-Cold War era, Western states prioritize building flexible militaries with cutting-edge hardware, adaptable force structures, and tailored personnel policies. This enables swift responses to unpredictable crises, often alongside allies in "coalitions of the willing". Yet, maintaining such capabilities requires advanced technology. Western democracies like the US, UK, Germany, and France have achieved democratic stability with professionalized militaries. The Nigerian Armed Forces can draw valuable lessons from these models, particularly amidst current security challenges, to enhance core military professionalism.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a critical discourse analysis of existing literature to identify key components of military professionalism, which include integrity and honour, respect and discipline, merit-based promotion, strong training programmes, and accountability mechanisms, all driven by strong leadership. Secondary data were sourced from books, journal articles, newspapers, academic literature, government reports, media articles, and policy documents. The data were analyzed thematically to gain insights into the research theme. This qualitative study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by drawing lessons from best global practices of military professionalism in Western democracies, informing the Nigerian Armed Forces' approach to addressing Nigeria's complex security challenges and proposing potential solutions.

Statutory Responsibility of the Nigerian Armed Forces

The Nigerian Armed Forces, like any armed forces, comprises the army, navy, and air force, which work together to defend the state. Historically, aside from the air force, which was established in 1964, the other two branches—the army and navy—were inherited from the colonial government at independence in 1960 (Gbor, 2004; Lawal & Ilyasu, 2019). Undoubtedly, as a state institution, the military's loyalty to colonial authority was transferred to the Nigerian state during the First Republic. According to Gbor (2004), the subordination of the military to the newly independent government marked the beginning of military professionalism in Nigeria, only to be disrupted by the military coups of 1966, the civil war, and prolonged military rule. This was echoed by Ogomudia (2007), who also argued that betrayal of trust and violation of the Constitution marked the start of the decline of military professionalism in Nigeria, representing a dangerous misuse of military power for selfish purposes. Indeed, military involvement in politics betrayed their neutrality by becoming insubordinate and disloyal to civilian authority. Instead of protecting citizens, they targeted fellow citizens, failing in their duty to defend lives and property.

The extended years significantly impacted military professionalism in areas such as training and civil-military relations. Central to military professionalism is regular and continuous training for personnel in both military and civilian institutions, locally and internationally. Consistent tactical training and exercises are crucial for developing core competencies within the military. These trainings ensure soldiers are prepared, equipped, and supported to carry out their missions effectively. The main objectives of such training include building capacity, fostering a deep understanding of military culture, and adapting to societal changes. Furthermore, these trainings reinforce core military values such as integrity, honor, expertise, sacrifice, and respect for civilians.

In the summation of Gbor (2024), despite several military training institutions being established during the long years of military rule, the merit system had no place as training opportunities were unevenly distributed, favouring a privileged few at the expense of others. In addition, maintenance of military equipment and personnel's welfare received the least attention, thereby having a devastating impact on the character of the military and its personnel's morale. As such, essential virtues such as loyalty to the state, selfless service, honour, and integrity were eroded and overshadowed by personal gain. It is worth noting that under the military rule, there was a high incidence of impunity, human rights abuses and corruption by the privileged officers and men. All these had a cumulative effect that significantly strained

civil-military relations, creating a complex and challenging dynamic in the face of security challenges.

By 1999, when the military transitioned power to the civilian regime, professionalism within the armed forces had become weakened. The armed forces' ability to perform their national defence roles became questionable. This spurred Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's administration to devise strategies to re-professionalize the military, particularly to keep the institution out of politics and redirect its focus on its primary roles of defence and national security. For example, Obasanjo's administration strategically removed all top military officers and retired those who had held political office since 1976. Additionally, the reintroduction of civilian control was reflected in the Federal Executive Council, where a civilian was appointed as the Minister of Defence to oversee the ministry. The administration also promoted regular training and adherence to guidelines for promotions, retirements, and postings.

Nigeria's internal security crisis, since the start of democracy, has kept the military constantly involved in various operations. Historically, the Nigerian armed forces have mainly participated in international peacekeeping missions and the Nigerian Civil War, with only limited roles in internal security. Notable exceptions include the Tiv Riot (1963), the *Maitasine* uprisings of the early 1980s, and several other ethnic and religious crises in northern Nigeria. Usually, maintaining internal peace is the police's responsibility, which makes these military deployments unusual. The military's involvement in the Odi and Zaki-Biam incidents in Bayelsa and Benue State, respectively, marked the beginning of military internal security operations since Nigeria's return to democratic rule (Albert, 2003; Obi-Ani, 2008). The extent of military involvement in extrajudicial killings and human rights abuses in these operations revealed serious flaws in military professionalism.

Militaries collapsing in the face of attacks by irregular forces, coups, mutinies, looting, human rights abuses against civilian populations, corruption, among others, have become prevalent in the African continent since the twenty-first century. Quedraogo (2014) sees all these as an indication of weak military professionalism on the continent; hence, weak military professionalism perpetuates instability, poverty, and deterred investment, with complex reasons largely stemming from political incentives and colonial-era legacies. Quedraogo contends that to break this cycle, sustained initiatives are needed to address fundamental political disincentives to reform and establish constructive civil-military relations, including national security reviews and integrating missions into a comprehensive defence policy. Strengthening military professionalism requires addressing political and military leaders, robust oversight

mechanisms, and active engagement from civil society, the media, and legislators to ensure accountability and promote norms of constitutionalism, integrity, and respect for human rights.

Lawal and Ilyasu (2019) argue for education and training PME as the veritable tools that could transform civilians into military professionals and reinforce professionalism. Musa and Heinecken (2022) analyze the impact of military unprofessionalism on civil-military relations and citizens' security in Nigeria, focusing on armed conflict and military abuse. The study argues that the Nigerian military's unprofessional conduct, combined with a lack of civil control, weakens internal security efforts, reduces trust, and increases citizen insecurity. This study is restricted to civil-military relations in the crisis area without recourse to other aspects of professionalism. Given the contributions of these studies, this study diverges from existing research by examining the weakened state of military professionalism in the Nigerian Armed Forces amidst security conundrums. Hence, strengthening military professionalism will improve security operations and but through lessons from global best practices.

Gauging the Principles of Military Profession in the Nigerian Armed Forces Using Best Global Practice

McKinlay (1971) assert that a professional armed force is characterized by five key criteria, also supported by Huntington (1981): These are specialized knowledge acquired through military education and training; autonomy to operate within their professional domain; a sense of corporateness that fosters cohesion; internal controls that regulate member behaviour; and a professional social ethic that prioritizes serving society's broader interests over personal gain.

Professional Training and Conduct: The first notable among the core principles of military professionalism is specialized knowledge acquired through military education and training. According to Huntington (1981), the foundation of any profession lies in the education, training, and development that members of the profession receive. The military profession is unique in that it monopolizes the knowledge and skills related to the management of collective violence. However, modern militaries are tasked with a wide range of responsibilities, including protecting civilians and upholding the principles of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). In reality, most armed forces serve to protect, help, and safeguard civilians, rather than solely engaging in warfare. Despite this shift, militaries are often not adequately trained, equipped, or prepared for these diverse roles, which require restraint in the use of force. Typically, their training and socialization lead them to acquire a military habitus, or mindset, geared towards confronting an enemy with aggression and the use of force.

The Nigerian military's training and equipment, while suitable for conventional warfare, are not well-suited for policing and law enforcement roles. This mismatch leads to excessive force and human rights abuses, as noted by Joshua, Gberville, and Onor (2021). The military's conventional mindset, focused on external enemies, hinders its ability to respond appropriately in internal deployments, resulting in strained civil-military relations. A key issue is the lack of conflict resolution skills among soldiers, which often leads to the use of violence as a default response. This is reflected in the way soldiers interact with civilians, particularly at military checkpoints, where corporal punishments and dehumanizing treatment are common (Musa and Heineken, 2022). Such actions demonstrate a disregard for due process and human rights, and serve to "other" civilians as if they were enemies (Musa and Heineken, 2022; 8). The consequences of these actions are severe, with human rights abuses and public protests calling for the military's withdrawal from certain areas.

Autonomy, Subordination to Civil Control and Oversight: The second dimension of military professionalism is autonomy, specifically self-governance and organizational functioning, as noted by Downes (1985). However, this autonomy is tempered by the need for subordination to higher political authority, given the potential risks and dire consequences of abuse of coercive power. A key aspect of this dimension is the relationship between the military and civilian authorities, with the military being subject to civil oversight and control. This ensures accountability and adherence to democratic principles. Professional soldiers are expected to maintain a distance from politics, refraining from intervening in political affairs to advance the interests of the military establishment. To Barany (2012), the military's commitment to neutrality and support for democratic authority is crucial for democratic self-correction and consolidation to succeed. When the military intervenes in politics, sacrificing professionalism for political expediency, it can undermine its professional status and legitimacy, a phenomenon known as praetorianism (Perlmutter & Bennett, 1980). Maintaining a balance between autonomy and civil oversight is crucial for ensuring military professionalism and upholding democratic values. This balance allows the military to operate effectively while remaining accountable to the society it serves.

The Nigerian military's considerable autonomy has led to instances of acting beyond its mandate, highlighting the need for effective civil control and civilian oversight. Although the Constitution (1999) grants the President and parliament oversight powers, in reality, these mechanisms are weak. The lack of political will to enforce the military's adherence to its professional ethos, respect for human rights, and compliance with the Constitution has resulted in the military operating as a "state-within-the-state" (Lambert,

2009). This lack of accountability has enabled predatory and extra-legal actions by the military to go unchecked. The military's significant political power, with many former members serving in government, contributes to this issue (Adekanye, 2020). Also, the close allegiance between military and political leaders undermines civil control, making it challenging to hold the military accountable for its actions (Adeakin, 2015). The absence of consequences for past atrocities, such as the Odi, Zaki Biam, and Shiites massacres, demonstrates the lack of desire to ensure the military acts within its professional limits.

Corporateness: The third principle of military professionalism is corporateness, which encompasses loyalty to the institution and profession, as well as the absence of conflicts and cleavages within the military. According to Downes (1985), group solidarity, interdependence, and teamwork are essential functional requirements for combat effectiveness and are integral to the military's corporate identity. This sense of corporateness is characterized by a shared sense of organic unity and consciousness among personnel, bound by a common purpose and unique social responsibility (Huntington, 1981). It is this collective identity that enables military personnel to work together seamlessly, relying on each other's strengths and expertise to achieve common objectives. The importance of corporateness in the military cannot be overstated. As noted by Guy L. Siebold (2007), it is critical for mission success. In essence, corporateness is a vital component of military professionalism, and its development and maintenance are essential for ensuring the effectiveness and success of military operations.

In Nigeria, the concept of corporateness within the military is problematic on two fronts. When accused of wrongdoing, military personnel often close ranks to protect their own. Despite their supposed corporate identity, teamwork, and cohesion, ethnic cleavages within the ranks lead to a lack of internal unity. These divisions influence how military personnel execute their mission, sometimes leading to favoritism towards certain groups. This strains relationships between civilians and soldiers and exacerbates insecurity. In response to perceived protection gaps, some groups have formed or joined vigilante groups, seeking security from both armed groups and the military. However, these vigilante groups operate outside state control, further destabilizing the security situation.

Internal Controls and Enforcement of Internal Affective Neutrality: The fourth dimension of military professionalism involves a system of controls that regulates the conduct of military personnel. According to McKinlay (1971), this system encompasses the enforcement of internal controls and the development of self-controls among members, as well as internal impartial criteria that govern appointment, promotion, and standards within the profession. A critical component of this system is the military justice

system and disciplinary codes, which hold personnel accountable for violating behavioral standards. Effective leadership and a functional chain of command are essential for promoting discipline and accountability within the military (Ouédraogo, 2014). However, the integrity of this system can be compromised when internal controls are not enforced or when appointments and promotions are based on factors such as ethnicity, religion, or political allegiance, rather than merit. This can lead to a culture of mediocrity, undermining the professionalism and effectiveness of the military. As Ouédraogo notes, "a military organised around ethnic or tribal biases cannot defend the republic, much less the population," and will "lack the popular trust, legitimacy and competency of a merit-based force, hindering its effectiveness" (Ouédraogo, 2014). Therefore, a merit-based system is crucial for ensuring that the military operates with professionalism, accountability, and effectiveness.

The Nigerian military's system of controls, intended to regulate personnel conduct, is ineffective. Erring soldiers are rarely prosecuted or held accountable, and reports of misconduct are often not made public (Alaga & Akum, 2013). Atrocities like the Shi'ites massacre, Odi, and Zaki Biam massacres remain unaddressed, suggesting military leadership condones human rights abuses. The failure to enforce internal controls has led to a culture of impunity among soldiers, who often act unprofessionally and without discipline, while citizens suffer the consequences without recourse to justice. Furthermore, active-duty personnel commonly abuse substances like alcohol, Indian hemp, and marijuana during working hours. This substance abuse leads to ill-discipline, altered judgment, and aggressive behavior, compromising military effectiveness and performance. Soldiers under the influence of substances are prone to making poor security judgments and decisions, which undermines effectiveness and performance. The relationship between soldiers and substance-abusing youths further exacerbates the problem, as soldiers befriend and collude with these individuals to ensure a regular supply of substances.

The lack of accountability and substance abuse among soldiers undermines the military's ability to perform its duties effectively. It also erodes trust between the military and civilians, highlighting the need for reform and improved accountability within the military. The absence of effective internal controls and discipline has severe consequences for both the military and civilians, emphasizing the need for systemic change.

Professional Social Ethics and External Affective Neutrality: The fifth dimension of military professionalism is the development of a professional social ethic and external affective neutrality. Given the military's significant responsibility and virtual monopoly on the execution of collective violence, it has a critical obligation to use its power in the best interest of the

community (McKinlay, 1971). A professional social ethic in the military context entails a commitment to self-sacrificing and selfless service to society. This means that military personnel should prioritize societal goals over personal or organizational interests, demonstrating a genuine dedication to serving the greater good. As Downes notes, "the military profession, perhaps more than any other profession, must seek to convince society and those elected to govern that the profession is motivated by the ethic of self-sacrificing and selfless service" (Downes, 1985). In addition to this professional social ethic, the military must also maintain external affective neutrality. This requires adopting a non-partisan stance to party politics in the conduct of operations, ensuring impartial and apolitical behaviour. Effective civil oversight is indispensable to guarantee that military personnel act under these principles, avoiding any perception of bias or partisanship (McKinlay, 1971).

The Nigerian military often falls short of exhibiting a professional social ethic and responsibility to protect. Some soldiers lack commitment to their mission, particularly when divisions exist within the military or between the military and civilians. At checkpoints, soldiers sometimes express disdain for civilians, stating they're unwilling to sacrifice themselves for "bloody civilians." This attitude highlights a lack of professional social ethic and external affective neutrality, undermining the oath to serve and defend the state and its citizens.

The military's rent-seeking behaviour further erodes its professional social ethic. Soldiers frequently extort money from commuters at checkpoints, prioritizing personal gain over security checks. This practice has become synonymous with military checkpoints, with many associating them with extortion rather than security measures. Commercial vehicle drivers, such as taxi and truck drivers, are often targeted, with soldiers delaying their journey until a bribe is paid. Soldiers often target haulage trucks and vans, threatening thorough searches to extort money from drivers. This tactic takes advantage of the drivers' concern for perishable, fragile, or expensive goods, which can be damaged or lost due to delays. Civilians have come to accept bribery as a "mutual benefit" to avoid checks and delays. However, this practice has severe security implications. By accepting bribes, soldiers enable illegal goods and weapons to pass through checkpoints unchecked. This compromises the safety and security of civilians and undermines the military's role in maintaining law and order.

Given the above five variables, the literature and empirical studies reveal the unethical practices of the Nigerian armed forces, which contravene the principles of military professionalism. This has, in turn, undermined the complex security situation in the country.

Obstacles to Achieving Military Professionalism in Nigeria

Despite the concerted government efforts to achieve military professionalism in Nigeria, the task is laden with several obstacles rooted in its historical and political context. First and foremost, the Nigerian Armed Forces is a legacy of colonialism, which was originally designed to protect the government from its citizens rather than serving the citizens' interests. (Ukpabi, 1980; Ouedraogo, 2014). The recruitment, orientation and mandates became dysfunctional, a pattern that persisted into the post-colonial era. Addressing these trends has been difficult, and has been worsened by prolonged military rule in the country.

Also, politicization of the military has been a major obstacle to professionalism. Since 1966, privileged military leaders and officers have often resisted democratic transitions and majority rule; instead, they prioritized the acquisition of power and wealth. This was obvious with a series of unending transition programmes embarked upon by the regimes of General Gowon, Babangida and Abacha, a ploy to perpetuate them in power. While power and wealth remained the ultimate, there was little or no attention to training, expertise and equipment maintenance, all of which are key to an effective military. The absence of systematic checks and balances has allowed the interweaving of political, military, and economic interests to endure, fostering widespread corruption.

The military has become a class within the democratic system. Control of the military has become a means to power and wealth, leading to ongoing competition and collusion between politicians and security leaders. This is a major factor in the military struggle for appointment, promotion and deployment under a democratic dispensation.

Weak operational capacity in the military is an obstacle to professionalism in Nigeria. This has manifested in the following areas:

- a) Gaps in the chain of command, leading to indiscipline and a lack of accountability. A functional chain of command is essential for military institutions, promoting discipline, accountability, and effective leadership. However, in Nigeria, gaps in the chain of command have led to indiscipline and disconnect between official policy and actions on the ground. For instance, in northern Nigeria, soldiers fighting *Boko Haram* insurgent groups have been accused of committing atrocities against civilians (Adam Nossiter, 2013). The disconnect between official military policy and the actions of the 'rank and file' raises concerns about accountability and leadership. Senior military leaders' inability to explain these actions suggests a breakdown in command and control, highlighting the need for improved leadership, discipline, and accountability within the military.

- b) Inadequate oversight of procurement practices, which can result in corruption and inefficiencies. African militaries are typically governed by legislative texts, including staff regulations and disciplinary codes. However, gaps in the chain of command and disciplinary protocols often lead to impunity for criminal acts committed outside barracks. This perpetuates a culture of lawlessness, reinforcing the perception that military personnel are above the law. The resulting impunity undermines the military's reputation and fosters deviant behavior among troops.
- c) Weak resource management, hindering the military's ability to carry out its duties. Nigerian armed forces struggle with effective management of human resources, equipment, and logistics, which hinders their ability to maximize limited resources and compromise operational effectiveness. This lack of sound management capacity is evident at all levels, ultimately undermining the military's performance.
- d) Diminishing operational capacity, which can erode the military's ability to respond to threats. Inadequate oversight of procurement practices is a significant issue in many African militaries. Despite large budgets, troops often face poor living conditions, low pay, and limited opportunities for advancement. Corruption in procurement processes has led to allegations of inferior equipment and diversion of supplies, further eroding trust and compromising military effectiveness. For instance, Twelve Billion Naira (N12B) were spent on barracks rehabilitation and construction in the 2012 budget, yet many barracks remain in disrepair (Daily Trust, 2013, March 18). The lack of transparency and oversight in military spending has raised concerns, with allegations of corruption and mismanagement. The absence of legislative oversight and civil society scrutiny has contributed to this problem.
- e) Poor morale, affecting the motivation and performance of personnel. Poor morale plagues African militaries, despite producing competent and professional officers trained in top military schools. However, these officers often struggle in environments where competence and professionalism aren't rewarded, leading to stagnation and demotivation. This has sparked desertion and mutinies among the troops fighting the *Boko Haram* insurgent groups. Corruption allegations against senior commanders further erode morale and encourage corrupt practices among lower ranks. Inadequate support, equipment, and paltry pay force soldiers to extort from locals or engage in profit-oriented activities to survive, undermining their effectiveness and reputation.

This has weakened the military's capacity and bred deep-seated fear and distrust among the general population.

Strengthening Military Professionalism Through Lessons for Global Best Practice

According to the Center for Strategic Studies (2022), military professionalism does not emerge by chance but is a dedicated outcome. It is not the result of a single event or temporary push that builds professionalism and then produces benefits indefinitely. Rather, it must be constantly reinforced, refined, and perpetuated. Military professionalism is a culture that must be institutionalized to reverberate within a force. Therefore, the following are lessons from the best global practices in strengthening the Nigerian military for effective operations.

- Realigning the military's mandate for modern security challenges. The Nigerian government must reassess its security sectors and realign its military to match actual threats. Integrating new missions into comprehensive defence policies will enhance operational capacity. The Nigerian Armed Forces often struggle to respond effectively to modern security challenges due to outdated designs and organizational structures. Originally intended to counter external aggression, they are increasingly tasked with addressing non-traditional threats like internal conflicts, terrorism, and transnational crime. This mismatch between structure and function contributes to ineffectiveness, poor human rights records, and a lack of professionalism. Deploying military forces for policing activities has led to gross human rights abuses and erosion of professionalism.
- Redefining the military's mission by aligning its role with the country's actual security needs, ensuring it is apolitical, accountable, capable, and affordable (Matlosa, 2005). This requires streamlining the armed forces for efficiency and responsiveness, focusing on specific areas like anti-terrorism and maritime piracy, as practiced in most advanced democracies (Barany, 2012). It also involves coordinating with other security sector actors and government agencies, defining clear roles, and having the military play a supporting role in domestic counter-terrorism, while police and intelligence agencies take the lead (Barany, 2012). This approach optimizes the military's effectiveness, promotes interagency collaboration, and enhances overall security.
- Supporting soldier development is crucial for the military. By prioritizing manpower development, the military will build competency, compassion and become a respected unit that

effectively defends and protects citizens. This involves shifting focus towards constabulary and counterinsurgency operations, where soldiers develop deep knowledge of local communities, build trust and respect, and foster strong relationships. Emphasis on integrity, skill, dedication, loyalty, and sacrifice is essential in professionalizing the armed forces. Investing in smaller, better-trained, and equipped forces can contribute to building pride and greater professionalism, while raising the calibre of recruits. This approach enables militaries to preempt security threats, respond effectively, and serve their communities with distinction.

- Prioritizing education and training is vital for African militaries. By valuing academic qualifications and combat training for advancement and promotion, militaries can build a more professional and effective force. Professional military education not only enhances operational capabilities but also improves the military's reputation with the general population. Provision of equal access to education, the military can model equity, build a sense of ownership across communities, and foster a more educated security sector. This, in turn, enables personnel to demonstrate restraint, judgment, and adaptability in addressing complex security challenges, ultimately leading to more effective and responsible security operations.
- De-politicizing the military environment requires a clear framework that defines the roles of military and political actors, ensuring transparency and accountability. This involves establishing strictures on political behavior, providing ethics training for legislators, and clarifying the chain of command in various situations. A well-defined framework would outline the military's role in decision-making, specify acceptable levels of political involvement by military brass, and establish mechanisms for civil-military relationships. It would also include review and revision of national security sector legislation to clarify roles and mandates of different institutions, define mediating mechanisms for disagreements, and specify sanctions for politicians who attempt to subvert these authorities.
- Civil-military collaboration requires a transparent and collaborative environment where civilian and military leaders work together effectively. Civilian leaders should clearly explain the defence budget and security strategy to military leaders, while military leaders should provide their expertise and advice to inform decision-making. A robust legislative involvement in defence issues is essential for democratic civil-military relations (Barany, 2012).

Regular dialogue and compromise between civil and military actors can enhance prospects for successful democratic consolidation and civilian control over the military.

Furthermore, partnerships with the international community and civil society can play a crucial role in promoting security sector reform and democratic values. An active and informed civil society, coupled with a free media, can help build trust and confidence between the military, society, and the state.

To achieve this, military personnel need to learn how to communicate effectively with the media and civil society, and media training can help build constructive relationships and ameliorate mistrust.

- Institutionalize ethics and accountability into military culture - Security is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond the military to include other ministries, the judicial branch, the legislature, and civil society. A professional army must maintain relationships with all key security actors to perform its duties effectively. To achieve this, the military must institutionalize an ethical and accountable culture, building trust and respect with society.

In the first place, strengthening military discipline and duty is crucial, particularly in addressing human rights abuses. African military courts have been inefficient and ineffective in prosecuting perpetrators, and military leadership should prioritize strengthening the military judicial system to restore discipline and ensure compatibility with human rights standards.

Secondly, rewarding integrity and strengthening accountability are also essential. This can be achieved by changing incentives within the armed forces, making integrity a prominent criterion in personnel promotions, appointments, and rewards. Human rights values and codes of conduct should be reinforced through training and education, and opportunities for corruption should be minimized (Pyman, 2011).

Additionally, procurement processes require competent professionals and strict adherence to sound procedural structures. Centralized procurement offices outside of the military can establish an additional layer of accountability, and involving civil society in corruption-prone areas like procurement can boost transparency and integrity.

Internal dysfunctions can be remedied by strengthening the oversight role of military inspection services, making them more autonomous and populated with a mix of military and civilian auditors, lawyers, and policy analysts. A well-defined ethical framework is also necessary, outlining codes of conduct, values, and behaviour expected of military personnel. Creating a military ombudsman as an independent oversight mechanism can enhance accountability and responsiveness. This office should have

operational independence, substantial political authority, and be staffed by civilians with relevant expertise.

Ultimately, strengthening parliamentary oversight and institutionalizing external audits can enhance internal governance and accountability. Legislatures have a constitutional mandate to monitor defense spending, and external audits can help prevent corruption and mismanagement. Building stronger civilian oversight is essential for instilling military professionalism.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examines the erosion of military professionalism in Nigeria's armed forces, highlighting its profound impact on civil-military relations and citizen security. The lack of professionalism is attributed to various factors, including the country's historical and political context, politicization of the military, and weak operational capacity. The Nigerian military's involvement in internal security operations has been marred by reports of human rights abuses, impunity, and corruption, which have strained civil-military relations and eroded public trust. To strengthen military professionalism, lessons can be drawn from global best practices. Firstly, realigning the military's mandate to match actual security threats is crucial. This involves redefining the military's mission, streamlining its role, and ensuring it is apolitical, accountable, capable, and affordable. Secondly, supporting soldier development is vital, focusing on building competency, compassion, and respect for citizens. This can be achieved by prioritizing manpower development, emphasizing integrity, skill, dedication, loyalty, and sacrifice, and investing in smaller, better-trained, and equipped forces. Thirdly, prioritizing education and training is essential, valuing academic qualifications and combat training for advancement and promotion. Professional military education can enhance operational capabilities, improve the military's reputation, and foster a more educated security sector. Additionally, depoliticizing the military environment requires a clear framework that defines the roles of military and political actors, ensuring transparency and accountability. Furthermore, institutionalizing ethics and accountability into military culture is critical. This involves strengthening military discipline and duty, rewarding integrity, and minimizing opportunities for corruption. Strengthening parliamentary control and institutionalizing external audits can also improve internal governance and accountability. By adopting these strategies, the Nigerian military can improve its effectiveness, build trust with citizens, and enhance national security. Ultimately, strengthening military professionalism is essential for promoting democratic values, respecting human rights, and ensuring the safety and security of citizens.

References

- Adam Nossiter, "Bodies Pour in as Nigeria Hunts for Islamists," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2013.
- Adeakin, I. A (2015) 'A New Form of Authoritarianism?' A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science and Public Policy at The University of Waikato
- Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2022). Deepening a Culture of Military Professionalism in Africa.
- Alaga, E., & Akum, R (2013). Civil-Military Relations and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. Retrieved from <http://www.ccd21.org>
- Albert, I.O. (2003). *The Odi Massacre of 1999 in the Context of the Graffiti Left by the Invading Nigerian Army*. University of Ibadan. Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies.
- Barany, Z. (2012). *The Soldier and the Changing State: Building Democratic Armies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas*. Princeton University Press.
- Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended). (2011). Federal Government Printer.
- Daily Trust, "Military Barracks in Disrepair Despite N12 Billion 2012 Budget," March 18, 2013. Available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201303181685>.
- Desch, M. (1999). *Civilian Control of the Military. The Changing Security Environment*. MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore.
- Downes, C (1985) "To Be or Not To Be a Profession: The Military Case" *Defense Analysis* 1(3):147-171. DOI: 10.1080/07430178508405201
- Guy L. Siebold (2007). The Essence of Military Group Cohesion. *Armed Forces & Society* 33(2):286-295. DOI: 10.1177/0095327X06294173
- Gbor, J. W.T. (2004) "Military Professionalism in the Nigerian Armed Forces" in Gbor J.W.T.(Ed) *Military History: Nigeria from Pre-Colonial Era to the Present*: Longman Nigeria Plc.: Lagos. 282-311
- Holsti, O. R. (1998). A Widening Gap between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society?: Some Evidence, 1976-96. *International Security*, 23(3), 5-42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539337>
- Huntington, S. (1981). *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. New York, NY: Belknap Press.
- Ivey, A (2024). "Internal deployment and democratic survival" in *Research Handbook on Civil-Military Relations*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Political Science and Public Policy, 206-218. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800889842.00025>
- Janowitz, M. (1960). *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*. Free Press <https://doi.org/10.2307/1891771>
- Joshua, S., Gberevbie, D.E., & Onor, K. (2021). "Building Security through Insecurity: The Nigerian Military and Counter-Violence Campaigns in the Fourth Republic". *Armed Forces & Society*, 47, 177 - 200.
- Lambert, A. (2009). *Democratic Civilian Control of Armed Forces in the Post-Cold War Era*, Berlin/London/Wien/Münster/Zürich (LIT: DCAF), Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces

- Matlosa, K. (2005) "From a destabilizing factor to a depoliticized and professional force: the military in Lesotho," in *Evolutions & and Revolutions: A Contemporary History of Militaries in Southern Africa*, Martin Rupiya (ed). Pretoria: *Institute for Security Studies*, 85-110.
- McKinlay, R. van Gils (1971) *The Perceived Role of the Military*. Rotterdam University Press, 1971
- Musa, S. Y. (2019). Assessing military operations in internal security in Nigeria. *Verstehen Journal of Social Research*. 1 (2). 231-244
- Musa, S. Y. & Heinecken, L. (2022). "The Effect of Military (Un)Professionalism on Civil-military Relations and Security in Nigeria" *African Security Review*, 31 (2), 24.01. 2022. 157-173
- Obi-Ani, P. (2008). Creation date Democratic "Dictatorship" in Nigeria: A Case Study of Odi and Zaki Biam Massacres. (5) 152-164
- Ogomudia, A.O. (2007). *Peace Support Operations, Command and Professionalism: Challenger For the Nigerian Armed Forces in the 21st Century and Beyond*. Golden Press Limited
- Ojo, E. (2006). 'Taming the Monster', 267; Taming the Monster: Demilitarization and Democratization in Nigeria. *Armed Forces and Society*. 32 (2) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X05277905>
- Olabode, A (2024), Insecurity and Nigeria's Socio-Economic Development. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*. 7(2), 166-181. DOI: 10.52589/AJSSHRPGKPNW8K
- Olubiyo. Kolade Gabriel (2020) An Appraisal of the Nigerian Military in the Internal SecuritynOperations in Nigeria since 1999." *Anyigba Journal of History and Internal Studies (AJOHIS)*. 1(1): 138-159
- Ouédraogo, E (2014). *Advancing Military Professionalism in Africa*. A Research Paper from The Africa Center for Strategic Studies, No. 6, Washington, D.C.
- Perlmutter, A., & Bennett, V. P. (1980). *The Political Influence of the Military: A Comparative Reader*. Yale University Press.
- Pyman, M. (2011). *Building Integrity and Countering Corruption in Defence and Security: 20 Practical Reforms*. Technical Report. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.24084.22400
- Salahu, M. L. and Ilyasu, Y. A. (2019). Military, Politics and Professionalism in Nigeria: The Emergent Issues. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*. 6 (6), 100-103. Online ISSN: 2349-4182, Print ISSN: 2349-5979
- Schiff, R. L. (2009). *The Military and Domestic Politics: A Concordance Theory of Civil-Military Relations*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Sun, I. Y., Sung, H. E., & Chu, D. C. (2007). Collateral Gains from the Military? A Cross-National Analysis of the Armed Forces Crime Relationship. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 51(5), 599–614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X07299225>
- Ukpabi, S.C. (1980). The Military in Nigerian Politics, 1900 -1970. *Nigeria Magazine*. 69-87.

- Yusuf J.M. (2017) "Professional Military Education and Military Professionalism in the Nigerian Army" in Ibrahim S. Tangbam, OE., Ahmed and A.O. Osakwe, C.C., (eds) *Defence, Security, Economy and Development in Nigeria*, London, Bahiti and Dalila. 114- 146