

THE FUTURE OF POLICING IN NIGERIA: FOCUS ON REFORMS, INNOVATION AND DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

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Abstract

The problem of policing in Nigeria has become one of increasing concern regarding institutional, operational, and legitimacy issues in response to rising levels of insecurity and the requirement for increased police accountability. In this paper, the future of policing in Nigeria is explored through an assessment of the innovations needed to develop a more efficient and accountable policing service within Nigeria. Anchored on democratic policing theory, broken windows theory, and social contract theory, the paper focuses on examining issues relating to the challenges faced by the Nigeria Police Force regarding its operational and institutional aspects, effectiveness of the on-going reforms aimed at transforming and improving the quality of policing in the country, decentralisation of the police through the state and community-based policing models, significance of technological advancement and intelligence-led policing, and ultimately, adapting democratic policing in the local environment of Nigeria. The study utilises desktop research approach and content analysis of previous studies. Findings reveal that NPF is still struggling under the burden of institutional centralisation, logistical insufficiencies, manpower insufficiencies, corruption, poor welfare system, lack of accountability, and conflict between the police force and the community.

While the process of police reforms using legislations such as the Police Act 2020 and community policing remains promising, the process of implementation has been quite haphazard and non-localised. In addition, this study has shown that decentralising policing is important although it should go hand-in-hand with strict regulations that discourage any attempt by politicians to manipulate the police force. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that technology and intelligence-led policing remain inadequately developed, making the ability of law enforcement officers to address emerging criminal activities, such as cybercrime, terrorism, and organised crimes, difficult. To conclude, this study proves that the process of remodelling policing in Nigeria should be a holistic one taking into account democratic reform, professionalism, technology, community cooperation, and international experiences. Establishment of state police is highly recommended.

Keywords: Democratic Accountability, Future, Innovation Policing, Reform, State Police

Introduction

The police are a significant organisation which provides for law, order, and safety in most societies across the globe. In the international context, the roles and activities conducted by the police have undergone transformation significantly due to new types of threats, technological development, and democratic pressures. The development of policing models in many advanced democracies has taken a different form as well, shifting its attention to a community-oriented model based on intelligence and human rights principles (Loader & Walker, 2007). It reflects a growing realisation that policing should evolve from force to values such as openness and citizens' participation (Mboho&Asangausung, 2024).

In Africa, discussions surrounding reforms have gained momentum in light of various problems associated with the functioning of police forces in the region. Many states in Africa experience various difficulties in ensuring effective policing due to factors such as weak state institutions, political influence, corruption, and poor organisational capacity (Baker, 2008). Negative perceptions about police in the region are mainly connected with their colonial history, militarisation, and politicisation in Africa (Udousoro et al., 2025). Nevertheless, some African nations started implementing reforms with respect to decentralisation and community policing.

A very special case can be made regarding the Nigerian policing situation. Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is one of the largest policing organisations in Africa but has been riddled with inefficiencies, underfunding, human rights violations, and a general lack of trust among Nigerians (Chukwuma & Iyanda, 2020; Bassey et al., 2024). The centralised structure of the NPF has proven ineffective in addressing the local security challenges of terrorist attacks in the North-East, farmer-herder conflict in the North-Central, banditry in the North-West, cult

violence in the South-West, militancy in the South-South and the secessionist groups in the South-East (Esoh et al., 2025). The Amnesty International (2020) and Asangausung et al. (2023), submitted that the recent police brutality witnessed during the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria in 2020 has brought into focus the necessity for police reform in the country. Many reforms have been made including passing the Police Act 2020, implementation of community policing practices, and restructuring of the police force. However, the problem is not simply about reforms within the policing organisations; rather, it is more about reinventing policing.

Consequently, the research intends to provide a critical exploration into the future of policing in Nigeria through a qualitative analysis of past studies. Through this paper, some of the major challenges of the Nigeria Police Force will be identified, and possible areas for reforms discussed. Some of the questions to be answered include how decentralisation and use of technology can contribute to the future of policing in Nigeria. The paper seeks to examine how ethical reorientation and community policing can shape the future of Nigerian police force.

Statement of the Problem

There is currently a deep-seated crisis of police force within Nigeria in terms of their legitimacy, capacity, and relevance to the country's security challenges and the growing disgruntlement of citizens with the law enforcement agencies. Even with the constitutional mandate for the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) to ensure law and order, protect lives and properties, and enforce the law, there have been inefficiencies in terms of how they carry out their duties, underfunding of the force, poor perception of them by the citizens, and high level of corruption.

This has created a wide gap of mistrust and lack of cooperation from the citizenry in the effort to enforce laws and restore peace. These included many cases of extrajudicial killing, arrests without warrant, extortion, and human right violations carried out by the Nigeria police personnel over the years, leading to the perception of the force as being repressive. The 2020 #EndSARS movement brought to light just how violent and unyielding the police were (Asangausung et al., 2023). Even after disarming the abusive units and promising to reform the force, there was little transparency and sustainability to those efforts (Victor, 2026).

Apart from public distrust, there are also other weaknesses of the NPF which affect its performance. Being centrally controlled, the organisation is unable to manage an area as vast and heterogeneous as Nigeria. Security problems such as insurgencies in the North-Eastern part of the country, local conflicts in the northern-central region, kidnapping and banditry in the North-Western regions, and secessionist activities in the South-Eastern states cannot be adequately managed under the existing police system since local policing models are yet to be developed and implemented (Essoh et al., 2025). Consequently, many Nigerian communities do not feel secure and, in some instances, non-state security organisations appeared in those areas (Abang & Asangausung, 2025; Abang et al., 2025).

Adoption of sophisticated technologies and training of personnel in digital skills can boost productivity in any industrial setting (Ukommi & Asangausung, 2025). Security technologies therefore can assist in the fight against crime in Nigeria. Developed countries have deployed and implemented modern technologies in crime detection, prevention, investigation, and control with appreciative effect. Yet, Nigeria does not give much attention to providing sophisticated security technologies and support to aid crime management, making it difficult for security agencies to take decisive actions on matters of insecurity.

Scholars including Anzizi (2024), Asangausung et al. (2024), Blumberg et al. (2020), Singh (2022) Ordu (2017), suggested that low wages, poor training, logistical insufficiency, and political interference within the police service are just some of the factors that influence negatively on the officers' moral values. The struggle for accountable policing may not be won in organising conferences, press briefings, or setting up reform committees, but in courtrooms, where the law is transformed from the statement of ideals into an instrument of consequence. Akpan submitted that institutions rarely reform because they are asked to do so, rather, they reform because the price of refusing becomes so high (Victor, 2026; Oni, 2022,). That is why the problem lies not only in the inefficient system, but in the lack of a clear vision of how to develop it. A modern vision should be based on such values as democracy, community cooperation, accountability, and other contemporary approaches to managing the NPF. The future of policing in Nigeria depends on comprehensive police reform, adoption of modern technology, intelligence-led policing, professional training and capacity building, adequate funding, community policing and public trust, inter-agency collaboration and decentralisation of law enforcement responsibilities.

While there exists an extensive literature regarding policing practices and policies in Nigeria, most of the literature tends to focus on the reporting of inefficiency, corruption, and deficiency in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) (Asangausung& Brown, 2025; Paul, &Enyindah, 2022; Okoru et al., 2024; Odekunle, 2016; Okafor, 2020; Alemika& Chukwuma, 2018). In fact, there are numerous accounts in the literature pertaining to police brutality and historical backgrounds of the Nigeria Police Force (Asangausung et al., 2021). There are also discussions on community policing and establishment of state police in Nigeria (Shiyanbade, 2026; Odo et al., 2025; Brown et al., 2024; Umeh et al. 2025, Sukare& Abdullahi, 2025). However, there is absence of research dedicated to analysing the future of policing in Nigeria. This study intends to bridge this research gap.

Research Objectives

This research aims at providing a critical evaluation of the future of policing in Nigeria by critically analysing the possible reforms that can be made in the Nigeria Police Force. The research was aimed at accomplishing the following specific objectives:

- i. To find out the major obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of the Nigeria Police Force in terms of its structure and operations.
- ii. To evaluate the effectiveness of police reforms that have taken place or continue to take place in relation to accountability, trust, and legitimacy.
- iii. To examine the possible advantages and drawbacks that may come from decentralisation of the police in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on state/community policing.
- iv. To describe the application of technological means and intelligence-led policing in terms of its ability to aid in crime prevention and efficient policing in Nigeria.
- v. To examine how democratic community policing strategies may be modified and adopted for use within the Nigerian context.

Research Questions

- i. What are the main structural and operational challenges facing the Nigeria Police Force?
- ii. How have earlier and current police reforms, such as community policing projects, sought to solve problems related to accountability, legitimacy, and trust?

- iii. How does decentralisation of policing, for example, through the development of state police and community police, improve security in Nigeria?
- iv. How do technology and an intelligence-led approach contribute to the future of policing in Nigeria?
- v. How could democratic community policing strategies be modified and adopted for use within the Nigerian context?

Literature Review

This literature review examines important academic insights into key issues regarding trends and reforms in policing in Nigeria and beyond. The discourse concerning the future of policing in Nigeria has been largely informed by the emerging realisation about the many problems that are facing the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). There is a consensus among scholars on problems such as corruption, lack of professionalism, lack of resources, centralised command, and poor public-police relations as being some of the main barriers to effective policing in Nigeria (Alemika& Chukwuma, 2018; Odekunle, 2016).

Conceptualisation of Police and Policing

In general, the concept of police involves the organised endeavour that is made by the state or community in ensuring order, enforcing laws, and maintaining safety (Paul &Enyindah, 2022; Okorie, 2023). Traditionally, the concept of policing in Nigeria has largely been understood from the perspective of coercion within the framework of centralised command (Omoyeni et al., 2026). According to Okorie (2023), policing involves law enforcement, crime prevention, the protection of lives and property from danger. In order to visualise the future of policing, therefore, it is important to rethink the role of policing in light of its multiple facets, namely its role as a service provider and protector of human rights, among others.

In the case of Nigeria, the future of policing is based on the departure from the current approach to policing, which tends to be reactionary and militaristic in nature, to a more proactive, intelligence-led, and people-oriented one (Okoru et al., 2024). In essence, it entails the development of an accountable, technologically advanced, and culturally sensitive policing practice, as well as a decentralised system wherein policing will take place at both

state and community levels in a way that respects the constitutional guidelines (Victor, 2026; Oni, 2022; Ordu, 2017).

Moreover, the future of policing entails the use of contemporary technology such as artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, databases and cyber forensics, among others, for the purposes of facilitating crime prevention and investigation (Eshed, 2025). It is also concerned with the issue of re-training the police forces in terms of ethics and respect for human rights. Therefore, in envisioning the future of policing in Nigeria, the study goes beyond the narrow conception of policing to adopt an inclusive and developmental perspective of security. This new paradigm not only considers the role of policing within the context of crime prevention, but also places emphasis on issues of peace-building and national development.

Structural and Operational Challenges of the Nigeria Police Force

One of the significant problems mentioned in literature is the over-centralised nature of Nigeria's policing system. According to Alemika (2013), the highly centralised nature of the command structure of the NPF makes it difficult for them to respond to regional security threats and makes them less proactive in terms of policing. Adebayo (2019) claims that policing in Nigeria, being a federal and heterogeneous state, should be localised and flexible, based on regional security dynamics. The inflexibility of the existing policing framework is made worse by factors such as underfunding, out-dated technology, and inadequately trained personnel, as pointed out by Hills (2008) and Asangausung et al. (2024).

Police Reforms and Community Policing

Community policing is considered as the answer to the legitimacy crisis facing the NPF. Internationally, the concept of community policing focuses on collaboration, problem-solving, and service delivery by promoting close collaboration between the police and the people (Brogden & Nijhar, 2005). In the case of Nigeria, though, the application of this concept has been ineffective and mainly symbolic in nature. Poor institutional framework, lack of community involvement, and inadequate political will have been cited by Okafor (2020) as some of the challenges that have hindered the success of community policing in Nigeria. On the other hand, Onu (2014) and Asangausung et al. (2021) notes that many police personnel continue using an authoritarian approach, thus posing an obstacle to the development of legitimacy.

Decentralisation and the Call for State and Community Police

It appears that there is a growing trend toward discussions about the need for decentralisation of policing in Nigeria. According to various scholars including Osaghae (2021), the centralised approach to policing cannot work in a federal country like Nigeria with its diversity of ethnicity, culture, and politics. It seems that, when done right, decentralisation can be helpful in creating more effective policing systems. On the other hand, one has to take into account some negative consequences related to potential misuse of powers by state governments (Olaosebikan, 2020).

Technology and Intelligence-Led Policing

Contemporary literature also highlights the importance of technology in revolutionising the processes of law enforcement. Technologies like digital surveillance, artificial intelligence, biometric databases, and predictive analysis have made law enforcement more effective and efficient in progressive nations (Loader & Walker, 2007). Nigerian authors including Ekhomu (2017) insist that it is high time the NPF embraced technologies to deal with new forms of crimes like cyber fraud, terrorism, and kidnapping. Yet, lack of technical literacy, poor information and communication technology facilities, and lack of strategy on how to incorporate technology in policing are some major obstacles (Ekpenyong & Nte, 2020; Ukommi & Asangausung, 2025).

Global Best Practices and Local Adaptation

Actually, the prevailing view is that Nigeria should learn the best practice models of democratic policing from other nations. South Africa, India, and Kenya could offer valuable examples in addressing challenges ranging from policing diversity, police accountability, and citizen participation in policing. The fear is that it would not be proper for Nigeria to adopt any foreign model without being context-specific. According to Brogden (2004), the adoption of policing methods without modification in their true forms from developed nations will definitely result in failure or outright rejection due to the specific nature of the conditions prevailing in such settings. Consequently, it is mandatory for any process that will reform the Nigerian Police Force to take into consideration the problems associated with ethnic affiliations, politics, and lack of trust in security agencies (Bassey et al., 2024).

Recent Developments and the Demand for Reform

The ban of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), following the #EndSARS protest in 2020 was a welcome development towards police reform in Nigeria. The reasons for these protests arose from the abuses orchestrated by SARS operatives against citizens (Asangausung et al., 2021). Thus, police reform in Nigeria becomes a matter of urgency and necessity considering the need to address police brutality, police impunity, and other issues that arise due to the lack of accountability (Amnesty International, 2020). As reported by Human Rights Watch (2020) and CLEEN Foundation (2021), such abuses were systematic in nature. Umeh et al. (2025) examined the role of state police in crime control in Imo State and found that there is need to establish state police in Nigeria. Similarly, Sukare and Abdullahi (2025) examine the establishment of state police in Nigeria, focusing on issues, challenges and prospects. The authors found that establishing state police under the current political climate may give room for politicisation, role conflicts with the state actors and as well increase ethnic and religious tensions. However, the Bill for establishment of state police in Nigeria has passed the second reading in the National Assembly. Oriola (2026) affirms that the establishment of a new police service is an opportunity to utilise cutting-edge socio-scientific knowledge to build something new, avoid errors of existing models, with an eye to an institution that will serve current and future generations.

Theoretical Framework

The future of the Nigeria Police Force may be considered with the help of several theoretical approaches, including Democratic Policing Theory, Broken Window Theory, and Social Contract Theory. These theories allow offering some suggestions concerning such important matters as the legitimacy of the police forces, their capacity to meet various challenges, their accountability towards the citizens and their cooperation.

First of all, one may say that the Democratic Policing Theory should be considered as the central point of this research. It is necessary to note that the main idea of this theory is the assumption that democratic policing presupposes transparency, human rights, people's involvement in the work performed within law enforcement agencies, and accountability. As Bayley (2006) claims, such features as citizen consent, non-discriminative attitude to people regardless of their ethnicity, observance of the rule of law, and public oversight are the basic components of the democratic policing. Considering the historical problems with the lack of

accountability and impunity in the NPF and lack of people's involvement in its activities, it becomes apparent that it is essential to introduce democratic policing ideas.

Another theoretical view to look at is the broken windows approach formulated by Wilson and Kelling in 1982. It provides the explanation of how minor activities like vandalising property and loafing contribute to the creation of an environment that favours criminal activities. It is obvious from this theory that law enforcement efforts directed at solving problems associated with orderliness and minor offenses will produce an environment. However, it is worth mentioning that this theory may be applicable in the context of Nigeria. Crime rates in urban areas of Nigeria are extremely high as compared to other areas (Williams & Christopher, 2026).

Likewise, the Social Contract Theory, as suggested by philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, offers a philosophical justification for the legitimacy of the police force. The theory proposes that people give up some rights to form a society where the state takes responsibility for ensuring their protection (Brown et al., 2024). The expectation from the state is to work in the interests of the people to ensure peace and justice. The problem of police brutality, police corruption, and inefficiency in Nigeria is seen as a violation of this contract, hence the low level of trust in the police force. This has been seen in the 2020 #EndSARS protests where citizens demanded the renewal of the contract. Hence, any idea for the future must include restoring trust in the police by way of ethics, professionalism, and accountability (Victor, 2026).

Theoretical Synthesis

The future of policing in Nigeria necessitates the integration of these three theories – Democratic Policing Theory, Broken Windows Theory, and Social Contract Theory. By synthesising these three theories, a multidimensional view will emerge in relation to the requirements of a good policing system that needs to be established in Nigeria. In particular, Democratic Policing Theory provides the understanding that policing institutions should embrace democratic qualities such as accountability, respect for human rights, and inclusive decision-making (Muntingh et al., 2021). The police are not act as coercive mechanisms of the state but rather provide services in partnership with the communities (Onu, 2017). In this context, democratic policing theory becomes important for the current situation in Nigeria since reforms in the country's policing should put citizens at the heart of security governance considering the high degree of distrust that exists between them and the authorities.

Broken Windows Theory builds on this in bringing out the preventive and community-oriented aspects of policing (Ruhl, 2025). This becomes particularly relevant in Nigeria, where small disorders frequently escalate into larger problems of insecurity. The theory is applicable in Nigeria because it enables the promotion of community-oriented policing that addresses the security needs of a population (Omoyeni, 2026; Nnashetu et al., 2025). The theory, when combined with democratic theory, ensures that police practices are neither oppressive nor oppressive towards certain populations that face marginalisation.

The Social Contract Theory offers the underlying moral justification of the policing framework. Here, it is necessary to take into account the character of the contract and its impact on the relationship between the citizens and the authorities in the state. This theory will prove to be most significant for the Nigerian state due to the abuse of power and inefficiency of state institutions, leading to the breakdown of the social contract.

The synthesis of these theories reveals that all of them discusses the issues of legitimacy, responsiveness, participation, and prevention. While in Democratic Policing Theory, principles for implementation are offered by the theorist, in Broken Windows Theory recommendations for grassroots involvement are provided, whereas Social Contract Theory explains the nature of the relationship between the police and people through the notion of reciprocity. Thus, the combination of these theories provide a comprehensive approach towards the reform of the Nigerian police system.

It should be stressed that for the successful reformation of the Nigerian policing process, not only policies and institutional changes are needed. Instead, there is a need for an effort towards dealing with the issue of Nigerian policing from a broader viewpoint which includes ethics and democracy alongside structural changes. This way, all the stakeholders in the reforming process can come up with appropriate initiatives for the field.

Materials and Methods

The research method employed in this paper is qualitative, using mainly desktop research and analysis of secondary data sources. The use of desktop research is quite relevant when trying to examine the future of police operations in Nigeria since the method enables the in-depth and reflective synthesis of the knowledge, policy guidelines, scholarly works, and empirical studies concerning the same topic.

The secondary data were sourced from reliable sources, and these sources encompass scholarly journals, government publications, publications by the Nigeria Police Force, presentations by civil societies, and publications from trustworthy international bodies such as the UN, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch. Other important sources that provided information include policy briefs, reforms, and other major historical events, such as the #EndSARS protest.

The selection of secondary data was influenced by the necessity to build upon previous empirical evidence, theories, and reforms that were made in order to evaluate the possibility of changing the policing system. Special attention was paid to studies analysing issues like democratic policing, community security model, police legitimacy, accountability, decentralisation, as well as innovations in technology used by law enforcement agencies.

In order to analyse the data collected during the course of the research, the authors employed content analysis. This approach was useful in terms of framing the discussion within particular discourses, which at the same time allowed drawing conclusions based on the analysis of the data provided. The secondary literature was assessed not only according to its content, but also regarding its methodological validity and pertinence to the subject matter of the paper. Such an approach is relevant considering the topic of research being broad and covering general issues related to theory and practice rather than fieldwork and experiments. This research method allows evaluating the potential future of police system in Nigeria using

Results and Discussion of Findings

This study employed content analysis of scholarly literature, policy documents, police reform reports, and institutional assessments to critically examine the future of policing in Nigeria. The findings were presented and discussed according to the research objectives and questions. The discussion is anchored on Democratic Policing Theory, Social Contract Theory, and Broken Windows Theory, which collectively provided a framework for understanding police legitimacy, public trust, crime control, and institutional reform.

Structural and Operational Challenges Facing the Nigeria Police Force

The analysis revealed that the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) continues to face numerous structural and operational challenges that significantly hinder its effectiveness in maintaining internal security. The reviewed literature consistently identified excessive centralisation, inadequate personnel, poor funding, obsolete equipment, insufficient training, weak logistics,

and poor welfare conditions as major impediments to effective policing. Studies by Alemika (2013), Chukwuma and Iyanda (2020), and Asangausung et al. (2023) similarly observed that the NPF remains under-resourced and overstretched in relation to Nigeria's growing population and complex security environment.

The findings further indicate that allegations of corruption, extortion, brutality, abuse of power, and human rights violations continue to undermine public confidence in the police. These institutional deficiencies have weakened police-community relations and reduced citizens' willingness to cooperate with law enforcement agencies in crime prevention and intelligence gathering. These findings support the assumptions of Social Contract Theory, which maintains that the legitimacy of state institutions derives from their ability to provide security and protect citizens' rights. According to Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, citizens voluntarily surrender certain freedoms to the state in exchange for protection and social order. However, when state institutions such as the police fail to provide adequate security or engage in practices perceived as unjust, the social contract is weakened, resulting in declining public trust and legitimacy. The widespread public dissatisfaction that culminated in the #EndSARS protests illustrates this erosion of confidence in policing institutions.

The findings also resonate with Broken Windows Theory, which argues that visible signs of disorder, neglect, and institutional inefficiency create conditions that encourage criminality and social instability. Poorly equipped police stations, delayed responses to criminal incidents, ineffective patrol systems, and weak law enforcement mechanisms signal institutional incapacity and may embolden criminal actors. Consequently, strengthening police capacity and professionalism remains essential for restoring public order and confidence.

Effectiveness of Police Reforms in Enhancing Accountability, Trust, and Legitimacy

The study examined the effectiveness of previous and on-going police reform initiatives, including the Police Act 2020, the Police Trust Fund, the Police Reform Agenda, and the Community Policing Programme. Findings revealed that while these reforms demonstrate an official commitment to improving policing outcomes, their implementation has yielded mixed results. The analysis showed that reforms have largely focused on legislative and policy adjustments rather than fundamental institutional transformation. Although the Police Act 2020 introduced provisions aimed at improving accountability, professionalism, and

operational efficiency, implementation challenges continue to limit its practical impact. Likewise, community policing initiatives have recorded modest achievements but have not substantially transformed police-community relations or improved public trust.

These findings support the observations of Alemika and Chukwuma (2005), who argued that police reforms in Nigeria frequently remain superficial due to weak implementation frameworks, inadequate funding, and limited political commitment. Similarly, Hills (2008) contended that many reform programmes fail because they do not sufficiently address underlying institutional and cultural challenges within the police organisation.

From the perspective of Democratic Policing Theory, effective police reform requires accountability, transparency, respect for human rights, civilian oversight, and responsiveness to community needs. The findings suggest that although policy frameworks increasingly reflect democratic policing principles, institutional practices often remain inconsistent with these ideals. Consequently, accountability deficits continue to undermine public trust and police legitimacy. Social Contract Theory further explains that reforms can only strengthen institutional legitimacy when citizens perceive tangible improvements in service delivery, fairness, and security outcomes. The persistence of misconduct allegations and limited public confidence suggests that many reform efforts have yet to fulfil citizens' expectations regarding democratic governance and public safety.

Decentralisation of Policing and the Prospects of State and Community Police

The findings indicate growing support among scholars, policymakers, and security practitioners for decentralising policing through the establishment of state and community police structures. The reviewed literature suggests that decentralisation could enhance responsiveness to local security challenges, improve intelligence gathering, strengthen community engagement, and facilitate more effective crime control strategies. Studies by Baker (2008) and Osaghae (2021) argue that highly centralised policing systems are often ill-suited to diverse societies characterised by significant regional variations in security threats. The findings indicate that localised policing structures could provide context-specific responses to challenges such as banditry, kidnapping, communal conflicts, and violent extremism.

The findings are particularly consistent with Democratic Policing Theory, which advocates policing systems that are responsive to local communities and accountable to citizens. State and community policing structures have the potential to strengthen democratic participation by promoting closer interaction between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. Furthermore, Social Contract Theory suggests that decentralised policing may improve institutional legitimacy because citizens are more likely to trust security institutions that understand local realities and address community-specific concerns. Enhanced responsiveness and accessibility could therefore strengthen public confidence and cooperation.

However, the findings also identified significant concerns regarding political interference, abuse of authority by state actors, uneven resource distribution, and the absence of adequate oversight mechanisms. Consequently, successful decentralisation would require constitutional safeguards, strong accountability frameworks, and independent monitoring institutions to prevent misuse of policing powers.

Technology and Intelligence-Led Policing in the Future of Nigerian Policing

The analysis revealed that technological innovation and intelligence-led policing are central to the future effectiveness of policing in Nigeria. However, the findings indicate that technological adoption within the NPF remains relatively limited. Manual record-keeping systems, inadequate forensic facilities, insufficient digital infrastructure, and limited intelligence-sharing mechanisms continue to constrain effective policing operations. The reviewed studies, including Ekpenyong and Nte (2020), demonstrate that inadequate access to forensic technologies, surveillance systems, crime databases, and analytical tools significantly weakens criminal investigations and crime prevention efforts. This challenge is particularly concerning given the increasing sophistication of contemporary security threats such as cybercrime, terrorism, kidnapping, and organised criminal networks.

The findings support the argument that modern policing has evolved beyond reactive crime control towards intelligence-led and technology-driven approaches. Intelligence-led policing enables proactive crime prevention through data analysis, risk assessment, predictive policing, and strategic resource allocation. The relevance of Broken Windows Theory is particularly evident in this context. Effective surveillance systems, rapid response mechanisms, and visible technological capabilities help address minor disorders before they

escalate into more serious criminal activities. By increasing the certainty of detection and enhancing police visibility, technological innovations contribute to maintaining public order and reducing opportunities for criminal behaviour. Additionally, Democratic Policing Theory emphasises that technological tools must be deployed in ways that respect civil liberties, ensure accountability, and protect citizens' rights. Therefore, technological advancement should be accompanied by appropriate legal and ethical safeguards.

Adapting Democratic Community Policing Strategies to the Nigerian Context

The findings revealed that although democratic and community-oriented policing models have produced positive outcomes in countries such as South Africa, Kenya, India, and the United Kingdom, their adaptation in Nigeria remains limited. Existing community policing initiatives have often been characterised by weak citizen participation, inadequate training, and excessive central control. The reviewed literature suggests that successful community policing requires meaningful partnerships between police officers and community members, mutual trust, shared responsibility for security, and sustained engagement with local stakeholders. Studies by Asangausung et al. (2024) and Hills (2008) indicate that these conditions have not been fully achieved within the Nigerian context.

These findings strongly support Democratic Policing Theory, which emphasises that police institutions should operate under the rule of law, remain accountable to citizens, uphold human rights, and encourage public participation in security governance. Democratic policing recognises citizens as partners rather than subjects of law enforcement. Similarly, Social Contract Theory underscores the importance of trust and reciprocity in police-community relations. Citizens are more likely to cooperate with police institutions when they perceive them as legitimate, fair, and responsive to community concerns. Community policing therefore serves as an important mechanism for rebuilding trust and strengthening institutional legitimacy.

Furthermore, Broken Windows Theory highlights the value of police-community collaboration in addressing minor disorders and neighbourhood-level security concerns before they escalate into serious crimes. Through regular engagement, community partnerships can facilitate early intervention, improve informal social control, and contribute to safer communities. Overall, the findings suggest that successful adaptation of democratic community policing in Nigeria will require institutional reforms, enhanced public

participation, improved officer professionalism, cultural sensitivity, and sustained commitment to accountability and human rights protection.

In sum, the content analysis demonstrates that the future of policing in Nigeria depends largely on comprehensive institutional reforms, improved accountability mechanisms, strategic decentralisation, technological modernisation, intelligence-led policing, and the adoption of democratic community policing principles. The findings further revealed that Democratic Policing Theory, Social Contract Theory, and Broken Windows Theory collectively provide valuable explanations for the challenges confronting the NPF and the reforms required to enhance its effectiveness. While significant policy frameworks and reform initiatives already exist, their success ultimately depends on political commitment, effective implementation, adequate resource allocation, and the restoration of public trust in policing institutions.

Conclusion

The major conclusion drawn from this study is that the future of policing in Nigeria is fundamentally dependent on comprehensive institutional transformation rather than isolated policy reforms. The findings revealed that the Nigeria Police Force continues to be constrained by structural and operational deficiencies, including excessive centralisation, inadequate funding, poor logistics, limited manpower, weak accountability mechanisms, and low public trust. Although several reform initiatives have been introduced over the years, their impact has been undermined by implementation gaps, inadequate political commitment, and insufficient institutional capacity. Consequently, the existing policing framework has been unable to effectively respond to the evolving security challenges confronting the country.

The study further concludes that sustainable improvements in policing effectiveness can only be achieved through the adoption of democratic, decentralised, and technology-driven policing models. The findings demonstrate that state and community policing structures have the potential to improve responsiveness to local security needs, while intelligence-led policing and modern technological tools can significantly enhance crime prevention, investigation, and law enforcement efficiency. However, these innovations must be accompanied by strong accountability mechanisms, constitutional safeguards, and

professional standards to prevent abuse of power and ensure public confidence in the police institution.

Finally, the study concludes that restoring the legitimacy and effectiveness of policing in Nigeria requires rebuilding the social contract between the police and the citizenry. Public trust, community participation, respect for human rights, transparency, and democratic accountability emerged as indispensable elements for the success of future policing reforms. Therefore, the future of policing in Nigeria lies in the development of a citizen-centred police service that is professionally competent, technologically equipped, locally responsive, and firmly grounded in democratic principles and the rule of law.

Recommendations

Based on the stated objectives and findings, the following recommendations are made:

- a) The Federal Government of Nigeria should urgently conduct an extensive review of the structure of the Nigeria Police Force to deal with weaknesses such as over-centralisation, personnel shortage, and logistical inadequacies. Effective allocation of funds, recruitment on merit, and modernisation of police facilities will be helpful in overcoming service delivery problems.
- b) There is need for a national audit and evaluation of police reform initiatives in the country especially community policing initiatives to detect gaps in their implementation process. The reform approach adopted must include training, sensitisation, and consultation with civil society actors, including traditional rulers and youth organisations. State police should become an integral part of the reform agenda.
- c) The Constitution of the Republic of Nigeria needs to be amended to facilitate the effective take-off of state police in the country.
- d) The Nigeria police personnel should be adequately trained on the use of digital technologies in crime detection, prevention, control and investigation.

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