

Public Confidence and Willingness to Report Crimes in Nigeria: The Submission of the Residents of Abeokuta South Local Government

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ABSTRACT

Evidence gathered from several cases against the performance of the police shows that security work cannot be done effectively by the police without the community members. The community's willingness to report incidents of antisocial behaviour to the police gives room for effective and efficient performance of the Nigeria police. The collective responsibility between the community members and the police will help the police to discharge and carry out their primary, legal and modern functions. In Nigeria, several publications have linked the poor performance of the Nigeria Police to different internal and external factors. However, this paper intends to examine the willingness of the residents of Abeokuta South Local Government to report crime to the Nigeria Police as expected. Extant literature were reviewed while instinctual drive theory was adopted for the explanation of the research inquiry. The study adopted Mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods and cross sectional survey for the collection of data from 256 residents of Abeokuta South Local Government area in seven (7) wards. Multistage was adopted to break the study locations from wards to streets and house numbers before purposive sampling method was adopted for the administration of face to face questionnaire to respondents. The Linear Regression analysis was adopted and the study found out that trust in police fairness (0.152, $p=0.005$), openness in engagement (0.200, $p<0.005$), trust in police procedure (0.172, $p<0.005$), rights protection (0.138, $p<0.005$) and institutional commitment (0.127, $p=0.005$) were significant compared to other variables stated. The qualitative results corroborate scholarly submissions of the past indicating that lack of confidence and willingness to report crime stem from the corrupt nature of the Nigeria Police and poor response to emergencies.

KEYWORDS

Crime-reporting; public-confidence; willingness; social-order

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the police are expected by the citizens to ensure internal security of lives and properties and also maintain laws and order in a given society compared to the responsibilities of other security agencies such as army, Navy, Immigration, and Customs among others. In modern days, the multiple tasks expected to be carried out by the police which mostly overwhelm and effect their performance. This assertion is supported by Ogunmefun et al. (2024) which state that in the contemporary world, the tasks of the police

advance from primary function to legal function and modern function. The overwhelming nature of the tasks expected to be performed by the police calls for community involvement in security related to matters of securing lives and properties of the people.

In Nigeria, the police are overloaded with multiple tasks which negate or undermine their performance (Aborisade, & Ariyo, 2022). The above statement shows that the citizens must equally support the growth and development of security issues through their willingness to report crime or suspects to the Nigeria Police to aid their performance. Also scholars such as Tyler, 2014; Boateng, 2018; Murphy & Mazerolle, 2016) opine that the understanding of the willingness of the citizens in crime reporting is influenced by multiple variables like perceived police legitimacy, fear of retaliatory attack, police-citizen contact experience, and socio-economic standing of the citizens. According to Hornby (2024), willingness is a voluntary process or procedure for carrying out a task to the end. The word willingness should be adopted and embraced by Nigerians in order to promote the task of security of lives and properties of the people which can be collectively achieved by the police and the community. To ensure this outcome, Okonkwo (2023a) is of the opinion that when citizens exhibit *Ub untu* attitude, the state and its agencies perform better.

A comparative research conducted and reviewed from scholarly publications in Nigeria shows that public-police relationship is characterized by dissatisfaction and distrust (Ikea et al. 2021). This is because the result of their findings indicated that series of police misconduct and malpractices were noticed among law enforcement officers by the citizens. This negates their trust in the work the Nigeria Police are doing. Also, Nwachukwu et al. (2024) further research on the image of the police in Nigeria and report that a large number of the community questioned the image of the police in terms of transparency, integrity, and responsiveness. Okonkwo (2023b) corroborates this in arguing that the brutal attitude of the state and its parastatals in relation to agitations from citizens dents the image of the state and its security agencies. These negative perceptions were found to be major deterrents to effective crime reporting and crime control in general.

In Nigeria's Ogun State, the police-public relationship is not an easy one. Ogunmefun et al. (2024) carried out an empirical survey and found out that over 60% of respondents reported that police-public engagement enhances community crime prevention and improves social order. This finding points towards the value placed on the possibilities of cooperation, partnership and problem solving in the state. To advance the effectiveness of the cooperation of the citizens in promoting and supporting the good work of the Nigeria Police. Sani (2022) clarifies that the Ogun State Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) are theoretically and practically positive mechanisms. Their efforts assist in establishing trust and communication between the police and the citizens.

This study intends to research on the level of public confidence and their willingness of report crime to the Nigeria police with a particular reference to the collection of primary data from the residents of Abeokuta South, Ogun State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the framework of this research, several publications were consulted and the scholarly submissions of the scholars were reviewed in line with the aim of the study while instinctual drive theory was also adopted to explain public confidence and the willingness of members of the public to report crime to the Nigeria Police. Instinctual drive theory was rooted in the scholarly work of Sigmund Freud. The theory is psychological in nature but suitable to analyse this paper. According to Sigmund Freud in the Instinctual drive theory,

there two (2) major instinct in every human being that directs or controls their actions. Freud identified the instinctual drives:

- i) Eros instinct drive and
- ii) Thanatos instinct drive

The Eros according to Sigmund is the drive that directs or controls individuals towards positive thinking such as thinking towards positive development and growth, thinking towards perceiving the police as legal security agents, thinking towards reporting crime to support the security network of the police, thinking towards trusting the work of the police, thinking towards having confidence in the police, thinking towards solving problems through the help of the police and thinking towards promoting the image of the police in progressive matters. On the other hand, Sigmund explains Thanatos as a negative thinking process such as thinking towards perceiving the police as a bad police network, perceiving them as a failed security agency, perceiving them as agents of corruption and bribery, seeing and explaining them from the viewpoint of serial killers among others. Sigmund further explains how each of the divided instinctual drives works, He explains that when one individual instinct outweighs the other, it will determine the confidence and willingness of the person or individuals to report crime. Freud explains that if the Thanatos instinct outweighs the Eros thinking of an individual, such person will never have confidence in police tasks neither will they show willingness to report crime to the Nigeria police because every explanation of the Nigeria Police seems negative. However, if the Eros outweighs the Thanatos, the individual concerned will effectively and efficiently report crime to the Nigeria police and also have confidence in the Nigeria Police at any point in time. The literature reviewed shows that there are diverse orientations to the study. While some supported the Eros submission, others support the Thanatos submission. For example scholars such as (Mourtgos, Adams & Nix, 2021; Jackson et al., 2015) opine that the attitude and performance of the police can determine how well people would want to support or rate them. Other scholars who supported the Thanatos submissions like (Tyler & Jackson, 2014; Mazerolle et al., 2014; Boateng, 2018) opine that negative experiences like corruption, abuse or neglect, which would lead to public unwillingness to assist.

Research has found out that people are likely to cooperate and trust the police when they perceive them to be fair, respectful and responsive to public issues (Murphy & Mazerolle, 2016). Using instinctual drive theory to analyze the concept, public perception, police openness, neutrality reflect on the values the public associate with the personality of the police as they perform their tasks.

There have been several reports and cases of misuse of power, extrajudicial killings, extortion, unlawful detention, by the Nigerian police force (Alemika, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2020). These have led to loss of trust and the belief that the police is a force of oppression and not a protector of public order. There was a first-hand evidence of police harassment, arbitrary arrest, and bribery, especially in urban areas like Abeokuta (Nwachukwu et al., 2024). The experience generates fear of law enforcement agencies, preventing witness from approaching police agencies.

Several articles reviewed have shown that there are multiple factors that negate public confidence and ability to report crime which include poor public perceptions of the profession, slow response to emergency calls, refusal to follow up investigations after crime reporting and poor public trust. (Adamu & Rasheed, 2021; Olutola & Bello, 2018). If the public complains are poorly addressed by the organ of justice (Adeyemi & Asaju, 2021), there will be negative implications on the confidence and willingness of the citizens to partake in reporting crime to the Nigeria police which may lead to either jungle justice

or underrating the work of the Nigeria Police in terms of ensuring the security to life and properties.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted the use of mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods and cross sectional survey method for the administration and collection of research instruments (structured questionnaires) from 256 residents in seven (7) wards and 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with the use of unstructured questionnaires at Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The study population for Abeokuta South was estimated to be 425,700 by the Projected Population Census in 2022 with about 15 wards and various streets. The sample size was derived through the use of Taro Yemane sampling formula which was estimated to be 399. Probability (Multistage) and non-probability (purposive) was adopted to serve the instrument. The beauty of adopting multistage sampling is that it breaks Abeokuta South Local Government into Wards, streets, and house numbers. Thereafter, purposive sampling was adopted for the direct administration of the instruments to the identified residents of Abeokuta South Local government of Ogun State, Nigeria. In addition, before the questionnaires were served, all ethical conditions were met such as informed consent from the study's local government and residents, confidentiality was maintained among other things. The instrument served were retrieved and screened, coded and edited to reduce possible errors. At the end of the screening, coding and editing, 256 structured questionnaires and 10 In-depth interviews were found useful for the inferential and descriptive analysis. In the analysis of the primary data collected from the residents of Abeokuta South Local Government Area in Ogun State, Nigeria on their confidence and willingness to report crime to the Nigeria Police, inferential (Linear Regression) and descriptive (Percentages, Frequency distribution, mode and mean) statistical analyses were adopted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section present a comprehensive data analysis and interpretation of information collected through designed questionnaires administered to Abeokuta south local government residents in Ogun state, Nigeria. The section is centered on the analysis of data to assist the main study that is aimed at examining citizen trust in the police and their willingness to report crime. The response in the table below expresses an insight on the general perception and confidence level of respondents regarding performance, responsiveness, and trust in the Nigerian police force:

The Relationship between Public Confidence and Willingness to Report Crimes to the Police in Nigeria.

Table 1. Multi Variant Linear Regression Result showing the relationship between public confidence in the police and willingness to report crimes.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1					
(Constant)	1.145	.374		3.063	.002
Trust in Police Fairness	.152	.045	.176	3.363	.001
Perceived Safety	-.060	.049	-.064	-1.216	.225
Police Responsiveness	-.007	.060	-.007	-.116	.907

Police Integrity	-.026	.055	-.026	-.478	.633
Civic Responsibility	-.022	.054	-.024	-.406	.685
Police-Public Relationship	-.083	.047	-.089	-1.741	.083
Openness in Engagement	.200	.054	.201	3.682	.000
Trust in Police Procedure	.172	.044	.202	3.896	.000
Complaint Handling Confidence	.039	.055	.040	.712	.477
Rights Protection	.138	.046	.157	2.975	.003
Institutional Commitment	.127	.055	.143	2.319	.021

Dependent Variable: Crime Reporting

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis shows the relationship between public confidence in the police and citizens' willingness to report crime. The regression model was framed to evaluate the degree to which each of these dimensions of public views and trust in the police institutions, independent variables, reflecting on various police-public interface, dependent variables were regressed. This pointed out citizens' willingness to report crimes. As shown in Table 1; the regression model also exhibited a statistically significant intercept ($B = 1.145$, $p = .002$) which indicates a level of willingness to report crimes even without strong perceptions of police performance. This implies a kind of inherent reporting behaviour in the population – one that is possibly prone to the impact of civic norms or external enforcement mechanisms. It was clear that several dimensions of public confidence were importantly positive in relation to the dependent variable. Trust in police fairness was an extremely strong predictor, with a regression coefficient of 0.152 ($p = .001$). This result suggests that citizens are more likely to cooperate by reporting crimes when they believe that the police operate fairly with them. In the same way, openness in engagement was highly positive with a relationship of $p < .001$ with $B = 0.200$; meaning that whenever police officers are open and communicative with the public, they tend to be more willing to report crime. Belief in the procedural justice that police officers follow due process also positively determined reporting behaviour with $B = 0.172$ and $p < .001$ indicating that institutional legitimacy would remain important for shaping public cooperation. Besides, citizens' rights protection was significant ($B = 0.138$, $p = .003$), indicating a positive effect of police rights-respecting behaviour on citizen intention to report crime incidents. Institutional commitment, which is perception of professionalism and consistency within the police, had a statistically significant positive impact as well ($B = 0.127$, $p = .021$). Overall, these results imply that legitimacy, fairness, and accountability are important in building public trust as well as encouraging active civic engagement in combating crime. On the other hand, the model also identified various factors that did not predict statistically significant likelihood of reporting crimes. There is no statistical significance of perceived safety ($B = -0.060$, $p = .225$) and police responsiveness ($B = -0.007$, $p = .907$), implying that general feelings of safety or the speed of police response may not individually motivate a person to report crime. Similarly, another variable such as police integrity ($B = -0.026$, $p = .633$), civic responsibility ($B = -0.022$, $p = .685$), and complaint handling confidence ($B = 0.039$, $p = .477$) was not found to be related to the dependent variable either. Interestingly, the police-public relationship variable had a negative coefficient $B = -0.083$ and was approaching significance with a $p = .083$, so there may be a developing trend that deserves more attention, particularly in as much as citizens understand general rapport vis-à-vis procedural trust. General regression results underscore the primacy of trust and institutional fairness over operational metrics in shaping public willingness to report crimes. While aspects of operational elements like responsiveness and

community relations are more into policing reforms, this analysis suggests that the more profound aspects like transparency, procedural justice, and rights protection drive cooperative behaviour. Findings fit with the procedural justice theory, according to which people are likely to comply with authority figures if they consider them legitimate, fair, and respectful of their rights.

It is, therefore, obvious that improving crime reporting strategies would not necessarily demand improvements in service delivery. Instead, they would be anchored on the ability to strengthen police institutions' legitimacy through their commitment to the principles of fairness, transparency, and protection of individual rights. Internal values create an environment in which citizens have confidence and are empowered and motivated enough to contribute toward controlling crimes through reporting and cooperation.

Qualitative Result

The outcome of the qualitative result corroborates with the quantitative result but it is slightly advanced in its submission derived from the structured questionnaires. Ten (10) residents were interviewed and they gave different submission to the outcome of the public confidence and willingness to report crime to the Nigeria police in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria

The question asked was structured along how would you describe public confidence and willingness to report crimes to Police in Nigeria. The following responses were gathered from different residents of Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria in their wards, streets and houses:

The first respondent:

I am not standing against Nigerian police because they are trying to be honest. Although it might not be enough, they choose to work as security personnel and they are paid for their services. The truth is that it is not an easy task at all, even I don't pray for my family to do the work because they can lose their lives at any time. So I give them support for what they are doing. I know and am sure if the police in Nigeria are ready to work, they will do it but we all know that corruption is the major reason for not really trusting them.

IDI/Community Resident/Sodeke-Isale Ijeun Ward 10/Abeokuta South

The submission of the second residents contradicts the submission of the first participants

I cannot trust them and am also afraid of reporting crime to them because they are also criminals at night. Police that can kill you at night if you are traveling in your car. So why should I trust them! I don't even pray I have something to do with them. Go to their station and try and report crime, they will tell you to pay for biro and book to document your statement. Even call them on emergency calls that thieves are raiding one area in your community, they will tell you they don't have fuel in their patrol vehicle. So why trusting them!

IDI/Communitrt Resident/ Itoko Ward 06/Abeokuta South

In another ward at Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria The same question was asked from another participants and she submitted that:

Police are neither good nor bad but it depends on the individual person or motive of the person in the uniform. I cannot nottotally condemn them and I

cannot finally trust them because they are human beings who are bound to run on vested interest over the general interest of the nations. If the person in the uniform is good to be, I see no reasons for not building my confidence around the police as security agents in Nigeria, but if the person in the uniform is bad, then the problem comes in because a bad person will affect the growth and development of the nation. So such persons are not to be trusted and I cannot willingly report crime cases to a criminal that will make my case worst.

IDI/Community Resident/Keesi/Emere Ward 04/Abeokuta South

The submission of another resident from the wards shows that the police as a profession is not bad but the individual mission in carrying out their tasks differs. The participant submitted that

I trust the police and I will help them because the profession is not easy to do. If it is easy every Nigerian should go and join the profession. It is not easy while you and I are sleeping, one man cannot do that because he or she is working. We are the ones destroying the image of the Nigeria Police. The work is too much, the number of the people in the police is small, so we need to work hand in hand with them to do something good for the security of life and properties of Nigerians. Know that while you are sleeping, a policeman is outside helping you. Let's trust them and have confidence in their work so that we can both achieve greater Nigeria today and forever.

IDI/Community Residents/Ake Ward 01/Abeokuta-South

The outcome of the result gathered from the qualitative analysis indicated that the police is not a bad profession but the mission of the individual or persons who take up the job as a task is the major factor that makes people see the police profession as a bad job. Three community residents interviewed at their wards, streets and houses out of ten (10) community residents submitted that the job is bad while six (6) out of the ten (10) community residents explained that it is the human factors that affect the profession, not as if the profession is bad from onset. It is also shared that adequate screening and meritocracy should be looked into for the appropriate selection of individuals or persons before they are employed into the profession.

Discussion and Research Findings

This section presents an integrative discussion of the key findings, connecting statistical results with conceptual insights and theoretical frameworks. The purpose is to interpret how public confidence, institutional challenges, and social influences shape crime reporting behaviour in Ogun State, with a focus on Abeokuta South Local Government Area. The data support how public trust in the police significantly affects crime reporting behaviour. Respondents who viewed the police as honest, fair, and responsive were more inclined to report crimes. This finding affirms the hypothesis formulated for the study which intends to research on whether public trust significantly impacts crime reporting to the police.

The outcome of the linear regression analysis on public confidence and the willingness to report crime to the Nigeria police in Abeokuta South Local Government, Ogun State, Nigeria shows that several variables were tested. The quantitative outcomes show that out of all the variables tested, trust in police fairness is significant at 0.152 with $p < 0.005$. Also,

Openness in community engagement with the police in crime reporting was found significant at 0.200, $p = <0.05$. The result of trust in the procedure of the police proved significant because the result was significant at 0.172, $p = <0.05$. In addition to some of the variables that are tested and also significant, the right to protection was tested and proved significant at 0.138, $p = <0.003$ while the last variable out of the tested and significant variables is institutional commitment which proved significant at 0.127, $p = 0.05$. Other variables tested that are not significant are perceived safety, police responsiveness, police integrity, public-police relationship and complaints handling confidence. While the qualitative responses interpreted and summarized show that the police as a profession should be perceived by the citizens from the transparency and accountability viewpoints rather than the condemnation perspective. The profession is not corrupt but the human factors in the profession corrupt the tasks expected to be carried out by the people employed as security agents in the state. The submission is drawn and related to the Sigmund Freud theory of instinctual drives that explain the importance people associated with the thinking orientation whether to report crime or not to report crime to the Nigeria police. This is due to their personal perceptions of value attached to the security work performed by the Nigeria Police (Tyler & Jackson, 2014; Ogunmefun et al, 2025). Respondents who felt listened to or treated respectfully were more willing to assist with investigations. On the contrary, those with prior negative experiences such as indifference, bribery, or arbitrary arrests exhibited reluctance to engage police services.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of the study intends to examine public confidence and willingness to report crime to the Nigeria police concluded that poor public perception and preconceived notions labeled against the Nigeria police have huge impacts on crime reporting, cooperation, and problem solving on crime related matters in the country.

Recommendation

It on this ground that the following recommendations are derived to support the outcome of the research inquiry:

1. Preconceived notion or stigmatization against the police profession must be erased and public awareness and orientation must be advertised for new beginning on the profession.
2. Whistle blowing policy (ies) must continue for transparency on crime reportage.
3. Encouragement of transparency and accountability in community policing or police-public relations
4. Creation of multiple safe and accessible reporting channels, such as toll free hotlines, mobile applications, community police post, and anonymous reporting platform.
5. Regular monitoring strategies such as police body cameras should be encouraged to fish out the bad eggs from the good ones.
6. Continuous training and retraining programmes for both the citizens and the police on crime reporting.
7. There is need to strengthen Police Community Relation Committee.
8. Encourage youth involvement in security related matters.

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