EXAMINING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD THE NIGERIAN POLICE

COSMAS VICTOR[1], ABDULKADIR USMAN[2], JONATHAN EDEGBO OMATA[3] & EDIME YUNUSA[4]

[1,2&4]DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, PRINCE ABUBAKAR AUDU UNIVERSITY, ANYIGBA, KOGI STATE – NIGERIA.

[3]DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA – NIGERIA.

*Corresponding Author: **EDIME YUNUSA**

Abstract

Public attitudes toward the Nigerian Police have remained inconsistent, largely due to persistent allegations of misconduct, corruption, and weak accountability structures, which have contributed to a widening social distance between citizens and law enforcement agents. This paper, titled Examining Socio-Economic Drivers of Public Attitudes Toward the Nigerian Police, investigated the socio-economic conditions that shape perceptions of the police and influence the nature of police–citizen interaction in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to identify the key socio-economic factors that affect public attitudes toward policing, assess how poverty, unemployment, and inequality influence trust in law enforcement, and evaluate how improved socio-economic conditions may strengthen cooperation between both parties. Anchored on Social Contract Theory and Conflict Theory, the paper argued that economic deprivation and social inequality weaken police legitimacy and foster alienation, thereby discouraging constructive engagement between citizens and the police. Adopting a systematic review methodology, the paper synthesised empirical and theoretical evidence from sociology, criminology, and police studies, drawing on national and international literature in peer-reviewed journal articles. The findings indicate that low income levels, political interference, poor working

Conditions among police personnel and widespread unemployment among citizens are critical drivers of declining police credibility and the erosion of mutual respect. The paper further revealed that socio-economic inequality intensifies suspicion, hostility, and corruption within police–public relations. The paper concluded that improving welfare for police officers, strengthening institutional accountability, promoting community engagement, addressing poverty and social exclusion are essential pathways for rebuilding public confidence and enhancing security for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Introduction

Across the world, the relationship between the police and the public is widely recognised as a central indicator of social order, legitimacy, and institutional trust. From a sociological standpoint, policing is not only a law enforcement activity but also a social contract that reflects the moral and economic fabric of society. When this contract is undermined by poverty, inequality, and corruption, citizens' trust in the police weakens, often leading to mutual suspicion and social disorganisation. Scholars such as Loader and Walker (2022) have emphasised that public trust in policing institutions is conditioned by broader structural and economic realities that either enable or constrain effective law enforcement. Similarly, Tankebe and Liebling (2021) argue that legitimacy in policing emerges from fairness, procedural justice, and citizens' belief that law enforcement operates in the collective interest.

Globally, studies have shown that socio-economic inequality is a critical determinant of police-citizen relations. Research from Latin America, South Asia, and Eastern Europe has demonstrated that deprivation and unemployment significantly reduce citizens' confidence in policing institutions and increase perceptions of corruption and brutality (Bradford et al., 2023). In such settings, police legitimacy becomes a function of both institutional accountability and the state's capacity to deliver social welfare. Consequently, economic marginalisation produces environments where law enforcement is seen as repressive rather than protective, deepening alienation between the police and the populace.

Within Africa, socio-economic factors have similarly shaped the trajectory of police-public relations. Anani-Bossman (2023) notes that in Ghana, digital communication tools have improved police visibility, yet persistent socio-economic inequality and inadequate resources continue to undermine public confidence. Nweke and Francis (2024) also observe that the absence of adequate police infrastructure, poor welfare, and the economic vulnerability of citizens reduce effective collaboration between communities and the police. In South Africa, Burger and Omar (2023) report that high inequality and inadequate institutional reform foster antagonism and reinforce perceptions of bias in policing. These findings highlight how structural deprivation and weak social protection systems in many African states translate into strained relationships between the police and the public.

In Nigeria, the challenges are even more pronounced. Studies consistently reveal that socio-economic deprivation, unemployment, and systemic corruption within law enforcement have severely eroded public

confidence (Akamike et al., 2023). The Nigerian Police Force operates under difficult socio-economic conditions, marked by low remuneration, poor working facilities, and limited institutional accountability (Ramoni, 2025). Consequently, public perception of the police is often framed by experiences of extortion, brutality, and selective enforcement of the law. Ure et al., (2021) found that perceptions of corruption and coercive behaviour among police officers discourage citizens from cooperating with crime-control efforts. Likewise, Sabastine et al., (2025) established that corruption and class bias in policing practices have weakened the moral legitimacy of the police in many Nigerian communities.

From a sociological perspective, these conditions reflect a breakdown of the normative expectations that underpin the social contract between the state and its citizens. When social inequality persists and economic security declines, the police who are meant to symbolise state protection become perceived as agents of oppression rather than guardians of public order. This paper therefore situated police-public relations within the broader socio-economic context of Nigeria, examining how poverty, unemployment, and inequality shape perceptions of policing, influence legitimacy, and determine the level of mutual cooperation necessary for sustainable security and social cohesion.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the constitutional mandate of the Nigeria Police Force to protect lives and property, the relationship between the police and the public has remained strained and characterised by deep mistrust. Empirical studies indicate that this crisis of confidence is not merely a product of individual misconduct but a reflection of broader socio-economic deprivation, inequality, and weak institutional accountability (Akamike et al., 2023; Ramoni, 2025). Persistent poverty and unemployment among citizens foster resentment towards the police, who are often perceived as agents of exploitation rather than protectors of justice. Similarly, inadequate welfare, poor working conditions, and corruption within the police structure have weakened professionalism and reduced the quality of public engagement. These dynamics perpetuate a cycle of hostility and social alienation that undermines effective policing and collective security.

The persistence of these socio-economic challenges raises critical questions about the legitimacy of law enforcement and the nature of social control in Nigeria. When the police are distrusted and citizens feel excluded from justice, the social contract that binds state and society becomes fragile. The resulting gap between the police and the public impedes cooperation in crime prevention and fuels insecurity. Although various reforms have been proposed, including community policing and welfare enhancement, little attention has been given to the underlying socio-economic determinants that shape perceptions of police legitimacy. Understanding how poverty, inequality, and institutional conditions interact to influence police-public relations is therefore essential for restoring trust, strengthening accountability, and promoting sustainable peace and development in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives

The central aim of this paper was to examine the socio-economic drivers of public attitudes toward the Nigerian Police with specific attention to the following:

1. To identify key socio-economic factors affecting police-public relations in Nigeria.
2. To examine the extent to which corruption, poor remuneration, and inadequate welfare among police personnel affect their interaction with the public.
3. To evaluate how social inequality and institutional accountability shape perceptions of police legitimacy in Nigeria.
4. To explore possible policy measures and reforms that can strengthen police-public trust through improved socio-economic conditions.

Methodology

This paper adopted a systematic review approach, drawing on sociological and criminological perspectives to analyse secondary data from scholarly publications, government reports, and empirical studies on policing and socio-economic conditions in Nigeria. The method relied on documentary analysis, enabling critical interpretation of trends, debates, and empirical findings across different contexts. Peer-reviewed articles by authors to establish the link between socio-economic variables and police-public relations.

The paper emphasised on interpretive and analytical reasoning to identify patterns and theoretical connections between socio-economic deprivation and the erosion of trust in policing institutions. This approach was appropriate because it allows the authors to synthesise diverse scholarly perspectives and derive sociological meaning from established empirical findings rather than rely on direct field data collection.

Theoretical Framework

The paper relied on the following theoretical foundations:

1. Social Contract Theory

Social Contract Theory is attributed primarily to Thomas Hobbes (1651), later refined by John Locke (1689) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762). The theory posits that the legitimacy of state authority rests on an implicit agreement between citizens and the government: citizens surrender certain freedoms in exchange for protection, justice, and social order. The state, represented by its institutions, including the police, is expected to safeguard the rights and welfare of the people. The theory provides a philosophical foundation for understanding police legitimacy and accountability. It underscores the expectation that the

police, as agents of the state, must act fairly and protect all citizens irrespective of social or economic status. When these expectations are violated, through corruption, brutality, or neglect, the social contract weakens, leading to public distrust.

In the context of Nigeria, Social Contract Theory explains why socio-economic inequality and institutional failure erode public confidence in the police. When the police fail to ensure safety or act justly, citizens perceive the state as defaulting on its obligations, resulting in hostility and non-cooperation with law enforcement agencies.

However, the theory was criticised that it assumes rational consent and equal participation in the social contract, which may not reflect the realities of unequal societies like Nigeria. It does not fully address the influence of structural inequality, class power, and coercion in shaping state-citizen relations.

2. Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory was first articulated by Karl Marx (1848) and further developed by Max Weber (1905) and later sociologists such as Ralf Dahrendorf (1959). The theory holds that society is characterised by continuous conflict between groups with unequal access to power and resources. Social institutions including the police, serve the interests of the dominant class by maintaining order favourable to those in power, often at the expense of the marginalised.

Conflict Theory provides a realistic sociological framework for interpreting police-public relations in a stratified society like Nigeria. It helps explain how economic inequality and class divisions manifest in policing practices, where the poor often face discrimination and coercion while the affluent enjoy protection. This theory elucidates how socio-economic structures perpetuate unequal treatment by the police. It suggests that the hostile relationship between police and poor communities in Nigeria reflects broader class struggles and economic disparities. Thus, poor welfare among police officers and deprivation among citizens both stem from the same structural imbalance that sustains institutional corruption and weakens accountability.

However, Conflict Theory was criticised for its overemphasis on economic factors and understate the role of moral duty, individual ethics, and institutional reforms in improving police-public relations. It also tends to portray all policing as inherently oppressive, which may not account for variations in community-based policing or reform-oriented practices.

In summary, Social Contract Theory and Conflict Theory both provide a complementary theoretical foundation for this paper. While the former emphasises legitimacy, consent, and mutual responsibility between the state and citizens, the latter exposes the structural and economic inequalities that undermine

these ideals. Their integration enabled a comprehensive sociological understanding of how socio-economic determinants shape police-public relations in Nigeria.

Key Socio-Economic Drivers of Public Attitudes Towards the Nigerian Police

Contemporary scholars highlights poverty, unemployment and economic marginalisation as recurring predictors of strained police–public relations in Nigeria. Empirical surveys and qualitative studies show that where citizens experience high levels of "lived poverty" and labour market exclusion, they are less likely to trust the police or to view officers as protectors of public safety; instead, policing is often experienced as selective enforcement or predation, which reduces the willingness of communities to cooperate with law enforcement (Afrobarometer, 2023; Aborisade & Ariyo, 2021).

These socio-economic conditions shape daily interactions: residents in poorer neighbourhoods report more negative encounters and are more likely to pay bribes, avoid reporting crimes, or rely on informal security arrangements, thereby weakening formal state capacity to prevent and investigate criminality (Afrobarometer, 2023; Ekpu & Mukoro, 2024).

Institutional resourcing and officer welfare are frequently emphasised as mediating factors between broader socio-economic structure and micro-level police behaviour. Studies of police working conditions in Nigeria link inadequate remuneration, obsolete equipment and poor living conditions for personnel to lowered morale and greater propensity for corrupt or coercive practices; poor welfare is presented not as an excuse but as a structural pressure that shapes how officers operate in communities (Ekpu & Mukoro, 2024; Ojo, 2023).

Where the state fails to provide adequate resources, police organisations adopt informal coping strategies that can include extortion, selective enforcement and the prioritisation of elite interests; such strategies then reproduce community distrust and a cycle of non-cooperation that exacerbates insecurity (Ojo, 2023; Aborisade & Ariyo, 2021).

Finally, macro-level governance deficits, weak oversight, inconsistent reform implementation and politicisation of security institutions, interact with socio-economic deprivations to determine the character of police–public relations. Large-scale surveys and national dispatches indicate that public perceptions of police misconduct are not isolated incidents but part of a systemic pattern that citizens locate within a broader governance failure, including unfulfilled reform promises after the #EndSARS protests and slow institutionalisation of accountability mechanisms (Amnesty International, 2020; Afrobarometer, 2024).

Consequently, socio-economic factors operate within an institutional context: poverty and inequality increase vulnerability to predatory policing, but the absence of transparent accountability channels and

reliable public services converts those vulnerabilities into persistent distrust of the police (Afrobarometer, 2024; Iwuoha, 2021).

Extent To Which Corruption, Poor Remuneration, And Inadequate Welfare Among Police Personnel Affect Their Interaction With The Public

The literature treats corruption among police officers as both a cause and a symptom of weak police–public relations. Empirical investigations in Nigeria document frequent citizen reports of petty bribery, extortion at checkpoints and demands for payments during routine interactions; these practices reduce reporting rates, encourage concealment of crimes, and delegitimise law enforcement in the eyes of ordinary people (Afrobarometer, 2023; Shodunke, 2022). Scholars argue that visible corruption transforms routine encounters into extractive exchanges, eroding procedural justice and undermining the normative expectation that citizens will receive protection and impartial treatment when they seek police assistance (Aborisade & Ariyo, 2021; Amnesty International, 2020).

Studies focusing on officer welfare emphasise the causal pathways linking low pay and inadequate welfare to corrosive behaviour, while also stressing important caveats. Quantitative and qualitative study by Ekpu and Mukoro (2024) and others shows that inadequate salaries, delayed allowances and poor accommodation contribute to low morale and occupational strain; under these conditions, some officers resort to corrupt practices as income-supplementing strategies. However, the literature is careful to note that poor remuneration does not deterministically produce corruption: factors such as organisational culture, leadership, supervision and sanctions shape whether welfare deficits translate into misconduct (Ekpu & Mukoro, 2024; Ojo, 2023). Thus, welfare is a significant risk factor whose effect size depends on institutional checks and internal governance.

The effects of corruption and poor welfare on public interaction are observable in behavioural outcomes and in macro-level measures of trust. Survey data and field studies show that citizens who report having paid bribes or suffered abuse are significantly less likely to cooperate with police investigations or to participate in community policing initiatives (Afrobarometer, 2023; Iwuoha, 2021). Moreover, crisis episodes such as the militarised enforcement of COVID-19 measures and the #EndSARS protests amplified public perceptions that policing prioritises control over care, thereby crystallising narratives of illegitimacy that persist even after administrative reforms are announced (Aborisade & Ariyo, 2021; Amnesty International, 2020). In short, corruption and inadequate welfare impair everyday interactions and produce longer-term damage to institutional trust unless addressed through sustained institutional reform.

How Social Inequality And Institutional Accountability Shape Perceptions Of Police Legitimacy In Nigeria

Scholars examining legitimacy emphasise that perceptions of police fairness are embedded in the distribution of social and economic goods; where inequality is salient, policing becomes a mirror of broader social stratification. Theoretical and empirical contributions indicate that citizens evaluate police legitimacy not only by immediate procedural fairness but also by whether policing seems to protect the interests of all social groups equitably (Tankebe & Liebling, 2021; Afrobarometer, 2024). In the Nigerian context, studies and national surveys reveal that marginalised groups, i.e those with lower incomes, less education and fewer political connections are more likely to report negative experiences and to perceive the police as partial or complicit in exclusionary practices, thereby reducing the perceived legitimacy of the force among large segments of the population (Afrobarometer, 2024; Iwuoha, 2021).

Institutional accountability mechanisms are central to whether perceptions of illegitimacy are corrected or entrenched. Where complaints systems, independent oversight bodies and transparent disciplinary procedures function effectively, citizens' grievances can be channelled into corrective processes that restore confidence; where such mechanisms are weak or politicised, alleged misconduct tends to reinforce narratives of impunity and worsen community–police relations (CLEEN Foundation, 2024; Police Act, 2020). Empirical accounts of Nigeria's post-#EndSARS environment show that the credibility of reform measures depends heavily on visible accountability outcomes including prosecutions, transparent inquiries, and restitution, rather than on mere announcements or restructuring (Amnesty International, 2020; Iwuoha, 2021).

Social inequality and accountability on the other hand shape the distribution of police attention and protection, while the presence or absence of credible accountability determines whether citizens interpret adverse encounters as isolated failings or as evidence of systemic injustice. The literature suggests that improving legitimacy requires parallel attention to material inequality through social policies and inclusive service delivery, and to institutional reforms that make redress visible and accessible, so that citizens experiencing abuse can see that the state is willing and able to sanction wrongdoing (Tankebe & Liebling, 2021; Afrobarometer, 2023). Without addressing both dimensions, reforms risk being superficial: greater resources or new policies alone will not restore legitimacy if the structural inequalities that produce differential treatment remain unaddressed.

Possible Policy Measures And Reforms That Can Strengthen Police-Public Trust Through Improved Socio-Economic Conditions

Policy discussions in the literature converge on multi-pronged measures that combine improved officer welfare, community engagement and stronger accountability to rebuild trust. Scholars such as Ekpu and Mukoro (2024) advocating practical reform point to sustainable financing of police services, revisiting remuneration and welfare packages, and investing in modern equipment and training as essential foundations for professional conduct; such measures are argued not merely to improve officer morale but

to reduce incentives for petty corruption and to enable more consistent, rights-respecting policing (Ekpu & Mukoro, 2024; CLEEN Foundation, 2024). The Police Act 2020 provides an institutional framework for community policing and clearer roles for oversight, but commentators stress that statutory reform must be accompanied by budgetary commitment and implementation plans to produce real change (Police Act, 2020; Ojo, 2023).

Community-focused interventions and responsive complaint mechanisms are emphasised as complementary reforms that address both socio-economic roots and relational deficits. Studies of community policing initiatives in Nigeria argue that localised partnerships can improve information flows, increase police visibility in non-coercive ways and create forums for negotiation between citizens and officers; however, successful models require funding, sustained training, and independence from partisan pressures so that community representatives can hold officers to account (Ojo, 2023; Localizing Security, 2025).

Parallel measures such as anonymous reporting channels, independent complaint bodies, and prompt, transparent discipline are repeatedly recommended to signal that misconduct will not be tolerated and to restore procedural legitimacy (Amnesty International, 2020; Iwuoha, 2021).

Finally, the literature underscores the importance of addressing upstream socio-economic drivers through social policy while coordinating security reforms with broader development strategies. Analysts argue that reducing unemployment, expanding social protection and improving public service delivery in underserved areas will diminish the demand for informal protection and reduce antagonistic interactions with police, thereby creating a more favourable environment for collaborative policing (Afrobarometer, 2024; Brookings, 2025).

 In sum, rebuilding police–public trust in Nigeria requires a multi-sectoral approach that pairs officer welfare and institutional accountability with social policies that reduce inequality and vulnerability; piecemeal reforms are unlikely to succeed unless they are integrated, financed and demonstrably implemented.

Empirical Reviews

Empirical studies abound on the subject matter of this paper and among the relevant ones are reviewed as follows:

Akamike et al., (2023) examined corrupt practices in the Nigerian Police Service using a case study approach situated within Nigerian public sector settings and grounded in a governance and institutionalist perspective that links resource constraints to corrupt behaviour. The study population comprised active police personnel and selected members of the public in sampled operational commands, and participants

were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure representation of ranks and community stakeholders. The research design was quantitative with cross sectional elements and employed structured questionnaires alongside documentary review for data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation techniques to test associations between remuneration, discipline and corrupt practices. The major finding was that poor remuneration and unsatisfactory conditions of service were statistically associated with higher incidences of corrupt practices among police personnel, and that weak disciplinary systems amplified these tendencies. The authors concluded that strengthening conditions of service and institutional discipline would reduce opportunities for corruption and improve conduct.

Albeit, the study provides useful empirical links between officer welfare and corruption that illuminate institutional pressures on front line behaviour. However, the study focuses primarily on internal organisational variables and does not systematically incorporate community perceptions or the broader socio economic context such as poverty and unemployment that shape demand for police contact, which is the gap the current paper filled by integrating both citizen level socio economic determinants and institutional factors into an analysis of police public relations.

Nnadozie (2021) investigated public perceptions of monetary bribery by police in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State, using a mixed methods design that combined survey research with in depth interviews and that drew implicitly on procedural justice theory to interpret public reactions to corrupt practice. The study population included urban residents of Awka who had varying experiences with police stops and reporting and the sampling technique used a multistage cluster approach for the survey component while interviewees were selected through snowball sampling to capture richly informed perspectives. Data collection involved a structured questionnaire measuring incidence and effects of monetary bribery together with semi structured interviews exploring personal experiences and civic responses.

Quantitative data were analysed with frequency distributions and chi square tests while qualitative data were theme coded. The study found that monetary bribery was widespread in routine police encounters and that victims of bribery were significantly less likely to report crimes or cooperate with investigations, thereby weakening formal mechanisms of criminal justice. The conclusion emphasised that monetary bribery undermines trust and discourages civic participation in policing initiatives. A comment on the work is that its localised empirical depth provides strong evidence of behavioural consequences of bribery in a Nigerian urban setting. The critique is that although the study powerfully documents citizen perceptions it is geographically limited and does not link those perceptions to macro level socio economic indicators or to comparative evidence across different Nigerian settings, a limitation addressed by the present paper through a wider national focus and by explicitly modelling socio economic determinants such as unemployment and inequality.

Ekpu and Mukoro (2024) explored factors affecting reward systems and employee commitment in the Nigeria Police Force in a regional public administration context and adopted organisational behaviour frameworks that emphasise the role of rewards and institutional arrangements in shaping employee conduct. The study population consisted of serving police officers across selected formations and the sampling technique was stratified random sampling to ensure coverage of ranks and departments. The research design was cross sectional and quantitative with data gathered through validated questionnaires that measured reward perceptions, commitment and self reported conduct. Analysis used regression models and correlation matrices to identify predictors of commitment and the potential mediating effects of reward structures. Key findings indicated that perceived inadequacies in the reward system and poor working conditions were significant predictors of low organisational commitment and increased propensity to engage in coping behaviours that include corrupt practices. The authors concluded that reforming reward structures and improving officer welfare are necessary steps to enhance commitment and ethical conduct. As a comment the study contributes robust statistical evidence linking welfare to attitudes that precede behaviour. The critique is that the analysis concentrates on organisational antecedents and officer attitudes without sufficiently examining how those factors translate into police public relations outcomes from the citizen perspective, and the current paper extends this line of enquiry by analysing how officer welfare and community socio economic status jointly influence trust and cooperation with the police.

Ramoni 2025 investigated determinants of job performance among personnel of the Nigeria Police Force using a survey design conducted across multiple police formations that framed its analysis within work environment and motivation theories. The study population included a broad sample of police personnel and the sampling technique employed proportionate stratified sampling to capture variation by rank and region. The research design was quantitative and cross sectional with data collection via standardised performance and work environment instruments supplemented by management records where available. Data analysis used hierarchical regression and mediation tests to establish relationships between work environment, motivation and performance outcomes. The major finding was that work environment variables significantly predicted job performance and that motivation moderated the relationship, suggesting that improvements in physical conditions and motivational incentives yield measurable performance gains. The conclusion recommended targeted investments in work environment and motivational packages to boost performance. The study is valuable in demonstrating empirically how structural workplace factors affect output. The critique is that performance is assessed largely from an internal organisational standpoint and the consequences of performance levels for public perceptions and legitimacy are not directly measured, thereby leaving a gap that this current paper addresses by linking job performance, officer welfare and socio economic conditions to police public relations and trust as perceived by communities.

Conceptual Framework: Socio-Economic Determinants of Police-Public Relations in Nigeria
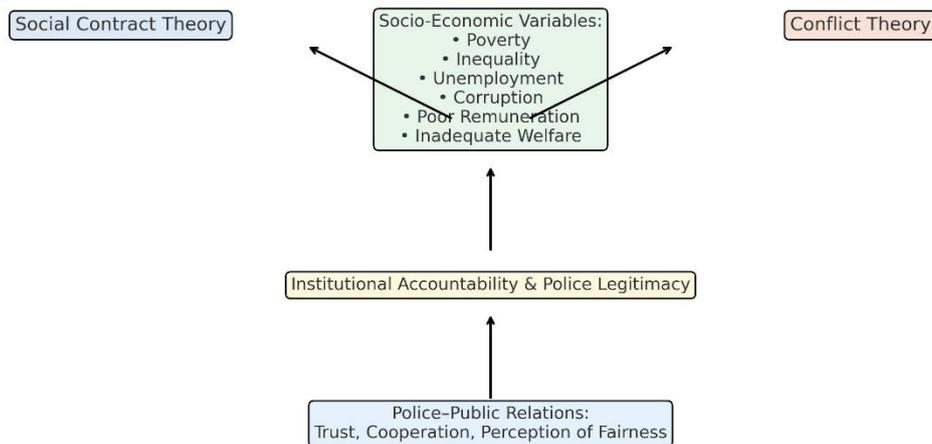
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework above illustrates the theoretical and analytical structure guiding this study on the socio-economic determinants of police–public relations in Nigeria. It connects the Social Contract Theory and Conflict Theory as foundational lenses explaining the dynamics between the police and the public.

The Social Contract Theory provides the normative foundation, emphasising mutual responsibility and legitimacy where the police are expected to uphold justice and protect citizens in exchange for public trust and cooperation. When socio-economic hardship and institutional failures occur, this social contract weakens, leading to mistrust and non-cooperation. In contrast, the Conflict Theory interprets police–public relations through the realities of social inequality and class struggle, showing that the police often function within structures that privilege the powerful and marginalise the poor.

These two theories converge on the socio-economic variables — such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, corruption, poor remuneration, and inadequate welfare — which act as key determinants influencing both police behaviour and public perception. These variables directly affect institutional accountability and police legitimacy, the mediating layer that determines how fairly and effectively policing is perceived in society. When accountability is weak and legitimacy eroded, public trust declines, leading to strained relations.

Finally, the framework culminates in the outcome variable, police–public relations, which manifests in the levels of trust, cooperation, and perception of fairness between citizens and law enforcement. The arrows connecting each stage indicate causal and reinforcing relationships, showing that improvements in socio-economic conditions and institutional accountability can rebuild police legitimacy and restore positive police–public engagement in Nigeria.

Discussions

The findings of this paper underscore that socio-economic conditions remain central to understanding the state of police–public relations in Nigeria, reflecting a broader pattern observed across many developing societies where material deprivation and weak institutions shape patterns of legitimacy and trust. As submitted by scholars such Akamike et al., (2023); Ekpu and Mukoro (2024) who revealed that corruption, inadequate remuneration, and poor working conditions among police personnel erode professional ethics and deepen public suspicion of law enforcement. These institutional weaknesses are further reinforced by the findings of Nnadozie (2021), who showed that routine bribery and extortion diminish public willingness to cooperate with the police, thereby reducing collective efficacy in maintaining security.

From a sociological perspective, these findings can be interpreted through both the social contract and conflict theoretical lenses adopted in this paper. While the social contract framework highlights the breakdown of mutual trust and moral obligation between citizens and the state when justice and protection are unequally distributed, the conflict theory interpretation situates these tensions within broader class inequalities and structural imbalances that perpetuate exploitation within the policing system. These perspectives suggest that the crisis of police legitimacy in Nigeria is not simply behavioural but structurally embedded in socio-economic deprivation and institutional neglect.

Juxtaposing these studies further indicates that reforms aimed at improving police–public relations cannot succeed without addressing the underlying economic and social inequalities that frame these interactions. Ramoni's (2025) work demonstrates that poor work environments and weak motivation among officers directly affect performance, implying that citizens encounter a police institution constrained by its own systemic deprivation. When such institutional fragility meets widespread unemployment and poverty among citizens, policing becomes a site of social conflict rather than social cooperation.

The literature therefore points to the urgent need for socio-economic reforms such as enhanced welfare, transparent reward systems, and community-oriented policing strategies that restore the moral authority of the police while improving citizens' confidence in state institutions. Objectively, these findings align with the aim of the present paper, which situates the deterioration of police–public relations within Nigeria's socio-economic context and calls for a redefinition of policing not as coercive control but as a reciprocal

social service grounded in fairness, welfare, and accountability. This synthesis advances sociological understanding by connecting material conditions to the moral economy of policing, revealing that meaningful change depends as much on social justice as on institutional reform.

Conclusion

This paper concluded that the nature of police–public relations in Nigeria is deeply influenced by socio-economic realities that shape both the conduct of police personnel and the attitudes of citizens toward law enforcement. Persistent poverty, inequality, unemployment, and institutional corruption have weakened public trust and eroded the legitimacy of the Nigeria Police Force. The review of existing literature and empirical studies indicates that low remuneration, poor welfare conditions, and lack of institutional accountability not only compromise officer professionalism but also sustain a cycle of corruption and alienation between the police and the public. Therefore, any attempt to improve police–public trust must go beyond superficial behavioural reforms to address the underlying structural and socio-economic determinants that define everyday policing interactions.

Recommendations

Arising from the above, the paper put forward the following recommendations:

1. Enhancement of Police Welfare and Remuneration: Government should review and improve the salary structure, housing, insurance, and welfare packages of police personnel to reduce susceptibility to corruption and strengthen motivation for ethical conduct in community engagement

2. Promotion of Community-Oriented Policing: The Nigeria Police Force should institutionalise community partnership frameworks that involve citizens in local security planning and dialogue, thereby fostering mutual understanding and reducing the perception of the police as an oppressive force.

3. Strengthening Institutional Accountability Mechanisms: There is a need for transparent oversight systems such as independent complaints commissions and routine audits to monitor police conduct, sanction abuses, and enhance the credibility of the institution in the eyes of the public.

Socio-Economic Empowerment and Public Education: Broader socio-economic reforms that reduce unemployment, poverty, and inequality should be prioritised alongside public enlightenment campaigns that encourage civic responsibility, trust, and cooperation with lawful policing efforts.

Article Publication Details

This article is published in the **UAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UARJAHSS)**, ISSN 3049-4362 (Online). In Volume 1 (2025), Issue 10 (December)

The journal is published and managed by **UAR Publisher**.

References

Aborisade, R. A., & Ariyo, O. G. (2021). Policing the coronavirus pandemic: Nigeria police senior officers' views on preparedness, response, legitimacy, and post-COVID policing. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, *24*(1), 77–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461355721998466

Afrobarometer. (2023). **AD715: Amid growing insecurity, Nigerians fault police for corruption and lack of professionalism**. https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad715-amid-growing-insecurity-nigerians-fault-police-for-corruption-and-lack-of-professionalism/

Afrobarometer. (2024). **AD891: Across Africa, public trust in key institutions and leaders is weakening**. https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad891-across-africa-public-trust-in-key-institutions-and-leaders-is-weakening/

Akamike, I. C., Okonkwo, C. A., & Ojima, A. S. (2023). Police corruption and public perception of security agencies in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, *13*(2), 45–58.

Amnesty International. (2020, October 26). **Nigeria: #EndSARS: Investigate killings of protestors**. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/3254/2020/en/

Anani-Bossman, A. A. (2023). The use of social media and the Ghana Police Service: An emerging communication perspective. In K. Yeboah & P. M. Adjei (Eds.), *Media, communication and society in Africa* (pp. 47–65). Springer.

Brookings Institution. (2025). Ensuring service delivery for all African citizens. In *Foresight Africa 2025–2030* (Chapter 4).

CLEEN Foundation. (2024). **Police reform project**. https://cleen.org/police-reform-project/

Ekpu, E. F., & Mukoro, A. (2024). Factors affecting reward system and commitment of Nigeria Police Force. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*, (32), 165–176.

Iwuoha, V. C., & Aniche, E. T. (2021). Protests and blood on the streets: Repressive state, police brutality, and the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, *13*(4), 1102–1124. https://doi.org/10.1093/jhrp/huab034

Localizing Security. (2025). The benefits of community policing in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration and Social Welfare Review*, *10*(3), 84–103.

Nnadozie, B. C. (2021). *Public perceptions of Nigeria police monetary bribery in Awka, Nigeria* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Nweke, O. C., & Francis, A. (2024). Socio-economic determinants of police visibility and public trust in Greater Accra, Ghana. *International Journal of Business and Social Science Research*, *13*(5), 937–948.

Ojo, P. J. (2023). Nigeria Police Force and the quest for community policing. *LCJSSS*. https://ideas.repec.org/a/ris/lcjsss/0028.html

Police Act 2020 (Nigeria). (2020). Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC). https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Police-Act-2020.pdf

Ramoni, A. R. (2025). Determinants of job performance among personnel of the Nigeria Police Force. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, *9*(4), 1128–1136.

Sabastine, I. J., Isaiah, D. M., & Daude, A. M. (2025). Corruption and its effects on effective policing in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, *10*(2), 66–74.

Shodunke, A. O. (2022). Enforcement of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown orders in Nigeria: Use of force and compliance dynamics. *African Safety Promotion Journal*, *20*(1), 1–13.

Tankebe, J., & Liebling, A. (2021). Legitimacy and criminal justice: A sociological analysis. *Annual Review of Criminology*, *4*, 189–210. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-030920-111451

Ure, O. R., Nnadozie, E. C., & Onyekachi, A. A. (2021). Public perception of police corruption and its implications for community policing in Awka South, Anambra State, Nigeria [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.