

Human Rights Violation by Law Enforcement Agents in Nigeria: Investigating the Incidence of Human Rights Abuse by The Police Force and The Frameworks in Place to Address These Issues.

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ABSTRACT

With an emphasis on the recurring trends of abuse and the legal frameworks put in place to deal with such misconduct, this study examined the frequency of human rights abuses by the Nigerian Police Force. Despite having constitutional and statutory protections like the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (2015), and the Police Act (2020), as well as being a signatory to important international human rights instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, widespread violations still plague law enforcement operations in Nigeria. Using documented reports from reliable organisations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the study identifies and investigates frequent abuses, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture, unlawful arrests, and excessive use of force. It also looks at the structural causes of these abuses, including judicial incompetence, institutional weakness, corruption, militarised policing culture, and inadequate police welfare. Despite the existence of strong legislative restrictions, the study discovers that a lack of political will and a culture of impunity frequently compromise execution. Through the use of a qualitative methodology and secondary data analysis, the study emphasises how urgently training, accountability systems, law enforcement, and institutional control need to be changed. It concluded with important suggestions for advancing a police force that upholds human rights and fortifying Nigeria's legal and democratic systems. The report adds to the current conversation on protecting human rights and changing Nigerian policing.

Keywords: Police, Police brutality, Law enforcement, Human rights, violation

INTRODUCTION:

No matter a person's nationality, race, sex, religion, language, socioeconomic origin, or any other status, they all have the inherent, inalienable, and unalienable rights that come with being human (Nwocha & Udude, 2020). The establishment of peaceful and equitable communities depends on these rights, which are the cornerstones of equality, justice, freedom, and human dignity. Since these rights are universal, a number of international legal instruments have been created to define and safeguard them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1948 and lays out a thorough framework of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, is the most important of these. Legally binding agreements like the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its sister treaty, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which mandate that signatory states uphold, defend, and fulfil the listed rights of people within their borders, serve as a complement to this. A major regional attempt to advance and defend human rights in accordance with African customs and sociopolitical realities is represented on the African continent by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, also known as the Banjul Charter, which was adopted in 1981 and ratified by Nigeria. These international commitments are domestically reinforced by Nigeria's constitutional framework, specifically Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution

(as amended), which guarantees a number of fundamental rights, including the right to life, human dignity, personal liberty, fair hearing, and freedom of expression (Nkobowo, 2022). Nigeria has demonstrated its commitment to upholding universal human rights standards and is legally obligated under international law to guarantee their compliance by ratifying these regional and international conventions.

But the disconnect between normative promises and real-world application is still a major issue, especially when it comes to how law enforcement agencies behave. This discrepancy is particularly noticeable in the way law enforcement agencies operate, as ongoing allegations of torture, abuse, arbitrary detention, and extrajudicial killings seriously damage the legitimacy and efficacy of the human rights principles contained in these documents (Inimiesi & Maduawuchi, 2022). Several reports from reputable national and international human rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), have detailed numerous instances of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and excessive use of force. For instance, Amnesty International (2023) reported the case of a police officer who shot and killed one Onyeka Ibe for refusing to pay a NGN 100 bribe (USD 0.13) in Delta state on the 5th of April. Still citing from Amnesty International:

On 6 September, armed police officers teargassed and used excessive force on University of Lagos students protesting against an increase in tuition fees from NGN 19,000 (USD 24.76) to NGN 190,000 (USD 247.65). Olorunfemi Adeyeye and six other students were arrested, beaten and threatened with death by police.

These offences are typically perpetrated with impunity, indicating a greater institutional culture of disrespect for the rule of law and a lack of accountability within the law enforcement apparatus. These crimes diminish public trust and put doubt on the state's commitment to justice, accountability, and the rule of law.

In Nigeria, the police are constitutionally mandated to maintain law and order, prevent and investigate crimes, enforce laws, and protect the lives and property of citizens, as outlined in Section 4 of the Police Act and supported by relevant provisions of the 1999 Constitution. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the state's main civil force, is essential to maintaining justice, protecting the inalienable rights of humankind, and maintaining internal security. It is the entry point for criminal cases into the criminal justice system, since it is the first encounter the general public has about the administration of criminal justice (Inimiesi & Maduawuchi, 2022). Despite the potential goal of establishing the Nigeria Police Force, in practice, they are associated with negative behaviours that jeopardize and sabotage their efforts in the battle against crime in society. The Nigerian police force, which is meant to diligently engineer the preservation of people's fundamental human rights, is responsible for a large number of human rights violations. Nigerian police are notorious for extrajudicial executions, brutality against innocent people, using force to coerce detainees into making confessions, outright corruption, and other crimes, even though they operate in a democratic setting (Barnabas, 2014). Grave violations, such as arbitrary and unlawful arrests, prolonged and incommunicado detentions, physical and psychological torture, extrajudicial executions, widespread extortion, and the indiscriminate use of excessive force, have been repeatedly brought to light by human rights organisations like Amnesty International, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and civil society organisations. According to Amnesty International (2021), the police often violate human rights, including illegal killing, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment, as well as enforced disappearance. The media is inundated with allegations of police violence against civilians they pledged to protect. According to a Vanguard story from August 29th, 2017, armed police personnel approach bus/taxi drivers and merchants on a regular basis, demanding bribes and abusing their human rights in order to collect money. Human Rights Watch (2020) captured this when it said that:

Ordinary Nigerians travelling on the country's roadways, buying and selling at markets, running daily errands, or working within their offices are routinely subjected to police extortion. Those who resist and fail to pay the bribes demanded are often threatened and unlawfully detained, and at times physically and sexually assaulted, tortured, or even killed by the police. Many of these abuses are perpetrated as a means to further extort money from ordinary citizens. The police officers make little attempt to hide the collection of money, exposing the near-total lack of political will on the part of Nigerian authorities to hold police officers accountable for their actions.

Taxi, minibuses, and motorcycle drivers, as well as private vehicles, are often subjected to extortion under fear of arrest, incarceration, and physical injury after being forced to halt at official or semi-official police roadblocks

around Nigeria. These checkpoints, ostensibly put in place to combat rampant and rising crime, have in practice become a lucrative criminal venture for the police (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Commercial vehicles and tricycle drivers who ply the road routinely daily, passing through these police checkpoints on multiple occasions, complain about having repeatedly bribed the same Police officers. The police, in their response to these complaints, creatively set up a system where drivers are given a password or number based on an identifiable mark on their vehicle (e.g., license plate number) to identify those commercial drivers who have already paid for a particular day. These monies collected, however, never find their way to the state treasury. More so, alleged offenders under Police custody usually complain that police officers employ crude techniques of investigation and interrogation while in police detention. These methods, according to them, include prolonged detention in police custody without trial; severe beating with a police baton and other dangerous objects; burning with hot objects; squeezing of testicles and inserting objects into the male genital organ; insertion of nails on feet; electric shock; suspension on the tree in various positions; cutting with a cutlass; and other forms of torture. In support of the aforementioned, the Nigeria 2019 Human Rights Report said that the police utilised a method known as "parading" arrestees, which involves escorting them around public locations and exposing them to public mockery and abuse. The notorious conduct of groups like as the now-defunct Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) shows the pervasive nature of abuse, with police habitually harassing, extorting, and brutalising individuals, particularly young people, in the name of crime control. The 2020 #EndSARS demonstrations, triggered by popular outrage over police violence, brought these problems to the forefront of public debate, both nationally and globally. Despite the breakup of SARS and repeated pledges of change, fresh and ongoing examples of abuse by other police units continue to surface, exposing deep-rooted structural and operational weaknesses.

The preceding cases demonstrate that Nigeria's police conduct is characterised by high-handedness, presumption, abuse of power and authority, as well as the brutalisation of the downtrodden or poor masses, who are frequently victims of unrealised personal liberty, constitutional freedom, and rights, as numerous cases of police brutality on innocent and defenceless citizens abound. Conventions, standards, and treaties are intended to guide the police's activities at both the national and international levels. The Nigeria Police Force, an institution designed to detect, investigate, and prosecute crime in order to reduce criminal activity in society, is increasingly becoming a perpetrator of crime (Inimiesi & Maduawuchi, 2022; Inimiesi, Waripamowei, & Ebitari, 2022). The shared truth that criminal prosecutors violate the rule of law endangers society because it will continue to harm their image in the eyes of end-users of their security services, reducing their efficacy and efficiency in the fight against crime in society. This trend (police brutality) has cost the lives of several defenceless civilians, including innocent people who were denied the right to a fair trial under the rule of law and were brutalised. Against this context, the purpose of this study is to explore the occurrence of human rights breaches by the Nigerian Police Force, determine the patterns and causes of such abuses, and critically evaluate the appropriateness and execution of current legislative frameworks meant to address them. Understanding these processes is critical for policy change, institutional accountability, and promoting a more rights-conscious law enforcement culture in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine patterns of human rights abuses by Police officers in Nigeria
2. To investigate the drivers of human rights abuses by Police officers in Nigeria.
3. To highlight the legal frameworks in place to address these issues
4. To provide actionable recommendations to reduce human rights abuses by Police officers in Nigeria.

Patterns of human rights abuses by Police officers in Nigeria

The law enforcement system in Nigeria has long-standing institutional, structural, and cultural dysfunctions that are reflected in the various and frequently connected ways that police personnel violate human rights. Arrests made arbitrarily and unlawfully, sometimes without a warrant, reasonable cause, or due process, are among the most common trends. Many people are often stopped, searched, and imprisoned on false pretences, sometimes based on profile factors like appearance, presence of mobile devices, or clothing style, especially young people and members of vulnerable groups. The unauthorised search for weapons and ammunition by Nigeria Police Force officials at the residence of politician Chief Edwin Clark in Abuja serves as a prime example. The action

was based on false information obtained from an "informant," who says he was acting on a tip from another citizen and just had Nigeria's best interests in mind when he reported the incident to the police (Ojoye, 2018). In another case, Aderanti (2023) stated that a defendant was wrongfully imprisoned after a police prosecutor got a First Information Report (FIR) that the presiding magistrate had not signed. The constitutional guarantees of liberty and protection from unjustified incarceration are regularly violated by these arrests. In flagrant violation of the rules of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (2015), detainees are frequently detained for longer than the legally required period of time without being charged or given access to family members or legal representation. For example, 24-year-old amateur boxer Sunday Bang talked about how three SARS police detained him at his Abuja house in October 2018 and charged him with robbery (Oluwafemi, 2021). He was taken into custody because he had gone to see his girlfriend just hours before armed robbers broke into her home. Sunday Bang told Amnesty International that he was denied access to his family and legal counsel while he was being held by SARS for five weeks. He told Amnesty International about his experience working at the SARS office in Abuja:

They took me to the torture chambers the second day after my arrest. One policeman, in charge of torture, came with a bicycle/car tyre tube and a hard piece of wood. He tied my left arm with the tube. It was very painful, and my arm went numb. He tied me from my palm to the end of my upper arm. They beat me with a stick and rod on my arms, knees and legs. They broke my two legs... I couldn't stand... I was bleeding from my legs and body. My blood was flowing all over the floor. I kept telling them that I was innocent of the accusation. The police officer was threatening that he would shoot me if I didn't admit that I participated in the robbery. I was very weak, because I had not eaten any food since my arrest (Amnesty International interview, Onitsha, 10 October 2017).

In the case of Chief Ibrahim Salami vs. Pa Josiah Oyediran Olaoye & Anor (2018) LPELR-47256(CA), for example, a man was arrested and detained for three days without a valid reason for the delay, which the appeal court found to be illegal. These violations not only violate personal freedom but also contribute to a culture of fear, impunity, and mistrust in the legal system (Action4justice, n.d).

The frequent use of torture and other cruel or humiliating treatment by police to coerce confessions or frighten detainees is closely related to illegal arrests. Reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Nigerian Human Rights Commission have repeatedly documented officers using cruel interrogation methods, such as beatings, electric shocks, suspension from ceilings, mock executions, and starvation, even after Nigeria ratified the UN Convention Against Torture and passed the Anti-Torture Act of 2017. By depending on forced confessions that lack the credibility of evidence, such methods not only violate the law but also compromise the integrity of the criminal justice system.

In police stations, SARS detention centres (before to its dissolution), and other unofficial holding facilities, torture is particularly common. For example, on October 10, 2017, Nigerian police officers allegedly tortured and killed Ibrahim Olamilekan Badmus (Inimiesi & Maduawuchi, 2022). Miracle, age 23, was arrested in February 2017 and held in SARS prison facilities in Awkuzu and Neni, Anambra State, on suspicion of stealing a laptop, according to Amnesty International (2020). Before being accused and hauled before a court, he informed Amnesty International that throughout his 40 days in SARS prison, he was abused and hardly fed. In his words:

At SARS Awkuzu, their leader directed them to hang me. They took me to the back of the hall and tied me up with ropes. They tied my hands behind me, tied my two legs together and then tied the rope binding my hands with that around my legs behind me, causing my chest to protrude. They had two, already prepared iron stands where they hang people. They passed an iron rod through the ropes and then lifted me up by the rod and hung me from the iron stand. Then they started to use all manner of items to beat me, including machetes, sticks, inflicting me with all manner of injuries... When the first officer came to check and saw that I was almost unconscious, he went to call their team leader, who then asked them to bring me down. They dumped me inside the interrogation hall (Amnesty International interview, Abuja, 30th September 2018).

The Nigerian police force's flagrant human rights abuses, including the use of torture as a form of interrogation, continue to be a source of popular disdain, scorn, and condemnation (Ogunode, 2015). These abuse patterns

indicate a serious disregard for constitutional and international human rights commitments and expose a policing mindset based on coercion rather than inquiry.

The extrajudicial killing of suspects and civilians is another concerning pattern of abuse. Police officers have frequently used excessive and disproportionate force during routine patrols, protests, or arrests, frequently resulting in the death of innocent people (Inimiesi & Maduawuchi, 2022). For example, in their report titled "State of Human Rights in Nigeria," the human rights organisation Centre for Constitutionalism and Demilitarisation (CENCOD) 2011 stated that on May 11, 2011, one Toochukwu Uzoukwu. Toochukwu, who was from Umudumiejike Community in Isiala Umuoizu Nwangele local government area of Imo state, was accused of smoking Indian hemp when he was apprehended and turned over to the policemen of Operation Famou Tangbei. The Bayelsa State Police Command reportedly investigated the incident and concluded that Toochukwu was indeed killed. Citing the same source, Cencod claimed that on June 27, 2011, a thirty-year-old student of the State's chapter of the Open University of Nigeria, Mr Kelvin Kadaba, was brutalised by members of Operation Famou Tangbei, who lacerated the victim's body. The Nigerian police not only execute detainees but also free citizens, mostly for refusing to pay bribes or during road checks. One particular incident occurred in Rivers state, where an Officer of the Nigeria Police shot a tricycle driver to death on Airport Road in Ruuokoro/Rukpokwu area of Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers state for refusing to pay a sum of one-hundred-naira (#100) bribe. Global attention was brought to the prevalence of unarmed civilians being shot dead during peaceful protests or while in detention by the 2020 #EndSARS demonstrations. Although there are explicit legal and constitutional prohibitions on the use of force and firearms, enforcement is lax, and accountability for these killings is infrequent. The Police Order 237, which outlines the permissible use of firearms, is either ignored or inadequately enforced. Additionally, many incidents of extra-judicial killings are not officially recorded or investigated, enabling a cycle of silence and impunity. Victims' relatives sometimes encounter threats, intimidation, or outright neglect when seeking justice. These practices drastically undermine public confidence and show the hazardous militarization of civil enforcement operations in Nigeria.

In addition to physical harassment, Nigerian police personnel have a long history of systematically extorting and exploiting their residents financially. Patrols, checkpoints, and roadblocks are frequently used as channels for unlawful financial demands rather than as tools of public protection. Although these checkpoints were supposedly established to tackle widespread and increasing crime, in reality, they have turned into a profitable criminal enterprise for the police (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Commercial truckers and tricycle operators who often travel the route and pass through these police checkpoints lament that they have bribed the same police officials on several times. The police, in their response to these complaints, creatively set up a system where drivers are given a password or number based on an identifiable mark on their vehicle (e.g., license plate number) to identify those commercial drivers who have already paid for a particular day. These monies collected, however, never find their way to the state treasury. This form of economic abuse disproportionately affects low-income earners, perpetuating cycles of poverty and injustice. Refusing to comply with extortion frequently results in violence, property confiscation, or false accusations. A guy was wrongfully charged, threatened with jail time, and refused access to legal counsel because he lacked the #500,000 necessary to escape police officials, according to a case published by Omojuyigbe in 2021. Further demonstrating how frequently police misuse their position is gender-based abuse, which includes sexual harassment and the exploitation of women while they are in custody. To bolster the aforementioned, a woman, identified as a widow and mother of two children, was reportedly arrested by a named police officer in Port-Harcourt, Rivers State, in July for failing to wear a nose mask. She was then allegedly taken to a guest house where she was subjected to sexual assault (Punch 2020). The report claims that the officer sought the lady's bank account information and placed N2,000 (\$5) into her account as payment, ostensibly, for sexually abusing her. The officer threatened to murder the woman if she refused his advances (Richard, 2021). The majority of victims do not disclose because they are afraid of reprisals or lack confidence in the legal system, even in the face of internal disciplinary standards and complaints channels such as the Police Complaints Response Unit (CRU). These trends show that police misbehaviour in Nigeria is indicative of a larger institutional breakdown rather than being isolated or episodic. The individual's right to life is in danger because of these accounts. These accounts of police highhandedness are nothing but infinitesimal when juxtaposed with the litany of reports on the abuse of power by Police officers.

Drivers of Human Rights abuses by Police officers in Nigeria

One of the foremost drivers of human rights abuses by police officers in Nigeria is the militarized orientation and authoritarian policing culture inherited from the country's colonial and military past. The colonial state established a police force as a means of solely enforcing its will and not to protect its subjects, or the natives, as the case may be (Sanya, 2020). This legacy endured through a series of military governments that imposed authoritarian authority and repressed opposition mostly via the use of the police. Therefore, rather than being based on service, accountability, and public trust, the police culture is still heavily based on the use of force, intimidation, and coercion (Akinlabi, 2022). Instead of seeing the public as fellow citizens who need to be protected, officers are taught to see them as enemies, especially young people and activists. The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) has traditionally used disproportionate force, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation techniques to quell protests, especially those organised by activists and young people, according to Nwagwu (2025). Systemic violence is encouraged by this combative mentality, especially when there are public demonstrations, interrogations, or operations in tense regions. The magnitude of this pervasive militarism and its incompatibility with democratic policing were made clear by the 2020 #EndSARS demonstrations and the violent reactions of police personnel.

Systemic institutional failure, which has its roots in poor governance frameworks, insufficient oversight, and a lack of a strong accountability mechanism, is another factor contributing to police officers' violations of human rights in Nigeria. In his research, Anzizi (2024) found that the NPF's problems arise from systemic problems that are made worse by a lack of openness and accountability. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) lacks internal discipline and transparency due to its highly bureaucratic and centralised organisational structure (Oyibokure, Okereka, & Mukoro, 2023; Salihu & Agu, 2024). Despite being set up to keep an eye on and regulate police behaviour, oversight organisations like the Police Service Commission (PSC) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) frequently lack the political will, operational independence, and financial resources necessary to carry out their duties. Police personnel regularly violate individuals' rights without fear of repercussions due to a culture of impunity brought about by the lack of clear, enforceable penalties for wrongdoing (Chukwuji, 2024). Furthermore, the inability of internal control systems, like the Complaint Response Units and the Inspector-General's X-Squad, to look into and punish negligent officers has made the current disciplinary procedures useless. The lack of standardised training modules focused on human rights and the rule of law, inadequate record-keeping, and opaque complaint procedures all contribute to this institutional breakdown. As a result, officers operate in an environment where abuses are normalized and rarely addressed, making institutional weakness a core enabler of rights violations. The preservation of basic rights in Nigeria would continue to be jeopardised by systemic failure in the absence of profound structural reforms, such as decentralised supervision, judicial independence, and empowered civilian watchdogs.

Corruption and economic hardship within the police force are major factors contributing to human rights abuses by Nigerian police personnel (Inimiesi & Kalama, 2023; Ajanwachuku, Mgbolu, & Chikaodili, 2024). Chukwuji (2024) asserts that although corruption in Nigeria is not a recent occurrence, the scope and severity of the issue continue to be astounding. Due to their low pay, inconsistent benefits, poor housing, lack of operational logistics, and little welfare benefits, the majority of officers labour under appalling conditions. Naankiel and Ayokha (2016) claim that inadequate police welfare and compensation directly contribute to human rights violations by the police, including extortion and the theft of suspects' property. These shortcomings frequently encourage police to employ extortion, bribery, and other abusive tactics to take advantage of their positions of authority for their own financial benefit. Illicit fines are frequently collected through roadblocks, unlawful checkpoints, and indiscriminate arrests, which makes law enforcement an exploitative weapon. For basic operations, such as refuelling patrol cars and maintaining station infrastructure, police formations frequently rely on money that is extorted from the general people.

Additionally, poor hiring practices lead to police violence (Inimiesi & Maduawuchi, 2022). Favouritism and political meddling abound in the hiring process itself, which frequently results in the hiring of inexperienced or underqualified personnel who lack the moral and professional compass needed for efficient law enforcement. Economic hardship and a dearth of meritocratic hiring practices combine to create a police culture where survival comes before service. Police officers in Nigeria seldom have mental health exams before hiring new officers, and the majority of the time, the medical records that new hires provide are not carefully checked to ensure that

they are reliable (Ajanwachuku et al, 2024). Additionally, a larger proportion of Nigerian police personnel are junior officers, whose educational backgrounds often consist of only a secondary school diploma. This is demonstrated by the conduct of these officers. Many police are encouraged to mistreat individuals instead than enforcing the law, especially the weak and impoverished who are unable to fight back or seek justice. The economic forces behind violations of human rights will continue to thrive unless police officers receive fair compensation, professional equipment, and ethical training (Abdullah, 2025).

In Nigeria, police violations of human rights are also greatly aided by judicial inefficiency and lax enforcement of the law. Despite the nation's adoption of progressive legal tools like the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (2015), the Police Act (2020), and the 1999 Constitution, the country's execution is still subpar because of judicial oversight shortcomings, prosecutorial independence issues, and delays in the legal system. Law enforcement personnel are encouraged to circumvent due process and frequently take matters into their own hands due to the sluggishness of the legal system (Mohammed, 2017). Additionally, court inefficiency and corruption erode public trust in the legal system while simultaneously giving police personnel more confidence since they know their wrongdoing is likely to go unpunished. Many human rights abuse cases against police officers are rarely prosecuted, and when they are, outcomes are often manipulated, delayed, or quietly dismissed (Inimiesi & Maduawuchi, 2022). This dysfunction discourages victims from seeking redress and contributes to a wider culture of silence and complicity. Additionally, the lack of legal literacy among citizens, particularly in rural and underserved communities, makes them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They often do not know their rights or the legal channels to report violations. Without an efficient legal system that guarantees timely justice, police officers are unlikely to respect legal procedures or citizens' rights, and the law becomes an abstract ideal rather than a lived reality (Inimiesi et al, 2022). Therefore, judicial reform, including case management improvements, anti-corruption mechanisms, and legal aid services, is essential in curbing police abuses.

Political commands, which frequently put regime safety first, are a last but no less important factor in police-led violations of human rights in Nigeria. Most of the time, the police officers on duty are not to blame for the crackdown on protesters. Political leaders frequently give instructions to use tear gas on any demonstration that they believe poses a danger to their authority or status (Ajanwachuku et al, 2024). As you may remember, the #EndSARS demonstration began peacefully before some suspected hired thugs broke in and attacked legitimate demonstrators, hurting several people in the process. When politicians issue directives like "shoot on sight," police violence can become political (New Desk, 2021).

Legal Frameworks in place to address these issues

From a local and international legal standpoint, Nigeria has a wide range of legislative frameworks intended to control police behaviour and protect human rights. Fundamental rights like the right to life, personal liberty, human dignity, fair trial, and freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment are enshrined in Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), which forms the basis of these protections (Inimiesi & Maduawuchi, 2022). The Nigerian Police Force is one of the state agencies for which these rights are intended to act as non-negotiable norms. The Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015, which was passed in order to guarantee a just, effective, and open criminal justice system, is a supplement to the Constitution. To reduce abuse and improve due process, the ACJA includes clear rules on suspect rights, legal arrest and detention practices, the ban on torture, and the prompt administration of justice. The Act requires that suspects be made aware of their rights at the time of arrest, forbids arrest in lieu, and places a strong emphasis on treating apprehended suspects humanely. The Act also mandates that police personnel notify supervisory magistrates of detentions, guaranteeing accountability and supervision in law enforcement operations. The outdated 1943 law was superseded by the Nigeria Police Act 2020, which brought about more revisions (Akinola, 2025). The emphasis on community policing, the ban on torture and cruel treatment, and the creation of monitoring organisations like the Police Complaints Response Unit (CRU) are just a few of the progressive reforms brought about by the new Act. Nigeria is bound by important international treaties and conventions, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Convention Against Torture (CAT), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which require the Nigerian government to respect global norms for police accountability and human rights protection.

Despite this comprehensive legal and normative framework, the implementation and enforcement of these mechanisms remain conspicuously poor. Systemic corruption within the police force and the larger criminal justice system continues to degrade the effectiveness of these laws (Anzizi, 2024; Ajanwachuku et al, 2024). Officers frequently operate without consequence, making unauthorised arrests, torturing people, and extorting them since there are no accountability systems in place and internal disciplinary procedures are ineffective. Existing oversight bodies, such the National Human Rights Commission and the Police Service Commission, usually struggle with a lack of funds, political meddling, and a restricted ability to look into and bring charges against negligent police (Inimiesi & Maduawuchi, 2022). Furthermore, there is a pervasive culture of institutional impunity, since accusations are frequently disregarded or rejected without adequate inquiry, and victims of police abuse seldom ever obtain justice. Transparency is further hampered by inadequate control from external civic watchdogs and internal supervisory mechanisms. Due in part to inadequate training, a lack of human rights education, and a lack of professional ethics, many officers are still ignorant of or unconcerned with the human rights protections incorporated into the legislation. The widespread discrepancy between laws and law enforcement procedures, where improvements mostly remain on paper without being translated into significant behavioural changes within the ranks, exacerbates these flaws even further (Inimiesi et al, 2022). Consequently, while Nigeria has made laudable steps in modernising its legislative architecture addressing police behaviour and human rights, the continuing inability to apply these frameworks effectively has allowed abuses to continue undetected (Inimiesi et al, 2022). This gap emphasizes the critical need for structural reforms that go beyond laws, including effective monitoring, civil society involvement, institutional independence, and a zero-tolerance attitude to impunity to restore public faith in law enforcement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian Police Force's ongoing pattern of human rights abuses highlights the nation's severe problems with governance, law enforcement, and the administration of justice. Nigeria has ratified many international and regional human rights conventions and has constitutional safeguards, but these normative frameworks have not yet been effectively incorporated into routine police operations. Unlawful arrests, arbitrary detentions, torture, enforced disappearances, extortion, and extrajudicial executions continue to occur at an alarming rate, which is indicative of systemic corruption, deep-seated institutional flaws, inadequate monitoring, and a militarised and impunity-ridden policing culture. Policy and practice continue to diverge, undermining public confidence in law enforcement, undermining the legitimacy of state institutions, and violating the rights and dignity of individuals, especially those from under-represented groups. Therefore, in order to return the Nigeria Police Force to its proper position as a service-oriented and rights-respecting organisation, immediate and extensive changes are required. In light of this, the study suggests the following:

1. First and foremost, police training programs should be completely revised to give human rights instruction, moral behaviour, community policing, and peaceful dispute resolution top priority.
2. Institutional accountability should be strengthened by empowering independent oversight organizations like the Police Service Commission and the National Human Rights Commission with greater autonomy, sufficient budget, and the legal capacity to look into and sanction erring police officers.
3. In addition to increasing victims' access to legal assistance, the judicial system should be reformed to guarantee prompt and unbiased resolution of instances involving police wrongdoing.
4. Fourthly, police personnel's welfare and salary should be enhanced to alleviate the economic constraints that frequently drive corrupt and abusive behaviour.
5. Lastly, sustained civil society involvement and public education campaigns are essential for fostering a human rights culture and making the police answerable to the people they serve. Nigeria can only expect to close the gap between its human rights obligations and the actual experiences of its people by making such ongoing, multifaceted efforts.

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