

Review Article

The Historical Evolution of the Nigeria Police Force and How Best It Can Be Managed

Mohammed Jamilu Haruna* 

Social Development Department, Kano State Polytechnic, Kano, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines the historical development of the Nigeria Police Force, its various challenges, and optimal management strategies. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) boasts a rich and intricate history that spans more than two hundred years. Originating during the colonial period, it has evolved into a national law enforcement body in Nigeria, experiencing substantial changes along the way. The paper offers an in-depth historical review of the NPF, emphasizing its progression, obstacles, and necessary reforms. Furthermore, the paper investigates effective management practices for the NPF, incorporating both international policing standards and local contextual considerations to fulfill its responsibilities. The findings indicate that successful management of the NPF necessitates a comprehensive strategy that tackles issues related to accountability, transparency, community involvement, and capacity enhancement. The study concludes with proposals aimed at reforming the NPF to improve its efficiency, effectiveness, and credibility in upholding law and order in Nigeria.

Keywords

Nigeria Police Force, History, Management, Policing Reforms, Accountability, Transparency, Community Engagement, Capacity Building

1. Introduction

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) serves as the principal law enforcement body in Nigeria, tasked with upholding law and order, safeguarding lives and property, and deterring criminal activities. The Nigeria Police Force is the principal law enforcement agency in the country. The NPF has its roots in the colonial era, with the establishment of the Hausa Constabulary in 1820 [14]. Over the years, the force has undergone several transformations, including: amalgamation, nationalization, and decentralization [1]. The NPF is headed by the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), who is appointed by the President of Nigeria [4]. The force is divided into sev-

eral departments, including: Administration Department: responsible for personnel management, training, and welfare, Operations Department: responsible for law enforcement, crime prevention, and maintenance of public order, Investigation Department: responsible for investigating crimes and gathering evidence, Intelligence Department: responsible for gathering and analyzing intelligence on crime and security threats [1, 11, 9]. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) has a rich and complex history spanning over two centuries. Here is a detailed account of the major events and developments that have shaped the force:

*Corresponding author: mohammedjamiluharuna@gmail.com (Mohammed Jamilu Haruna), mohammedjamiluharuna@kanopoly.edu.ng (Mohammed Jamilu Haruna)

Received: 25 December 2024; **Accepted:** 20 January 2025; **Published:** 3 September 2025



Copyright: © The Author(s), 2025. Published by Science Publishing Group. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

2. History of the Nigeria Police Force

The Nigeria Police was initially founded in 1820, with the establishment of a 1,200-member armed paramilitary unit known as the Hausa Constabulary. In 1894, a comparable force was created in Calabar, referred to as "The Niger Coast Constabulary," under the newly established Niger Coast Protectorate. Additionally, in the northern region, the Royal Niger Company established the Royal Niger Company Constabulary in 1888, with its headquarters located in Lokoja. Furthermore, the Lagos Police was formed in 1896 [9].

In the early 1900s, the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were established, leading to the formation of the Northern Nigeria Police from a segment of the Constabulary of the Royal Niger Company. Similarly, the Southern Nigeria Police was created from a portion of the Constabulary of the Niger Coast. In 1914, these distinct police forces were consolidated for the sake of "administrative convenience," resulting in the administration of the police from Lagos. The primary objective of this force was to suppress opposition to colonial governance. With a few exceptions, the police did not function as an investigative body [9].

In the 1960s, within the framework of the First Republic, the police forces in Nigeria experienced a transition from regionalization to nationalization. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was responsible for standard policing functions and played a crucial role in maintaining internal security, in addition to managing penitentiary, immigration, and customs duties to support military operations both within the country and internationally. The unification of the Lagos colony with the southern and northern protectorates by the British in 1914 led to the establishment of Nigeria as a single entity. In 1930, the regional police forces from both the north and south were merged to form the first national police force of the colony, known as the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). In late 1986, the NPF underwent a nationwide reorganization into seven area commands, replacing the previous command structure that aligned with each of Nigeria's states. Each area command was overseen by a commissioner of police and further subdivided into police provinces and divisions managed by local officers. The NPF headquarters, which also functioned as an area command, was responsible for supervising and coordinating the other area commands. Subsequently, these area commands were organized into Zone Commands as follows: Zone 1, based in Kano, encompassing Kano, Katsina, and Jigawa Commands; Zone 2, based in Lagos, including Lagos and Ogun Commands; and Zone 3, based in Yola, comprising Adamawa and Gombe Commands [9].

In mid-1989, a reorganization of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) was announced following the acceptance of a report by Rear Admiral Murtala Nyako by the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). During the same year, the NPF established a Quick Intervention Force in each state, distinct from the mobile police units, with the purpose of monitoring polit-

ical events and suppressing unrest during the transition to civilian governance. Each state unit, comprising between 160 and 400 officers, was led by an assistant superintendent and was equipped with vehicles, communication devices, firearms, and crowd control tools, which included cane shields, batons, and tear gas. Additionally, a Federal Investigation Bureau (FIB) was planned to succeed the Directorate of Intelligence and Investigation, with three directorates created for operations, administration, and logistics, each overseen by a deputy inspector general [9].

In February 1989, the military Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida dissolved the Police Service Commission and replaced it with the Nigeria Police Council, which operated under direct presidential oversight. The council was chaired by the president and included the Chief of General Staff, the minister of Internal Affairs, and the Inspector General of Police as its members. During a government reorganization in September 1990, Alhaji Sumaila Gwarzo, who had previously served as the director of the State Security Service, was appointed to the newly created position of minister of state for police affairs [8].

The establishment of the Nigeria Police Force is enshrined in sections 214 to 216 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria. Specifically, section 214 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) clearly articulates that:

"There shall be a Police Force for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and subject to the provisions of this section, no other police force shall be established for the Federation or any part thereof".

The Police Act, nonetheless, governs the operations of the Police Force as outlined in section 4 of the Act, which stipulates that:

"The Police shall be employed for the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged".

The officers and staff of the Force are deployed across all 36 states of the Federation, in addition to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, to address crime and criminal activities while upholding law and order, thus fostering peaceful coexistence within Nigerian society. Moreover, the operational command and supervision of the Nigeria Police Force are entrusted to the Inspector General of Police. Section 215 (1) (a) of the Nigerian Constitution specified that:

"There shall be an Inspector-General of Police, who, subject to section 216(2) of this Constitution shall be appointed by the President on the advice of the Nigeria Police Council from among serving members of the Nigeria Police Force."

The Nigerian Police (NP) is acknowledged by the 1999 Constitution as the country's national police force, endowed with exclusive jurisdiction throughout Nigeria. Furthermore, the Constitution permits the establishment of specialized divisions within the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), which may

be incorporated into the Federation's armed forces or assigned responsibilities related to the security of ports, waterways, railways, and airfields.

3. Challenges

The NPF faces several challenges, including:

- 1) **Inadequate Funding:** The force is often underfunded, leading to inadequate equipments, training, and personnel [6].
- 2) **Corruption:** Corruption is a significant challenge within the force, with some officers engaging in bribery, extortion, and other forms of misconduct [15].
- 3) **Inadequate Training:** Many officers lack adequate training, leading to poor performance and human rights abuses [3].
- 4) **Community Relations:** The force often has poor relations with the community, leading to mistrust and hostility [1].

Hence, policing in Nigeria is marked by widespread corruption, dishonesty, lack of public confidence, and lack of public support and cooperation, which collaboratively impeded the ability of the NPF to properly tap its operational potential [2]. Looking at the above antecedents in the history of policing in Nigeria, one may subscribe to the idea that the Nigeria Police Force is fundamentally a state machinery organized to defend and preserve the interest of the dominant class at the expense of poor and voiceless Nigerian masses. Consequently, despite the strategic position of the police in the criminal justice, and the important role it was given by the laws, the NPF are described more in image tarnishing terms by the major segments of the population [5, 7, 10, 12, 3, 13].

4. The Best Way to Manage Nigeria Police Force

Managing the Nigeria Police Force requires a multifaceted approach that addresses its structural, operational, and cultural challenges. Here are some strategies to consider:

4.1. Structural Reforms

- 1) **Decentralization:** Grant more autonomy to state and local police commands to respond to community needs.
- 2) **Reorganization:** Streamline the force and its structure, eliminating redundant units and positions.
- 3) **Merit-Based Promotion:** Implement a merit-based promotion system to ensure competent officers are promoted.

4.2. Operational Improvements

- 1) **Community Policing:** Foster community partnerships through regular engagement, outreach programs, and

collaborative problem-solving. The force has introduced community policing initiatives to improve relations with the community [9].

- 2) **Anti-Corruption Efforts:** The force has established anti-corruption units to investigate and prosecute corrupt officers [15].
- 3) **Intelligence-Led Policing:** Leverage technology, data analysis, and human intelligence to anticipate and prevent crimes.
- 4) **Specialized Units:** Establish specialized units (e.g., SWAT, forensic, cybercrime) to tackle complex crimes.

4.3. Training and Capacity Building

- 1) **Regular Training:** Provide regular training on modern policing techniques, human rights, and community engagement. The force should invest in training and development programs to improve the skills and knowledge of officers [1].
- 2) **Capacity Building:** Invest in capacity-building programs for officers, focusing on leadership, management, and technical skills.
- 3) **Mentorship:** Establish mentorship programs to pair experienced officers with new recruits.

4.4. Accountability and Transparency

- 1) **Independent Oversight:** Establish an independent oversight body to investigate complaints and ensure accountability.
- 2) **Transparency:** Foster transparency through regular press briefings, social media engagement, and community outreach programs.
- 3) **Internal Affairs:** Strengthen internal affairs units to investigate and address misconduct within the force.

4.5. Welfare and Benefits

- 1) **Competitive Salaries:** Ensure competitive salaries and benefits to attract and retain top talent.
- 2) **Healthcare and Insurance:** Provide comprehensive healthcare and insurance packages for officers and their families.
- 3) **Housing and Infrastructure:** Invest in modern housing and infrastructure for officers, including barracks, stations, and equipment.

4.6. Technology and Infrastructure

- 1) **Modern Equipment:** Provide modern equipment, including vehicles, communication devices, and forensic tools. The force should invest in modern equipment and technology to improve its effectiveness and efficiency [11].
- 2) **Digitalization:** Digitalize police operations, including crime reporting, investigation, and record-keeping.

- 3) Infrastructure Development: Invest in infrastructure development, including police stations, barracks, and training facilities.

4.7. Community Engagement

- 1) Community Outreach: Engage in regular community outreach programs to build trust and partnerships.
- 2) Citizen Police Forums: Establish citizen police forums to facilitate dialogue and collaboration.
- 3) Volunteer Programs: Develop volunteer programs to involve citizens in policing efforts.

5. Conclusion

The Nigeria Police Force is essential for upholding law and order within the country. Despite encountering numerous challenges, the force has initiated various reforms aimed at overcoming these obstacles and enhancing its operational effectiveness and efficiency. As the principal law enforcement body in Nigeria, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is tasked with the responsibilities of maintaining public order, safeguarding lives and property, and preventing criminal activities. Throughout its history, the NPF has experienced considerable transformations and reforms, influenced by Nigeria's colonial past, subsequent developments in the post-colonial era, periods of military governance, and the transition to democratic rule. The successful implementation of these reform strategies necessitates a sustained commitment to change, sufficient resources, and robust leadership. The study concludes by offering recommendations for the reform of the NPF to improve its efficiency, effectiveness, and legitimacy in the enforcement of law and order in Nigeria.

Author Contributions

Mohammed Jamilu Haruna is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Adebayo, A. (2018). Community policing and crime control in Nigeria. *Journal of Criminology*, 52(2), 151-165.
- [2] Alemika, E. E. O (2010) History, Context and Crisis of the Police in Nigeria. A Paper Presented at the Biennial Retreat of the Police Service Commission on the theme, *Repositioning the Nigeria Police to Meet the Challenges of the Policing a Democratic Society in the twenty-First Century and Beyond*, held at the Le Meridian Hotel, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, November 1-4.
- [3] Amnesty International. (2018). Nigeria: Police brutality and extortion. Retrieved from.
- [4] Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). Retrieved from.
- [5] Dambazau, A. B. (2007). *Criminology and Criminal Justice*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- [6] Human Rights Watch. (2019). Nigeria: Security forces abuse, extort civilians. Retrieved from.
- [7] Human Rights Watch and Center for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria (2002). *The Bakassi Boys: The Legitimacy of Murder and torture*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- [8] Jauhari, A. (2011). Colonial and Post-Colonial Human Rights Violations in Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 5: May 22.
- [9] Nigeria Police Force. (2020). Community policing. Retrieved from.
- [10] Nuraddeen, U. (2010). *Public Perceptions on Police Roles in Funtua, Daura and Katsina Metropolis*. An Unpublished M.Sc Thesis Submitted to the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Bayero University, Kano.
- [11] Ogundipe, S. (2020). Intelligence-led policing in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Intelligence and Cyber Security*, 3(1), 1-12.
- [12] Radda, S. I. et al. (2011). *The Nature of Police Patrol in Kano Metropolis*. Kano: Benchmark Publishers Limited.
- [13] Sule, K. A. (2015). *The Need for Human Rights Education among the Personnel of the Nigeria Police Force in Kano Metropolis*. An Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis submitted to the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Bayero University, Kano – Nigeria.
- [14] Tamuno, T. (1970). *The police in modern Nigeria, 1861-1965*. University of Ibadan Press.
- [15] Transparency International. (2020). Corruption perceptions index. Retrieved from.