

## **Professionalism in the Nigeria Police Force: Historical Influences and Challenges, 1960–1999**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explored the historical development of professionalism in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) from 1960 to 1999, analyzing it amid a dynamic historical context. The study utilized historical analysis drawing on primary sources including government reports, police records, and archival materials, alongside secondary scholarly works. It assessed how professionalism, characterized by ethical conduct, accountability, and public trust, evolved within the NPF. The investigation revealed that the force's colonial origins, extended periods of military rule, and internal challenges significantly influenced its professional standards. Systemic corruption, political interference, inadequate training, and resource shortages emerged as persistent barriers, undermining the NPF's operational capacity and contributed to public disillusionment. This erosion of professionalism manifested in the force's struggles to address escalating crime rates and civil disorder, alongside the growing reliance on vigilante groups by communities. By tracing these developments across the post-independence era, the paper underscored the lasting impact of historical factors on the NPF's institutional framework. These findings illuminated the intricate relationship between historical context and law enforcement efficacy, offering valuable perspectives for understanding ongoing challenges in Nigerian policing.

### **Introduction**

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), established under British colonial rule in the 1930s (Arase & Iwuafor, 2007) emerged as the nation's primary law enforcement agency following independence in 1960. The NPF inherited a complex legacy rooted in a colonial framework which was designed for control rather than service (Audu, 2025). That foundation shaped its post-independence trajectory. This paper examined the historical experience of the NPF from 1960 to 1999, focusing on the concept of professionalism and its evolution, challenges, and impacts during this period. Professionalism in law enforcement is defined here as ethical conduct, accountability, competence, and public trust (Afegbua, 2025). It was critical for

maintaining law and order and fostering societal cooperation, particularly in a post-colonial state like Nigeria, where the police navigated the dialectics of national identity, military dominance, and socio-economic upheaval(Hills, 2007).

### **Historical Background**

The NPF's post-independence journey began with its formal establishment as a centralized force in 1960, unifying regional police units under a national mandate(Tamuno, 1970). Initially modeled after the British constabulary, the NPF was tasked with maintaining law and order in a newly sovereign state(Audu, 2025). However, this transition was disrupted by the 1966 military coup, which dissolved regional forces and centralized authority under the Inspector-General, aligning the police with the federal government's agenda(Ojo, 2009).

### **Post-Independence and First Republic (1960-1966):**

The struggle for legitimacy of The Nigeria Police Force followed independence in 1960. It continued to operate alongside local administration police forces in the Northern and Western Regions. According to Sunday Effiong (2024), policing in the early 1960s relied more on visibility as violent crimes were not as prevalent, and people were generally more cautious in the presence of police officers. Ahmad Abdulramin Madori (March 25, 2025) interviewed believed that the highest level of police professionalism in Nigeria occurred in the 1960s.

However, the local police forces coexisting with the NPF were reportedly poorly trained, corrupt, and used for partisan political purposes(Alemika & Chukwuma, Analysis of police and policing in Nigeria A desk Study on the Role of Policing as a Barrier to Change or Driver of Change in Nigeria, 2010). Some of such purposes included the brutalization of opponents, by traditional rulers, politicians, and political parties.

### **The Military Era (1966-1979): Militarization and Decline in Police Professionalism**

Nigeria's first four decades after independence were dominated by successive military dictatorships(HRW, 2010). The military rule had a negative impact on police professionalism. According to Victor Olaliwaju,( 2024) the military frequently undermined the rule of law, which was the police's responsibility to uphold. This therefore placed the police in a challenging position. Such challenges limited their ability to maintain professionalism and public trust. Police repression reportedly became increasingly intensified under successive military regimes after 1966(Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000).

### **The Second Republic and Renewed Reforms (1979-1983)**

Nigeria transitioned to civilian governance in 1979. This ushered in the Second Republic. During this period the Nigeria Police Force received favourable attention. This period saw Police Mobile Force PMF squadrons equipped with Armoured Personnel Carriers APCs and new rifles. Officers were receiving promotions regularly. Various incentives were being provided. For Sunday Effiong (2024, this gesture undoubtedly spurred officers to perform their best and enhanced professionalism. Despite the reported positive developments, the military era returned in 1983.

**Muhammedu Buhari /Idiagbon military regime (19831985)**

Police professionalism in Nigeria was shaped by a mix of militarization, discipline-oriented governance, and anti-corruption campaigns. The administration projected a strong stance on law and order. Its methods often conflicted with democratic norms and undermined aspects of police professionalism. The regime viewed law enforcement through a militarized lens. The police were subordinated more directly under military rule and were often used as an enforcement tool to execute government decrees without civilian oversight. These affected police professionalism in multiple ways. Under Buhari and Idiagbon, the police were made to serve as instruments of fear. Though discipline was the slogan, it came at the expense of civil liberties. Officers were expected to enforce laws with military precision, often ignoring legal procedures and rights(Alemika E. , 1993).

A central hallmark of the regime was the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) which was launched in March 1984(Udoette, 2025). The Nigeria Police played a key role in implementing this program. It aimed to enforce public morality and social order. While it promoted a facade of professionalism, in practice, it often turned the police into moral enforcers rather than professional law enforcement officers(Udoette, 2025). Ironically, the period saw more attention to discipline and moral behavior within the police force itself. Officers were expected to model the behaviors the regime sought to enforce in society, including punctuality, neatness, and sobriety. However, this was more cosmetic than structural reform. The police training curriculum was not fundamentally altered. What changed was the expectation of immediate, visible discipline. And this demand rarely translated into internal professionalism or systemic improvement(Arase & Iwuafor, 2007, p. 119).

**The Babangida Era and the Challenges of Reform (19851993)**

During this time, the military reportedly confiscated APCs and other riot control equipment meant for civilian policing(Effiong, 2024). This contributed to a decline in morale and productivity. For Effiong, "My CRO remained as Inspector for more than ten years."Constables remained in one rank and cadre beyond ten to thirteen years. A senior military officer was quoted as stating a preference for not "training two militaries in a country," Effiong highlighted this as a prejudicial attitude towards the police and a major origin of the NPF's poor performance during certain periods. Despite these challenges, he recalled instances of professionalism within Nigeria during domestic operations in this era. For example, in 1986-1987, it reportedly took a high level of professionalism for the NPF to track down the notorious Anini robbery gang. For him police "apprehended them and prosecuted them" despite press descriptions of the gang leader's elusive nature. Furthermore, Effiong mentioned that the Force successfully quelled the Maitatsine riots in Kano in the 1980s. He concluded that considering the available logistics, the NPF discharged their duties effectively during this period. Although effectiveness can be subjective. There was the existence of training and retraining programs, including police colleges and the Police Staff College in Jos and POLAC in Kano. This also demonstrated a commitment to professionalism.

However, the period equally witnessed public reactions and demonstrations against the structural adjustment program from 1986 to 1990. Here police and soldiers were reportedly deployed to quell the riots. This led to casualties. Successive military governments installed few

effective checks on abuses of police authority. This encouraged misconduct and corruption to flourish, and contributed to declining morale. Poor remuneration, delayed promotions, and a lack of public appreciation led to frustration among officers(Alemika & Chukwuma, Analysis of police and policing in Nigeria A desk Study on the Role of Policing as a Barrier to Change or Driver of Change in Nigeria, 2010).

### **The Sani Abacha regime (1993-1998)**

This marked one of the most repressive and militarized periods in Nigerian history. Under his rule, police professionalism suffered severely. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was subordinated to the state's authoritarian agenda. The force was used less as a civil protector and more as an instrument of political suppression, surveillance, and control(Usuh, 2012). The police became deeply politicized. They were routinely used to harass, detain, or torture critics of the regime, especially pro-democracy activists, journalists, and opposition figures. For Alemika(1993), the Abacha years were a descent into fear. Police stations, once centers of civil complaints, became holding cells for regime critics. Professional standards were subverted by a new loyalty to state terror.

The Nigeria Police Force suffered neglect in funding, training, and equipment. Despite being used extensively by the regime, officers lacked the resources and modern techniques to engage in professional law enforcement. What existed was a hollow shell of a police force; they were uniformed, armed, and deployed, but untrained, unpaid, and unaccountable. Professionalism was not merely lacking; it was structurally discouraged(Arase & Iwuafor, 2007).

The image of the police as servants of the people was thoroughly eroded. Citizens feared police checkpoints, dreaded being arrested, and avoided police institutions, knowing they were extensions of military despotism. Police professionalism was undermined by widespread corruption and nepotism. Promotions were politicized, and some senior officers were appointed based on loyalty to the Abacha regime rather than merit. It became a force where loyalty to a dictator ensured promotion, and professionalism withered. Integrity was often either undermined or punished; while “compliance” was rewarded(Erhabor, 2025).

### **General Abdulsalami Abubakar transition period (1998-1999)**

This marked a period of critical interregnum between militarized repression and nascent democratic reform. It was a moment of cautious hope, but it also exposed the structural hollowness of the Nigeria Police Force after years of abuse under military regimes. General Abdulsalami Abubakar assumed office on June 8, 1998, following the sudden death of General Sani Abacha. His regime was essentially transitional. It was tasked with organizing elections and returning the country to democratic rule within a tight timeline of less than one year.

Although the police were expected to play a neutral and supportive role in the electoral process, the force was still plagued by the legacy of decades of politicization, militarization, and mistrust. The Abubakar regime did not undertake comprehensive reforms of the force; instead, it prioritized the political handover. According to Arase, the police remained in a reactive state, burdened by systemic dysfunction. Though the political atmosphere had relaxed, the police were institutionally unprepared to support the demands of a democratic transition(Arase &

Iwuafor, 2007). By 1998, the Nigeria Police Force had been severely underfunded, poorly trained, and lacked modern logistical equipment. Many officers were demoralized and unmotivated, while the public harbored deep suspicion toward the force due to its complicity in repression under Abacha. Despite the change in government, the culture within the police had not shifted. Brutality, extortion, and abuse remained widespread, reflecting institutional decay rather than the political climate alone.

The 1999 general elections, which ushered in the Fourth Republic under President Olusegun Obasanjo, were a major test of police neutrality and professionalism. The police were deployed across the country for security and electoral support duties, but their performance revealed serious shortcomings. During the 1999 elections, the police lacked electoral policing training. Many were unaware of rules of engagement in civil matters. In some areas, they were either complicit in electoral fraud or unable to control violence(Lekan, 2024).

Despite this, the elections were deemed relatively peaceful, more due to public enthusiasm for civilian rule than effective police professionalism. The short-lived Abubakar administration made no attempt to address the internal weaknesses of the police force. No new training institutions were introduced, no policy framework was implemented, and the structural culture of impunity persisted. According to Alemika, the failure to begin institutional police reform during the transition was a missed opportunity. The police entered the Fourth Republic with their authoritarian baggage intact. And as the civilian rule resumed on May 29, 1999, the Nigeria Police Force remained a broken structure operating within a new democratic framework(Arase & Iwuafor, 2007, p. 4). The need for reform was acknowledged but deferred. This left the Obasanjo government to inherit a force ill-equipped to support democratic governance.

### **Military Use and Abuse of the Police**

Military regimes redefined the role of the police from law enforcement to regime preservation. Police officers were often co-opted to enforce draconian decrees. And this militarized role engaged them to suppress dissent, detain political opponents, and manage the dynamics of “order” while the real administrative power lay in military hands(Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). This created a hybrid security arrangement in which the police were both subordinate to and scapegoated by the military. Under successive regimes, the police became an instrument of state power, often prioritizing regime security over public safety(Ojo, 2009).

### **Civilian Governance and Reform Rhetoric**

In contrast, the brief civilian administrations of the First (1960-1966) and Second Republics (1979-1983) projected a more humane vision of policing. There was rhetorical emphasis on constitutionalism, civil liberties, and professionalism. However, the translation of these ideals into policy was marred by political manipulation and weak oversight structures(Erhabor, 2025).

Political elites often used the police to harass rivals, rig elections, or suppress protests. Although State governors lacked operational control over Commissioners of Police, they often used informal channels to influence postings and deployments(Ewah, 2025). The result was a politicized force caught between loyalty to the federal command architecture and subservient



to state actors. The brief civilian Second Republic (1979-1983) offered a momentary shift, but its collapse under military intervention in 1983 reinforced the NPF's subordination to authoritarian control.

### **Significant Events and Changes**

Several pivotal events marked the NPF's evolution. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) necessitated a militarized approach, as the police supported the army in quelling the Biafran secession, blurring lines between civil and military roles (Tamuno, 1970, p. 245). This period saw an influx of demobilized soldiers into the force. This further entrenched a paramilitary culture in the police.

### **Concept of Professionalism in Law Enforcement**

Professionalism in policing entails adherence to ethical standards, disciplined conduct, and a commitment to public service (Argungu, 2025). It refers to the degree to which officers demonstrate competence, ethical conduct, and commitment to the rule of law, guided by institutional standards, specialized training, and a public service ethos. It is not merely the wearing of uniforms or hierarchical rank but the consistent display of lawful behavior, procedural fairness, and civic responsibility. For Hashimu Argungu, Police professionalism is a broad concept encompassing all facets of police work, from station management to complaint handling and investigative procedures, along with adherence to laws and ethics. According to him, it is written down in the code. Despite these written standards, Argungu noted a gap between the standards and their actual implementation. While standards were often written down, the challenge lied in officers obeying them. For the NPF, this ideal was articulated in its official codes, such as the Police Act of 1967, which mandated impartiality and competence (Alemika E. , 1993). However, translating these principles into practice proved challenging. Training programs, such as those at the Police College in Ikeja and Staff college Jos, aimed to instill professionalism, but they were often underfunded and outdated, reflecting colonial curricula rather than post-independence realities.

Alemika (1993) further expands this in the Nigerian context: "Professional policing entails training, adherence to lawful procedures, respect for rights, and continuous performance evaluation. It must serve not rulers, but citizens, in an accountable and transparent manner." Professionalism in the Nigeria Police Force involves:

- (i) Upholding the Nigerian Constitution and criminal laws without fear or favor.
- (ii) Discharging duties with discipline, restraint, and respect for human dignity.
- (iii) Being accountable to civilian oversight bodies, and responsive to community needs.
- (iv) Avoiding acts of corruption, partisanship, brutality, and unlawful detention.

In essence, professionalism is both a standard to strive for and a measure by which public trust in policing is judged. Between 1979 and 1999, this standard was repeatedly compromised, as this study demonstrates.

According to Alemika and Chukwuma police professionalism include:

### **Accountability and Oversight Principle**

Accountability is a cardinal element of democratic policing. The legitimacy of the police in a democratic society depended on public acceptance and support. The dynamics of modern Nigerian society and increased public awareness placed police activities under public scrutiny, demanding accountability (Alemika & Chukwuma, Analysis of police and policing in Nigeria A desk Study on the Role of Policing as a Barrier to Change or Driver of Change in Nigeria, 2010).

### **Internal Disciplinary Mechanisms:**

There was a goal to strengthen internal discipline mechanisms. Enforcing discipline was to be done without fear or favour (Arase & Iwuafor, 2007). Police Regulations contained sections for police discipline, offences, reporting, investigations, punishments, and appeals. Disciplining superior police officers for breaching the code of ethics was covered in the curriculum. It outlined processes and procedures in line with the constitution, civil service rules, Police Act..., and Police Service Commission Act (NPF, 2025).

### **Code of Conduct Enforcement:**

A Police Code of Ethics sets the standards for ethical behaviour. The code stated that officers must uphold the law regardless of the offender's ethnic or social status. They must not abuse their powers for special treatment or personal gain, nor use excessive or unnecessary force. Officers were expected to hold themselves to a higher standard of behaviour, both professionally and personally.

The Police Regulations contained the Code of Conduct for Nigeria Police officers. The Code of Conduct, along with Police Ethics and etiquette, was a topic covered in police training and curriculum. It was aimed for attitudinal change (NPF, 2025). According to the Police Act (LFN, 1990), every police officer is personally liable for any misuse of powers or acts exceeding their authority. Officers are required to use their best endeavour to uphold the force's good name and further good relations with the public. They must be determined and incorruptible and have strict regard for the correctness of their general behaviour.

Legislative initiatives were needed to review the Police Act and Regulations to include explicit guidelines conforming to international conventions and principles on law enforcement conduct. Disciplining officers for breaches of the code of ethics was part of the procedure for superior police officers (NPF, 2025).

### **Respect for Human Rights**

Respect for human rights was a fundamental aspect of policing in a democratic society (Arase & Iwuafor, 2007). Respect for human rights, particularly concerning arrest, detention, and interrogation, was declared as part of the new order of police service delivery. Police were expected to uphold qualitative justice delivery. This included obeying lawful court orders and facilitating the conviction of the guilty and acquittal of the innocent. Priority was to be given to the pre-trial rights of accused persons. And extrajudicial punishment of suspects by police officers was abhorred.

### **Challenges to Professionalism**

The NPF's colonial origins posed a foundational obstacle. Designed to enforce imperial control, the force retained a legacy of coercion rather than community service, a trait that persisted post-1960(Ahire, 1991). Military rule exacerbated this, as the police were frequently deployed to suppress dissent, undermining their autonomy and ethical grounding(Olukoshi, 1995). The integration of military personnel and the emphasis on order over justice further distanced the NPF from professional ideals, creating a force more akin to a paramilitary unit than a civilian agency.

According to Arase, in discussing Police Colleges and Historical Evolution of Training in the Nigeria Police: "Training is an invaluable tool for the effective policing of any society. An untrained or ill-trained police officer lacks the requisite knowledge, skill and attitude for effective crime control and is also a threat to the society"(Arase & Iwuafor, 2007). This clearly ties into how neglecting professional values and civil rights training undermined police effectiveness and public trust throughout the period under review.

To confirm the colonial origin of the College and the outdated curriculum retained after independence, Arase argued that: "The Police College Ikeja, established in 1930, served as the apex institution for training police officers in Nigeria... its training emphasized drill, discipline, parade and colonial-style law enforcement, which remained largely unchanged well into the post-independence era."(Arase & Iwuafor, 2007)

### **Poor Training and Human Resource Development**

A central challenge that significantly impeded the professionalization of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was the pervasive issue of poor training and inadequate human resource development. This deficiency affected officers from recruitment to advanced levels. It limited their capacity, competence, and ability to effectively and ethically police a post-colonial, and increasingly complex, society.

The foundation of police training in Nigeria was deeply rooted in its colonial origins. It significantly shaped its initial philosophy and curriculum(Osayande, 2008). The colonial police forces were established and maintained primarily for order maintenance, repression, and protecting colonial interests. It was rather not meant to serve the indigenous population(Effiong, 2024).

Despite the evolution of the Nigerian state and society, the training curriculum was limited. It largely failed to adapt to the demands of democratic policing and civic engagement. Erabhor indicated a lack of overhauling of the curriculum. This resulted in training that lacked relevance to real-world challenges and left officers feeling underprepared. The content was often described as narrow in scope, deficient in liberal subjects. These were crucial for understanding human behaviour and the dynamics of a complex society:

The content of the training is deficient in liberal subjects such as sociology, psychology and political science. Furthermore, refresher training for officers is infrequent. These inadequacies associated with selection, screening, testing and refresher training of officers at different times in their career adversely impact on discipline, orientation, attitude,



performance and conduct of Nigeria Police.(Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000)

This perpetuated a style of policing often characterized by a "master-servant" relationship inherited from the colonial structure. And it hindered self-expression and innovation among officers(Effiong, 2024). Institutions like the Police Staff College and the Police Academy were established and it offered various courses. However, the overall impression of training quality was often one of limitations and a lack of innovation in teaching methods.

Beyond the initial training, the NPF suffered from a significant lack of structured and continuous retraining programs(Erabor, 2025). Officers were often not provided with adequate refresher courses throughout their careers. Some never had commensurate course before or after promotions or new postings. This infrequent refresher training meant that officers' knowledge and skills stagnated. It failed to keep pace with evolving crime patterns, societal changes, and advancements in policing techniques(Erabor, 2025). The absence of consistent professional development hindered the force's ability to improve its services and adapt to new challenges.

The necessity of compulsory refresher courses for officers with significant years of service had been suggested as a critical area for attention.

The outdated curriculum and lack of retraining contributed to a negligence in teaching. Crucial principles of ethical conduct, civil rights, and community policing were relegated(Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). There were initiatives like the introduction of Fundamental Rights Enforcement training and Personnel and Civil Populace relationship studies. However, these efforts appeared to have been insufficient to fundamentally alter the force's orientation. The paramilitary focus inherited from the colonial era meant that training prioritized command and control over community engagement and human rights(Olaliwaju, 2024).

The lack of training in liberal subjects, psychological methods, and social dynamics meant officers were often ill-equipped to handle complex interactions with the public. They were less likely to understand the socio-economic factors contributing to crime(Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). This fostered mutual hostility and prejudice between the police and citizens. Reorientation workshops were suggested to help officers acquire a proper mindset for policing a democratic society and to enlarge the curriculum to include human rights education and international codes of ethics. There was global emphasis on community policing. Nigeria was no exception with the establishment of Police Community Relations Committees. Despite this, the force struggled to genuinely embrace this philosophy, partly due to the ingrained "colonial mentality" and lack of trust(Effiong, 2024).

### **Gender Sensitivity and Training Gaps**

The exclusion of women from operational responsibilities limited the diversity and responsiveness of the force(Jibrin, 2025). Until the late 1990s, gender was not a significant concern in police recruitment or deployment. Female officers were often relegated to administrative or clerical roles, with limited exposure to operational or leadership functions(Arase & Iwuafor, 2007). As regards equality and justice, available information show that the police had not fared well. In 1993, women constituted 4.8% (6,900) of the 137,734 officers in the Nigeria Police Force. Further broken down, women constitute 4.1% and 8.0% of the junior

and senior officer cadres(Alemika & Chukwuma, Analysis of police and policing in Nigeria A desk Study on the Role of Policing as a Barrier to Change or Driver of Change in Nigeria, 2010). Women officers suffered statutory discrimination in the areas of marriage and posting. In a study of gender relations and discrimination in the Nigeria Police Force, 44.6% and 57.6% of male and female police respondents reported that there were discriminations in the Force(Alemika & Chukwuma, Analysis of police and policing in Nigeria A desk Study on the Role of Policing as a Barrier to Change or Driver of Change in Nigeria, 2010).

### **The Police Service Commission and the Police Council**

Civilian oversight of the police became formalized through two constitutional bodies: The **Police Service Commission (PSC)** and the **Nigeria Police Council (NPC)**. The PSC had broad powers to appoint, promote, discipline, and dismiss all police officers except the Inspector-General. It also set guidelines for these processes. “The Police Service Commission shall have the power to (a) appoint persons to offices in the Nigeria Police Force; and (b) dismiss and exercise disciplinary control over persons holding any office” (Alemika E. , 1993).

Despite its authority, the PSC was often inactive, especially under military regimes. It lacked staff, funding, and support. Yet, its mandate remained critical to professionalism in the force. The oversight body meant to ensure proper functioning of the NPF (the Police Service Commission) did not operate for greater number of years of military rule. Its long absence affected effective human resources management.

The **Nigeria Police Council**, created in the 1963 and 1999 Constitutions, included the President, State Governors, the PSC Chairman, and the Inspector-General. Its duties involved supervising police administration and advising on IGP appointments. The Constitution defined the functions of the Police Council to include:

- the organization and administration of the Nigeria Police Force.
- the general supervision of the Nigeria Police Force (Alemika & Chukwuma, Analysis of police and policing in Nigeria A desk Study on the Role of Policing as a Barrier to Change or Driver of Change in Nigeria, 2010).

Unfortunately, just like the experience of PSC the Police Council rarely met and failed to fulfil its policy and oversight role.

### **Inadequate Funding and Logistical Constraints**

A major obstacle to the development of police professionalism in Nigeria was the chronic problem of inadequate funding and severe logistical constraints. This persistent underfunding hindered effective policing. The challenge was not merely a periodic setback but a fundamental structural problem. It undermined every facet of police operations and development, contributing significantly to institutional decay. The problems of poor funding were often compounded by poor management(Osayande, 2008) of the scarce resources that were made available. However, in the midst of the purported paucity of funds, analyst observed that few Generals and their accomplices were observed to be stupendously wealthy, suggesting the possibility for “kleptocratic compromise”(Anonymous, 2025).

### **Budgetary Neglect and Inequitable Resource Allocation**

Throughout the period under review, the NPF suffered from consistent budgetary neglect. Funding allocated to the police was often insufficient to meet their operational requirements. This led to significant shortfalls. At independence in 1960, the Nigeria Police Force had approximately 12,000 officers. By 1979, this number had increased to around 80,000, many of whom were poorly trained and equipped(Watch, 2025). During this period, the military governments perceived the NPF as a potential threat to their power and, as a result, deliberately underfunded the force. Between 1984 and 1988, the NPF's operating budget remained in the ₦360 million to ₦380 million range. In 1988, it increased to ₦521 million(Wikipedia, n.d.). Despite these investments, an NPF study in late 1990 concluded that the force's budget needed to double to meet its operational needs.

By the 1990s, the NPF's reputation for corruption was well-established. A 1994 report noted that "most people just join the police to make money."(Watch, 2025) In 1986, the National Security Organization was dissolved, and the State Security Service (SSS) was created. Initially, the SSS drew from the police's budget. This further strained the NPF's financial resources. Inefficient budgeting processes continued. The NPF lacked autonomy in determining its priorities. It relied heavily on the Ministry of Finance. This centralized budgeting process often resulted in misallocated funds and unmet basic resource needs(Africa: Nigeria Police Budget Process, n.d.). There was overemphasis on recurrent expenditure. A significant portion of the NPF's budget was consumed by salaries and allowances. This left little for training, logistics, or infrastructure development(Wikipedia, n.d.). Political interference continued. Frequent regime changes and centralization hampered consistent long-term budgeting or reform. This led to a lack of effective checks on abuses of police authority and allowing misconduct and corruption to flourish(Watch, 2025).

According to Parry Ossayande (2008), there was not only under budgeting but also a failure to release budgeted funds in full. For him, the method of budgeting in the country does not take adequate care of all the requirement or priorities of the Police. Coupled with this is the non-release of some of the estimated funds in the annual budgets. A close study of the funding of the Nigeria Police Force shows that:

from 1984 to 2007 the highest the Police had was 7.7% of the total Federal budget. An analysis of the budget figures also reveals that the allocations attained the highest peaks of 7.6% and 7.7% of the total budget in 1999 and 2007 respectively during which period the government expected much from the Police by way of maintenance of law and order in a democratic society as ours. It is necessary to observe that over 60% of the total Police budget is devoted to the payment of the emoluments of Police personnel, leaving less than a meager 40% for overhead cost and capital expenditure. The implication is that this has been a serious hindrance to effective Policing (Osayande, 2008).

This situation was exacerbated by the perception, particularly within military regimes, that the police, being larger than the military at independence, were a potential counter-force, leading to their marginalization and neglect. Successive military governments were criticized

for installing few effective checks on police authority abuses, partly by failing to adequately fund the force, allowing misconduct to flourish as officers resorted to unofficial means for survival and operational costs.

### **Evaluation, Disciplinary Systems, and Merit-Based Promotions**

To encourage discipline and reward excellence, the NPF developed clearer rules for evaluating officers. Misconduct was handled through a well-defined disciplinary code. Offences included corruption, insubordination, and discreditable conduct. Punishments ranged from fines and suspension to dismissal.

The power to enforce discipline among the officers and men of the police is spread across the upper ranks of the police hierarchy. The Inspector General of Police can mete out punishment to officers from the ranks of Inspector downwards. Senior officers from the ranks of Deputy Commissioner to Commissioner, Assistant Inspectors General and Deputy Inspectors General of Police can take disciplinary action against officers below the rank of Inspector. They can also hand out minor reprimands to officers of the Inspectorate cadre. Officers from the ranks of Assistant Superintendents to Assistant Commissioners have the authority to give minor disciplinary punishment to all other officers below the rank of Inspector.

The Nigeria Police Force had introduced and refined various accountability mechanisms. Internal units like the X-Squad and Provost Marshal played important roles in curbing misconduct. The re-establishment of the Police Service Commission and Police Council created constitutional avenues for civilian oversight. Evaluation systems and disciplinary rules emphasized professionalism, even though they were imperfectly enforced. These measures laid a foundation for a more disciplined and ethically grounded police force. However, they also highlighted the limits of reform in a context marked by military rule, underfunding, and weak political will.

### **Failures in Oversight and Accountability**

The lack of internal control mechanisms contributed to a culture of impunity, where erring officers operated without fear of sanctions. There were no effective internal control mechanisms to check excesses of officers... The failure of government to discipline erring officers encouraged impunity, and internal complaints systems either did not exist or were viewed as mere formalities. Officers Morale and Welfare was low:

Throughout military rule, morale in the police force was significantly undermined by poor welfare conditions, irregular promotions, and lack of institutional support. Many officers lived in appalling conditions, with no water or electricity, and had to buy uniforms and stationery from their salaries. Promotions were delayed, morale was low, and corruption became a survival mechanism rather than a vice (Arase & Iwuafor, 2007).

**Corruption and Its Impact**

Corruption became a defining feature of the NPF from 1960 to 1999, eroding its professional integrity. Bribery, extortion, and collusion with criminals were rampant, as documented in government inquiries and public accounts (Agbibo, 2013). During the oil boom of the 1970s, corruption escalated with economic opportunities, while the austerity of the 1980s and 1990s deepened it, as officers supplemented meager salaries through illicit means (HRW, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities*, 1999). This undermined the NPF's credibility, transforming it into an institution often feared rather than respected.

**Political Interference and Its Effects**

Political interference was a persistent barrier to professionalism (Ewah, 2025). Military regimes used the NPF to enforce authoritarian policies, as seen in the brutal suppression of the 1990s anti-SAP protests and the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. Civilian governments, too, manipulated the force, notably during the Second Republic's electoral disputes (Ojo, 2009). This subordination stripped the NPF of independence, aligning its operations with political agendas rather than public welfare.

**Inadequate Training and Resources**

Chronic underfunding plagued the NPF, limiting its capacity to develop a professional workforce. Training facilities were inadequate, and equipment, such as vehicles and communication tools, remained outdated (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). The integration of poorly trained ex-soldiers during military rule further diluted skill levels, while low morale and pay fostered unprofessional conduct (Odekunle, 1979). These deficiencies hindered effective policing, particularly in addressing rising crime rates in urban centers like Lagos and Port Harcourt.

**Conditions of Service, Salaries, Welfare, and Psychological Effects**

The condition of service remained poor through much of this period. Salaries were low, housing was substandard, and medical care was unreliable. The welfare gap was so severe that many officers resorted to extortion and bribery to survive (Lekan, 2024).

In Nigeria, the average policeman is inadequately educated for the roles he is expected to play. Further, he is inadequately trained for the police work, he is poorly remunerated and equipped and resented by the public... As a result, discipline and motivation of officers suffer (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000).

Some efforts were made toward improvement. Welfare insurance schemes, barracks rehabilitation, loan schemes, and pension reforms gave modest support (Arase & Iwuafor, 2007, p. 225).



### **Public Perception and Trust**

Public perception of the NPF as corrupt, brutal, and inefficient deepened over the decades. Surveys from the period indicate widespread distrust, with citizens often turning to vigilante groups for protection (Effiong, 2024). This cycle of alienation reduced cooperation, further impairing the NPF's ability to function professionally.

### **Impact of Professionalism on Police Efficiency Influence on Duty Performance**

The NPF's lack of professionalism compromised its operational effectiveness. High crime rates, including armed robbery and communal violence, persisted in the 1980s and 1990s, partly due to the force's inability to adapt to Nigeria's growing urban challenges (Odekunle, 1979).

### **Effect on Public Trust and Cooperation**

Unprofessional conduct, which was evidenced by human rights abuses and extortion, severely eroded public trust. The recurrent crackdown on pro-democracy activists after the annulment of June 12 1993 election, often involving arbitrary arrests and torture, exemplified this breach (HRW, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities*, 1999). As trust waned, citizens increasingly relied on informal justice systems, such as the Bakassi Boys in the Southeast, signaling a rejection of NPF authority. This dynamic weakened the force's societal role, perpetuating a cycle of inefficiency and illegitimacy.

Arase observed that the resultant consequence of these led to trust deficit:

The public's perception of the police shaped their cooperation with law enforcement, which in turn impacted on the overall security outcomes. The average Nigerian perceived the police as corrupt, abusive, and ineffective. The police had become alienated from the people they were meant to serve, with fear replacing trust and suspicion replacing cooperation (Arase & Iwuafor, 2007, p. 198).

### **Erosion of Civil Values in Policing**

There existed no independent body or internal mechanism with the power or will to monitor police conduct, review operations, or sanction erring officers in any meaningful manner during the years of military rule. The police remained focused on regime survival and public order, not civil liberties or professionalism. Officers were often more afraid of their superiors than of violating the rights of the citizens. Senior police officers were routinely incorporated into leadership positions, including taking political appointments as state administrators (Ekpoudom, 2025.) It went without saying then that whatever may have been the compelling arguments for the intrusions of the military into politics; the Nigeria Police Force was as culpable for the descent to the grim harvest of military rule in Nigeria (Arase & Iwuafor, 2007).

### Role of Professionalism in Aligning Policing with Democratic Norms

With the end of military rule in sight, the police introduced some measures to improve their human rights record. One example was the establishment of the **Human Rights Desk** in Lagos State police divisions, and later the **Police Duty Solicitor Scheme (PDSS)**. These were steps toward ensuring constitutional rights in police custody (Arase & Iwuafor, 2007).

Nevertheless, these efforts were limited and late. Most police officers had internalized the practices of the military era. Arrest without warrant, brutality, and contempt for due process had been prevalent. The officers and men of the Nigeria Police became faced with the arduous duty of reorienting themselves from the old policing methods prevalent in the military dispensations to the new policing ethics that suit a democratic society. In this new dispensation, citizens' rights were to be encoded in the constitution and the state had the responsibility of protecting such rights from violation by either its agents or other citizens. The difficulty of this change in attitude explained why some police personnel were still indulgent in the use of unwarranted and excessive force in the discharge of their duties. Conflicting Stakeholders' interests had hindered the development of community-oriented policing. Thus, professionalism was often aspirational rather than actualized. The gap between the legal mandate and the operational reality remained wide.

### Conclusion

From 1960 to 1999, the Nigeria Police Force evolved under the weight of colonial legacies, military dominance, and internal frailties. Its transition from a colonial tool to a national institution was marked by a struggle to embody professionalism, thwarted by corruption, political interference, and resource scarcity (Imobighe, 1990). These challenges did not only undermine the NPF's effectiveness but also entrenched a public perception of it as an oppressive rather than protective institution (Onoge, 1993). The period's legacy revealed a force shaped by Nigeria's turbulent history. This was centralized under military fiat, strained by economic crises, and challenged by societal expectations. While the return to democracy in 1999 offered hope for reform, the NPF's professional deficits which was rooted in decades of systemic neglect, persisted (Arase & Iwuafor, 2007).

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