



A Critical Examination of the Attitude of the Nigerian Police Force Towards the Public in Wukari Taraba State

Abstract

This study critically examined the attitude of the Nigerian Police Force towards the public in Wukari, Taraba State. It focused on police-public interactions, factors influencing police attitudes, and their implication on public trust. A convergent mixed-methods case study design was adopted for this study. The quantitative aspect of the study involved distributing structured questionnaires to one hundred and twenty (120) community members who had prior interactions with the police. In the qualitative component, fifteen (15) respondents were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation. While thematic analysis was done for the qualitative data. The study found that the public had negative perceptions about the attitudes of the police in Wukari, Taraba State, towards the community. Ordinary members of the public gave a mean score of 2.28 on police's level of respect and approachability, professionalism, fairness, integrity, responsiveness, and willingness to take responsibility for their actions and accept training. However, the public showed a positive attitude towards ethical reforms, accountability, and police training with a mean score of 4.06. The study also found that the public expressed a low level of trust in the police with a mean score of 2.87. The qualitative analysis also revealed that the public viewed the police as being disrespectful, corrupt, extortionate, and lacking accountability and responsible use of authority. The study concluded that negative police attitudes reduced public confidence and trust in the police and affected police-community relationships. The study recommended increased ethical training, leadership, and police accountability to enhance professionalism and public trust and police legitimacy in Wukari, Taraba State.

Keywords: Police attitude, Nigerian Police Force, police-public relations, public trust, procedural justice.

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Introduction

An effective and legitimate policing practice is essential and requires a good police-public relationship. The mainstay of public order, prevention of crime and law enforcement are the police institutions, but their effectiveness is

linked to how officers with citizens. The principles of respect, fairness, professionalism, impartiality and responsiveness can help build trust and support from the community, but intimidation, corruption, discrimination and abuse of authority can undermine police legitimacy (Shipurut *et al.*, 2025).

Literature on procedural justice indicates that citizens' perceptions of whether the actions of policing are legitimate is not only a function of the outcomes of those actions but of how they are performed. A sense of being treated with dignity, allowing citizens to voice their concerns, and a sense of how police decisions are made as neutral and trustworthy will make them more likely to accept the authority of police and cooperate with police (Tyler 2006, Bolger and Walters 2019). Conversely, lack of justice, respect, or arbitrary use of authority in institutions leads to loss of trust and the people tend not engage with institutions.

Corruption, accountability, professionalism, and police/community relations are all issues of importance that should be addressed, especially in Africa. Evidence from Ghana shows that public trust and cooperation with police officers are enhanced by their respect, impartiality, and accountability, while the opposite, i.e., corruption and abuse of power, reduce trust and cooperation with police officers (Tankebe and Fulzele 2023). However, the institutional and social contexts have to be taken into account, and police-public relations must be considered in national and local contexts.

Corruption, extortion, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and excessive use of force and lack of police accountability have given the Nigeria Police Force a bad name. These were evident during the 2020 #EndSARS protests when there was a widespread demand for police accountability and reform. Moreover,

incidents of police abuse and predatory policing can also impact citizens' trust in police and citizens' willingness to cooperate with police (Akinlabi 2022). These problems indicate that institutional changes need to go hand in hand with attention to the daily actions and working ethos of the police.

However, recent research has revealed that lack of trust and confidence of the public in the police to be fair and non-corrupt is one of the factors that lowers the public's willingness to report crimes and is a challenge to police-community relations (Sabastine *et al.* 2025; Shipurut *et al.* 2025). These are excellent local studies, however they are often on particular behaviours of misbehaviour and not attitudes of the police towards the public. Evidence about the overall dimensions of respect, fairness, professionalism, integrity, responsiveness and responsible exercise of authority is limited from an empirical perspective.

This study aims at addressing this, it critically examines the attitude of the Nigerian Police Force towards the public of Wukari, Taraba State. It covers police attitudes, factors that influence attitudes, and how attitudes influence the level of trust and relations with the community. The study is useful in providing a context specific piece of evidence for the current discourse on Police Legitimacy, Ethics of policing and Police-Public Relations in Nigeria, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and the citizens' experience.

This study tackles the gap by critically analysing the attitude of the Nigerian

Police Force to the public in Wukari, Taraba State. It explores the characteristics of police attitudes, conditions that shape those attitudes, and the impact of those attitudes on public confidence and police/community relations. The study brings some context-specific evidence to the general conversation about the legitimacy of the police, ethical policing and police-public relationship in Nigeria through the combination of quantitative data and narratives of citizen experience.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigeria Police Force is a very important agency that ensures public security, the maintenance of law and the security of the citizens. However, police-public relations are crucial for effective and legitimate policing. Corruption, extortion, intimidation, arbitrary exercise of authority and lack of accountability have all been areas of concern and have raised questions about the level of professional and ethical conduct expected of a public institution by the police. The ongoing concerns also raise doubts about the effectiveness of formal police reform to make real, tangible changes in how people experience policing in their daily lives.

Previous Nigerian studies have examined police legitimacy, procedural justice, corruption and the perceptions of public action by the police. Existing evidence, however, tends to be at the national or institutional level, and there is relatively little information regarding neighborhood-level aspects of police attitudes. Police favouritism and bribery

have been noted in Wukari Local Government Area as some of the factors that discourage reporting of crime and hinder police-community cooperation according to recent studies (Shipurut *et al.* 2025; Sabastine *et al.* 2025). These studies are useful in the context of giving local evidence, however they are tightly focused on specific misconducts with limited understanding of the broader issue of citizens' attitudes to the police.

This is a significant gap as citizens interact with the police on a daily basis and respect, fairness, professionalism, integrity, responsiveness and responsible exercise of authority is conveyed in these interactions. Negative experiences in these dimensions can erode public trust and hinder cooperation and positive experiences can foster perceptions of police legitimacy. However, there is little empirical evidence of the real lived experiences and interpretations of the public in Wukari of these dimensions.

The problem that this study sought to address therefore is the lack of knowledge of the general attitude of the police towards the citizens of Wukari area of Taraba state and the effect on the public's trust in the police and the public/police relationship. The study thus looks at the nature of police attitudes and what influences them, and why it matters for citizens' trust and engagement with the police.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the attitude of the Nigerian Police Force towards members of the

public in Wukari, Taraba State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the nature of police attitudes towards members of the public in Wukari, with particular attention to respect, fairness, professionalism, integrity, responsiveness, and responsible exercise of authority;
- ii. Examine the institutional and ethical factors influencing police attitudes towards members of the public in Wukari, including accountability, ethical leadership, professional training, and value re-orientation; and
- iii. Assess the implications of police attitudes for public trust and police-community relations in Wukari, Taraba State.

Literature Review

Attitude in Policing

Police attitude is the dispositions and behavioural tendencies that influence police work and police-public relations. It is seen in how officers treat citizens when responding to complaints, and how they talk to citizens. Attitude is crucial because people have attitudes towards police authority, and not only the attitudes of the decision makers, but their attitudes of the individual officers.

Literatures on procedural justice (Tyler 2006; Bolger and Walters 2019) is associated with citizens' acceptance of

police authority and their perception of the police as fair, neutral, respectful and trustworthy. On the other hand, a perception of hostility, discrimination, corruption or arbitrary use of authority may decrease citizens' trust in police and cooperation with law enforcement agencies (Mazerolle *et al.* 2021).

One's personality is not the only determinant of attitudes. The organization, leadership, professional training, accountability, and working environment may have an impact on officers' perceptions and use of authority. Correlated with officers' attitudes towards misconduct, organizational justice and ethical climate demonstrates the impact of an organization's surroundings on the behaviors of the profession (Fridell, Maskaly, & Donner, 2021).

There have been widespread complaints of corruption, extortion, abuse of authority and lack of accountability by police officers in Nigeria, eroding the public confidence in the police (Akinlabi 2022). Perceptions of favoritism and bribery can also make it less likely for individuals to report crimes and deter police-community partnerships, as revealed by evidence from Wukari (Shipurut *et al.* 2025; Sabastine *et al.* 2025).

In this study, the concept of police attitude means how the police behave in their daily work and relations with the people, including respect, fairness, professionalism, integrity, responsiveness, communication and responsible use of authority.

Police–Public Relations

Police–public relations are the character and quality of police–community relations. Such ties are not only related to crime control, but also to communication, cooperation, respect, responsiveness, and perceptions of the legitimacy of the police. The nature of these interactions is important because it is the subjective experience of police authority in the course of everyday interactions that can shape people's inclination to work with law enforcement authorities.

There is evidence in the literature that certain behaviours by police, including showing the respect and fairness to the citizen, can enhance citizens' trust in the police, while the opposite, such as perceptions of police corruption and intimidation, or unfairness, can undermine citizens' trust in the police (Tyler 2006; Mazerolle *et al.* 2021). The outcome of police actions thus not only influences police–public relations, but also the degree of fairness and professionalism in which police officers conduct themselves.

Rampant police impunity and corruption have also hindered relations between police and the citizens of Nigeria. Past incidents of police abuse and predatory practice can cause citizens not to trust the police and make them uncooperative with police officers as noted by Akinlabi (2022). Another potential disincentive to reporting crime and limiting police – community cooperation may be the perceived favouritism/bribery, Wukari finds

(Shipurut *et al.* 2025; Sabastine *et al.* 2025).

The definition of police–public relations for this study is the quality of police–public interaction, which is the extent of communication, cooperation, respect and community engagement that is displayed. Positive interactions will be expected to enhance citizens willingness to cooperate with the public and enhance citizens' trust in the police while negative interactions will be expected to increase the likelihood that citizens do not have as much trust in the police and/or do not want to cooperate with the public.

Professionalism in Policing

Professionalism in policing means that the police is able to perform their work competently, ethically and legally. It's good practice, respect for human rights, integrity, accountability and responsible use of police powers. Professionalism, therefore, is a demonstration of an officer's ability to perform operational tasks as well as demonstrating discretion and interactions with citizens.

Professionalism is related to public perceptions of police legitimacy. Officers who are fair, honest, competent and respectful will build trust within the institution, but if officers are not fair, or are dishonest, incompetent, or disrespectful they will lose that trust. The organizational culture, ethical leadership, professional training and accountability mechanisms are key to formulating professional conduct (Fridell, Maskaly and Donner 2021).

Nigeria has yet to overcome issues of corruption, police extortion, abuse of police powers and lack of police accountability. These difficulties can blame perceived police performance of citizens on police performance and vice versa (Akinlabi 2022). Wukari Police Studies of the last few years has also proved that the public is losing faith in and cooperation with the police because they are perceived to be favouring and bribing them (Shipurut *et al.*, 2025; Sabastine *et al.*, 2025).

Professionalism is used here to mean performing duties of the police efficiently, fairly, equitably and in ways that honor the rights and reasonable expectations of citizens. It is believed that this is one of the important aspects of attitude of the police and a precondition for having good relationship between police and people in Wukari in Taraba State.

Public Trust in the Police

Public trust in the police is the confidence of citizens in the integrity, fairness, competence and effectiveness of the police bodies. Trust in the police is the key to good policing because if they trust that the police will behave well and responsibly towards them, they will report crime, give information and cooperate with the police. Thus, it is closely tied with the legitimacy of the police and the police-public relations.

Literature on procedural justice shows that there are five factors that contribute to a sense of the rule of law: fair treatment, respectful interactions, neutrality, and trustworthy conduct (Tyler 2006; Mazerolle *et al.* 2021).

Citizens can become disaffection towards police if they believe they are corrupt, that they are abusive, discriminatory or unaccountable. Conversely, ethical and professional conduct can help build perceptions of the legitimacy of law enforcement and the need for them to be cooperative.

In Nigeria, low trust in the police has been attributable to the corruption of the police officers. Akinlabi (2022) attributes lack of trust and cooperation with the police to police abuse and predatory practices. In the same vein, results indicate that when police are seen as being bribed and biased towards some individuals, it can lead to a drop in crime reporting rates and impact on police-community relations, as reported in Wukari (Shipurut *et al.*, 2025; Sabastine *et al.*, 2025).

Public trust is Public confidence in the Nigerian Police Force and their expectation that it will treat the law equally, respect the citizens' rights, be accountable and keep them safe. It has been studied as one of the predominant attitudes of police officers and as a police - public relations indicator in Wukari of Taraba state.

Police Accountability and Ethical Conduct

Police accountability and ethical conduct is the responsibility of police in the proper use of their authority within the framework of laws and professional regulations while respecting the rights of others. Police officers and agencies must be accountable for their actions and decisions and should act by ethical principles, including integrity,

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objectivity, fairness, and respect for human dignity. These concepts are critical in establishing essential safeguards against the abuse of power.

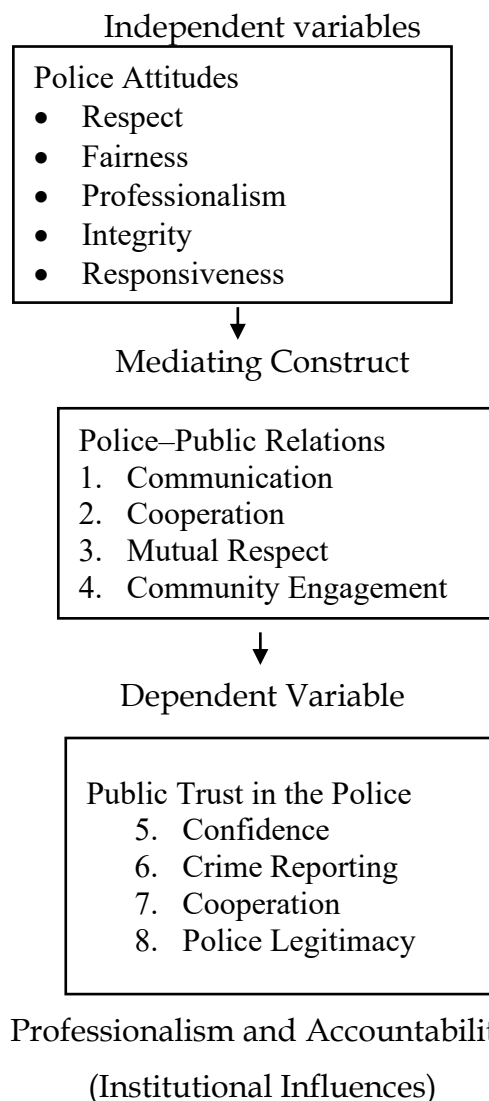
Police accountability entails not only sanctions but also effective systems of control, regulation, complaints, and civilian oversight, as well as principled management and leadership. It is a critical mechanism for preventing and reducing police misconduct and establishing trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. On the other hand, poor oversight and ineffective sanctions promote corruption, misuse of authority, and other misconduct.

While the Nigerian police force is being reformed, police corruption, unlawful arrests, extortion, and abuse of authority are still significant problems in the country (Akinlabi 2022). This issue significantly impacts the attitudes of the community toward the police and their willingness to cooperate with them. The procedural justice model emphasizes accountability to promote the perception of the police as an agency that respects and protects human rights since it makes the police appear as legitimate authorities (Tyler 2006).

In this study, police accountability and ethical conduct will be assessed as the extent to which police officers exercise their authority responsibly and adhere to professional rules and regulations while being answerable for their actions and decisions. Police accountability and ethical conduct are crucial factors in fostering positive police attitudes, improving police-community relations,

and gaining public trust in police in Wukari, Taraba State.

Conceptual Model of the Study



Source: Author's Conceptualization (2026).

Empirical Review

Fridell *et al.*, (2022) investigated how the relationship between organizational justice, ethical climate, and attitudes of police officers toward police misconduct in law enforcement agencies in the United States. The study was conducted using a quantitative cross sectional

survey design with sworn police officers from various police departments who were analysed using multivariate statistical techniques. Amongst the findings it was found that officers who felt their organizations were fair, transparent and ethically supportive were significantly less inclined to be condoning or rationalizing misconduct or unethical behaviour by their colleagues. This highlights the need for organizational culture for professionalism and ethical policing. But the study only included the United States and self-reported data, which could have included social desirability bias. This paper studied reviewed work is relevant for the current study as it indicated that the attitudes of police officers are affected by organizational factors.

Li and Sun (2023) analyzed how police-citizen encounters relate to the public's perception of police legitimacy in the United States. The study employed a quantitative study design and data from 5201 civilians who were the subjects of police traffic or pedestrian stops recently. The results showed that citizens' sense of fairness and respect from the police, lack of bias, transparency and neutrality, but not the enforcement of outcome, were more influential in shaping their perception of the legitimacy of the police. The study revealed that "procedurally just policing" is a clear way to boost public trust and institutional legitimacy. Its studies, however, are limited to the U.S. context of policing and the research only took place on traffic and pedestrian stops. The study is relevant to the current

study, as it is able to emphasize the significance of the attitude of the police and its impact on the public's trust. The study differs from the study of Li and Sun (2023) as they have taken into account the police attitude in the socio-cultural environment of Wukari in Taraba State.

Tankebe and Asif (2025) examined perceptions of police legitimacy, accountability and procedural justice among the public in Ghana. The researchers adopted quantitative survey design technique and bivariate analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the answers given by the respondents followed by multivariate regression. The results indicated that those who felt that police were respectful, fair, and responsible had more trust in police and were more willing to follow their instructions. Corruption, intimidation and abuse of authority, by contrast, had a negative effect on the legitimacy of the police and public trust. The study, however, was conducted in urban communities of Ghana, and only used quantitative data to explore deeper into the experiences of the participants. The study is relevant because it found that attitudes of the police are significant to the people's trust. The current study, unlike Tankebe and Asif (2025) uses a mixed method approach to investigate the attitudes of the police in the socio-cultural setting of Wukari in Taraba State.

In the study titled Police Favourability and its impact on crime reporting in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria, Shipurut *et al.*, (2025)

examined police favourability and its impact on crime reporting in the study area. The study's design was descriptive cross-sectional survey with 350 respondents randomly sampled from a population of 374,800 people from the Taro Yamane formula. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that overall the level of crime reported in Wukari was relatively low and that one of the factors that made citizens reluctant to report crime in the community was the impression that criminals are treated according to their wealth and influence in the community. The study recommended community policing, ethics and anti-bias training, and better accountability measures to help foster trust in the community. The study was however aimed at the problem of police favouritism and crime reporting in relation to the issue of police attitude towards the public at large was not explored. It is relevant to the present study because it provides empirical evidence of police attitudes in Wukari whereas the present study is broad based on attitudes among the police and its implications for police - public relations.

Sabastine *et al.* (2025) studied the impact of police bribery on crime reporting in Wukari local government area of Taraba State, Nigeria. The study employed descriptive cross sectional survey design and the respondents for the study were 350 out of 374,800 of the population with the random sampling technique using the taro Yamane formula. Descriptive statistics (such as frequencies, percentages, means and

standard deviations) were used to analyse the data. The results showed that police bribery had a significant negative impact on crime reporting as many of the respondents were apprehended that they might be asked to pay bribes or not be listened to by the police if they did not pay. The study revealed that bribery leads to loss of legitimacy, affects police-community relations and harms public trust in the police. It demanded more use of anti-corruption systems, community policing and independent reporting systems. But the study concentrated on issues of bribery and crime reporting and did not investigate general attitudes of the police. It is applicable in this study because it provides very clear evidence of how the practice of police officers impact the perceptions of the public and of police-public relations at a point of relevance in the study; Wukari.

Theoretical Framework

Procedural Justice Theory

Procedural Justice Theory is a conceptual framework introduced by Tom R. Tyler, 2006, about the factors and circumstances that determine people's assessment of legal authorities as fair in their use of authority and decision making. The theory challenges the idea that citizens' perception and evaluation of the police is based on its success in achieving desired outcomes. Rather, it implies that the process by which decisions are made and their implementation, is a critical component of citizens' acceptance of their decisions (Tyler 2006).

One of the key ideas of the theory is that an individual's perception of police legitimacy is enhanced if they engage with law enforcement officers in a perceived manner of procedural fairness. Voice, neutrality, respect and trustworthiness are the four key elements. Voice gives citizens an opportunity to share and voice their situation and perspective. Neutrality should be grounded on the same and equal standards and it must not be based on personal interests or prejudice. Respect relates to the notion that citizens are treated with dignity and courtesy, and trustworthiness relates to the notion that authorities are concerned with citizens' welfare and are honest. (Tyler 2006) These are the factors that determine the citizens' perception of the legitimacy of the police power.

The theory also provides explanations as to the relationship between police behavior and public co-operation. Citizens who feel the police are fair and respectful are more likely to accept police decisions, obey and follow lawfully, report crimes, give information and cooperate in investigations. However, negative perceptions of legitimate authority, arising from disrespect, discrimination, corruption and arbitrary use of authority, can otherwise impact perceptions of legitimate authority and reduce cooperation (Bolger and Walters 2019; Mazerolle *et al.* 2021).

The linkage of police attitudes to public trust and police-community relationship is the important aspect of the present study under the framework

of Procedural Justice Theory. The dimensions that are explored in this study are all direct concerns of citizens to the exercise of police power: responsiveness, communication, integrity, professionalism, fairness, respect, and responsible exercise of authority. Positive behaviour can then maintain a feeling of legitimate authority, and negative behaviours can result in disengagement and mistrust.

There are a few limitations to the theory, however. It emphasizes the citizen's perception of fairness, which may not fully reflect structural conditions, material discrepancies, organizational culture, corruption, or restrictions, among other factors that might affect the actions of the police. In addition, the concerns about substantive outcomes and/or institutional performance are not eliminated because of perceptions of procedural fairness. Some of these limitations exist, but the theory is applicable to the current study as it provides a framework for analysis of the impact of police behavior on citizens' perceptions of legitimacy, trust and cooperation.

Thus, the theoretical framework for this study is the Procedural Justice Theory which will provide a guide to the analysis in the understanding of how police officers in Wukari's attitude and behavior towards the public influences public trust and police-community relations.

Methodology

The design of this study was a convergent (mixed methods) case study, which was used for the critical

examination of the attitude of the Nigerian Police Force to the public in Wukari, Taraba State. The mixed-methods approach combined quantitative and qualitative methods to give a holistic view of the attitudes of the police and the perception of the public. Data were collected using the quantitative component to gather quantitative data on the nature of interactions between police and the public and the qualitative component to collect qualitative data on participants' experiences and perspectives. This was the case study design as it allowed for the in-depth investigation of policing practices in the real-life context of Wukari (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The respondents of the study were members of the community who had previous contact with the Nigerian Police Force, Wukari. To ensure those who were selected would have a knowledge and experience with police and public interaction in the context of the project, the purposive sampling method was used. The participants were youth leaders, market leaders, business owners, religious leaders, civil society representatives, and other citizens who have interacted with the police before.

Data collection techniques used were structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. A total of 120 community members were administered with questionnaire and 15 purposively selected community members were interviewed using semi-structured interview method. The primary data was complemented by documentary

data which included the Police Act 2020, official policy documents, and relevant scholarly publications. The data gathered from the quantitative approach of the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics which includes frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviations. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data, following Braun and Clarke's (2021) framework. The interpretation involved synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative results to give a holistic picture of the attitudes of the police officers towards the people of Wukari, Taraba state.

Results

A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to community members in Wukari, Taraba State with previous contact with Nigerian Police Force. One hundred per cent of the 120 questionnaires were retrieved. The questionnaires were completely retrieved through direct administration of the researcher and the willingness of the respondents to participate the study. When the returned questionnaires were analysed, all were completed and suitable for analysis with a 100% usability rate. The high response rate and ease of usability of these responses served as a basis for analysing the attitude of the Nigerian Police Force to the public in Wukari, Taraba State and for drawing valid conclusions about the attitude of the police, the value reorientation and public confidence in the police.

Police Attitudes

The first objective of this study was to examine the attitudes of officers of the Nigerian Police Force towards members

of the public in Wukari, Taraba State. To achieve this, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with eight statements on a five-point Likert scale. Table 1 presents the findings.

Table 1: Community Members' Perceptions of Police Attitudes

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Police officers treat community members respectfully	2.48	1.21	Disagree
2	Police officers are approachable	2.35	1.18	Disagree
3	Police officers behave professionally	2.29	1.15	Disagree
4	Police officers are fair in dealing with citizens	2.18	1.12	Disagree
5	Police officers demonstrate integrity	2.06	1.08	Disagree
6	Police officers respond promptly to complaints	2.42	1.24	Disagree
7	Police officers communicate politely	2.33	1.19	Disagree
8	Police officers exercise their powers responsibly	2.11	1.14	Disagree

Source: Field Data, 2026

Table 1 shows a negative attitude of the police toward most respondents. The mean score for all of the eight indicators is below the level of positive perceptions with the lowest scores being for integrity ($M = 2.06$), responsible use of police powers ($M = 2.11$), and fairness ($M = 2.18$). Other negative scores were for professionalism, responsiveness, approachability, treatment with respect and communication. The results indicated that ethical, professional, and interpersonal issues of police conduct in Wukari are interrelated and varies, suggesting that the concern is not limited to just misconducts but rather, an overall deficiency in police-public relation.

Value Re-orientation

The second objective of this study was to identify the factors influencing the attitudes of the Nigerian Police Force towards the public in Wukari, Taraba State. To address this, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements concerning value re-orientation and ethical reform. Table 2 presents the findings.

Table 2: Community Members' Perspectives on Value Re-orientation

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Police officers have become more ethical in recent years	2.56	1.23	Disagree
2	Ethics training can improve police behaviour	4.12	0.89	Agree
3	Police reforms should emphasize moral values	4.28	0.76	Strongly Agree
4	Ethical leadership will improve policing	4.35	0.72	Strongly Agree

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5	Police accountability should be strengthened	4.42	0.68	Strongly Agree
6	Officers should receive regular ethics training	4.18	0.84	Agree
7	Value re-orientation can reduce police misconduct	4.08	0.91	Agree
8	Ethical reforms are necessary within the Nigerian Police Force	4.45	0.65	Strongly Agree

Table 2 demonstrate that participants are unhappy with the current ethical behaviour of police officers, but that they strongly support change. Respondents rated police officers as less ethical ($M = 2.56$), but strongly believed ethics training, moral values, ethical leadership, increased accountability, and value re-orientation are all ways in which their conduct might be improved. Ethical changes in Nigerian Police Force ($M = 4.45$) received the most support. In general, the results indicate that the institutional and ethical changes are seen as essential to combat police misconduct and to improve police behaviour.

Public Trust

The third objective of this study was to assess the implications of police attitudes for public trust and police-community relations in Wukari, Taraba State. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with eight statements concerning trust and confidence in the Nigerian Police Force. Table 3 presents the findings.

Table 3: Community Members' Levels of Public Trust in the Police

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
17	I trust the Nigerian Police Force	2.32	1.20	Disagree
18	I am willing to cooperate with the police	3.85	1.02	Agree
19	The police protect citizens' rights	2.45	1.18	Disagree
20	The police enforce the law impartially	2.28	1.22	Disagree
21	The police are accountable for their actions	2.18	1.14	Disagree
22	I feel safe reporting crimes to the police	2.52	1.26	Disagree
23	Ethical policing strengthens community confidence	4.32	0.74	Strongly Agree
24	The police contribute positively to community safety	3.02	1.15	Undecided

Public confidence in police was generally low with respondents giving low scores to the Nigerian police force with 93% indicating lack of trust in police ($M = 2.32$). They also showed low confidence that police protect citizen's rights ($M = 2.45$), enforces laws without discrimination ($M = 2.28$) and accountability for their actions ($M = 2.18$). Many respondents indicated that they were not encouraged to report any crime to the police ($M = 2.52$). However, the police were willing to collaborate with the public ($M = 3.85$) and many respondents indicated that ethical police will increase public

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confidence ($M = 4.32$). This implies that although the public lacks confidence in the police, they are however willing to collaborate with police when the police behave ethically thus restoring police legitimacy and improving police – community relationship.

Qualitative Findings

Fifteen community members were purposively selected for the semi structured interviews to gain in-depth understanding of the public experience of Nigerian Police Force in Wukari town, Taraba State. Six themes emerged from the thematic analysis: negative experiences with the police, perceived corruption and extortion, lack of accountability, professionalism and ethical conduct, community perceptions of police legitimacy, and suggestions for changing police attitudes and community trust.

Overall, participants frequently noted incidents of disrespect, intimidation, harassment and abuse of authority by the police. Many of the respondents commented on the unfair treatment they received during ‘normal’ contact with officers and that there were many times when they needed to pay unofficial fees to officers to provide services, or to carry out their duties. Victimisation was connected with the demand for ‘transport money’ before investigations could take place, which was also evidence to the public of the corruption and unethical behaviour of the police. These accounts are also supported by quantitative results, as the mean scores were low in relation to the professionalism and integrity of the police, fairness and treatment towards citizens.

The other recurring theme was the lack of accountability of the Nigerian Police Force. Participants felt police misconduct was not being meted out in a manner that was effective, and that officers were rarely punished for misconduct. The state of impunity therefore, many respondents felt that it facilitated the corruption, misuse of authority and inadequacies in providing public services.

But some good experiences were shared by some participants with the police, which did not lack professionalism, integrity and respect towards citizens. The few examples cited here demonstrate that it is possible to be an ethical officer if he or she upholds professional standards and procedural fairness; however, that is not always the case.

The interviews also revealed that the officers’ negative attitude on citizens has had negative impact on their level of confidence and trust in the Nigerian Police Force. Many people do not report crime or cooperate with police due to fear of harassment, extortion and unfair treatment, participants said. To address these challenges, the following suggestions were offered, among others: Persist with ethics training, have more effective accountability, have effective community policing, have ethical leadership, have institutional reforms, and increase public awareness of citizens’ rights. The qualitative results

corroborate the quantitative results in that the positive attitude of the police towards the public through ethical and institutional changes is necessary for reestablishing public confidence and good relationship with the police in Wukari, Taraba State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings showed that police officers' attitudes toward the public were predominantly negative with the scores obtained being low in respect, fairness, professionalism, integrity, responsiveness and responsible use of authority. The qualitative data also supported these findings, with many of the participants reporting experience of intimidation, discourtesy, extortion and abuse of power by the police. These findings agree with the results of Shipurut *et al.* (2025) which showed that negative behaviours of the police have a negative impact on trust and police-community relations. The findings are also consistent with the findings of the theory of Procedural Justice Theory (PJT) which states that fairness and treatment of people is an important factor that contributes to the legitimacy of police and their cooperation with the people they serve.

The study findings indicated that good ethics, accountability, ethics training and value reorientation are the effective methods that respondents strongly believed should be used to improve the behavior of police. Similarly, those interviewed identified the factors affecting police attitudes as corruption, lack of police accountability, poor supervision and police institution

culture. The results are consistent with those of Fridell *et al.* (2022) and Tankebe and Asif (2025) who noted that ethical cultures in organisations and accountability systems foster professionalism and minimize police misconduct. The findings show that, in addition to the existing ethical and professional training, there is a need for institutional changes that seek to enhance police attitudes.

Overall, the study showed a negative attitude of the public towards the Nigerian Police Force, particularly when they believed that there was no ethical policing, while there was some degree of trust for the Nigerian Police Force when they believed the police is ethical. Interviewees also reported that, corruption, police unfairness and abuse of police personnel made it difficult to report crimes and reduced police legitimacy. The results support Li and Sun (2023) and Sabastine *et al.* (2025) results that found procedural justice in policing positively affects the public's trust and cooperation and negative police actions negatively affect trust and cooperation. It is therefore concluded that this study showed that the attitude of the police officers in Wukari, Taraba State can serve as a good tool for better police-community relations and regain public trust in Wukari, Taraba State.

Conclusion

The study critically analyzed the attitude of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) to the community of the public in Wukari, Taraba state. Results showed that overall, police attitudes are viewed as negative, especially with respect to

respect, fairness, professionalism and accountability, which erodes public confidence and quality police-community relations. While there was a strong belief that the moral, accountable and ongoing professional development of officers could help to enhance policing, concern over corruption and abuse of authority are important issues. The study finds that the critical areas that need to be strengthened to improve police attitudes, restore public confidence and make the Nigerian Police Force more effective and legitimate are the areas of strengthening of ethical standards, institutional accountability and strengthening of community oriented policing.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Nigerian Police Force should organize regular training and retraining programmes on professionalism, human rights, procedural justice, and effective communication to promote respectful, fair, and ethical interactions with members of the public.
2. The Police Service Commission and the leadership of the Nigerian Police Force should strengthen internal accountability, ethical leadership, and disciplinary mechanisms while improving officers' welfare and working conditions to discourage corruption, extortion, and abuse of authority.
3. the Nigerian Police Force should institutionalize community policing through regular stakeholder meetings, town hall engagements, and collaborative security initiatives that encourage dialogue, mutual respect, and public participation in crime prevention.

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