

## Public Perception of the Police and Crime Prevention in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The end of military rule in 1999 notwithstanding, the image of the Nigerian Police as a corrupt and inefficient organization with penchant for human rights abuse has not yet been redressed. During General Sani Abacha's infamous regime, the resort to repression coupled with a rise in armed robbery wave led to a reckless abuse of human rights, including torture and extrajudicial executions by the police while road checkpoints became hotbeds of extortion, the police completely lost their bearings in combating crime particularly heinous politically motivated murders that became the hallmark of the Abacha regime. Throughout Nigeria history, the police had been a tool of the state, mistrusted and feared by the people instead of being friend to the general public. The tragedy is that the brutal mindset lingers on still. Independent Advocacy and Anti Corruption Group project in a recent research aimed highlighting the magnitude of corruption and its effects on democracy clearly placed the police as the most corrupt institution in Nigeria. In spite of the remarkable increase in the strength of the police from 122,000 in 1999 to 320, 000 in 2006, and 371, 800 as at present, the police welfare package, including housing allowances and provision of uniform had remained static over the years. This paper is of the view that there is urgent need to build a new police force that is compliant with democratic cultures and values. The welfare of the Nigeria Police should be accorded the highest priority. The IGP has to check official corruption and miscarriage of justice within the system.

### Introduction

A police officer is never called when things are going well; they are only called upon when there is a grave and sinister problem. It is only natural then that police receive criticism for what they do within the society. After all, any occupation charged with the responsibilities of bringing order out of chaos or enforcing laws and regulations accepted or unaccepted by the people, preventing antisocial behaviors etc are bound to be controversial. Therefore two issues will be looked into in succession to fully understand the operations of the police in trying to prevent crime in Nigeria. First, section 214 (1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Police Acts and Regulations (Cap 359) part II subsection 3 provided that there shall be established for Nigeria a police force to be known as the Nigeria Police Force (hereafter in the Act referred to as "the Force"). In other words no other police Force can/should be found in any part of the country. This has generated a lot criticism from State governors, intellectuals, and technocrats' who saw no correlation between the Federal Constitution and the Unitary Police Force imposed on the country. It also means that the Commissioner of Police in all the States of the Federation is responsible to the Inspector General and not to the State Governors unless clearance is sort first from the headquarters, the governor of a state cannot give orders to the Police Commissioner.

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This has therefore created a lot of serious security problem at the State level. Two, subsection 4 of the same act and decree No 23 of 1979 states 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 due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged, and shall perform such military duties within or without Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of, this or any other act. Wide discretionary latitude is therefore given to the police to enforce the law without corresponding strong checks on the power given to them. No wonder this power is subject to series of abuses in Nigeria where the police is still expected to be friend to the public.

The public sees the police as an instrument and face of the government in power that is always ready to unleash terror at the slightest opportunity. Hence they are held in low regard and do not enjoy the habitual cooperation of the public. The public perception of the police is not shaped by the kind of job they are called to do but by the attitude of the personnel. Their roles in many cases denigrate the law, endangering the citizens and blotting the institutional reputation of the police that they represent. The police no doubt know that they are not liked by the public, despite the fact that they risk their lives to protect them, at the very slightest opportunity they are booed and geared at by the public calling them derogatory and disgusting names. This dislike or resentment of the police apparently has some bearing on Nigeria Police colonial history.

The police are conceived, not a service organization for natives...because of the use to which the colonial masters put the police that is harassing and arresting tax defaulters, brutalizing trade unionists and other nationalists, and torturing persons accused of criminal offences, nobody wanted to have anything to do with the police...it will be seen therefore, that from the beginning a serious communication gap was built between the police and the public and this mutual distrust rather than disappear continued to grow wider. The situation is so bad that it became fashionable for parents to threaten their unwary and troublesome children with police presence (Odu cited by Asemota, 1993). The unfortunate mundane picture of the police painted here by the public has created serious problems for the police /public relations and public perception of the police in crime prevention.

### **History of the Nigeria Police**

The Nigeria Police Force history has been variously documented based on the need to fully understand the context of policing in the present day Nigeria [Okonkwo, 1966; Tamuno, 1970; Ahire 1993; Alemika, 1993; Rotimi, 1993, 2001]. The first police force in the country according to Alemika [2003] was established in 1861; and between 1861 and 1906, the British colonizers, through wars, treaties obtained by violence and foul means, subjugated the estimated four hundred nationalities [Otiye, 1990] that inhabited the territory of Nigeria. Alemika pointed out that these nationalities were amalgamated at various levels and times, which results into the creation of the colony and protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria, in 1906. These two protectorates were further amalgamated in 1914 to become a political entity-the colonial Nigeria state [Alemika, 2003]. According to Alemika, other police forces were created between 1867 and 1914 to maintain colonial definition of law and order within the different nationalities subjected to British colonial rule [Alemika, 2003].

Two types of police system were maintained by the colonialist; these are: Forces and constabulary that were established and controlled by colonial officials and the local forces established around local or native authorities controlled by local surrogates – indigenous traditional rulers. In between 1900 and 1905 according to Alemika [2003] and Tamuno [1970] the various police forces and constabulary created by the colonizers were amalgamated into two major forces – Northern Nigeria Police Force and Southern Nigeria Police Force. Alemika stated that the two forces co-existed with the local/native authority police forces between 1917 and 1930, especially in the Northern and Western areas of the country. The Northern and Southern police forces in 193 were later brought together to be what we call today the Nigeria Police Force. Also, the forces co-existed with the local police forces, until 1966

when they were abolished due to their usage as tool of political oppression, extortion and annihilation [Ahire, 1991, 1993; Ohonbamu, 1972; Rotimi, 1993, 2001].

The Nigeria Police Force came into existence in 1930 [Alemika and Chukwuma 2000; Onyeozili, 2005; Tamuno, 1985]. At inception, the force was saddled with ‘normal police duties’ as well as ‘extra police’ functions. The ‘normal police duties’, including para-military roles, which the colonial authorities assigned the police, have remained largely unchanged for the past seventy-three years [Alemika, 2003c; Odekunle, 2004]. All over the world, the base line objective of the police is the maintenance of law and order. The central objective entails such duties as prevention, control and combating of criminality; maintenance of public order and peace; rendering assistance and services to members of the community who require them and upholding the rule of law [Odekunle, 2004; Alemika, 2003].

Odekunle [2004] observes that the central and sub objectives of policing, the importance of policing to society and citizens’ perception of the government [which the Police is seen as representing] cannot be overestimated. He shows the importance of the police in his observation of their duties as the government officials most proximate to crime, temporally and procedurally the leading figures in crime prevention/control and in the law enforcement process [see also Gana, 1993:23]. Odekunle maintained that the Policemen’s honesty, integrity and observance of procedural laws in handling offenders and non-offenders have deep implications for the citizens’ perception of fairness and justice and for the degree of respect the average citizen has for the law; lastly Odekunle averred that policemen’s behaviors affect citizens’ opinion about their government, being the most visible compared to courts or prisons and as well as being the visible primary or main government authority legally authorized to use force on citizens when necessary [Odekunle, 2004:26; Onoge, 1993].

The Nigerian Police according to Tamuno [1985:12] are accorded wide powers by laws. For instance, they are empowered: to take measures to prevent crimes, detect or investigate crimes, detect and apprehend offenders and collect evidence for prosecution. In Alemika and Chukwuma’s [2000] view of the police functions the idealistic vision of the police roles was explained with John Alderson advocacy that the police should:

Contribute towards liberty, equality and fraternity... help reconcile freedom with security and to uphold the rule of law... facilitate human dignity through upholding and protecting human rights and pursuit of happiness... provide leadership and participation in dispelling criminogenic social conditions... contribute towards the creation reinforcement of trust in communities... strengthen the security of persons and property and the feeling of security of persons... investigate, detect and activate the prosecution of offences, within the rule of law... facilitate free passage and movement on highways and roads and on streets and avenues open to public passage... curb public disorder... deal with major and minor crises and to help and advice those in distress where necessary activating other agencies.

This is one of the major reasons why critics of the police have labeled the organization as over centralized pro-state and belligerent not to serve society or the people but to serve some parts of society and some people at the expense of others Alemika and Chukwuma [2000]. According to Bowden cited in Alemika and Chukwuma [2003], the roles of the police include the repression of the poor and powerless in order to protect the interests of the rulers. The police roles, therefore, include standing as a “buffer between elite and masses” and to perform “the essential holding operation against the mal-contented until military force could be applied in a punitive and salutary manner”. Still citing the work of Brodgen, Alemika and Chukwuma [2000] were of the opinion that “Police forces are structured, organizationally and ideologically to act against the marginal strata”.

Alemika and Chukwuma [2000] argued that the more realistic view is to see police forces as repressive and service organizations. They explained that police repress and at the same time serve the public. However they noted that variations exist in the priority attached to repressive and service functions of the police in different societies and even governments within a society. Alemika [1993a] and Alemika and Chukwuma [2000:5] in his/their exquisite argument stated that:

...Police work embodies ironies. Police are instrument of oppression and exploitation in a totalitarian and unjust social system. Yet they are essential to the preservation of justice and democracy.... The police are guardians of social order. As an institution, the police force, helps to preserve, fortify and reproduce the prevailing social order, and are hardly catalysts for its change. Thus when a social order is oppressive, exploitative and unjust, the police preserve it by suppressing and defusing demand for democracy and elimination of oppression and injustices. Similarly, in a democratic, just and equitable society, police have greater chances of serving as Vanguard for social democracy, human rights and social and economic justice.

This view justifies the critics' notion that the Nigerian police are pro-government while the public see them as unfriendly with penchant to unleash terror. Nobody really wants to have anything to do with the police, if they could be avoided, majority of the members of the public would love to avoid them at the slightest opportunity.

### **Police Public Image and Crime Prevention**

There is no doubt that the effectiveness and efficiency of the Nigeria Police have been under stress and adversely affected by various problems such as inappropriate policing orientation and strategies with emphasis on reactive instead of proactive/preventive measures, brutality against citizens, including extra-judicial killing, corruption and extortion, poor performance in the areas of intelligence analysis and utilization as well as investigation and perversion of the course of justice etc [Jike, 2003; Ekpeyong, 1987 Alemika, 1993; Onoge, 1993]. Onoge [1993] observed that the sloganeering "Police is your friend" in present-day Nigeria notwithstanding, the rival popular image of the police as corrupt "*kill and go*" squad has not abated. Onoge wondered that despite three decades after independence Nigeria still quests for a social order based not on brute force but on just and moral consensus. Violence inter-communal and religious conflicts remain, corrupt looting of the national treasury continues to occur, all sorts of violent crime are committed with reckless abandon in the full glare of the police statutorily charged with public peace and order maintenance; all of these signal the lack of commitment to orderly development of the Nigeria socio-political space [Onoge, 1993].

Till date, it is somehow very disturbing that despite the constitutional powers granted the police to maintain public peace, safety and general security in Nigeria the quality of security has nothing to be proud of and it has no doubt generated a great deal of controversies [Odekunle, 2004]. Odekunle declared "Nigeria Police Force falls short of optimum performance". This is manifest in the widespread inefficiencies, corruption, unfairness in dealing with suspects, occasional over-use of legitimate force, bad temper, bullying, and other abuses of citizen's rights with impunity. The Apo six killings in Abuja by the police in, 2005 is an example [Brewier, Gueke, Hwne, Moxon-Browne and Wilford, 1996].

Ekpeyong [1987] argued that there were reports of some crimes committed with the connivance or participation of the police, this is also evident in: 'How the police protect robbers: a victims account' in Tell Magazine, December 31, 2001. It was reported in this paper that some of the men of the special Anti Robbery squad of the Nigeria Police, Lagos command, struck a deadly partnership with armed robbers, helping them escape justice and threatening the lives of victims who make efforts to recover their stolen property. Ekpeyong [1987] observed that there were cases also of alleged destroyer of crime evidences and reports by the police, arrested persons released, criminal charges and prosecutions dropped in exchange for bribes or other benefits. Ekpeyong also averred false charges were reportedly made against innocent and ignorant citizens, criminal investigations suspended and other abuse of rights with impunity were rampant among the police citizen's. The poor educational attainment, the lack of the requisite professional qualification, the recruitment of low-skilled persons, and low-salary scale, which had lagged behind the national minimum for several years but until now, is allegedly at the root of the misdeeds of the police and high attrition rates [Ekpeyong, 1987].

In line with the police inefficiency Orobator [1993] observed that the problem of underfunding is not peculiar to the police, but said it will remain a recurring problem so long as the supply of national

resources cannot meet the demand for social services. From this point however, the underfunding of the Nigeria Police has reduced their state of preparedness and level of efficiency to a pitiful level. The acute shortage of accommodation for the policemen made the co-ordination of their activities difficult and this adversely affected their performance. Orobator maintained that the police cannot be said to be better off in terms of equipment, radio and other communication facilities that can hardly be relied upon, their capacity for mobility is at best close to zero. He said, cases of an entire Police Division having only a vehicle, which is usually not always road worthy, are abundant and indeed there are stations without vehicles at all.

The end result according to Orobator [1993] is that the Nigeria Police is not adequately equipped for its job; the nonchalant attitude to work is also an additional factor that has aided the inefficiency of the police in crime prevention and control in Nigeria. Alemika [2003] was of the opinion that agencies of crime management in Nigeria share in common certain problems such as authoritarian or repressive legacy and orientation, lack of consultation with and accountability to citizens; lack of policies that specifically harmonize their operations with democratic principles of criminal justice system; poor funding of activities; poor staffing and inadequate remuneration of staff; inadequate resources; insensibility/insensitivity to and thereby non-utilization of, scientific research, knowledge and expertise in the various academic fields of criminology, penology, sociology of law, criminal justice and law enforcement to improve training, planning, operations, monitoring and evaluation; corruption; lack of institutionalized mechanisms by which the agencies are answerable to the public for their activities and lack of coordination to achieve efficiency [Alemika, 2003].

Benjamin [2001] also points out that the police has not been useful nor helpful in promoting its image before the general public, as there are many cases of murder, assassination, and robbery which took place in the society that have lasted for two or more years without the police identification of the culprits talk less of arresting and prosecuting such groups or gangs. The failure of the police according to Benjamin to either apprehend killers of robbery victims and assassins all over the country has apparently reinforced the belief of critics who describe the police force as dubious, corrupt, inept and brutal. The matter is more paradoxical as there have been instances whereby either robbers or assassins kill some police officers, yet it has failed to unfold the actors behind such scenes. Thus, such actions provide fresh evidence to cynics who have argued that if the police cannot provide justice even if posthumously, for one of its own then it has got no business posturing as credible guarantor of public security and well-being [Benjamin, 2000].

Crime generally gives rise to insecurity and fear, alienation and despair, suspicion and conflict; some cities like Lagos often witness armed hoodlums strike at will with insolent ease and gratuitous brutality, robbing, maiming and killing their victims; sometimes houses on an entire street are raided for several hours making one to wonder if indeed there is police at all in Nigeria [Obioha, 2004; Omisakin, 1998]. In addition the renewed assassination and other violent crimes in Lagos and Onitsha among others is a further major incident that has seriously dampened public confidence in the police force [Benjamin, 2000]. In the course of performing its statutory duties to the larger society, the Nigeria police have often times been indicted in various ways. As have been earlier enunciated, officers are accused of brutality, of violating fundamental human rights, or extra-judicial killings, of aiding and abetting criminal activities, of engaging in bribery and corruption [Onyeozili, 2005; Ekpeyong, 1987].

Odinkalu [2004] and Odekunle [1981] stressed that the capacity of Nigeria Police in monitoring and managing the social space in the nation are disappointingly sub-optimal and will continue to remain unless a new relationship of honest and genuine interdependence is built between the government and the governed and between the police as an institution of government and the civil society as those from whom government derives its legitimacy. Most violent conflicts had occurred due to the ineptitude and inefficiency in the performance of police statutory duties. The civil society as a result of the incompetence of the police tends to find support of ethnic militias and other 'self-help' security outfits to provide the much-needed security for their lives and property.

President Obasanjo’s administration, on assumption of office, allocated 2.5 million naira to the Nigeria Police Force to acquire crime-fighting facilities to enhance security in Lagos and Abuja [Alemika, 2003]. Despite this allocation, the incidence of violent crimes has not abated. There has also been increase incidence of violence by militant ethnic and religious groups across the country during the past years. Unfortunately, the government has not demonstrated capacity to effectively manage such violence that has claimed thousands of life or challenged the law enforcement authority of the police [Alemika, 2003].

### Public Perceptions of Police Performance

Where the police serve the society, there would be less division and hostility between the public and the police. It has been observed that the police are often in constant conflict with large segments of the populace largely because the police are enmeshed in the conflicts within the society and are also agencies of the state employed to enforce the laws that are made by rulers and to maintain the social order in which the interests of political and economic power-holders are paramount or dominant. The enforcement of laws and maintenance of social order that promote the interests of rulers against that of the vast majority of the people by the police often put them in hostile relations with the members of the public. The public and police perceptions of crime prevention in Nigerian urban centers are illustrated in Table 1

**Table 1: Views about effectiveness of Police in Crime Prevention**

Police views about their ability to prevent crime in Society	N	%
Very Effective	106	53.0
Effective	69	34.5
Very Ineffective	11	5.5
Ineffective	13	6.5
No response	1	.5
Total	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Public views about ability of police to prevent crime		
Very Ineffective	183	48.8
Ineffective	122	32.5
Very effective	40	10.7
Effective	26	6.9
No response	4	1.1
Total	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2013**

In table 1, 87.5% of the police say they are very effective and effective in the provision of public safety while the members of the public [81.3%] say the police are very ineffective and ineffective. The implication is that there is a gap between public expectation and police actual performance in crime control. Majority of the police claimed that the reason for the decrease in crime rate is due to police renewed effort, while the public believed it is as a result of intervention of self help groups in the neighborhood. The public view shows nothing but a loss of confidence in police ability to prevent crime in the society. Furthermore, the insensitivity of the police to the plight of the public on security matters is glaringly revealed. This may have deleterious consequences on community policing.

**Table 2: Public and Police Relationship**

How would you describe the relationship between the Public and the Police	N	%
<b>Very Cordial/ Cordial</b>	15	7.5
<b>Very antagonistic</b>	112	56.0
<b>Antagonistic</b>	68	34.0
<b>No response</b>	5	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Reasons		
<b>The Police are corrupt and insensitive</b>	57	28.5
<b>The Police are trigger happy</b>	30	15.0
<b>Police are Unfriendly</b>	60	30.0
<b>Police are friends to criminals</b>	8	4.0
<b>Cordial relationship</b>	6	3.0
<b>There is mutual mistrust</b>	15	7.5
<b>The public see police as law violators</b>	9	4.5
<b>No response</b>	15	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2013**

Respondents were asked to describe the relationship between the police and the public. Majority [56.0%] described the relationship as very antagonistic while 34.0% simply said it was antagonistic. Various reasons were adduced for this; while 28.5% said police corruption and insensitivity would not allow for smooth relationship between the public and police, 30.0% saw the police as unfriendly always in perpetual collision with the members of the public and 15.0% said the police are trigger happy which sometimes results into extra judicial killings of defenseless citizens. Seven and half percent [7.5%] believed there is constant mutual mistrust between the police and members of the public. Only a negligible few [3.0%] were of the view that the relationship between the two groups is cordial probably because of the belief that the police is the keeper of public peace.

***Types of assault the public suffered from the police***

Respondent’s personal experience of brutality in the hands of the police in Table 3 reveals that, very few respondents have not been assaulted by the police. Assault, ranges from verbal [5.3%], slapping [12.3%], kicking [20.8%], injuring [12.3%], and threat to kill [12.8%]. Respondents therefore have suffered serious assault from the police as majority of them [84.8%] confirmed that they have been assaulted by the police. It could therefore be inferred that police modes of operation are often times detrimental to the citizens whom they have sworn to protect.

**Table 3: Types of assault the public suffered from the Police**

	Response	N	%
Verbal Assault by Police	Yes	20	5.3
	No	347	92.5
	No Response	8	2.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Slapped by Police	Yes	46	12.3
	No	279	74.4
	No Response	50	13.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Kicked by Police	Yes	78	20.8
	No	247	65.9
	No Response	50	13.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Injured by Police	Yes	46	12.3
	No	279	74.4
	No Response	46	12.3
	Not Applicable	4	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Threat to kill by Police	Yes	48	12.8
	No	277	73.9
	No Response	46	12.3
	Not Applicable	4	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
None of the Above	Yes	318	84.8
	No	49	13.1
	No Response	4	1.1
	Not Applicable	4	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2006**

*Police actions witnessed by respondents*

Respondents also reported that they have witnessed police actions against both suspects and people in the community in the form of verbal assault [13.2%]; slapping [71.4%]; kicking and beating [71.7%]; Injuring [38.9%]; torturing [21.6%] and killing [18.0%]. The practice of police slapping, kicking, beating and threatening to kill with gun constitute violence against the public, so also threatening to shoot citizen with gun and pointing guns at citizens by police as Alemika and Chukwuma [2000] have pointed out can also be described as act of brutality or torture. These acts also constitute degrading treatment prohibited by the constitution. The constitution provides that:

Every individual is entitled to respect for dignity of his person and accordingly [a] no person shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment [Chapter 4, Section 34 of the constitution, of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 199 and section 31 of the 1979 constitution].

It must be stressed therefore that police acts of descending on suspects and citizens with horse whips, guns and violently seizing or abducting suspects or people arbitrarily is out of step with the law and offends section 34 [1] [a] of the 1999 constitution as being inhuman and degrading treatments.

**Table 4: Police actions witnessed by respondents**

Which of the following assaults by Police have you witnessed?	Responses	N	%
Verbal Assault	Yes	132	35.2
	No	235	62.7
	Not Applicable	4	1.1
	No Response	4	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Slapping	Yes	278	74.1
	No	88	23.5
	Not Applicable	5	1.3
	No Response	4	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Kicking	Yes	269	71.7
	No	97	25.9
	Not Applicable	5	1.3
	No Response	4	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Injuring	Yes	146	38.9
	No	220	58.7
	Not Applicable	5	1.3
	No Response	4	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Killing	Yes	71	18.9
	No	295	78.7
	Not Applicable	5	1.3
	No Response	4	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>
None of the Above	Yes	66	17.6
	No	295	78.7
	Not Applicable	10	2.7
	No Response	4	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2013**

***Police/Public Joint action for crime Prevention***

In Nigeria, particularly in urban areas, crime has increasingly become intractable. Rising incidence of bombing, armed robbery, assassination and corruption has led to a perplexing anxiety, fear and frustration, which in turn have affected the economic and social life of Nigerians. There is no doubt that Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in crime during the past two decades [Alemika and Chukwuma, 2000].

Urban centers with their reputation as a “bee-hive of opportunities” kept on attracting immigrants, with their economic fortunes and dense population, the cities had recorded an incommensurable level of crime. In fact a large body of literature believes that urbanization in particular has brought many unpleasant consequences such as violence and instability in modernizing countries [Huntington, 1968; Onibokun and Kumuyi 1996]. It is also generally assumed that within the urban environment, violent disturbances are most likely to occur in the over-crowded, squalid, and distressed neighborhood [Fogelson, 1971; Stren and White, 1989].

The plague of crime has continued to generate anxiety among residents in Nigerian urban centers. Urbanites move about with great mistrust, fear and circumspection. Cars are brazenly snatched from motorist both in the night and broad daylight, in lonely and crowded neighborhoods, financial institutions are raided on regular basis with reckless abandon, with feeble or no challenge from the law enforcement agents whose weapons are outmatched by the sophisticated ones used by the criminals. The most tragic aspect of this is that all efforts of the government to deal with these ubiquitous armed robbers and assassins of political big wigs have yielded no desired result. For instance, on assumption of duty, President Olusegun Obasajo administration allocated 2.5 billion naira to the Nigeria police to acquire crime-fighting equipments to enhance security work in Abuja and Lagos; despite this allocation the incidence of violent crime has not diminished [Alemika, 2003d]. Yet in Chapter 2 of 1999 Constitution, it was explicitly stated that the security and welfare of the people should be the primary purpose of government [S.14 [2] [b]].

In recent times there has been multiplicity of community crime control groups and private security organizations, but a systematic partnership between them and the police has not been worked out. This leads to one of the basic questions this paper seeks to answer. Is it possible for the police and these groups to work together to fight the endemic crime and criminality in Nigeria urban metropolis? Table 3 shows the opinions of police respondents.

**Table 5: Cross tabulation of police responses to Public\Police joint Action**

If no give reasons for your answer	Do you think public and police can work together to prevent crime?				Total
	Yes	No	Don't know	No response	
<b>OPC is police enemy/can't work together</b>		45 [32.1%]			45 [22.5%]
<b>Illegal/lawless/Unprofessional</b>		58 [42.3%]			58 [29.0%]
<b>They are criminals</b>		23 [16.8%]			23 [11.5%]
<b>No response</b>	55 [100.0%]	12 [8.8%]	1 [100.0%]	6 [100.0%]	74 [37.0%]
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b> [28.0%]	<b>138</b> [68.5%]	<b>1</b> [0.5%]	<b>6</b> [0.3%]	<b>200</b> [100.0%]

**Source: Field Survey, 2013**

The police gave various reasons for the incompatibility of the police and self help security groups in crime prevention ranging from the perceived enmity between the two organizations [22.5%], to lawlessness, unprofessionalism and illegality of most private security groups in crime prevention [29.0%], and still others said they are criminals [11.5%]. Generally, majority [68.5%] said the police and self help security groups cannot work together. However, a significant fraction [28.0%] believed the police and the public can work together to control crime in Nigeria metropolitan centers.

### Conclusion

The police are granted enormous powers by law and the constitution to take preventive measures against the commission of all crimes in Nigeria; in this sense the law allows them to use such reasonable force as may be necessary for the prevention of crimes. In the exercise of this authority, they have in various ways malevolently violated the rights of members of the public with impunity. This practice has earned the Nigeria police different derogatory names, hatred and constant collision with the members of the public to whom they have sworn an oath to protect. So far it can be inferred from the data gathered in this study that the relationship between the police and the public in Nigeria is not cordial, the police are more accountable to the government rather than to the members of the public whose interest they were statutorily established to protect.

In Nigeria the public perception of the police is warped based on the misuse of powers vested in them. This misuse of powers which creates negative police image and police-public relations is manifested in police corruption and brutality which had been their regular hallmark. This position can be changed if and only if the police are reoriented towards adequate care and respect for human dignity, citizen's fundamental rights and privileges. The police should work relentlessly towards redeeming their public image of underperforming, immodest, brutal, corrupt and predatory force.

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