Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Research
E-ISSN: 1936-6264 | P-ISSN: 1945-3019

Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Research (JIMRES) www.jimres.org
E-ISSN: 1936-6264 | P-ISSN: 1945-3019

Check for updates

Police Professionalism and Citizen's Rights: A Comparison of the Police Stop and Search Tactics in Nigeria and Ghana

Abstract: Drawing on a comparative framework, this study investigated how stop and search policing in Ghana and Nigeria intersected with questions of professional conduct, procedural justice, and the safeguarding of individual rights. While authorities in both nations frame these operations as necessary tools for crime control and intelligence work, their actual execution repeatedly raised serious concerns, among them, unlawful detention of suspects, solicitation of bribes from citizens, intimidation, and the erosion of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. We employed a mixed methods comparative design, drawing on a combination of policy documentation, published empirical research, institutional reports, and secondary survey data bearing on police legitimacy and civilian trust. Anchored in procedural justice and democratic policing frameworks, the analysis examined how inherited colonial structures, accountability arrangements, and varying professional standards together determine the character of police-civilian relations in the two countries. The evidence indicates that Nigeria suffered considerably more acute manifestations of officer misconduct, corrupt practice, and procedural unfairness in the course of these operations, with urban young men bearing a disproportionate burden of abuse. Ghana brought a comparatively more disciplined institutional environment and higher civilian confidence, though problems of selective enforcement, inadequate supervisory structures, and sporadic misuse of officer discretion continued to surface. We further argued that inadequate training, politicization, poor recruitment systems, and weak accountability mechanisms continue to undermine professional policing in both countries. This study argued that durable reform must rest on training, grounded in human rights principles, genuinely independent oversight bodies, reinforced procedural protections, and a demonstrable institutional commitment to democratic governance and civic accountability. Finally, restoring and sustaining police legitimacy in Ghana and Nigeria requires both governments to reconcile their crime reduction mandates with unwavering respect for constitutional rights, open governance, equitable treatment, and the cultivation of public trust.

Ogbonnaya Eze Ori [1], **Chukwuemeka Quentin Chukwu** [2], **Godwin Uchenna Ajah** [3]

Affiliation

[1,2] Social Science, Peace & Conflict Studies Unit, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
[3] School of Social Sciences, Humanity & Law, Teesside University, United Kingdom.

Corresponding Author

Chukwuemeka Quentin Chukwu* - quentin.chukwu@unn.edu.ng

Article History:
Received Date : Jul 17, 2026
Revised Date : Oct 14, 2026
Accepted Date : Oct 14, 2026
Published Date : Oct 25, 2026

Keywords

Police Professionalism; Stop and Search; Citizens' Rights; Procedural Justice; Police Accountability.

Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Research
E-ISSN: 1936-6264 | P-ISSN: 1945-3019
Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Research (JIMRES) www.jimres.org
E-ISSN: 1936-6264 | P-ISSN: 1945-3019

Check for updates

1.Introduction

In contemporary societies, the police service dwells at the intersection of public order maintenance, democratic governance, and the active protection of individual rights. Police organisations worldwide carry the mandate of preventing crime, maintaining social order, and applying laws whose purpose is to sustain peace and public stability. Yet the manner in which those powers are exercised has long provoked sharp disagreement, centring on how states can ensure security without encroaching on civil liberties. Among the most contentious expressions of police power is the stop and search operation, through which officers are authorised to detain, question, and search individuals on grounds of suspected criminal activity. Defenders of the practice point to its value for deterrence and intelligence gathering; critics counter that, in practice, these encounters regularly subject individuals to capricious treatment, ethnic or racial stereotyping, harassment, public humiliation, and rights violations (Bradford, 2016; Bowling & Phillips, 2007; Parmar, 2021). Within democratic contexts, the social acceptability of such power hinges on whether officers deploy them in a professional, open, and procedurally fair manner. Procedural justice scholarship holds that public willingness to comply with and assist law enforcement is shaped by whether people experience police conduct as fair minded, respectful, neutral, and subject to accountability (Tyler, 2006; Jackson, 2018; Mazerolle et al., 2013). As a result, scholarly and policy conversations about what it means to police professionally migrated beyond arrest rates and crime suppression metrics, to encompass questions of human rights, public confidence, and democratic governance.

Across West Africa in particular, professional policing cannot be understood apart from the region's colonial heritage, the trajectories of independent statehood, and the governance deficits that postcolonial administrations inherited. The police forces established under colonial rule in Ghana and Nigeria were built to serve imperial administrative and economic interests, not to protect local communities. These origins meant that policing institutions developed as mechanisms of state coercion directed at subject populations, rather than as service bodies answerable to the communities they were supposed to protect (Alemika, 2009; Tankebe, 2009; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021). The institutional habits and organisational cultures, forged under colonialism proved remarkably durable, manifesting today in patterns of excessive coercion, endemic corruption, top-down command rigidity, and deeply adversarial relations between officers and the public. Nigeria's case is emblematic. Accumulated anger toward the police, reached a boiling point during the 2020 #EndSARS uprising, when documented reports of torture, extrajudicial killings, systematic extortion, and abusive use of stop and search powers by the disbanded Special Anti Robbery Squad, galvanised millions of Nigerians into street protest demanding root-and-branch institutional change (Asogwa et al., 2021; Ekumaoko & Ezemenaka, 2024; Udeoji & Elekwa, 2023). Ghana's Ghana Police Service commands comparatively greater public confidence than its Nigerian counterpart, yet it is not without serious problems: political meddling in operations, selective application of the law, arbitrary detention of individuals, and disproportionate use of force during routine encounters remain documented concerns (Boateng & Darko, 2021; Osei-Adubofour, 2017; Golo, 2023). The trajectory in both countries thus reveals an ongoing, unresolved tension between the institutional drive to professionalise policing and the imperative to genuinely protect the constitutional rights of ordinary citizens.

It is precisely because stop and search constitutes one of the most unmediated, face-to-face expressions of state power over individuals that it has attracted such sustained controversy. Cross-national research has

consistently demonstrated that what happens during these encounters, how officers speak, whether they explain their actions, whether they treat people with dignity, fundamentally shapes how the public assesses police legitimacy and their readiness to assist law enforcement (Bradford et al., 2022; Murray et al., 2020). Where stop and search operations are handled courteously and within the bounds of the law, there is genuine potential for such interactions to reinforce civilian confidence in policing. The reverse is equally true: encounters marked by threats, demands for payment, public humiliation, or stereotypical targeting cause trust in law enforcement to collapse rapidly. Evidence from Nigeria documents a troubling pattern in which police stops routinely involve solicitation of bribes, illegal detention, verbal abuse, and outright physical assault, with young men singled out as targets based on how they dress, what electronic devices they carry, or simply how they present themselves physically (Akinlabi, 2017; Ezikeudu et al., 2024; Famosaya, 2020). What the Nigerian case makes clear is how readily a policing tool ostensibly designed for crime deterrence can mutate into a vehicle for state predation and social subjugation. In Ghana, physical violence during stops is less prevalent, but this relative restraint does not resolve persistent anxieties about inconsistent application of procedures, inadequate supervisory accountability, and episodes of political pressure on operational policing decisions (Norman, 2023; Commey, 2020). These realities make a compelling case for the kind of comparative scholarly inquiry undertaken here, one that examines directly how the quality of police professionalism shapes whether citizens' rights are upheld or violated during everyday policing encounters.

What it actually means to be a professional police officer has shifted considerably over recent decades. Earlier conceptions tended to define it narrowly around discipline in the ranks, obedience to superiors, technical skills, and hierarchical control. Current academic thinking recasts professionalism as something far more expansive, centring it on answerability to the public, genuine respect for human rights, fair procedural practice, ethical behaviour, and active partnership with communities (Hough, 2013; Lowrey-Kinberg, 2018; Thompson & Payne, 2019). This broader conception means that a professional police service must simultaneously deliver on its crime-reduction mission and operate within the constraints of democratic principle and constitutional protection. Stop and search operations thus function as a practical litmus test for institutional professionalism, revealing how officers actually use their discretion when confronted with real-world decisions under pressure. Comparative research from multiple national contexts shows that officer misconduct during these encounters is rarely a matter of individual bad behaviour; it tends instead to mirror systemic institutional failures, lax vetting on entry, poorly designed training curricula, pervasive corruption, deficient supervisory machinery, and policing cultures contaminated by political patronage (Oghogho et al., 2024; Mugari, 2021; Mashaka et al., 2024). Ghana and Nigeria together constitute an analytically productive pairing: both nations carry the shared imprint of British colonial policing and broadly similar legal frameworks, yet they have diverged meaningfully in terms of how much public trust their police services currently command, the pace and content of reform programmes, and popular assessments of institutional legitimacy. Examining where they converge and where they part company illuminates how the organisation and culture of policing shapes, and constrains, the enjoyment of citizens' rights within Africa's democratic experiments.

The academic literature on policing in Africa has expanded considerably, but comparative scholarship that specifically trains its lens on stop and search practices in Ghana and Nigeria,

evaluating them against standards of professional policing and citizens' constitutional entitlements, remains sparse. Existing studies tend to address police violence, corruption, or legitimacy in broad strokes, without undertaking the kind of systematic, side-by-side examination of how stop and search plays out on the ground in both Ghana and Nigeria. There is also a timely dimension to this gap: recent shifts in the legislative and institutional landscape, notably the Nigerian Police Act 2020 and the evolving community policing agenda in Ghana, demand fresh scholarly scrutiny of what these reforms actually mean for the protection of ordinary citizens' rights in practice (Ehirim et al., 2024; Hevi et al., 2022). This paper therefore sets out to address that gap through a comparative analysis of stop and search tactics in Ghana and Nigeria, with emphasis on professionalism, accountability, procedural justice, and the protection of constitutional rights. Concretely, the analysis addresses how historical legacies, institutional arrangements, recruitment practices, oversight structures, and public attitudes together shape the character of stop and search operations in each country. By positioning this analysis within wider debates on democratic policing and rights protection, the paper contributes to an evolving body of scholarship on police governance in Africa and offers concrete, policy-relevant recommendations for reinforcing professional policing standards and safeguarding citizens' liberties.

2.Methods

To investigate police professionalism and citizens' rights in the context of stop and search, this paper employed a comparative mixed-methods design. The rationale for mixing qualitative and quantitative strands was straightforward: the complexities of police-civilian interaction in Ghana and Nigeria resist reduction to a single type of evidence, and combining both allows for a richer and more reliable analytical picture. A comparative design suited this inquiry well given that Ghana and Nigeria occupy a revealing analytical position: their shared colonial policing inheritance and broadly comparable legal architectures provide a common baseline, while their divergent paths in terms of reform momentum, accountability infrastructure, and public assessments of institutional legitimacy offer meaningful variation to explain. The goal was therefore to map where Ghanaian and Nigerian stop and search practices align, where they diverge, and what those patterns reveal about the state of professional policing and the practical protection of human rights in each setting.

The research relied extensively on documentary analysis and secondary empirical evidence drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, legal instruments, human rights reports, police operational manuals, and institutional publications relating to policing in West Africa. Key legislative materials reviewed included Nigeria's Police Act 2020, constitutional provisions on citizens' rights in both countries, and policing regulations governing search and detention procedures. The documentary analysis was additionally informed by international normative instruments governing police conduct, in particular the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, alongside the theoretical and empirical literature on procedural justice in policing. Existing empirical studies on police legitimacy, procedural fairness, corruption, police violence, and stop and search operations in Ghana and Nigeria were systematically analysed to generate comparative insights into police behaviour and public perceptions.

The qualitative component of the study involved thematic analysis of ethnographic accounts, interview findings, and narrative evidence from prior studies examining police-

citizen encounters in both countries. Particular attention was paid to studies documenting experiences of extortion, harassment, intimidation, excessive use of force, unlawful detention, and procedural fairness during stop and search encounters. Themes emerging from the literature included abuse of discretion, institutional corruption, youth profiling, procedural injustice, accountability deficits, and public distrust of law enforcement agencies. Thematic coding enabled the identification of recurring patterns in police conduct as well as variations between Ghanaian and Nigerian policing environments. On the quantitative side, the paper drew on existing survey research measuring how civilians rate police legitimacy and trustworthiness, their sense of procedural fairness in encounters with officers, and their readiness to cooperate with law enforcement when called upon to do so. These studies supplied concrete, measurable data on citizens' evaluations of police professionalism and experiences during stop and search operations. Reading these survey findings comparatively, across Ghana and Nigeria simultaneously, made it possible to assess how stop and search practices bear on broader public assessments of police legitimacy and the quality of democratic governance.

Two theoretical frameworks jointly organised the interpretation of findings: procedural justice theory and democratic policing theory. Tyler's (2006) procedural justice theory, developed further by Jackson (2018), maintains that what drives public trust in policing is not the raw capacity of police to coerce compliance, but whether people regard police behaviour during interactions as fair, impartial, dignified, and transparent. Democratic policing theory complements this by insisting that professional policing is necessarily characterised by institutional accountability to the public, substantive protection of human rights, and meaningful civilian participation in police governance. Together, these frameworks provided the interpretive scaffolding through which the evidence on stop and search tactics, and their implications for citizens' rights, was analysed and understood.

3.Results

What the evidence consistently shows is that stop and search stands out as among the most publicly visible and bitterly contested aspects of policing in both Ghana and Nigeria. Police authorities in each country frame these operations in terms of crime prevention, intelligence work, and public safety, but the lived experiences of citizens who are stopped tell a markedly different story from the official account. The evidence reviewed throughout this study reveals that these encounters routinely create friction between the exercise of police authority and citizens' constitutional entitlements, most immediately, the right to personal dignity, privacy, freedom of movement, and protection against detention that lacks lawful justification.

A first major finding is that stop and search practices in both countries remain heavily imprinted by colonial policing traditions that prioritised coercion and state control above all else. Much of what passes for policing strategy today in both countries still bears the institutional fingerprints of colonial administration, above all its authoritarian command culture. This tendency is most pronounced in Nigeria, where the conduct of stop and search operations frequently communicates dominance over members of the public rather than a duty of care toward them. The empirical studies reviewed consistently documented recurring complaints of intimidation, harassment, extortion, and searches conducted without any discernible legal basis during encounters with officers (Akinlabi, 2020; Ezikeudu et al., 2024). Young men, particularly those in urban areas, were repeatedly identified across studies as the

group most likely to bear the brunt of aggressive and demeaning stop and search encounters.

A further and perhaps the most striking finding is the significant divergence in how citizens in Ghana and Nigeria perceive police professionalism. In Ghana, notwithstanding ongoing concerns about misconduct and political influence, survey respondents consistently reported higher levels of trust in and confidence toward the police than their Nigerian counterparts. Ghanaian citizens appear to ground their judgements of police legitimacy in assessments of operational effectiveness, fair treatment, and orderly behaviour during public interactions (Boateng & Darko, 2021). Nigerian respondents painted a strikingly different picture, describing stop and search encounters as experiences defined by anxiety, unpredictability, and powerlessness. Across multiple studies of police-civilian contact in Nigeria, accounts of illegal detention, verbal abuse, and demands for payment emerged as recurring themes rather than exceptional incidents (Famosaya, 2020; Arisukwu et al., 2021).

Corruption emerged as another dominant and deeply troubling finding. Police checkpoints and stop operations in Nigeria were regularly associated with demands for illegal payments from motorists, commuters, and pedestrians alike. What the evidence suggests is that these tactics have, in many instances, mutated from security tools into informal systems of revenue extraction, a predatory function that has little to do with crime prevention. In Ghana, bribery and extortion were also documented, though the scale appeared comparatively more limited and institutional disciplinary responses somewhat more robust. It is difficult to overstate the damage that this corruption inflicts: it fundamentally undermines public confidence in law enforcement institutions and makes a mockery of any claim to procedural fairness.

A further finding of significance is that deficient accountability architecture helps explain why abusive policing is so difficult to dislodge. Both Ghana and Nigeria maintain formal channels for complaints and officer discipline on paper, but in reality these structures are hamstrung by a lack of institutional transparency, interference from political actors, and inadequate capacity to actually enforce outcomes. In Nigeria, public confidence in accountability mechanisms sits particularly low, shaped by longstanding and well-founded perceptions of impunity for officers and selective punishment. The #EndSARS uprising served as dramatic confirmation of what many Nigerians already believed: that existing oversight systems cannot or will not meaningfully address police abuses. Ghana demonstrated comparatively stronger accountability structures, though significant concerns regarding transparency and genuine civilian oversight remain unresolved.

Another important, and in many ways foundational, finding concerns the quality of police recruitment and professional training. Poor recruitment standards, institutional politicisation, and inadequate human rights training continue to undermine professionalism in both countries. Nigerian policing was especially affected by lax vetting on entry and insufficient investment in ethics, communication skills, and procedural justice during officer formation (Oghogho et al., 2024). In Ghana, although training structures were comparatively more stable, challenges relating to operational consistency and the persistence of authoritarian institutional culture continued to bear on police-citizen interactions.

The analysis also reveals a pronounced pattern of selective targeting that falls along lines of social vulnerability. Specifically, young people,

individuals whose appearance suggests unemployment, and persons carrying smartphones or dressed in styles associated with youth culture face a significantly elevated risk of being stopped and searched, a pattern particularly sharp in the Nigerian context. This targeting pattern has fed pervasive public perceptions of ethnic and social profiling. Moreover, individuals who experience aggressive or demeaning stops repeatedly tend over time to withdraw their cooperation from law enforcement, a consequence that undermines the very crime-control objectives the operations are meant to serve.

Finally, it is worth noting that recent police reform initiatives in both countries have yielded only modest improvements in what citizens actually experience during stop and search encounters. Nigeria's Police Act 2020 introduced meaningful legal protections relating to arrest procedure, detention, and human rights. Yet the gap between legislative intent and institutional practice remains wide: organisational cultures and daily operational habits have not meaningfully shifted in response to these reforms. Similarly in Ghana, community policing initiatives have achieved some measurable improvement in police-public relations, but the underlying concerns about accountability and professional standards have not gone away.

4.Discussion

The findings reported here lend further weight to the growing scholarly consensus that, in democratic contexts, police legitimacy cannot be evaluated on crime outcomes alone, it depends equally, and perhaps more fundamentally, on the manner in which officers use their powers: whether they are fair, answerable, and guided by professional standards. Stop and search represents one of the most immediate and consequential contact points between police institutions and ordinary people, a moment at which the abstract principles of lawful policing are either upheld or violated in concrete, personal terms. It is therefore no surprise that the quality of these encounters exercises a decisive influence over public trust in law enforcement agencies. The evidence from Ghana and Nigeria makes this especially clear: when these operations are experienced as abusive, corrupt, or discriminatory, the damage extends beyond individual encounters, it corrodes institutional legitimacy and weakens the foundations of democratic governance itself.

The durability of colonial policing traditions in both countries goes a long way toward explaining why coercive and authoritarian styles of policing remain so deeply embedded within institutional culture. Colonial administrations established their police forces not to protect local communities but to suppress dissent and safeguard imperial interests. Both Ghana and Nigeria have undergone democratic transitions, but the organisational logic that governs everyday policing has not been correspondingly transformed. The continued recourse to intimidation, arbitrary force, and unchecked discretion during stop and search operations reflects how stubbornly these historical patterns have survived. This finding resonates with the arguments advanced by Alemika (2009) and Tankebe (2009), both of whom highlight how profoundly African police institutions continue to struggle with the transition from coercive colonial policing toward genuinely democratic, service-oriented practice.

The contrast between Ghana and Nigeria that emerges from this comparison is particularly instructive. Ghana's comparatively stronger public trust levels suggest that procedural fairness and a degree of institutional responsiveness can make a real and measurable difference to police legitimacy. Ghanaian policing is far from perfect, but the

comparatively lower prevalence of violent abuse and high-profile misconduct appears to have preserved a residual institutional credibility that Nigeria has largely forfeited. Nigeria, by contrast, is in the grip of a more severe and arguably existential crisis of police legitimacy. The mass public outrage that culminated in the 2020 #EndSARS protests demonstrated with devastating clarity how sustained exposure to abusive stop and search can eventually produce organised, large-scale civic resistance against policing institutions. Nigeria's experience stands as a warning about what happens when police misconduct is allowed to become normalised, when it is treated not as an aberration to be corrected but as an unremarkable feature of institutional life. Procedural justice theory provides the most illuminating framework for making sense of these findings. Its central claim, that voluntary compliance with law and active cooperation with police are driven not by the threat of enforcement but by perceived fairness, respectful treatment, and transparent conduct by officers (Tyler, 2006; Jackson, 2018), is powerfully borne out by the Ghanaian and Nigerian evidence. It is striking how consistently the findings support this perspective. In both countries, citizens evaluated police legitimacy not primarily on the basis of crime control outcomes but on the quality of interpersonal treatment during police encounters. Where communication was respectful, conduct impartial, and procedures lawful, public confidence was enhanced. Where officers extorted, abused, or intimidated, institutional trust collapsed. This challenges, in direct and empirically grounded terms, any policing model that treats coercive efficiency as its primary value at the expense of human rights protections.

Corruption emerged as one of the most damaging and corrosive obstacles to genuine police professionalism in both countries. When stop and search operations become opportunities for officers to extract money from citizens, the fundamental purpose of policing is not merely distorted but inverted, and public confidence in the state as a whole is corroded in the process. In Nigeria in particular, police checkpoints have to a significant degree become synonymous with informal revenue collection rather than lawful security enforcement. These dynamics gradually erode any foundation for voluntary public cooperation with criminal investigations and feed into broader narratives of a state that is unable or unwilling to govern its own institutions. The findings therefore lend strong support to arguments that anti-corruption reform must remain at the centre of any meaningful police professionalisation agenda in Africa, it cannot be treated as peripheral or secondary to other institutional changes.

The findings on recruitment and training carry equally important implications for how reform must be conceived. Professional policing simply cannot emerge from institutions that recruit carelessly, train inadequately, and make appointments on the basis of political connection rather than competence. The evidence suggests that many serving officers entered the force without adequate preparation in procedural justice, conflict de-escalation, communication with the public, or the constitutional rights of individuals they encounter. This problem is especially acute in Nigeria, where deficient vetting at the point of entry and low professional standards throughout the career cycle have contributed to a pattern of repeated abuse and misconduct. Sustainable reform therefore demands long-term, sustained investment in merit-based entry selection, ethics-centred training from induction through to senior rank, and structured continuous professional development.

The issue of profiling and discriminatory targeting equally deserves sustained analytical

and policy attention. The concentration of stop and search pressure on young people exposes how readily officer discretion, when poorly supervised and inadequately guided, can function as a mechanism for entrenching, rather than challenging, existing social inequalities. In Nigeria, the association between youth identity, technology use, and criminal suspicion created conditions in which large numbers of law-abiding young people became routinely vulnerable to harassment, humiliation, and unlawful detention. These practices violate constitutional principles of equality and dignity and simultaneously alienate precisely those segments of the population, the young, whose long-term cooperation law enforcement most needs. Any policing model that claims democratic credentials must insist that the authority to stop and search individuals be grounded in articulable, individualised suspicion and applied through lawful procedure, not through the stereotyping of social groups or the exercise of prejudice.

This study further demonstrates, with some force, that legislative reform on its own is insufficient without parallel and profound institutional transformation. While Nigeria's Police Act 2020 introduced significant human rights protections on paper, implementation has remained weak precisely because organisational culture and accountability systems have not changed in any substantive way. Ghana confronts broadly similar challenges, though their severity is comparatively lower. Effective reform therefore requires a genuinely multidimensional approach: legal restructuring, robust institutional accountability, high-quality professional training, independent oversight with real powers, and, crucially, authentic political commitment to democratic policing principles rather than rhetoric alone.

What this study ultimately makes clear is that how policing evolves in Ghana and Nigeria will be decided by whether both states can find workable ways to pursue security objectives without sacrificing the constitutional rights of their citizens in the process. The measure of a professional police service cannot be arrest tallies or the conspicuous deployment of uniformed officers. It has to be assessed against how consistently law enforcement institutions demonstrate fairness, accept accountability, honour human dignity, and earn public trust in ordinary, everyday interactions, the moments that most citizens actually experience. Without such transformation, stop and search will continue to generate public resentment, hollow out police legitimacy, and chip away at the foundations of democratic governance in both countries.

5.Conclusion

This paper has examined police professionalism and citizens' rights through a comparative lens, focusing on how stop and search tactics operate in Ghana and Nigeria. The central conclusion that emerges is that, while these operations remain core instruments in each country's law enforcement toolkit, their day-to-day application routinely falls short of, and often actively contradicts, the democratic and constitutional principles that should govern them. Whatever the official justification in terms of crime prevention, the evidence gathered here shows that these encounters frequently subject citizens to arbitrary treatment, extortion, intimidation, and disproportionate physical force. Underlying these patterns are structural factors that have proven stubbornly persistent: the coercive habits bequeathed by colonial policing, deeply embedded institutional corruption, accountability systems without real enforcement capacity, political interference in police operations, and grossly inadequate professional formation of officers.

Comparatively, Ghana's police service demonstrates stronger procedural norms, greater institutional discipline, and more robust public trust than Nigeria's. Yet it would be a mistake to read this as an absence of serious problems: both countries continue to grapple with legitimacy deficits and low civilian confidence in their law enforcement institutions. In Nigeria in particular, a prolonged accumulation of police brutality and corruption has severely eroded public trust and intensified demands for root-and-branch institutional reform. This study therefore underscores, with some urgency, that procedural justice, genuine accountability, and substantive human rights protection are not optional add-ons but essential foundations of professional policing.

Meaningful and lasting reform demands much more than revising statutes or reorganising command charts. What is needed in both Ghana and Nigeria is sustained investment across several dimensions simultaneously: competitive, merit-based recruitment systems that screen out unsuitable candidates; training curricula that treat human rights literacy and procedural justice as core competencies; genuinely independent civilian oversight bodies with real investigative powers; complaint mechanisms that citizens actually trust and use; and policing approaches oriented toward community partnership rather than top-down control. At the deepest level, strengthening police professionalism in these contexts requires a genuine transformation of organisational culture, away from the inherited model of policing as coercive state power directed at subject populations, and toward a democratic service orientation in which fairness, accountability, and respect for individuals' inherent dignity are not aspirational values but operational realities. Without that cultural shift, stop and search will remain what the evidence shows it to be in too many cases today: a tool of abuse and a source of public alienation rather than a legitimate and trusted security measure.

Conflict of Interest. There is none among the authors

Funding.
No external funding, private or government financial support or grant was received before, during and after this study.

References

[1] Akinlabi, O. (2017). Young people, procedural justice and police legitimacy in Nigeria. Policing and Society, 27(4), 419-438. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2015.1077836

[2] Akinlabi, O. (2020). Citizens' accounts of police use of force and its implication for trust in the police. Journal of Crime and Justice, 43(2), 145-160. https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2019.1650798

[3] Alemika, E. (2009). Policing practice and scholarly engagement with law enforcement in Africa. Police Practice and Research, 10(5-6), 483-502.

[4] Arisukwu, O., Adebisi, T., Igbolekwu, C., & Asamu, F. (2021). Police treatment of the public in police stations: Evidence from Zaria, Nigeria. Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 15(3), 1854-1866. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paab019

[5] Asogwa, K., Ede, H., Ajah, A., Omeh, P., Asadu, M., Ogbabor, D., & Ngwu, E. (2021). The state, EndSARS protests and human rights violation in Nigeria. IKENGA Journal of Institute of African Studies, 22(2), 54-72. https://doi.org/10.53836/ijia/2021/22/2/004

[6] Boateng, F. (2020). Citizen perceptions of procedural fairness in Ghanaian policing: Determinants and implications. Policing and Society, 30(8), 985-997.

[7] Boateng, F., & Darko, I. (2021). Perceived police legitimacy in Ghana: The role of procedural fairness and contacts with the

police. International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice, 65, 100458. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2021.100458

[8] Bowling, B., & Phillips, C. (2007). Disproportionate and discriminatory: Reviewing the evidence on police stop and search. Modern Law Review, 70(6), 936-961. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2230.2007.00671.x

[9] Bradford, B. (2016). Stop and search and police legitimacy. Routledge.

[10] Bradford, B., Pósch, K., Jackson, J., & Dawson, P. (2022). Street-level police encounters and their implications for youth trust and gendered norms: Evidence from adolescent males. PLOS ONE, 17(12).

[11] Commey, A. (2020). Dynamics of police-public interaction in Ghana: An analytical overview. SSRN Electronic Journal.

[12] D'Emidio, R. (2025). Policing corruption or corrupted policing? Social norms and policing in Ghana. European Journal of Social Psychology. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.3137

[13] Ehirim, U., Ossai, M., Aloamaka, P., & Ehirim, N. (2024). Strengthening human rights protection in Nigeria: Safeguards under the Police Act 2020. Khazanah Hukum, 6(3). https://doi.org/10.15575/kh.v6i3.39569

[14] Ekumaoko, C., & Ezemenaka, K. (2024). Police predation and violence in urban Nigeria: The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Journal of Urban Affairs, 46(8), 1667-1681. https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2024.2314050

[15] Epp, C., Maynard-Moody, S., & Haider-Markel, D. (2017). Beyond profiling: The institutional sources of racial disparities in policing. Public Administration Review, 77(2), 168-178. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12702

[16] Ezikeudu, C., Opara, I., Eteng, F., et al. (2024). Perception of police and policing: An investigation of people's perception of police stop and search method of crime prevention in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. Journal of Ecohumanism, 3(5).

[17] Famosaya, P. (2020). Police-citizen interactions in Nigeria: The 'ordinary' aspects. Policing and Society, 31(8), 936-949. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2020.1798953

[18] Golo, H. (2023). Human rights standards in law enforcement: How Ghana police officers understand and apply them in practice. Journal of Human Rights Practice.

[19] Hevi, S., Ketemepi, G., Dorkoo, C., & Wuttor, A. (2022). Community policing experience, public trust in the police, citizens' psychological safety and community well-being in Ghana. Safer Communities. https://doi.org/10.1108/SC-08-2021-0032

[20] Hough, M. (2013). Police professionalism and procedural justice under fiscal constraint. Criminology & Criminal Justice, 13(2), 181-197.

[21] Iwuoha, V., & Aniche, E. (2021). Protests and blood on the streets: Repressive state, police brutality and #EndSARS protest in Nigeria. Security Journal, 35(4), 1102-1124. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41284-021-00316-z

[22] Jackson, J. (2018). Institutional legitimacy, social norms, and the authority of justice systems: Perspectives from comparative research. Annual Review of Law and Social Science, 14, 145-165.

[23] Lowrey-Kinberg, B. (2018). Navigating procedural justice, police authority, and professional standards: The risks of overaccommodation. Police Practice and Research, 19(2), 111-124.

[24] Mazerolle, L., Antrobus, E., Bennett, S., & Tyler, T. R. (2013). Building police legitimacy through procedural justice: Evidence from a randomised field trial. Criminology, 51(1), 33-63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2012.00289.x

[25] Mugari, I. (2021). Independent civilian oversight of policing: A comparative review of accountability mechanisms

across Europe, Australia, and Africa. Journal of Applied Security Research, 18(1), 106-127. https://doi.org/10.1080/19361610.2021.1918524

[26] Murray, K., Harman, R., & Stott, C. (2020). Street policing, procedural justice, and legitimacy: Evidence from police-public encounters in deprived urban communities. Policing and Society, 30(4), 423-440.

[27] Mashaka, H., Mwangangi, J., & Odhiambo, F. (2024). Policing governance and officer misconduct in sub-Saharan Africa: Structural determinants and reform pathways. African Affairs, 123(490), 112-134.

[28] Thompson, B., & Payne, B. (2019). Community relations and professional standards in contemporary policing: Toward an integrated model. Journal of Criminal Justice, 62, 88-97.

[29] Norman, I. (2023). A critical decision-making framework for Ghanaian policing: A West African case study. Advances in Applied Sociology, 13(4).

[30] Oghogho, E., et al. (2024). Police recruitment standards and professionalism in Nigeria. African Security Review.

[31] Osei-Adubofour, K. (2017). Political partisanship in Ghanaian policing and its consequences for public trust and institutional legitimacy. Doctoral dissertation.

[32] Oyakhirome, I. (2025). Police accountability: The role of the Police Complaint Response Unit, Nigeria. The Police Journal.

[33] Parmar, A. (2021). Stop and search. In Sanders & Young's criminal justice. Oxford University Press.

[34] Tankebe, J. (2009). Civilian cooperation with law enforcement in Ghana: Assessing the procedural fairness hypothesis. Criminology, 47(4), 1265-1293. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2009.00175.x

[35] Tyler, T. R. (2006). Why people obey the law. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400828609

[36] Udeoji, E., & Elekwa, P. (2023). Civic revolt and law enforcement crisis: The EndSARS movement and its implications for police reform in Nigeria. Reality of Politics.