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## **Police and Public: The Role of Public Perception of the Police on Crime Control in Abakaliki Metropolis, Ebonyi State, Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study examined the role of public perception of the police on crime control in Abakaliki metropolis, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was used, with 386 respondents from the urban area. The results showed a low negative relationship between public perception of the police and crime control, with a regression coefficient of  $r = -.016$ . A unit increase in negative public perception of the police led to a 1.6% decrease in crime control. However, a significant relationship was found between public perception of the police and crime control, with a Beta = 0.16 and p-value (sig = .023) less than the 0.05 level of significance. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to compare the relationship between procedural justice, public perception of the police, and crime control in Abakaliki metropolis. The correlation coefficient showed a negative relationship between public perception and crime control, with a unit increase in negative public perception leading to a 1.6% decrease in crime control. In the second model, public perception of the police had a negative relationship with crime control, with a regression coefficient of -0.17. Procedural justice made more significant contributions to the model than public perception, with a Beta value of -.019. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship was rejected, indicating a significant relationship between procedural justice, public perception of the police, and crime control in Abakaliki metropolis, with procedural justice making the largest contribution.*

## Introduction

Globally, public views of the police are contingent upon the dynamics of police success in crime control, the interaction of historical legacies, modern issues, and society's expectations of the police force. In modern nations such as the United States and Europe, police personnel demonstrate a high degree of professionalism, leading to good perceptions and effective crime control. This fosters public confidence and facilitates information sharing with police personnel, hence assisting in crime detection and control. Conversely, in Africa and other developing nations, the majority of police personnel demonstrate significant unprofessionalism, leading to poor perceptions of corruption and inefficiency in crime management. This adverse view fosters distrust and diminishes collaboration between the police and the community (Adegoke, 2014; Ajayi, 2014; Ajayi and Longe, 2015; Otu et. al., 2026).

The Nigerian Police has been charged with several instances of professional misconduct, including bribery, corruption, extortion, brutality, extrajudicial murders, torture, and the use of physical force against individuals, among others. The notorious Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) incited significant protests in 2020, known as the #EndSARS protest, resulting in the disbandment of SARS and the formation of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit. Nonetheless, despite the dissolution of SARS and the formation of SWAT, police professional misconduct remains pervasive in Nigeria. All these factors contribute to the poor opinion of the Nigeria Police Force among the population, resulting in the avoidance of police by community members at all costs (Ojedokun et. al., 2023; Arisukwu et. al., 2021).

The bad impression of the Nigerian police by the population is often defined by a lack of confidence and legitimacy. Law enforcement has faced challenges due to poor training and limited resources, which have hindered its efficacy in crime control. Due to the ineffectiveness of the primary agents of crime control in Nigeria in mitigating the multitude of crimes and insecurity in the country. The crimes and insecurity include abduction, armed robbery, banditry, and communal violence. The Nigerian Police Force has faced criticism for its failure to mitigate crime and insecurity in Nigeria. All these factors contribute to the public's impression of the

police as ineffectual and inefficient in their duty of crime control (Karimu, 2014).

The interaction between the public and law enforcement is crucial for efficient crime control in any community. The Nigerian police need public collaboration to efficiently identify and regulate crime, as well as to apprehend and convict criminals based on information from the community. Notwithstanding initiatives such as the Police Public Relations (PPR) and community-oriented policing, which sought to enhance the relationship between law enforcement and the public, police community engagements were designed to rehabilitate the image of the Nigeria Police and promote a harmonious relationship with the populace (Onwuama, Asadu, Eke, Egbuche, and Nwoke 2019).

Regrettably, the rapport between the Police and the people has not been amicable or congenial. The absence of a friendly connection fosters mistrust and diminishes collaboration between the police and the population, thereby affecting crime control in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. This research is conducted to investigate the relationship between the police and the public, specifically focusing on the influence of public perception on crime control in Abakaliki Metropolis, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The particular aims are to investigate public opinion of the police and crime control in Abakaliki metropolitan and to chronicle procedural justice as a pathway to understanding this perspective.

## Literature review

### Public perception of the police in Nigeria.

The populace perceives the Nigerian police as a tool and representative of the ruling administration, consistently prepared to instigate terror at the least provocation. Consequently, they are considered in low esteem and lack the regular collaboration of the public (Olusegun, 2014). The public perception of the police is nothing to write home about – the perception of the public regarding the police is at low ebb (Idowu & Nwosu, 2021), arising from accusations of police violence and intimidation, human rights violations, complicity in criminal operations, and involvement in bribery and corruption (see Ajayi & Longe, 2015). Borrowing from Obaro (2014), "the Nigerian Police currently confront a legitimacy crisis." Two intersecting difficulties are apparent. There is a notable increase

in crime, violence, and insecurity. The people are increasingly developing mistrust towards the police” (Alemika, 2003, p. 19; Ibidapo-Obe, 2003; Jike, 2003, p. 7). The Nigerian police are the most unethical agency in which the general public has completely lost faith and become dissatisfied (Ajibade, 2011).

A significant aspect that has undermined the integrity of the Nigerian police and adversely influenced public image is the prevalence of bribery and corruption (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005; Amnesty International, 2016). The Nigerian Police and bribery and corruption are inextricably linked (John, 2017). Consequently, individuals characterize and depict the police in derogatory ways (Jike, 2003). Based on the historical context of the Nigeria Police and its contemporary circumstances, the Nigeria Police now confronts a triad of crises concerning performance, integrity, and legitimacy (Alemika, 2003; Ibidapo-Obe, 2003). Bowden, as referenced by Alemika and Chukwuma (2003), asserts that the police serve to suppress the impoverished and vulnerable to safeguard the interests of the ruling class. The tasks of the police include acting as a "buffer between the elite and the masses" and executing "the crucial holding operation against dissenters until military force can be employed in a punitive and corrective manner." Odekunle said that the "Nigeria Police Force is deficient in achieving optimal performance" (Odekunle, 2004). Ajayi articulated that the prevalent inefficiencies, corruption, and inequities in the treatment of suspects are shown by the sometimes excessive use of lawful force, poor temperament, bullying, and other violations of citizens' rights without accountability (Ajayi, 2014).

Obaro (2014) listed certain elements, among others, as precursors to the public view of the police in Nigeria. “Effectiveness and efficiency in crime prevention and control; in the detection, apprehension, and prosecution of offenders; strict adherence to the rule of law; acknowledgment and safeguarding of citizens' dignity and rights; accountability to the populace; civility and incorruptibility; and concern for the general welfare of citizens. When these criteria are met, the public grants the police legitimacy and support, thereby enhancing their performance.” The police must address issues of ineffectiveness, corruption, and brutality; failure to do so undermines their public legitimacy, acceptance, respect, and support (Alemika, 2003, p. 27).

Odekunle (2004) and Odekunle (1981) emphasized that the Nigerian Police's ability to monitor and manage the social environment is regrettably inadequate and will persist unless a new relationship of sincere and authentic interdependence is established between the government and the populace, as well as between the police as a governmental institution and civil society, from which the government derives its legitimacy.

### **Procedural Justice as a primary influence on public perception of the police**

Procedural justice refers to the methodology used by law enforcement authorities to ensure that individuals are treated equitably and with appropriate respect (Sedevic, 2015). A primary reason for public support of the police is the perception of their legitimacy; however, existing research, predominantly from the United States, suggests that the most significant factor influencing public evaluations of the police and their legitimacy is procedural justice (Hinds and Murphy, 2007). Procedural justice encompasses four interrelated concepts as identified by Jannetta and Bieler (2015): treating individuals with dignity and respect, providing individuals with a voice throughout interactions, ensuring neutrality in decision-making, and communicating trustworthy intentions. The police can affect the behavior of the public in more consensual and less confrontational manners: by improving public perception and legitimacy through justified and procedurally fair actions, they can instill in citizens the belief that obeying the law is morally justified (Tyler & Huo, 2002). Hinds and Murphy observed that how the police interact with individuals is the primary determinant of their attitudes, orientations, and behaviors (Hinds & Murphy, 2007). Research on procedural justice identifies correlations among fairness, police legitimacy, and legal compliance (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Jackson et al., 2011).

After the research conducted by Thibaut and Walker (1975) on procedural justice, numerous studies concerning legal, political, and managerial authorities have established a correlation between an authority's legitimacy and individuals' satisfaction with the procedural justice dimensions of their interactions with that authority (Murphy, 2005; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler & Smith, 1998; Wissler, 1995). Studies in the policing domain regularly demonstrate that assessments of police legitimacy and public perception of law enforcement are contingent upon

individuals' perceptions of their treatment by the police, irrespective of judgments about the efficacy of police performance (Hinds & Murphy, 2007). Sunshine and Tyler (2003) discovered that perceptions of the legitimacy of the New York police were most influenced by concerns over procedural justice, with decreased emphasis on performance evaluations and distributive justice assessments. In a panel study involving 1,653 New Yorkers' interactions with the police, Tyler (2004) confirmed that procedural justice, specifically the fairness of interpersonal treatment, influenced respondents' perceptions of police legitimacy, while assessments of distributive fairness regarding outcomes did not affect legitimacy perceptions. The application of procedural fairness by police significantly influences public perceptions of law enforcement more than the results of police activities (Hinds & Murphy, 2007).

Evaluating Tyler's (1990) work, other empirical studies have arisen about the correlates and ramifications of legitimacy views in diverse circumstances. Numerous studies substantiate Tyler's two principal conclusions: firstly, procedural justice—defined as evaluations of the fairness of treatment processes—exhibits a robust correlation with legitimacy; secondly, legitimacy increases the probability of legal compliance and individuals' readiness to cooperate with criminal justice authorities (Murphy & Cherney, 2012a; Reisig et al., 2014; Hertogh, 2015; Tankebe et al., 2015). The public expects the police to execute their authority in a fair, unbiased, honest, and consistent way. When the police act differently, individuals see their treatment as unjust, which then prompts them to doubt the legitimacy of the police. A favorable assessment of equitable treatment bolsters police legitimacy (Reisig et al., 2014).

Recent research on legitimacy has reaffirmed that it is fundamentally based on perceptions of the fairness and justice of the procedures employed by legal authorities during interactions with the public, as well as the effectiveness of police in managing crime and disorder (i.e., procedural justice versus police effectiveness) (Tyler, 1990; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Subsequent research conducted in several advanced Western societies (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia) seemingly corroborates this assertion; when evaluating the police, procedural justice is deemed more significant than police effectiveness (Tyler,

2006; Murphy et al., 2014; Bradford, 2014; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Over the years, the police have implemented several interventions to foster synergy and enhance understanding with the public, particularly with perception, legitimacy, and compliance. Empirically, the police may foster favorable shifts in citizens' perceptions of law enforcement by including procedural justice discussion in various forms of police engagement (Higginson et al., 2013). Ultimately, systematic police-citizen interactions possess the potential to mitigate crime and address disorder issues within communities, neighborhoods, and precincts (Jackson et al., 2012).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Conflict Theory**

The paper was anchored on the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (see Marx and Engels, 1950a, initially published in 1848). The pair authored influential works that influenced essays from other experts on the idea. It is a recognized truth that, as of today, there exist inconsistencies in conflict perspectives within sociological and criminological contexts. Nonetheless, the principal idea or argument of the conflict theory remains unchanged. The idea posits that society has several groups, each with distinct interests to safeguard and maintain. Consequently, conflict is inevitable when these interests collide. Conflict theorists assert that societal structures are class-based, favoring one group (the affluent) to the detriment of another (the impoverished). Consequently, the foundation for integrating the theory into the research is established. The Nigerian Police is a fundamental governmental entity tasked with preserving peace and order, enforcing laws within society, and preventing and controlling crime, among other responsibilities. The historical portrayal of the Nigerian police is not geared towards public service but rather serves the interests of the colonial rulers.

Ajayi (2014) observes that the police are perceived not as a service organization for the populace, but rather as an instrument of oppression employed by colonial authorities to harass and apprehend tax evaders, brutalize trade unionists and nationalists, and torture individuals accused of criminal offenses. Consequently, public engagement with the police diminished, establishing a significant communication gap that fostered mutual distrust, which only

intensified over time. This sad and unsightly historical depiction of the Nigerian police, which has persisted from its establishment, continues to be relevant today. The public perceives the police as a mechanism and tool of the ruling government (the affluent/powerful) to safeguard its interests and those of its supporters, and is potentially poised to exert violence on the weak (public) at the smallest provocation. Consequently, the foundation for public skepticism, fear, animosity, and reluctance to collaborate with law enforcement is built, ultimately undermining the people's opinion of the police.

Given the historical context of the Nigerian police and its ongoing issues, conflict theory serves as a concrete foundation for this research. Ajayi (2014) demonstrates that the Nigerian police, via their historical context extending to the present, are marked by repression, oppression, violence, corruption, misuse of authority, and several other vices that foster a poor public impression. The theory is beneficial to this research because of its emphasis on the dichotomy of classes with varying interests throughout society. It asserts that one group (class) consistently requires the protection of its interests and those of its allies by using existing state institutions (such as the police) as tools for domination, oppression, safeguarding interests, and subjugating other classes (groups). This established the foundation for the populace to see the police as a tool of the government (the affluent and elites), thereby fostering unfavorable attitudes toward law enforcement. The police often lack the necessary cooperation, participation, trust, and respect from the public regarding intelligence sharing, which leads to resentment, animosity, and suspicion, thereby exacerbating the negative public image and perception of law enforcement. This significantly impacts the overall acceptability and performance (effectiveness and efficiency) of the police in crime prevention and control, which is the fundamental emphasis of this research.

The theory is deemed pertinent to the study as it elucidates the evident relationship between the government and its allies (the affluent/powerful), its institutions (the police), and the populace (the masses/have-nots/powerless). Furthermore, it reveals the foundation for the seeds of distrust, animosity, and suspicion that have undermined public perception of the Nigerian police regarding crime prevention and

control, as well as its overall efficacy. This significantly impacts the overall performance, efficacy, and efficiency of the police force. Despite the considerable success of the theory and its applicability to the task, it has not been without criticism. Consequently, the hypothesis has faced criticism in many respects.

### **Methodology**

The research used a cross-sectional survey design. This approach entails the selection and observation of representative samples or a cross-section of the complete population of a phenomenon, conducted at a single moment in time. It gathers data objectively to draw judgments about a certain group at a particular moment. This design is deemed suitable for this study since it enables the researcher to collect sufficient and precise data from the sample to generalize the results to the total population. The research locale is the urban region of Abakaliki metropolis. It traverses three Local Government Areas: Abakaliki, Ebonyi, and Izzi. The residents of this region are mostly of Igbo descent, largely engaged in agriculture, small-scale trading, and government service occupations. It served as the headquarters of the former Ogoja province before the establishment of Southeastern State in 1967.

According to the 2006 national census, the population of Abakaliki metropolis was 149,683. The National Population Commission forecast the area's 2016 population at 198,100 (NPC, 2016). This constituted the population study for this research. The study's target group comprises both males and females who have reached the legal age of adulthood (18 years and older) and possess the ability to read, write, or answer the questionnaire. The study's sample size is 399. This was obtained using Taro Yamane's (1967) method for calculating sample size. The formula for sample estimation is expressed as:  $n \text{ equals } \frac{N1}{N(e)2}$ .

The research used a multi-stage sampling procedure. This strategy, which employs sequential random sampling, was used to identify streets and respondents for the research. The approach was considered pertinent due to the substantial size of the research population, which comprises several clusters such as streets, settlements, and households. Abakaliki metropolis spans three local government units. Consequently, by using a random sample

technique of hand-drawing without replacement, two out of the three local governments constituting the research region were chosen. In the second stage, fifteen streets were chosen from each of the two local administrations, resulting in a total of thirty streets. In the last step, a systematic selection procedure was used to choose a household from the sample frame, from which one adult (18 years and older) was chosen as a participant in the research. In the absence of adult respondents (18 years and older), the subsequent household was automatically replaced until the requisite sample size was attained. Data were gathered using a closed structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including graphs, charts, basic percentages, and frequency counts. The distribution tables facilitated the interpretation of the acquired data and the analysis of the study topics. Linear regression,

multiple regression, and multinomial regression were used to test the hypotheses and reveal the relationships among variables in the research.

**Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

A total number of 399 (three hundred and ninety-nine) questionnaires were administered, while 386 (three hundred and eighty-six) were duly filled and retrieved. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including graphs, charts, basic percentages, and frequency counts. The distribution tables facilitated the interpretation of the acquired data and the analysis of the study topics. Linear regression, multiple regression, and multinomial regression were used to test the hypotheses and reveal the relationships among variables in the research.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

		Gender Distribution of Respondents			
	Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	206	53.4	53.4	53.4
	Male	180	46.6	46.6	46.6
	Total	386	100.0	100.0	100.0
		Age Distribution of Respondents			
Valid	18-27	88	22.8	22.8	22.8
	28-37	98	25.4	25.4	25.4
	38-47	124	32.1	32.1	32.1
	48and Above	76	19.7	19.7	19.7
	Total	386	100.0	100.0	100.0
		Educational qualifications			
	Education	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No formal education	59	15.3	15.3	15.3
	FSLC	58	15.0	15.0	15.0
	SSCE/GCE	77	19.9	19.9	19.9
	OND/NCE	55	14.2	14.2	14.2
	B.SC	94	24.4	24.4	24.4
	M.SC/PH.D	43	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Total	386	100.0	100.0	100.0
		Occupation			
	Occupation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	UNEMPLOYED	31	8.0	8.0	8.0
	FARMER	101	26.2	26.2	26.2
	CIVIL SERVANT	105	27.2	27.2	27.2
	PUBLIC SERVANT	98	25.4	25.4	25.4
	TRADER	51	13.2	13.2	13.2

	Total	386	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Marital status</b>					
	<b>Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	SINGLE	153	39.6	39.6	39.6
	MARRIED	145	37.5	37.5	77.1
	DIVORCED	33	8.6	8.6	85.7
	WIDOWED	30	7.8	7.8	83.5
	SEPERATED	25	6.5	6.5	100.0
	Total	386	100.0	100.0	
<b>Religious affiliations</b>					
	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	CHRISTAINITY	155	40.2	40.2	40.2
	ISLAM	87	22.5	22.5	62.7
	AFRICAN TRADITIONAL	93	24.1	24.1	86.8
	OTHER	51	13.2	13.2	100.0
	Total	386	100.0	100.0	
<b>Ethnic group</b>					
Valid	IGBO	226	58.6	58.6	58.6
	HAUSA	70	18.1	18.1	18.1
	YORUBA	60	15.5	15.5	15.5
	OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS	30	7.8	7.8	7.8
	Total	386	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Source: Field Survey**

A total of 206 males participated in the research, representing 53.4% of the total respondents, while a total of 180 females participated in the research, amounting to 46.6% of the total respondents. This means that males participated more than females in the research. It also implies that a total of 386 respondents took part in the research.

It was also observed that 88 respondents between the age bracket 18-27years representing 22.8% of the total population of respondents, 98 respondents within the age bracket 28-37 which accrued to 25.4% of the total respondents, 124 respondents within the age bracket 38-47 which accrued to 32.1% of the total respondents, and finally, 76 respondents within the age bracket 48 and above which amount to 19.7% of the total respondents participated in the research. This shows that respondents within the age bracket 38-47 participated more in the research.

According to the table, regarding the educational status of the respondents, 59 respondents, representing 15.3% of the total population, have no

formal education. Whereas, 58 respondents representing 15% of the total population of the respondents have the First School Leaving Certificate. While 77 respondents representing 19.9% of the total population of the respondents have SSCE/GCE. While 55 respondents representing 14.2% of the total population of respondents have OND/NCE; and 94 respondents representing 24.4% have B.Sc. And finally, a total number of 43 respondents representing 11.1% of the total population of respondents have M.SC/PHD. This signifies that respondents with BSc participated more in the research.

In terms of occupation, the table shows that 31 respondents, representing 8% of the total number of respondents, were unemployed at the time of conducting this work. 101 respondents representing 26.2% of the total number of respondents were farmers. 105 respondents representing 27.2% of the total number of respondents are Civil Servants. Public Servants: 98 respondents representing 25.4% of the total number of respondents. 51 respondents

are traders, amounting to 13.2% of the total population.

The distribution of the respondents based on marital status is as follows. 153, representing 39.6% of the total population of respondents of the study, were single. 145 representing 37.5% of the total population of respondents of the study were married, 33 representing 8.6% of the total respondents were divorced. 30 representing 7.8% of the total population of respondents of the study were widowed, and 25 representing 6.5% of the total population of respondents of the study were separated. This means that the singles were the highest respondents to the instrument of study. This is represented in the chart above.

On religion, Christianity dominates as 155 respondents representing 40.2% of the total

population of respondents are Christian. Islam came third with 87 respondents representing 22.5% of the total population of respondents. The African Traditional Religion has 93 respondents, representing 24.1% of the total population of respondents. And other religions have 51 respondents representing 13.2% of the total population of respondents. This is presented in the chart above.

The dominant ethnic group of the respondents is Igbo, with 226 respondents representing 58.5% of the total population of the respondents. Second to it is the Hausa ethnic group with 70 respondents representing 18.1% of the total population of the respondents. The next is the Yoruba ethnic group, with 60 respondents representing 15.5% of the total population of the respondents. While other ethnic groups recorded 30 respondents, representing 7.8% of the total population of the respondents.

**Research Objective 1: Public Perception of the Police in Abakaliki Metropolis**

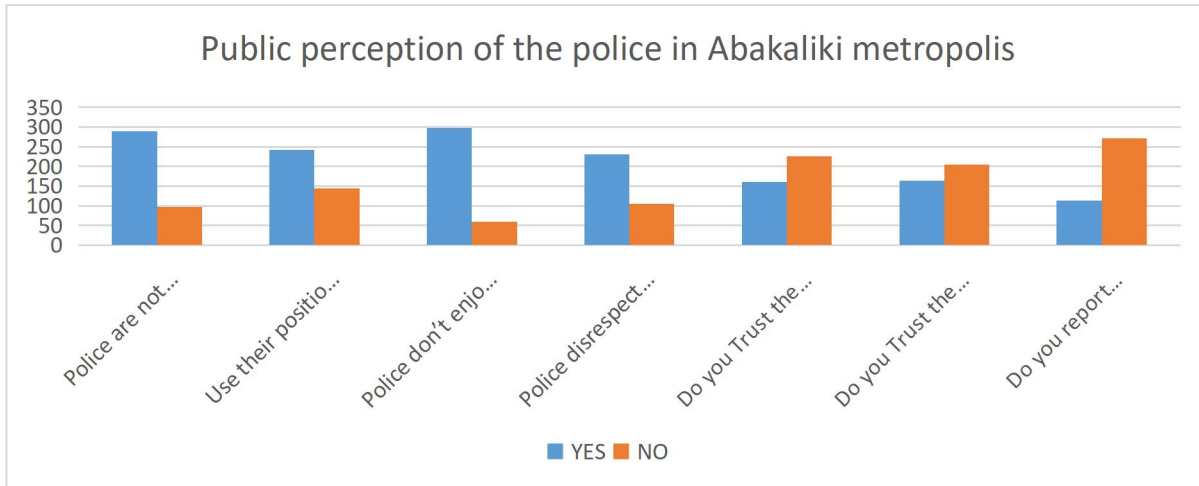
This section presents data on the public perception of the Police in Abakaliki metropolis. Respondent’s opinions are presented in the tables below.

**Table 2: Respondent opinions on the public perception of the police in Abakaliki metropolis.**

S/N	Item statement	YES	%	NO	%
1	Police are not trusted by residents	289	75.9	97	25.1
2	Use their position to spell violence	242	62.7	144	37.3
3	Police don’t enjoy public cooperation	297	76.9	59	15.3
4	Police disrespect the law	231	59.8	105	27.2
5	Do you Trust the motive of police	161	41.7	225	58.3
6	Do you Trust the police	164	42.5	204	52.8
7	Do you report suspicious activities to police	114	29.5	272	70.5

**Source: Field Survey.**

Data in table 2 showed that the respondents opinions on public perception of the police in Abakaliki metropolis. In this cluster, six item questionnaires were administered to respondents in which item 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 with their respective percentages of 75.9%, 62.7%, 76.9%, 59.8%, and 51.6% are all above 50% benchmark. This implies that the respondents accepted that police are not trusted by residents; that they use their position to spell violence, don’t enjoy public cooperation, and disrespect the law. They also accepted that they do no report suspicious activities to police because they don’t trust them. Item 5 and 6, with respective percentage of 41.7% and 42.5% which are below the benchmark shows that respondents do not trust the motive of police.



The graph above represents the respondent responses on public perception of the police in Abakaliki metropolis.

**Research objective 2: Procedural justice as a precursor to public perception of the police in Abakaliki metropolis**

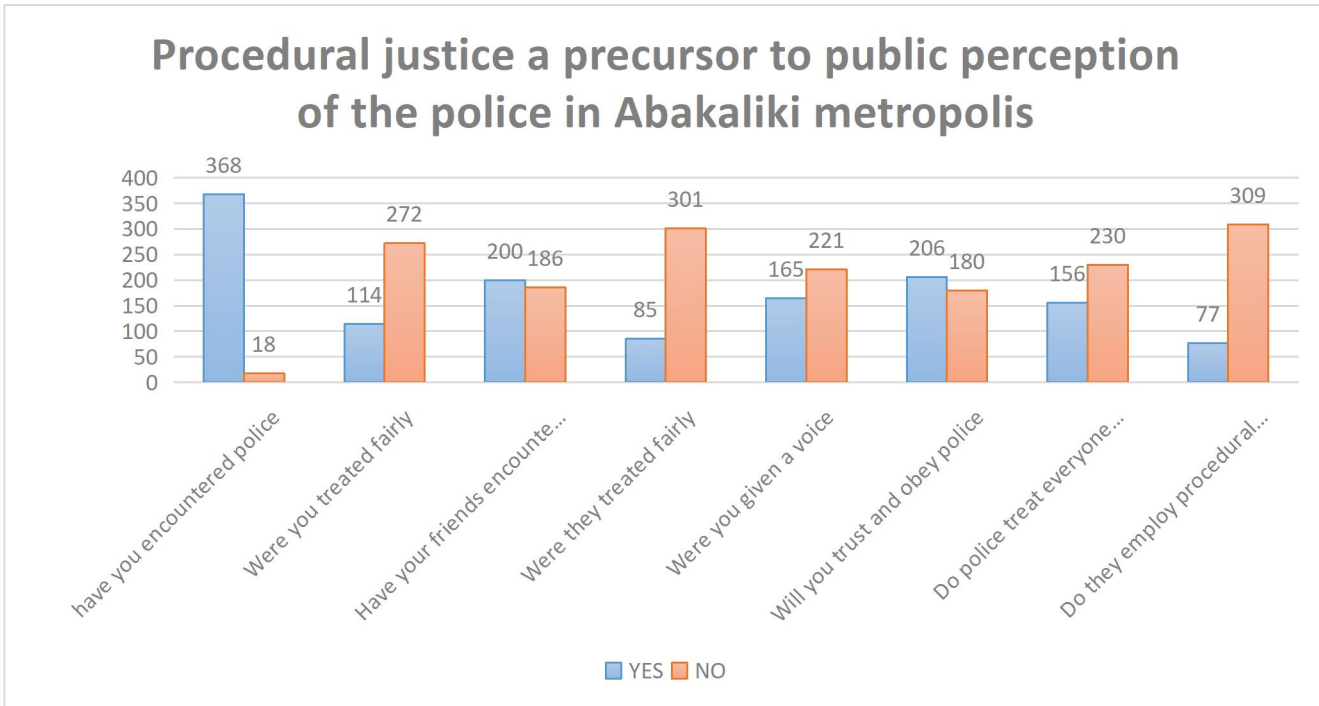
This section presents data on procedural justice as a precursor to public perception of the police in Abakaliki metropolis.

**Table 3: Respondents’ opinion on procedural justice a precursor to public perception of the police in Abakaliki metropolis**

S/N	Item statements	YES	%	NO	%
1	have you encountered police	368	95.3	18	4.7
2	Were you treated fairly	114	29.5	272	70.5
3	Have your friends encounter police	200	51.8	186	48.2
4	Were they treated fairly	85	22.0	301	78.0
5	Were you given a voice	165	42.7	221	57.3
6	Will you trust and obey police if they treat people fairly and more civil	206	53.4	180	46.6
7	Do police treat everyone equally	156	40.4	230	59.6
8	Do they employ procedural justices	77	19.9	309	80.1

**Source: Field Survey.**

Table 3 shows frequencies and percentages of the respondents’ opinion on procedural justice a precursor to public perception of the police in Abakaliki metropolis. In this cluster, eight item questionnaires were administered to the respondents. Item 1, 3 and 6 with respective percentages of 95.3%, 50.8% and 53.4% were above 50% benchmark indicating that the respondents accepted that they have encountered police, their friends have encounter police and they will trust the police. Item 2, 4, 5, 7 and 9 with their respective percentages of 29.5%, 22.0%, 42.7%, 40.4%, 19.9% which are below the 50% benchmark which indicates that the respondents agreed that they were not treated equally and fairly, were not given a voice and that police in Abakaliki do not employ procedural justice.



**Test of Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between public perceptions of the police and crime control in Abakaliki metropolis.

**Table 4:** linear regression testing of the relationship between public perceptions of the police and crime control in Abakaliki metropolis

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T		Zero-order	Partial	Part
1 (Constant)	7.292	1.007		7.242	.000			
Public perceptions	-.032	.098	-.016	-.119	.023.	-.016	-.016	-.016

a. Dependent Variable: crime control

The data in table 4 showed the result of regression and correlation analysis of relationship between public perceptions of the police and crime control in Abakaliki metropolis. There result showed that there is a low negative relationship between public perceptions of the police and crime control with regression coefficient of  $r = -.016$  with  $p =$  value of  $.023$ . Therefore, a unit increase in negative public perception of the police leads to 1.6% decrease in crime control. The regression result showed that there is significant relationship between public perception of the police and crime control as the  $Beta = 0.16$ ,  $p$ -value ( $sig = .023.$ ) is less than 0.05 level of significant. In other words, negative perception of police activities by Abakaliki citizens leads to low crime control.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant relationship between procedural justice, public perception of the police and crime control in Abakaliki metropolis.

**Table 5:** multiple regression test of no relationship between procedural justice, public perception of the police and crime control in Abakaliki metropolis.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Correlations			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1 (Constant)	7.292	1.007		7.242	.000			
Public perceptions	-.012	.098	-.016	-.119	.013	-.016	-.016	-.016
2 (Constant)	7.165	1.236		5.797	.000			
Public perceptions	-.013	.099	-.017	-.128	.011	-.017	-.017	-.017
procedural justice	.013	.071	-.019	.178	.032	-.019	-.019	-.019

a. Dependent Variable: crime control

From table 5, multiple regression analysis was conducted to compare the relationship between procedural justice, public perception of the police and crime control in Abakaliki metropolis. The correlation result showed that there is a negative relationship between public perceptions and crime control with correlation coefficient of  $r = -.016$  in the model one. Therefore, a unit increase in negative public perception of the police leads to 1.6% decrease in crime control. In the second model, public perception of police had negative relationship with crime control with regression coefficient of  $-0.17$ .

This indicates that an increase in negative public perception of police leads to 1.7% decrease in crime control. In second model also procedure justices had negative relationship with crime control with regression coefficient of  $r = -0.19$  indicating that improvement in procedural justices by one unit leads to increase in crime control by 1.9%. The regression analysis indicated that procedural justices Beta of  $-.019$  made more contribution to explaining the model compared to public perception with Beta value of  $-0.17$ . These variables were significant as their sig values are less than 0.05 level of significant. In other words, null hypothesis of no significant relationship was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between procedural justice, public perception of the police and crime control in

Abakaliki metropolis, with procedural justice making largest contribution.

**Discussion of findings**

The survey revealed that the population in Abakaliki metropolitan area exhibits a lack of trust in the police and generally refrains from cooperating with them in various endeavors. Obaro (2014) illustrates that "the Nigeria police today are confronted with a legitimacy crisis." Two interrelated difficulties are apparent. There is a notable increase in crime, violence, and insecurity. The people is increasingly experiencing mistrust towards the police" (Alemika, 2003:19-32; Ibidapo-Obe, 2003, p.3; Jike, 2003, p. 7). The investigation showed that the police use their authority to perpetrate violence and disregard the law, resulting in the public's reluctance to report suspicious activity within the examined community. Ajibade said, the Nigerian police represent the most unscrupulous organization, in which the general public has completely lost confidence and become disaffected (Ajibade, 2011). The findings indicated a substantial correlation between public perception of the police and crime control in the area under study. The poor view of police activity among inhabitants of Abakaliki metropolis results in ineffective crime control. This is in line with the assertion of Idowu and Nwosu (2021) that the Nigerian police are held low esteem by the public which has a negative

implication on crime prevention and control. Omale (2025) submitted that when the public lacks confidence in the police, efficacious administration of justice (policing-crime prevention and control) becomes an illusion.

The majority of individuals studied reported encountering the police, during which they experienced unequal and unfair treatment, lacked a voice, and noted that the police in Abakaliki do not apply procedural fairness in their interactions with the public. This has significantly influenced public perception of the police negatively and has substantially impacted crime prevention and control in Abakaliki metropolis. Selected findings from literature indicate that research conducted in advanced societies, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, suggests that procedural justice is deemed more significant than police effectiveness when evaluating law enforcement (Tyler, 2006; Murphy et al., 2014; Bradford, 2014; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003).

Similarly, procedurally fair police-citizen interactions has the potential to mitigate crime and address disorder issues within communities, neighborhoods, and precincts (Jackson et al., 2012). To ensure a favorable public view and efficiently manage crime, the police must implement procedural fairness in their interactions with the community. This has been substantiated by researchers in procedural justice. Tyler and Huo (2002) observed that law enforcement can affect the populace in more consensual and less confrontational manners: by improving public perception and legitimacy through justified and procedurally fair actions, they can instill in citizens the conviction that it is morally right to adhere to the law. Hinds and Murphy observed that the manner in which the police interact with individuals is the primary determinant of their attitudes, orientations, and behaviors (Hinds and Murphy, 2007).

### **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

The study indicates that public perception is an indisputable factor in current policing; hence, the significance of public attitudes and perceptions of the police is paramount in crime prevention and control in the present day. Nonetheless, the police, through their pervasive unprofessionalism and lackadaisical demeanor characterized by corruption, extortion, incivility, brutality, impunity, and ineffectiveness in their statutory duties have consistently tarnished

public perception of law enforcement, thereby jeopardizing effective crime prevention and control within the studied area and, by extension, throughout Nigeria. Consequently, the notion of procedural justice, which includes treating individuals with respect and dignity, allowing individuals to express their perspectives throughout interactions, making impartial choices, and demonstrating trustworthy intentions, should be included into the Nigeria Police Service. This will not only cultivate a favorable perception of the police but also reinforce the widespread adage "police are your friends"; it necessitates the training and retraining of law enforcement personnel. This aims to ensure that the police remain informed about international policing standards that promote professionalism and best practices. Ultimately, the police should prioritize public trust and confidence, which can be fostered through a series of dialogues, lectures, seminars, and symposiums with the community. Public awareness must be cultivated via television programs and radio jingles to reorient perceptions of the police and promote harmony and collaboration between the community and law enforcement.

### **Ethical Consideration**

Approval to carry out the research was sought and obtained from the Department of Criminology and Security Studies and the Research Unit of the Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike. Also, anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent of the participants were maintained and guaranteed.

The manuscript has not been submitted for consideration for publication or published anywhere before.

### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflicting of interest regarding this paper.

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