

**POLICE REFORMS AND DEMOCRATIC POLICING IN NIGERIA: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PDP AND APC GOVERNMENT, 2011-2023**

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Abstract

This study examined police reform and democratic policing in Nigeria from 2011 to 2023, through a comparative analysis of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) led governments within this period. Against the backdrop of Nigeria's evolving democratic governance and longstanding challenges within the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the research investigated the formulation, implementation, and outcomes of police reform policies under the two major political parties. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, and documentary analyses to assess the degree to which police reforms have transformed the institution towards democratic policing norms, including accountability, respect for human rights, community engagement, and operational effectiveness. The historical context of policing in Nigeria reveals deep-rooted colonial legacies, militarization, and systemic corruption that continue to undermine democratic policing ideals. Both the PDP and APC administrations launched various reform initiatives seeking to depoliticize, professionalize, and modernize the police force. The study finds that while reforms under the PDP predominantly emphasized institutional restructuring, enhanced accountability frameworks, and human rights training, the APC government's reforms were more operationally oriented, focusing on technology integration, crime reduction strategies, and police welfare improvements facilitated partly by new Police Acts and Trust Funds. Despite these concerted efforts, the research uncovers structural impediments constraining reform effectiveness, including persistent political interference, inadequate funding, inconsistent training programmes, and resistance from within the police force.

Keywords: Police, Police Reforms, Human Rights, and Democratic Policing.

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Introduction

The police as an institution of the state is the most visible symbol of governmental power, authority and the primary enforcer of its laws. It is also an agency of social control in the hands of those who control the affairs of the state. It is deployed within the context of the primary function of any government being the protector of lives, freedom and properties of its citizens. The exercise of governmental power therefore, ought to be conditioned by this purpose (Locke, 1976; Rousseau, 1976). Society gives government wide range of powers through its laws, for the purpose of efficient and effective preservation of that law and order, and the protection of citizens from fear, loss of life and property that may result from crime and violent conflict.

Protection of fundamental human rights is a core element of democracy and the police are an important state agency for that role. Thus, public opinion of police conduct and image is expected to reflect the legitimacy of the government. For this reason, since the rebirth of democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has constantly trained and retrained police personnel on democratic-style policing. With the democratization process that ushered

in civilian rule through the 1999 general election, the expectation of Nigerians was that the police would be more professional in their conduct, particularly in relation to protecting the fundamental right of citizens.

Historically, the policing system in Nigeria is an inheritance from the British. It is an institution that was created by external interest. The police were seen as an inevitable part of British colonial rule. It was perceived to be a tool of oppression and domination by the British during colonial rule, and later by the indigenous elites after independence. However, Modern policing in Nigeria emerged in 1930 through the merger of three essentially Para-military groups-the Hausa Constabulary in Lagos, established in 1861, the Royal Niger Constabulary (initially a private security force of the Royal Niger Company) and the Oil Rivers Protectorate Force. The last two were established in the late 19th century (Ikuteyijo and Rotimi, 2014).

The long military regimes have their strong footprints in the current policing system in Nigeria. The military coup of July 1966 and the subsequent outbreak of the civil war resulted in the centralization of police authority and command, excessive use of

force, involvement of police in political governance, and a decline in their welfare, professionalism, and prestige (Bolaji, 2015). These challenges made the policing system under the military regimes inappropriate and incapable of providing an effective democratic policing.

All the democratic administrations since 1999 have embarked on one form of police reform initiatives or another in order to democratize the policing system in Nigeria. The most common policy initiative has to be the commissioned of Presidential Panels on Police Reform. Another form of police reforms is the enactment of new act, repeal, or amendment of existing laws. The PDP and APC governments have either picked one or combined the two police reform initiatives during their administrations.

This study addressed the following research questions; what are the key differences and similarities in police reform policies between the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) governments? To what extent have the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) governments achieved institutional changes within the Nigeria Police Force? The general objective

is to examine comparatively police reform and democratic policing in Nigeria under the democratic government of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) from 2011 to 2023. However, specific objectives are to; examine the differences and similarities in police reform policies between the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) governments, and assess the effectiveness of institutional changes undertaken by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) governments

The Concept of Police Reform and Democratic Policing

The relationship between the police and the public has been an issue of concern in democratic societies. The police play a crucial role in maintaining law and order, and their actions are expected to be guided by the principles of democratic policing. However, in recent times the police have been accused of various forms of misconduct, include the excessive use of force, profiling, and discrimination. These accusations have led to calls for police reform aimed at promoting democratic policing.

The need for police reform arises from the realization that the police are not immune to the shortcomings of human nature, including biases, prejudices, and abuse of power. These shortcomings can manifest in the form of misconduct by the police, leading to the breakdown of trust between the police and the public they serve (Ingram, Terrill and Paoline III, 2018). Police reform seeks to address these shortcomings by creating mechanism for accountability, transparency, and oversight of police conduct. The aim is to ensure that the police act in accordance with democratic principles and respect the rights and dignity of all individuals.

Democratic policing emphasis the respect for human rights, transparency, accountability, and partnership between the police and community they serve. Democratic policing is essential to police reforms (Pino and Wiatrowski, 2006). It provides a framework for ensuring that police conduct is consistent with democratic principles. Democratic policing emphasises the importance of police being responsive to the needs and concerns of the community they serve (Akinlabi, 2016). This approach can promote trust and confidence in the police and reduce the likelihood of misconduct.

Democratic policing also provides a framework for police reform by emphasizing the importance of oversight and accountability (Akinlabi, 2019). It requires that the police to be accountable for their actions and that they are mechanisms in place to ensure that the police are held accountable. Oversight and accountability mechanisms can include civilian oversight boards, internal affairs unit, and independent investigatory bodies. These mechanisms can help ensure that the police are held accountable for their actions and that there is transparency in the police department (Akinlabi, 2019).

Police reform is necessary to promote democratic policing and ensure that the police act in accordance with democratic principles. Police reforms can take many forms, and the specific elements of police reforms depend on the context of society in which it been implemented (Grant, Grabias and Godson, 2006). However, some common elements of police reform include training, community policing, oversight and accountability, diversity and inclusion, and data collection and analysis. Democratic policing is essential to police reform because it provides a framework for ensuring that

police conducts is consistent with democratic principles.

Theoretical Insight

The study of institution was the root of Political Science. However, immediately after Second World War II, attention was shifted to the new theoretical approaches based more on individualistic assumptions of behaviouralism and the rational choice (Peters, 2018). Institutionalism was criticised for being too descriptive, parochial, a-theoretical and non-comparative. While institutions never completely disappeared from the agenda, few theorists seriously considered their role in shaping political outcomes (Lecouers, 2000). The 1990s saw political science developed a renewed interest in institutions as reflected in the growing importance of the new institutionalist literature (Bolaji, 2015).

Understanding the policy choices of a particular country entails an understanding of the country's political and policy history, as argued by Hall (1992), and in particular the impact of various institutional factors on policy choice and government performance. HI, like other forms of institutional theories, gives explanatory pride of place to the rules,

routines, standard operating procedures, and norms of legitimate action that both enable and constrain political action. It is however distinct from other forms of institutionalisms in its belief that historical context durably defines the purposes to which new institutions are put: the goals they pursue; the values they embody; the norms of appropriate behaviour they both adhere to and expect from others (James, 2009).

Thus, the basic idea behind HI is that the policy choices made when an institution is created or a policy initiated, will have a long-range determining impact on future policy, which in literature is explained as 'path dependency' (Nørgaard, 2001). Policy initiated at any point in time is thus determined by choices made in the past. The path may be changed but this requires great political craftsmanship.

According to HI, ideas create institutions, which thereby become material manifestations of the ideas (Nørgaard, 2001). HI does not accord more importance to any of the actors in the policy process and analyses that several actors can in different ways contribute to policy outcomes, and as such institutional outcomes at any point in time is

the product of the convergence of a number of historical factors.

HI which was inspired by the pioneering works of Plato, Locke, Hobbes and Madison builds on earlier works by Katzeinstein, Skocpol, Thelen and others scholars too numerous to mention, by viewing institutions as intervening variables (or structuring variables) through which battles over interest, ideas and power are fought. For them, institutions are important both because they are the focal points of much political activity and because they provide incentives and constraints for political actors and thus structure that activity. Rather than being neutral boxes in which political fights take place, institutions actually structure the political struggle itself. Institutions can thus also be seen as the points of critical juncture in an historical path analysis because; political battles are fought inside institutions and over the design of future institutions (Steinmo, 2001).

In either case, the HI is interested in developing a deep and contextualized understanding of politics. In sum, HI provides a framework for the role of institutions in structuring relations of co-operation and conflict between actors. At its centre is the

idea that agents, particularly political elites, do not operate in a vacuum but within an institutional setting that might impose constraints or offer opportunities for action.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodology that was adopted for this research and the analysis of the data gathered in the course of the research. It dwelled on issues such as the research design, the sources of data, sample and sampling technique, instrument for data collection, procedure for data gathering and method of data analysis.

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is a comparative case study approach, which aims to provide an in-depth analysis of police reform initiatives and democratic policing in Nigeria under the government of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) from 2011 to 2023. This design facilitated data collection of the sampled population using relevant instruments, aiding in achieving the study objectives. The survey design employed questionnaire and key informant interview to gather information on the police reforms under the Peoples' Democratic Party and All

Progressive Congress. This methodological choice is rooted in the need to understand the complex socio-political dynamics and reforms under these distinct political regimes, which have alternated in power during the specified period. The comparative case study approach enabled the identification of key patterns, divergences, and convergences in the strategies and outcomes of police reforms under the two political parties. It encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research methods to facilitate a comprehensive analysis.

Area of the Study

Nigeria occupies a landmass of 923,037 square kilometres, with a population of around 216,783,381 million as at 2022 (National Bureau of Statistic, 2022). The vast landmass of the country cuts through the grassland, savannah, all through the mangrove and the Atlantic Ocean. Nigeria, a West Africa nation is bordered by Benin Republic to the west, Niger to the north, Chad to the northeast, Cameroon to the east and in the south by coastline stretches along the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean.

Nigeria got her independent in 1960 and became a republic in 1963. Nigeria political

history has been marked by military coups, electoral fraud, and ethnic tension. The country has made significant strides towards democracy since the return to civilian rule in 1999, but challenges persist. Nigeria, a vibrant and diverse nation operates under a federal presidential system. This political structure outline in the 1999 constitution is designed to balance power between the federal government, the 36 constituent states and 774 local governments. The system is characterized by three distinct branches, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary.

3.3 Population of the Study

The population of this study is 371, 800 being the total active manpower of Nigeria Police Police (Nigeria Police Force, 2023).

3.4 Sampling Size

This study was carried out to assess police reform and democratic policing by the Nigeria Police Force. Therefore, the sample size of this study is 400. This is determined using the Taro Yamane formula (1967)

$$n=N/1+N(e)^2$$

Where

n signifies sample size

N signifies the total population under study

e signifies the margin error (0.05)

Therefore,

$$n= 371,800 /1+371,800 (0.05)^2$$

$$n= 371, 800 /930.5$$

$$n=399.57$$

$$n= 400.$$

The 400 questionnaires was distributed among the police officer from the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police and above across the six geopolitical zones of country and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) based on the latest data by the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics on the number of police officer in each of the six geopolitical and the FCT. The questionnaires were share using Google form.

Table 3.1: Six Geopolitical Zones and FCT, Sample & Sample Size of Study

Geopolitic al Zones	Percentag e	N=40 0	Sample Size per Geopolitic al Zones
	Distributi on of Police Officers		

North	17	400	68
Central	13	400	52
North East	16	400	64
North West	11	400	44
South East	17	400	68
South	21	400	84
South South	05	400	20
South West	100		400

FCT

Total

.Sources: Field Survey, 2024

3.5 Sampling procedure

The method used in selecting respondents for this study is a combination of simple random and purposive sampling. Multistage sampling procedure was adopted for the respondents that were selected for the administration of the questionnaire. Sample random will be complemented with purposive sampling technique to select interviews respondents. Purposive technique allowed the selection of respondents based on their experiences and

JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

rank in the Nigeria Police Force or for being a member of CSO, NGO, or human right activist.

The questionnaire was sent to each respondents email or Whatsapp number through the use of Google Form to police officer from the rank of ASP and above. With the help of research assistants, the researcher was able to distribute the questionnaires to the target police officers across the country.

Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis

1.1 Presentation and Analysis of Data

A total of 400 questionnaires sent to police officers from the rank of ASP throughout Nigeria, of which 378 police officers completed the questionnaire. Therefore, 378 questionnaires as sample size were ultimately utilized in this study, administered by the researcher and one assistant. After the return, coding, situating, weighing, and editing processes, these 378 questionnaires formed the basis for data analysis and interpretation of the study.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1.1: Frequencies of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	330	87.3
	Female	48	12.7
Rank	ACP & above	17	4.5
	CSP	20	5.3
	SP	35	9.3
	DSP	70	18.5
	ASP	236	62.4
Years of Service	1–5 years	136	36.0
	6–10 years	149	39.4
	11–15 years	32	8.5
	16–20 years	55	14.6
	20+ years	6	1.6
Department	Force Criminal Investigation	98	25.9
	Logistics & Supply	49	13.0
	Intelligence	48	12.7

JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

Traffic	45	11.95; 9.3%), CSP (20; 5.3%) and ACP & above (17; 4.5%). With respect to years of service, most respondents had served between 6–10 years (149; 39.4%) and 1–5 years (136; 36.0%), while smaller proportions had served for 11–15 years (32; 8.5%), 16–20 years (55; 14.6%), and 20 years or more (6; 1.6%).
Training & Development	42	11.1
Research & Planning	25	6.6
ICT	24	6.3
Finance & Administration	16	4.2
Operations	14	3.7
Office of the Force Secretary	13	3.4
Forensic	4	1.1
Educational Level	305	80.7
Masters	63	16.7
PhD	10	2.6

Sources: Fieldwork, 2025

The demographic characteristics of the respondents (N = 378) reveal that the majority were male (330; 87.3%), while females accounted for 48 (12.7%). In terms of rank, the largest proportion were ASP (236; 62.4%), followed by DSP (70; 18.5%), SP

1.2 Differences and similarities in police reform policies under PDP and APC Governments

Across departments, the highest representation came from the Force Criminal Investigation Department (98; 25.9%), followed by Logistics and Supply (49; 13.0%), Intelligence (48; 12.7%), Traffic (45; 11.9%), and Training and Development (42; 11.1%). Smaller numbers of respondents were drawn from Research and Planning (25; 6.6%), ICT (24; 6.3%), Finance and Administration (16; 4.2%), Operations (14; 3.7%), Office of the Force Secretary (13; 3.4%), and Forensic (4; 1.1%). Regarding educational attainment, most respondents held a first degree (305; 80.7%), while 63 (16.7%) had a master’s degree, and 10 (2.6%) possessed a PhD (Table 4.1).

Table 4.2.1: Perceived Political Party Effectiveness of Implementation of Police Reforms

Party	Frequency	Percent
Neither	60	15.9
PDP (2011–2015)	137	36.2
APC (2015–2023)	107	28.3
Both equally	74	19.6
Total	378	100.0

Sources: Fieldwork, 2025

Among the 378 respondents, 36.2% indicated that the PDP (2011–2015) implemented more effective reforms, 28.3% chose the APC (2015–2023), 19.6% believed both parties were equally effective, and 15.9% selected neither (Table 4.2.1).

Table 4.2.2: Primary Focus of Police Reforms under the PDP Government

Reform Focus	Frequency	Percent
Accountability & transparency	53	14.0
Community	82	21.7

policing		
Crime reduction strategy	74	19.6
Human rights training	68	18.0
Infrastructure development	57	15.1
Officer training programs	9	2.4
Public perception & trust	10	2.6
Resource allocation	25	6.6
Total	378	100.0

Sources: Fieldwork, 2025

When asked about the primary focus of police reforms under the PDP government, respondents most frequently identified community policing (21.7%), crime reduction strategies (19.6%), and human rights training (18.0%). Smaller proportions emphasized accountability and transparency (14.0%),

infrastructure development (15.1%), resource allocation (6.6%), public perception and trust (2.6%), and officer training programs (2.4%) (Table 4.2.2).

Resource allocation	19	5.0
Total	378	100.0

Table 4.2.3: Primary Focus of Police Reforms under the APC Government

Aspect Improved	Frequency	Percent
Community policing	97	25.7
Accountability & transparency	32	8.5
Crime reduction strategy	90	23.8
Human rights training	68	18.0
Infrastructure development	51	13.5
Officer training programs	8	2.1
Public perception & trust	13	3.4

Sources: Fieldwork, 2025

In terms of aspects most focused on under the APC government, the highest proportions of respondents cited community policing (25.7%), crime reduction strategies (23.8%), and human rights training (18.0%). Other areas included infrastructure development (13.5%), accountability and transparency (8.5%), resource allocation (5.0%), public perception and trust (3.4%), and officer training programmes (2.1%) (Table 4.2.3).

Table 4.2.4: Perceived Political Party Effectiveness and Focus of PDP and APC on Police Reforms

The crosstab between perceived political party effectiveness and the primary focus of police reforms under the PDP government showed varied opinions (Table 4.2.4). Among those who believed neither party was more effective, the most common focus identified was infrastructure development (23.3%) followed by human rights training (20.0%). Respondents who chose PDP highlighted

community policing (26.3%) and crime reduction strategies (17.5%) as the major reform areas, while those who selected APC pointed to crime reduction (25.2%) and human rights training (21.5%). For those who felt both parties were equally effective, community policing (25.7%) was most frequently mentioned. The chi-square test indicated no significant association between perceived party effectiveness and PDP reform focus, $\chi^2(21, N = 378) = 26.38, p = .192$.

Table 4.2.5: Perceived Political Party Effectiveness in Selected Aspects under APC and PDP Reforms

For the APC reforms, the crosstab indicated similar differences in perceptions (Table 4.2.5). Respondents who felt neither party was more effective most often cited crime reduction (26.7%) and community policing (25.0%). Those who selected PDP as more effective emphasized crime reduction (22.6%) and human rights training (21.9%). In contrast, respondents supporting APC pointed to community policing (29.9%) and crime reduction (19.6%) as areas of improvement. Among those who chose both equally, community policing (24.3%) and crime reduction (29.7%) were the most mentioned.

The chi-square test revealed a marginal association between perceived party effectiveness and the aspect of policing most improved under APC reforms, $\chi^2(21, N = 378) = 31.19, p = .071$.

Discussion of the Findings

4.6.1 Police Reforms and Democratic Policing in Nigeria: A Comparative Study of PDP and APC Governments

The study revealed that both PDP and APC prioritized community policing, crime reduction, and human rights training as central pillars of reform. This convergence reflects recognition of three enduring challenges facing Nigerian policing: the need to rebuild trust with communities, address high levels of crime, and reduce widespread human rights abuses. These three reform areas consistently ranked highest under both governments. This demonstrates continuity in reform priorities, though with differing emphasis. David, Adepoju and Akinkuotu (2024) supported this claim of bipartisan PDP-APC priorities in community policing, crime reduction and human right training. Meanwhile maintaining law and order, compliance to the rule of law, respect of human rights, crime prevention, detection and

apprehension of offenders formed the central theme of Alemika and Chukwuma, (2005) work on policing in Nigeria. This is in line with the findings of this study where crime prevention and reduction, human right and community policing are top area of reform.

Despite similarities, differences emerged in emphasis and perceived effectiveness. PDP reforms were more strongly associated with accountability and infrastructure development, suggesting a policy-driven approach. APC reforms, in contrast, were associated more with community policing, crime reduction, and operational improvements such as digitalization and technology. Respondents considered PDP reforms more effective compared to APC. Senior officers in particular overwhelmingly favoured PDP reforms, while mid-career officers (DSPs and ASPs) were more balanced, reflecting differences in engagement with reforms.

An anonymous respondent scored PDP higher on accountability and transparency than APC, reflecting perceptions that PDP engaged more with systemic reforms, whereas APC prioritized crime control (Fieldwork, 2025). While both parties invested in infrastructure, APC reforms were

more closely associated with digital tools and operational modernization, whereas PDP reforms emphasized physical infrastructure such as housing and facilities. The evidence suggests that PDP were more reformists in policy orientation, emphasizing accountability, transparency, and institutional change, while APC reforms were more operational, focusing on crime reduction, community policing, and technological improvements.

While respondents gave PDP an edge in perceived effectiveness, neither party was able to fully overcome structural barriers such as funding shortages and political interference. Both governments made progress in aligning policing with democratic norms, particularly through community policing and human rights training, but the persistence of systemic challenges limited transformative change.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The comparative analysis of police reforms undertaken by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) governments reveals significant but incomplete progress towards democratic policing within Nigeria from 2011 to 2023.

Both parties initiated comprehensive reform programs motivated by the urgent need to transform the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) from a historically centralized, militarized, and politicized institution into a professional, accountable, and community-centred law enforcement agency. However, the effectiveness and sustainability of these reforms remain mixed, constrained by enduring structural, political, and cultural obstacles. To consolidate and deepen police reforms for democratic policing in Nigeria, this study recommends that; Federal Government must undertake long-term impact evaluations of previous police reform policies and programmes to measure reform effects on officers' welfare and public trust. Federal Government must introduce and operationalize decentralized policing frameworks, including establishing state police forces with autonomous funding and administrative control. Decentralization enhances responsiveness to local contexts, fosters accountability to communities, and mitigates over-centralization risks.

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Table 4.2.4: Perceived Political Party Effectiveness and Focus of PDP and APC on Police Reforms

PE	AT	CP	CR	HRT	I	OT	PP	RA	Total
Neither (n=60)	15.0%	15.0%	18.3%	20.0%	23.3%	3.3%	0.0%	5.0%	100%
PDP (n=137)	10.9%	26.3%	17.5%	17.5%	16.1%	2.9%	4.4%	4.4%	100%
APC (n=107)	15.9%	16.8%	25.2%	21.5%	12.1%	0.9%	1.9%	5.6%	100%
Both equally (n=74)	16.2%	25.7%	16.2%	12.2%	10.8%	2.7%	2.7%	13.5%	100%
Total (N=378)	14.0%	21.7%	19.6%	18.0%	15.1%	2.4%	2.6%	6.6%	100%

Sources: Fieldwork, 2025

JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

Table 4.2.5: Perceived Political Party Effectiveness in Selected Aspects under APC and PDP Reforms

PE	CP	AT	CR	HRT	I	OT	PP	RA	Total
Neither (n=60)	25.0%	11.7%	26.7%	10.0%	11.7%	3.3%	3.3%	8.3%	100%
PDP (n=137)	23.4%	8.8%	22.6%	21.9%	16.1%	2.2%	2.9%	2.2%	100%
APC (n=107)	29.9%	11.2%	19.6%	17.8%	15.9%	0.9%	0.9%	3.7%	100%
Both equally (n=74)	24.3%	1.4%	29.7%	17.6%	6.8%	2.7%	8.1%	9.5%	100%
Total (N=378)	25.7%	8.5%	23.8%	18.0%	13.5%	2.1%	3.4%	5.0%	100%

Sources: Fieldwork, 2025