

**RECRUITMENT, PROFESSIONALISM, AND PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN
ARMY**

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of recruitment standards on professionalism and performance in the Nigerian Army. It argues that recruitment standards are not merely administrative formalities but the foundational determinant of military effectiveness. The paper traces the historical evolution of Nigerian Army recruitment from colonial-era martial races doctrines through the ethnicised quota system of 1957-1966 to contemporary practices, drawing on Omeni and Alli's (2026) analysis of how non-meritocratic recruitment weakened institutional corporateness and contributed to political instability. The paper analyses how compromised recruitment standards manifest in professional conduct, including documented cases of military misconduct against civilians, erosion of ethical reasoning, and damage to civil-military relations. The paper concludes that sustainable military effectiveness requires uncompromising commitment to recruitment standards, depoliticisation of the selection process, strengthened vetting, improved welfare and equipment, and sustained engagement to address regional disparities and negative perceptions.

Keywords: Recruitment standards, professionalism, performance, Nigerian Army, military effectiveness, counter-insurgency.

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Introduction

Any military organization is only as strong as the men and women who serve in it. This is to say, the process of recruitment serves as the gateway, the first and most critical filter that determines who gets the chance to wear the uniform. Perhaps this is why in July 2025, a former Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Faruk Yahaya (rtd), stood before an audience at the Nigerian Defence Academy in Kaduna and issued a stark warning. He stated that for the Nigerian Army to remain effective, its recruitment and selection processes must be thorough and uncompromising, adding pointedly that there is no room for weakness or mediocrity (Makama, 2025).

Conversely, recruitment standards are the set of benchmarks; educational qualifications, physical fitness levels, medical health, and psychological stability, that candidates must meet to be considered for enlistment. These standards are supposed to be the non-negotiable baseline for entry. The Nigerian Army is currently engaged in a multi-dimensional struggle against complex security threats, including terrorism, banditry, and kidnapping for ransom. The operational demands of these conflicts are immense. Succinct to state that despite all of this, and especially the bravery of individual soldiers, there is a persistent perception that the Army's overall effectiveness is sometimes below expectation (Omisore and Okofu, 2014; Uzor & Nwogwugwu, 2016). While equipment, funding, and strategy are often discussed, the human element is sometimes overlooked (Uzor & Nwogwugwu, 2016).

It is known that there exists a symbiotic relationship between these entry requirements and a soldier's later conduct in and out of the battlefield, in whatever shape and form (Makama, 2025). Clearly, a recruit who cannot meet basic physical standards

may fail to endure the rigours of patrol. And a recruit with marginal literacy may struggle to operate the sophisticated communication and weapons systems that define modern warfare. Perhaps most importantly, a recruit who is psychologically unstable may pose a danger to themselves, their unit, and the very civilians they are sworn to protect. As Yahaya argued, effective training helps solidify the soldier-first concept, and training curricula must be updated to reflect modern threats including terrorism, asymmetric warfare, and ideological extremism (Makama, 2025). In essence, the raw material that enters the Depot in Zaria or the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) in Kaduna largely determines the quality of the finished product that is deployed to the field (Omeni and Alli, 2026). It is against this background that this paper argues that recruitment standards are the bedrock of military professionalism and the primary determinant of operational performance.

Literature Review

The Concept of Recruitment

Recruitment is one of the most important functions of any organisation. It is the process through which organisations find and attract people to fill vacant positions. According to Butler and colleagues, as cited in Omisore and Okofu (2014), recruitment covers all the organisational practices and decisions that affect how many people are willing to apply for jobs and how many are willing to accept employment when offered. This definition is helpful because it shows that recruitment is not just about advertising jobs. It includes everything an organisation does to influence the number and type of people who want to work for it. Omisore and Okofu (2014) explain that recruitment works together with selection and placement to bring people into positions that have been identified through

job analysis. Job analysis is the process of studying a job to understand what duties it involves and what qualities a person needs to do it well. When organisations understand their jobs properly, they can recruit people who are suitable for those jobs.

Kamran and colleagues (2015) describe recruitment as the process of getting the people needed for an organisation to continue operating. It involves finding a list of potential employees to fill vacant positions. They make an important distinction between recruitment and selection. Recruitment is about finding candidates, while selection is about choosing the right ones from among those candidates. Selection consists of the processes involved in picking qualified and competent applicants who are suitable for the job.

Divyalakshmi and colleagues (2017) highlight why proper recruitment matters. They argue that good recruitment helps line managers work more effectively in achieving the main goals of the organisation. Every human resource manager is expected to pay proper attention to recruitment and selection activities because these activities determine the quality of people who join the organisation.

In simple terms, recruitment is about identifying, screening, shortlisting and hiring potential workers to fill empty positions in an organisation. It is a core part of Human Resource Management. The goal is to choose the right person for the right position at the right time. Recruitment also means attracting, selecting and appointing candidates to meet the organisation's need for workers.

However, military recruitment has special features that make it different from civilian recruitment. The stakes are higher because soldiers may be called upon to risk their lives. The qualities required are more demanding because military service requires physical

fitness, psychological stability, and the ability to function under extreme stress. And the consequences of poor recruitment are more severe because inadequate soldiers can fail in combat, endanger their comrades, and undermine national security.

The Concept of Military Professionalism

Military professionalism has been extensively studied by scholars of civil-military relations and military sociology. Understanding what professionalism means is essential for analysing how recruitment affects it. For instance, Omeni and Alli (2026) identify corporateness as the central element of military professionalism. Corporateness means the sense of shared identity, values, and mutual commitment that binds soldiers together as a distinct professional community. When soldiers share a strong sense of corporateness, they trust each other, they are willing to sacrifice for each other, and they place the interests of the military institution above personal or sectional interests. When corporateness weakens, soldiers become fragmented, trust erodes, and the institution becomes vulnerable to factionalism and political interference.

Samuel Huntington, a pioneering scholar of civil-military relations, argued that military professionalism has three main characteristics. First is expertise: the specialised knowledge and skill required to manage violence. Second is responsibility: the obligation to use that expertise in service of society, not for personal gain. Third is corporateness: the sense of collective identity that distinguishes military professionals from civilians.

Later scholars have built on Huntington's framework. They have emphasised that professionalism is not just about technical competence. It also includes ethical conduct, respect for human rights, and adherence to the

laws of war. A professional soldier is not just someone who can fight effectively. They are someone who fights within the bounds of law and ethics, who respects civilians, and who maintains discipline even under extreme stress.

Wolfendale (2007) examines how moral character develops in military personnel. She argues that genuine virtue requires more than just natural disposition. It requires understanding why certain behaviours are right and others wrong. Soldiers must be able to deliberate about the ends of the military profession and exercise wisdom in applying military virtues. This capacity for ethical reasoning cannot be taken for granted. It must be cultivated through education and training. But it also depends on the raw material that recruits bring with them. Soldiers who lack the cognitive capacity to understand ethical reasoning may never develop into truly professional soldiers, no matter how good their training.

The Concept of Military Performance

Military performance is harder to define especially in terms of measurements than professionalism. Perhaps this explains why scholars have approached it from different angles. Alli (2025) looks at it from the military performance in counter-insurgency operations. He argues that the Army's effectiveness has declined significantly from earlier decades. During the 1990s, Nigerian infantry battalions demonstrated their combat capability in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. Today, most regular units lack the offensive training, equipment, and mindset needed for combat. They are relegated to static defensive roles while overworked Special Forces units conduct offensive operations.

Alli traces this decline to multiple factors, including inadequate training, poor

equipment, and the absence of clear rotation policies that allow troops to rest and recover. But his analysis also implies a recruitment dimension. Soldiers who lack the foundation to become effective infantrymen cannot be transformed through training alone. The erosion of regular infantry capability reflects, in part, the erosion of recruitment standards.

The Institute for Security Studies (2025) examined intelligence and technological deficiencies in Nigerian security operations. Their report documented that limited use of technology for planning, surveillance and reconnaissance constrains security force capacity. Security forces sometimes rely on commercial cellphone networks and WhatsApp messaging to coordinate movements, making them vulnerable to interception by insurgents. Meanwhile, some insurgent groups are using modified commercial drones and other technologies for their operations. These technological gaps have recruitment implications. Soldiers who lack the educational foundation to operate sophisticated equipment cannot take advantage of new technologies even when they become available. Investing in technology without investing in the human capacity to use it is unlikely to improve performance.

Adamu (2025, 2026) has consistently emphasised intelligence deficiencies in Nigerian counter-terrorism operations. He argues that Nigeria has failed to prevent insurgents from generating funding, acquiring weapons, recruiting new members, and moving freely. These failures reflect weaknesses in human intelligence gathering, which in turn reflect the quality of personnel in intelligence roles. Soldiers who lack community engagement skills and cultural intelligence cannot effectively gather information from local populations.

The Evolving Landscape of Nigerian Army Recruitment

The foundation of the Nigerian Army was laid during British colonial rule, and its recruitment patterns reflected the racial ideologies of the era. The British colonial administration, seeking to maintain control over the vast territory of Nigeria, deliberately recruited soldiers from regions they categorised as containing warrior peoples (Omeni & Alli, 2026). This concept, known as the martial races doctrine, held that certain ethnic groups possessed inherent military qualities that made them more suitable for soldiering.

The colonial army's roots can be traced to 1863, when Lieutenant John Hawley Glover established a constabulary force in the North composed primarily of freed Hausa slaves (Nnanna, 2025). This northern orientation was not accidental. As Nnanna (2025) explains, the force continued to attract largely illiterate Northern youth who typically communicated in Hausa. That is why even today, the two most widely spoken languages in the Nigerian Army barracks are English and Hausa, with the barrack culture being predominantly Northern.

The British justified this recruitment pattern through racial ideology. According to historical analysis, the colonial government treated ethnic and social groups unequally, supporting absolutist-feudal systems, and until 1936 even slave-owning systems in the North, while creating conditions in the South that were less alien to European sensibilities (Ryder, n.d., para. 12). The northern regions were deliberately kept isolated from Western education and modernising influences, while the South experienced greater exposure to missionary schools and colonial administration.

This development split created a paradoxical situation. As Omeni and Alli (2026)

document, northerners were preferred for infantry roles based on martial stereotypes, but they had significantly less access to Western education. Table 3.1, adapted from their research, illustrates the disparity in educational qualifications between northern and southern candidates during the late colonial period.

Table 3.1: Regular Recruitment Enlistment Figures by Region (1958-1965)

Year	North (Sat)	North (Passed)	Rest of Nigeria (Sat)	Rest of Nigeria (Passed)
1958	407	293	3,200	2,268
1959	596	347	3,750	2,328
1960	572	345	3,968	2,538
1961	590	422	4,134	2,768
1962	723	420	5,496	3,200
1963	1,003	493	8,414	3,960
1964	1,437	850	9,919	6,455
1965	1,709	930	11,462	7,389

Source: Adapted from Omeni and Alli (2026, Table 2)

The table reveals that while northern participation increased over time, the pool of eligible candidates from the South consistently dwarfed that of the North, reflecting the educational disparities created by colonial policy. This imbalance would become a source of tension as Nigeria approached independence.

The Independence Era and the Introduction of the Quota System

A watershed moment in Nigerian Army recruitment occurred in 1958, when the army no longer recruited men exclusively from the north, as before, but from all over the country (Ryder, n.d., para. 9). This policy change, coming just two years before independence, opened military service to southern Nigerians who had been excluded for decades.

The consequences were immediate and far-reaching. As Ryder (n.d.) notes, officer

candidates from the south predominantly flocked to the numerous positions of the outgoing British officers, as they were generally better trained (para. 9). Southern candidates, benefiting from greater access to colonial education, were better positioned to meet the educational requirements for officer commissions. This created a dangerous friction: This clashed with the older officers, who had been taught that their people (Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri) belonged to the 'warrior peoples' and that representatives of the southern ethnic groups Yoruba and Igbo were not entitled to the new positions (Ryder, n.d., para. 9). Historical analysis suggests this conflict was to trigger the Biafra War in 1966 (Ryder, n.d.).

In response to these tensions and the perceived overrepresentation of southerners in the officer corps, the Nigerian government introduced a regionally based Quota System for military recruitment between 1957 and 1966 (Omeni & Alli, 2026). This policy, framed as inclusive and designed to ensure that all regions were represented in the armed forces, had profound and unintended consequences.

Omeni and Alli (2026) offer a rigorous analysis of this transformation. Drawing on archival records, parliamentary debates, and training college records, they demonstrate how the quota system reshaped officer cohorts, lowered professional thresholds, and fostered resentment among rival groups (Omeni & Alli, 2026, Abstract). The policy, they argue, weakened corporateness and legitimized factional politics within the military (Omeni & Alli, 2026, Abstract).

Table 3.2 illustrates the shifting ethnic composition of officer intakes before and after the quota system's implementation.

Table 3.2: Officer Intake by Region (Pre-Independence, Pre-Quota, and Post-Quota Periods)

Period	North	West and Midwest	East and Ika-Ibo	South Cameroons
Pre-Independence	8 (14%)	10 (17%)	37 (65%)	2 (3%)
Pre-Quota	21 (32%)	12 (18%)	29 (45%)	3 (5%)
Post-Quota	104 (48%)	46 (21%)	66 (31%)	Nil
Cumulative	133 (39%)	68 (28%)	132 (31%)	5 (2%)

Source: Adapted from Omeni and Alli (2026, Table 3)

The data reveals a dramatic shift. Eastern officers, predominantly Igbo, who constituted 65% of officer intakes in the pre-independence period, saw their share reduced to 31% in the post-quota era. Northern representation, meanwhile, grew from 14% to 48% of intakes. As Omeni and Alli (2026) explain, a policy framed as inclusive instead weakened corporateness and legitimized factional politics within the military.

The consequences of this ethnicisation were devastating. By 1966, the officer corps was divided in identity, unequal in competence, and prone to intervention (Omeni & Alli, 2026, Abstract). When a group of predominantly Igbo officers executed a coup in January 1966, their ethnic profile raised suspicions that one group aimed to dominate both the Army and Government (Omeni & Alli, 2026, p. 4). The subsequent counter-coup, which targeted Igbo officers, decimated the Army's leadership and set the stage for civil war.

The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) left an indelible mark on the Army and its recruitment practices. The experience of war, in which soldiers from all regions fought on both sides, paradoxically created conditions for a more integrated military in the post-war period.

According to Global Security (2014), during the 1970s, most officers and men received higher pay than they could hope to earn in civilian jobs. Most had at least a rudimentary national consciousness, having fought for 'One Nigeria,' and many officers were personally loyal to Gowon, who ruled until 1975. Moreover, army units were tribally mixed and few officers would be able quickly to assemble and utilize for coup purposes a large contingent of fellow tribesmen (Global Security, 2014, para. 4).

The post-war era also saw the formalisation of the federal character principle in military recruitment. As Mongabay (n.d.) notes, Military recruitment was highly selective and subject to a constitutional mandate that the composition of both the officer corps and other ranks should reflect Nigeria's 'federal character' (para. 4). This principle, enshrined in the 1979 Constitution and subsequent iterations, required that appointments to public institutions reflect the diverse character of the Nigerian federation.

The selectivity of recruitment during this period was notable. Mongabay (n.d.) reports that more than 20,000 applicants sought 1,760 places in the army during one recruitment period, underscoring the competitiveness of military service (para. 4). The minimum educational qualification was a West African School Certificate, ensuring a baseline of literacy and cognitive ability.

However, despite the federal character mandate, regional imbalances persisted. Mongabay (n.d.) observes that Northerners were overrepresented, however, especially in

the infantry, in which soldiers from the states of Sokoto, Niger, Kaduna, Kano, and Borno predominated. In 1985 it was estimated that 70 percent of senior officers came from the northern or middle belt region, whereas the administrative, technical, and logistic formations were dominated by southerners (para. 4).

The Impact of Recruitment Standards on Professionalism

At the passing out parade for 3,439 new recruits of the 89 Regular Intake in December 2025, the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Waidi Shaibu, directly addressed the new soldiers, urging them to maintain discipline, integrity, and respect for human rights in all operations, reminding them that these values are the cornerstone of professional soldiering (Umeh-Saboye, 2025). This public charge underscores the institution's understanding that discipline is not automatically present but must be a quality identified and cultivated from the very point of entry.

A stark example of what happens when unsuitable individuals penetrate the system was seen in October 2025 when the Defence Headquarters announced the arrest of sixteen officers for indiscipline and breach of service regulations (Eyiango, 2025). The investigation revealed that their grievances, which led to conduct incompatible with the standards of military service, stemmed from perceived career stagnation caused by repeated failure in promotion examinations (Olatunji, 2025). This incident directly connects the quality of intake to later professional failure. It suggests that individuals who lack the intellectual or educational foundation to pass requisite exams may become disgruntled, posing a risk to order and discipline. As former Chief of Army Staff Lt.-Gen. Faruk Yahaya (rtd)

argued, the system must be thorough and uncompromising at the recruitment stage to avoid such outcomes, stressing the need to be courageous and firm in weeding out bad eggs at every stage (Bello, 2025; Makama, 2025).

The case of Private Ruth Ogunleye provides another complex and cautionary tale about the importance of robust psychological screening and its impact on a soldier's career and well-being. In January 2024, Ogunleye publicly accused a senior officer of sexual harassment and mistreatment, alleging that her life had been made unbearable after she rejected his advances (BBC News Pidgin, 2024). The Army launched an investigation, and the Director of Army Public Relations, Major General Onyema Nwachukwu, later stated that the accused officer was cleared of wrongdoing (BBC News, 2024). Crucially, the Army's defence hinged on Ogunleye's mental state. Nwachukwu explained that medical evaluations, including at the National Hospital in Abuja, confirmed she was suffering from a condition that rendered her medically vulnerable, leading to her discharge on medical grounds with a 50 per cent disability pension (BBC News, 2024).

Regardless of where the truth lies in the allegations, the case highlights a critical point: an individual with undiagnosed or unmanaged psychological vulnerabilities was recruited, trained, and served for over five years before a major crisis erupted. The Army's own explanation framed her allegations as a consequence of her medically vulnerable condition. This incident powerfully illustrates why comprehensive psychological screening at the point of entry is so vital. If such screening had identified this vulnerability earlier, a tragic and public breakdown might have been prevented. It underscores that the military must proactively identify those who possess high levels of resilience and emotional regulation to

function effectively and avoid such damaging incidents.

In one case, soldiers from the 174 Battalion Barracks in Ogiyo beat a civilian, George Oyekan, to death following a dispute with his landlady (Salau, 2023). In another, a fruit seller in Gusau was shot by a soldier after demanding payment for goods (Salau, 2023). The report also detailed how military personnel often contravene traffic laws with impunity, assaulting officials from the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) who attempt to enforce order (Salau, 2023). These acts of violence and lawlessness are the actions of soldiers who do not understand that their duty is to protect citizens, not to terrorise them. As Lt.-Gen. Yahaya noted, the military must be a force capable of small-unit warfighting with speed, precision and initiative, but this cannot happen if soldiers lack the ethical grounding to discern friend from foe and to respect the rights of the civilians they are meant to secure (Makama, 2025). The failure to select for moral integrity at the recruitment stage creates soldiers who view the uniform as a license to dominate rather than a symbol of service.

The Ogunleye case also touches upon the issue of personal stability and its intersection with professional reliability. While the Army ultimately framed her discharge as a medical matter, the initial allegations pointed to a breakdown in relationships and command climate. The Army's investigation aimed to determine if senior officers had made her life unbearable or if her medically vulnerable condition had skewed her perception (BBC News Pidgin, 2024). This complex case shows that an individual's psychological state is inseparable from their professional performance. An unstable soldier is a risk not only to themselves but also to unit cohesion and discipline. Furthermore, the fact that

Ogunleye was paid her terminal benefits and a 50 per cent disability pension acknowledges that the institution had a responsibility to her, a responsibility that ideally should have been identified earlier through more rigorous initial screening (BBC News, 2024). The Army's leadership has recognised this, with Lt.-Gen. Shaibu reminding new recruits that their oath binds them to uphold both civil and military laws, implicitly acknowledging a history where this has not always been the case (ANTHONY, 2025).

The Impact of Recruitment Standards on Operational Performance

The connection between the quality of personnel entering the Nigerian Army and their effectiveness on the battlefield is not merely theoretical. It is a relationship that manifests in the Army's ability to hold territory, adapt to evolving insurgent tactics, and protect civilians. Perhaps the most telling indicator of how recruitment quality affects performance is the Nigerian Army's institutional reliance on designated Special Forces units to conduct offensive operations. According to retired Major General Fatai Alli (2025), this practice reflects a dangerous misconception about the capabilities of regular infantry battalions. Rather than empowering conventional units, the Army has relegated them to policing roles involving confidence patrols, operating checkpoints, or remaining largely confined to bases. Meanwhile, the Special Forces have been overused but under-supported, becoming fatigued, demoralised, and increasingly ineffective over time (Alli, 2025).

Alli (2025) argues that a dangerous myth has been created that only elite units can fight insurgents. In the past, operations now regarded as special were routinely conducted by Nigeria's regular infantry battalions. During the 1990s, these units demonstrated

their combat capability in diverse theatres such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. Today, that level of combat effectiveness has significantly declined. The majority of regular units lack the offensive training, equipment, and mindset needed for combat (Alli, 2025). This erosion of baseline combat capability is fundamentally a recruitment issue. Soldiers who lack the educational foundation to understand small-unit tactics, the cognitive capacity to adapt to evolving threats, and the psychological resilience to function under fire cannot be transformed into effective infantrymen through any amount of training. When the raw material entering the Army is inadequate, the result is a force that cannot perform its core function: closing with and destroying the enemy.

Alli (2025) describes a broken cycle of reaction and complacency that characterises Nigerian military operations. When insurgents strike, the military rushes in with hastily assembled units labelled special forces. Though marginally better trained, these units fall short of true special forces standards. They might achieve temporary successes, but the pattern soon repeats. Once relative calm is restored, the military reverts to passive policing. Insurgents regroup. Attacks resume (Alli, 2025).

This pattern reveals that the problem is not equipment, though that matters, but the human element. As Alli (2025) notes, troops conduct patrols in unserviceable vehicles, suffer from fatigue, and endure harsh, isolated conditions with no rotation or relief in sight. The absence of clear rest and rotation protocols contributes directly to low morale and poor effectiveness. These are soldiers who, perhaps lacking the cognitive flexibility or resilience that better screening might have identified, become demoralised and ineffective when conditions deteriorate.

Again, the operational environment in which Nigerian soldiers fight has grown increasingly complex. According to the Tactics Institute (2025), the asymmetric warfare in the North-East has been redesigned by Boko Haram and ISWAP with the development of sophisticated tactics, mobility, and different types of propaganda. The rise of ISWAP in the use of weaponised drones, anti-aircraft guns, and armoured vehicles, many looted from military reserves, represents a significant escalation in militant capability (Tactics Institute, 2025).

These developments place new demands on soldiers. Operating against an enemy with drones and sophisticated weapons requires technical competence, situational awareness, and the ability to adapt quickly. Soldiers who lack the educational foundation to understand digital systems, interpret surveillance data, or coordinate complex responses are at a severe disadvantage. As the CSIR's behavioural science research in South Africa has demonstrated, modern warfare requires attributes including cultural and emotional intelligence, leadership, human relations and teamwork, as well as technical, technological and tactical proficiency (DefenceWeb, 2016). These are not qualities that can be instilled in six months of basic training if the recruit lacks the underlying capacity.

Lawal, Sanusi, and Musa (2025), examine Nigeria's military and political strategies in countering Boko Haram. They note that while military strategies include counterinsurgency operations, regional cooperation through the Multinational Joint Task Force, and intelligence gathering through community engagement, persistent violence and the group's resilience highlight critical shortcomings, including intelligence failures and troop morale issues (Lawal et al., 2025).

Intelligence gathering through community engagement requires soldiers with cultural intelligence, language skills, and the ability to

build trust with local populations. These are not qualities that can be assumed. They must be identified at recruitment and cultivated through training. Soldiers who lack the interpersonal skills and cognitive flexibility to engage effectively with civilians will not gather useful intelligence, leaving the Army operating blind.

The same study emphasises that strengthening intelligence capabilities, improving military logistics, and fostering community trust are crucial steps toward enhancing operational effectiveness (Lawal et al., 2025). These are all areas where the quality of personnel matters enormously. Intelligence analysis requires cognitive ability. Logistics management requires organisational skill. Community engagement requires emotional intelligence. When recruitment standards fail to identify individuals with these attributes, operational effectiveness suffers.

A study of United States Marines in tactical competition by Thompson, Ramadan, Alexander, and Galster (2023) found that morning heart rate variability identified top from bottom quartile finishers before a single competition event. By day three, cognitive psychomotor vigilance was a significant indicator of performance resilience and final group rank (Thompson et al., 2023). This research demonstrates that psychological and physiological states are not separate from performance, they are fundamental determinants of it. The implications for recruitment are clear. Soldiers who enter service with poor baseline physical fitness or undetected psychological vulnerabilities will not perform well under the cumulative stress of prolonged counter-insurgency operations. They will fatigue faster, make poorer decisions, and be more likely to break under pressure. The study's authors conclude that incorporating psychophysiological monitoring, cognitive performance testing,

and musculoskeletal evaluation could help inform selection and support needs, drive workload modulation, and provide critical metrics for evaluating operational readiness (Thompson et al., 2023). The Nigerian Army's recent induction of 6,195 soldiers from the 88 Regular Recruit Intake, of whom 255 could not complete training (Kilete Nigeria, 2025), suggests that the physical screening process may be passing candidates who subsequently fail to meet training demands. The question is how many more pass training but lack the physical and psychological resilience for sustained operational deployment.

Conclusion/Recommendations

In conclusion, it is clear that the recruitment standards are not merely administrative formalities but the very foundation upon which military professionalism and operational performance are built. One cannot build a 21st-century professional army capable of defeating sophisticated insurgent threats with recruits who do not meet the baseline requirements of the 20th century. Every compromise in standards at the point of entry ripples outward through training, through professional socialisation, through operational deployment, and ultimately through the nation's ability to defend itself and its citizens.

To this end, the path forward requires sustained commitment at every level: from political leaders who must resist the temptation to use recruitment for patronage; from military commanders who must enforce standards without fear or favour; from recruitment officers who must conduct thorough vetting despite pressure to produce numbers; and from society, which must come to see military service as a source of pride rather than a last resort.

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Politicians must be removed from the selection process entirely, or their role strictly limited to identifying candidates who must then meet unaltered professional standards.
2. Background checks must be thorough, verifying not only documents but also community standing, family history, and any potential connections to extremist networks.
3. Sensitisation efforts must continue, but they must be accompanied by concrete actions that address underlying fears. The perception that soldiers from certain regions are deliberately deployed to die must be confronted with transparent deployment data and visible examples of successful officers from those regions.
4. There should be Improved Welfare and Equipment as a Recruitment Strategy
5. Modernise Training and Highlight Career Pathways;the Army should aggressively communicate the career opportunities that military service offers.
6. Finally, the Army must invest in the intelligence and technological capabilities that modern warfare demands.

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