



## PUBLIC MISTRUST OF THE POLICE IN NIGERIA

**FRY, Lincoln J.**

*State Attorney's Office,  
Florida 15<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit (retired)  
974 General Patton Terrace  
Port St Lucie, Florida 34953.  
772-871-1709  
[lincolnfry@bellsouth.net](mailto:lincolnfry@bellsouth.net)*

### ABSTRACT

*Based on a sample of 2,324 respondents from Nigeria collected by Afrobarometer in 2008, this paper examines the issue of public trust in the police. The findings show that about 46 percent of Nigerian respondents listed their level of trust in the police as "not at all". Responses were broken down by demographic factors, responses to single items, and constructed scales. Logistical regression was used to identify the factors that predict public trust in the Nigerian police. In order, these factors were trust in elected officials, perceived corruption, religion and age. Some factors that were expected to be significant were not, including fear of crime, prior victimization and poverty. The study suggests the need to mine the Afrobarometer files in depth in order to reveal the policy implications of this data source for sub-Saharan Africa as well as each of the countries that participate in these ongoing surveys.*

**Keywords:** *Nigerian Police, Trust police, Trust elected officials, and Perceived corruption.*

### INTRODUCTION

Effective social control depends upon the voluntary compliance and cooperation of citizens who perceive the police and the courts as having legitimacy; trust is a core value in determining legitimacy. Public trust is important to the police force particularly in democratic societies where the police have to earn legitimacy for their actions from citizens; effective police work requires satisfactory and confidential relationships with citizens. The international literature suggests that there is large variation in the degree of trust of the police within and between societies, including in the United States (Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sharp & Johnson, 2009), the United Kingdom (Bradford & Jackson, 2009; Bradford et al, 2008), and other European countries (Kaarianen, 2007).

Africa has begun to receive some attention in that context, partly because of surveys conducted within sub-Saharan countries and publications available through what is known as the Afrobarometer Project. Trust in societal institutions has been a major topic in those studies, and trust in the police has tended to be treated as a major factor in the development of corruption (Lavalley, Razafindrakoto & Roubaud, 2008). One constant in the studies produced by Afrobarometer, and others, has been the low trust ratings the police in Nigeria have received from citizens, especially when compared to other African countries (Armah-Attoh, Gyimah-Boadi & Chikwanha, 2007). There have been numerous Afrobarometer-based country level studies conducted about other topics, like corruption, yet as far as we can determine, except for South Africa (Pruitt, 2010), no Afrobarometer based study seems to have examined trust in the police at the individual African country level. As a result, the purpose here will be to use data collected from 2,324 respondents in Nigeria by Afrobarometer in 2008 to examine the question of public mistrust of the police and to identify the factors that predict trust in the police in Nigeria. There exists a moderate volume of literature devoted to public trust in the police in Africa. The section below will briefly review that research, especially those generated about Africa by the Afrobarometer Project; then the review will turn specifically to the police in Nigeria. The purpose is twofold; 1) to provide some assessment of the degree of public mistrust of the police found in studies of African



countries; and 2) to identify the factors identified at the country level that appear to be predictive of public mistrust in the police in Africa countries.

### **Literature Review**

At the continent level, a large volume of research conducted in Africa has concentrated on corruption, and the way corruption affects trust in public institutions has been a central theme. Attila (2008) utilized data collected by Afrobarometer from 1999 through 2001 from 21,531 respondents in 12 African countries to identify perceptions of corruption. The study found that about 15 percent of all respondents responded that "almost all" of their country's civil servants were corrupt as were 12.6 percent of their elected leaders. Nigeria was identified as one of the most corrupt countries, with 46.2 percent of all respondents choosing "almost all" regarding their assessment of the extent of corruption among officials. Nigeria was also identified as one of the most efficient countries when it came to people considering public action having some effect on corruption, 64 percent of the respondents endorsed that position. Individual characteristics identified as related to perceptions of corruption were age, gender, employment status (connection with public administration) and place of residence, rural versus urban.

Armah-Attoh, Gyimah-Boadi & Chikwanha (2007) looked at the trust-corruption nexus and concluded that corruption is perhaps the major obstacle to building popular trust in state institutions in Africa. Their findings also supported what can be seen as alternative hypothesis, namely that mistrust in state institutions raises popular suspicions that public officials are corrupt. Utilizing data collected at different time periods, they showed that the police are seen as the most corrupt in the 12 countries included in their study and across time; eleven percent of all respondents reported paying a bribe to avoid trouble with the police. Eighty-eight percent of urban residents compared to 78 percent of rural residents and 83 percent of males compared to 79 percent of females perceived "some/most/all" of the police to be corrupt.

Lavallee, Razafindrakoto & Roubaud's (2008) Afrobarometer paper is of importance here in that they reported on mistrust of the police as one dimension of their work on corruption, and presented some interesting findings because they highlighted Nigeria. The study utilized two different waves of interviews conducted in 18 different countries and found that 76 percent of Nigerian respondents believed that most or all of the police were involved in corruption. Nigeria also had the highest percentage of respondents who had paid a bribe in the last year of the study??!, 46 percent, and the highest percentage of respondents who expressed no trust at all in political institutions. Regarding the availability of public services, an interesting finding was that the surveys revealed that 64 percent of all Nigerian respondents lived in an area without a police station.

A major theme in the literature devoted to the Nigerian police is the need to take an historical perspective regarding the way police services have developed in Nigeria over time. Ajayi & Aderinto (2008) present the history of the Nigerian Police as documented in the literature, building on the work of researchers like (Tamuno, 1970; Alemika, 1993; Saleh-Hanna, 2008). Elsewhere, Onyeozili (2005) argued that colonialism implemented a new, but alien, militarized policing geared to the ends of political oppression and economic exploitation without regard to the needs of the colonized. Thus colonialism distorted the traditional institutions and values which had from time immemorial sustained harmonious relationships, peace and security of pre-colonial African communities. Since public safety and enforcement of legitimate laws are the chief responsibilities of the Nigerian civil police force, the purpose of studies that take an historical perspective is to show the linkage between colonial policing and what is currently described as the total collapse of the system of law enforcement in Nigeria.

The critiques of the Nigerian police that appear in the literature are critical, with savage and/or brutal perhaps more appropriate descriptions. Like the literature devoted to the continent of Africa reviewed above, studies conducted in Nigeria have tended to look at trust



in the police as it relates to corruption. Studies have ranged in scope from broad societal critiques (Adebayo & Ojo, 2009; Omotola, 2007) to studies which are restricted to specific geographical locations, like Lagos. Omotola is an example of the former and took the broad view of the place or role of the Nigerian police, stressing that they are central to "sustainable democracy" in Nigeria. Rather than finding that the police have been an instrument for sustaining democratic values, the police have been tragically serving to undermine democracy in Nigeria. The Gbadamosi and Bello's (2009) paper is an example of the latter, in that they surveyed 1,833 residents of Lagos in an attempt to establish how attitudes toward corruption relate to other ethical issues, like Islamic work ethics, money ethics and the perception of corruption. The results showed no significant gender differences. Christians rated the incidence of corruption higher than Muslims, and older and more educated respondents rated the incidence of corruption higher.

Still others attempt to address some specific dimension of the Nigerian police culture as it relates to corruption (Aremu, Pakes & Johnston, 2009; Idialu & Oghuma, 2007). Aremu, Pakes and Johnston looked at the efficacy for police counseling, specifically self-efficacy as a counseling strategy, as a way to address police attitudes toward corruption. Another paper called for educating accountants in order for them to be able to address corruption in developing societies, with Nigeria the prime example (Idialu & Oghuma, 2007).

The previously cited Lavalley, Razafindrakoto & Roubaud (2008) Afrobarometer paper is of importance here. Besides highlighting Nigeria, the Lavalley, Razafindrakoto & Roubaud paper does provide a rationale for this paper, in that they call for more detailed and expanded studies, pointing to the need to look at country level differences, especially what they refer to as national particularities. They note that their approach shows general trends but stress that the countries in their sample are quite different, and there is the need to take proper account of national environments. With that in mind, the present study will now describe the Nigerian context of this paper in more detail.

### **Method**

This paper builds on the suggestions that there is the need to look at country level differences in the factors which impact citizen level of trust in public institutions. Focusing on the police, Nigeria was chosen as the target country for this study because of the literature cited above, especially because of the negative way citizens critique police in that country.

The Data Source, Afrobarometer, is a collaborative research effort produced by social scientists from 20 African countries. The Project's objectives are as follows; 1) to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in sub-Saharan Africa; 2) to strengthen institutional capacity for survey research in Africa; and 3) to broadly disseminate and apply survey results. Begun in 1999, five rounds of the survey have been completed; Nigeria was included in all five waves. The last wave currently available was conducted in 2008 and that survey provides the basis for this study.

**The Survey: what kind of survey?** Interviews were completed with 2,324 citizens 18 years of age or older. These were face-to-face interviews and were conducted in five different languages. The sampling frame included all of Nigeria's provinces, and the final sample supports estimates to the national population of all adults in Nigeria that is accurate to within a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points at a confidence level of 95 percent.

**Sample Characteristics:** The characteristics of the study's sample are presented in Table 1.



Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Nigerian Sample (N=2,324)

	N	(%)
<b>Age</b>		
18 through 24	729	31.5
25 thru 34	876	37.8
35 thru 59	640	27.6
60 and over	71	3.1
Missing (1) Don't know (7)	8	
<b>Gender</b>		
male	1,165	50.1
female	1,159	49.9
<b>Education</b>		
Less than high school	1,021	44.0
Completed secondary/high school or more	1,298	56.0
Don't know	5	
<b>Employment</b>		
Unemployed	1,132	49.2
Employed part time/full time	1,167	50.8
Missing	25	
<b>Race</b>		
Black African	2,324	100.0
<b>Religion</b>		
Muslim	929	41.6
Christian	1,306	58.4
Missing/all others	89	
<b>Residence</b>		
Urban	1,145	49.3
Rural	1,179	50.7

Table 1 reveals that almost 70 percent of the sample were under 35 years of age, and only about 3 percent were 60 years of age and older. The gender breakdown was almost fifty-fifty. Forty-four percent of the sample had completed less than a high school education, with 56 percent completing high school and more. About half of the sample was unemployed and the remainder was either employed part time or full time. There was no variation by race, in that 100 percent of the respondents were listed as Black Africans. Muslims accounted for 41.6 percent of the respondents and Christians, 58.4 percent. The split between urban and rural residents was almost fifty-fifty, with slightly more rural residents in the sample.

## Measures

### The Dependent Variable:

*Trust of the Police:* In this study respondents were provided with a list of public officials, public offices, national bodies, and various levels of government as well as specific public institutions, including the police. Fixed responses regarding the level of trust were provided and coded as follows; 0) none at all; 1) a little bit; 2) somewhat; 3) a lot. The results from the 2008 and the 2005 surveys are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Trust in the police in Nigeria in 2005 (N=2363) in 2008 (N=2,324)

z	Year			
	2005		2008	
	N	%	N	%
Not at all	1,423	60.9	1,033	45.8
Just a little	544	23.3	658	29.2
Somewhat	288	12.3	393	17.4
A lot	80	3.4	170	7

\* Don't know/haven't heard enough.

Table 2 shows that the Nigerian police received much better trust marks from Nigerian respondents in 2008 as compared to 2005. "Not at all" responses were reduced from 60.2 percent to 45.8 percent. All of the 2008 responses improved in every category, while the "a lot" of trust response remained low, 3.4 percent in 2005 compared to 7.5 percent in 2008. This paper does utilize the same measure of trust in the police as the Sharp and Johnson (2009) paper and will follow the same data classification procedure in terms of the mistrust of police measure. This study creates a dichotomous dependent variable which places the "not at all" response in one category, coded as 0, and all other responses in the other category, "just a little", "somewhat" and "a lot" are coded as 1. This procedure will provide the basis for the logistical regression approach described below.

**Independent Variables:** Besides the control variables listed in Table 1, the survey included a number of single item questions as well as series of questions which lent themselves to scale construction. These included responses provided by the interviewers, and verified by their supervisors, like was there a police station in the study area and whether there was a visible police presence in the survey area. Three questions dealt with fear of crime and victimization, asking over the past year whether the respondent or anyone in their family feared crime in their own home, over the past year had anything been stolen from your home? If yes, how often? Over the last year, have you or anyone in your family ever been physically attacked?

A series of scales were constructed through the use of factor scaling. Scores were calculated and assigned to each respondent. Scales included the respondent's level of trust in their interpersonal relationships, their trust in elected officials, their perceived assessments of the level of corruption in the society, their trust of national commissions (the national commission items were specifically designed for and only included in the Nigerian survey), and finally, the lived poverty indicator Afrobarometer developed by (Bratton, Mattes & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005). The items included in each scale are listed in the Appendix along with their means, standard deviations and their Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

## Results

The first step in the analysis was the cross-tabulation of mistrust of the police by the social and demographic variables included in Table 1. These results appear in Table 3.

**Table 3 Cross-tabulation of Demographic Variables by Police Trust/Mistrust**

Variable	None at all		Just a little, somewhat, a lot		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender						
Males	599	52.8	536	47.2	1,135	100.0
Females	622	55.6	497	44.4	1,119	100.0
					Chi-squared = 1.79	p = .18
Education						
Less than high school	384	39.1	599	60.1	983	100.0
High school and more	638	51.0	612	49.0	1,250	100.0
					Chi-squared = 31.80	p = .000
Religion						
Muslim	321	35.3	588	64.7	909	100.0
Christian	690	52.8	616	47.2	1,306	100.0
					Chi-square = 66.03	p = .000
Employment						
Unemployed	534	46.8	606	53.2	1,140	100.0
Work part or full time	493	45.1	599	54.9	1,092	100.0
					Chi-squared = .65	p = .42
Residence						
Urban	554	49.1	574	50.9	1,128	100.0
Rural	479	42.5	647	57.5	1,196	100.0
					Chi squared = 9.815	P = 0.002

Table 3 revealed significant relationships between mistrust of the police and education, religion and residence, rural versus urban. Table 3 shows that when education was broken down by those with less than a high school education compared to those with high school or more, the more educated respondents showed more mistrust of the police. Muslims revealed more trust of the police than did Christians, and rural as opposed to urban residents also demonstrated more mistrust of the police. Gender and employment status breakdowns did not produce any significant results.

The next step was to cross-tabulate the police visibility, fear of crime, victimization and the payment of bribes measures by the mistrust of the police measure. These results are displayed in Table 4.

*Table 4 . Cross-tabulation of Police Visibility, Fear of Crime, Victimization and Payment of Bribes by Trust/Mistrust of Police.*



Variable	None at all		Just a little, somewhat, a lot		Total
Police station in area					
Yes	512	47.2	572	52.8	1,084
No	500	43.9	640	56.1	1,140
			100.0		
			100.0		
					Chi squared = 2.549 p= .11
Police visible in area					
yes	543	46.9	614	53.1	1,157
No	455	43.0	602	57.0	1,057
			100.0		
					Chi squared =3.368 p= .07
How often feared crime					
Never	674	47.5	744	52.5	1,418
Once or more	347	42.5	469	57.5	816
			100.0		
					Chi squared = 5.233 p= .022
Had something stolen from house					
Never	664	47.2	742	52.8	1,406
Once or more	366	43.6	474	56.4	840
			100.0		
			100.0		
					Chi squared = 2.829 p=.093
					Have you/family member been physically attacked
Never	760	45.1	925	54.9	1,685
Once or more	268	48.3	287	51.7	555
			100.0		
			100.0		
					Chi-squared = 1.705 p= .192

Table 4 revealed that the item which asked whether there was a police station in the local area did not reach significance and the item concerned with police visibility just fell short , at p=.07. The fear of crime item was statistically significant, at p=.022 while the questions about something being stolen from the home and whether someone had been physically attacked did not reach significance.

**Logistical Regression Analysis:** The final step in the analysis was to enter the variables included in Tables 1, 3 and 4, along the scale scores listed in the Appendix, into a logistical analysis procedure. The results appear in Table 5.

Table 5. Logistic Regression of Trust in the Police and the study's Independent Variables

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Z	P
Trust in Elected Officials	-.34	.030	-11.26	.000
Corruption	.07	.014	5.13	.000
Religion	.50	.138	3.64	.000
Age	.11	.006	1.97	.05
Victim property crime	.24	.148	1.63	.10
Trust National Commissions	.04	.024	1.52	.13
Employed	-.17	.129	1.34	.18
Interpersonal trust	.03	.029	1.17	.24
Poverty	-.02	.014	-1.09	.27
Urban-rural	.14	.135	1.03	.30
Victim violent crime	.13	.167	.79	.43
Gender	-.08	.128	.64	.52
Education	-.06	.138	-.42	.67
Police visible in area	.03	.131	.26	.80
Fear of Crime	-.03	.150	-.20	.84
Police station in the area	.01	.29	.04	.97
		Number of observations	1622	
		Pseudo R2=	.23	



Table 5 shows that four variables reached significance in the logistical regression analysis. In order of their power these were as follows; trust in elected officials,  $z = -11.72$ ; perceived corruption,  $z = 4.45$ ; religion,  $z = 3.32$ . Age,  $z = 1.97$ . The analysis produced a Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> of .23.

### **Discussion:**

The objectives of this paper were to determine the level of mistrust of the police provided by a national sample of Nigerians and to identify the factors which predicted that mistrust. With several exceptions, the results presented here did not provide any major surprises and were consistent with the literature devoted to trust of the police and public institutions in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria. It may seem somewhat of a surprise that the level of trust in elected officials was the strongest predictor in the logistical regression analysis, and not perceived corruption. However, both factors were highly significant.

Religion was the third strongest predictor in the logistical regression analysis and this finding extended some of the issues and questions raised by Gbadamosi & Bello (2009). They found that Muslims scored significantly lower on their attitude towards corruption scale, which meant they perceived less corruption than Christians. This in turn suggested that Muslims might have more trust in the police than Christians. The findings were consistent with that position and supported Gbadamosi & Bello's call for the need to look at Muslim-Christian differences with a larger sample which contained a sufficient number of Muslims, something this study accomplished. The final significant factor identified in the regression analysis was age, again supporting earlier findings reported in the literature review.

Perhaps what is most interesting are the factors that disappeared in the logistical regression analysis. These include the fear of crime, victimization measures, poverty, and presence and the visibility measures. One issue of concern is noted in Table 5, the number of missing cases. The number of observations in Table 5 is 1,622, out of a total sample of 2,364. This means that slightly over 30 percent, actually 31.4 percent, of the observations in the sample were lost in the logistical regression analysis. What this means for measures that just fell short, like being the victim of a property crime, still remain to be determined by future research. The discussion should be made much more robust.

There is the need to follow-up this study by looking at trust in the police in a number of countries included in the Afrobarometer surveys. The plan is to follow the direction provided in Europe by Kaariainen (2007) who studied 16 European countries to determine the factors which predict trust in the police. There are 20 countries in the 2008 Afrobarometer file and as far as can be determined, studies regarding trust in the police have only been conducted in two countries, South Africa and this study in Nigeria. Pruitt's (2009) earlier research in South Africa found that corruption, interpersonal trust and poverty were the strongest predictors of trust in the South African police.; one of those predictors, corruption, was found to be significant in this study. The purpose of the proposed larger study will be to identify the factors that can be generalized across African countries and those that are country specific regarding respondent trust in the police.

### **Conclusion**

This study looked at the factors which predicted mistrust in the Nigerian police. The findings revealed four significant factors: trust in elected officials, corruption, religion, and age were identified as those factors. The conclusion drawn from these results point to the need to expand the study of trust in the police to other African countries and to look for factors that cut across those 20 African countries as well as those that are idiosyncratic to specific African countries. The conclusion should be tied to the findings reported. The author could



do better by anchoring the findings into a logical conclusion and drawing inferences with a view to making some limitations of the study.

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