

POLICE COMPLIANCE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS DURING ARREST AND DETENTION IN ABUJA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: Despite constitutional protections under Section 35 of the 1999 Constitution and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015, human rights violations remain pervasive within the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) during arrest and detention in Abuja. Guided by Conflict Theory, this cross-sectional survey engaged 397 respondents to assess compliance, barriers, and impacts on public trust. Findings indicate inconsistent adherence to rights standards: suspects frequently experienced torture, denial of legal counsel, delayed court presentations, and arrests without warrants, while treatment of female detainees and human rights training showed comparatively better, yet uneven, compliance. Institutional and operational barriers—including corruption, inadequate funding, weak internal discipline, political interference, and outdated practices—alongside societal tolerance of police brutality, reinforced these violations. Direct exposure to arrest and higher educational attainment were associated with more negative perceptions of compliance. These abuses eroded public trust, reduced community cooperation, and fostered fear, illustrating the systemic reproduction of power inequalities central to Conflict Theory. Respondents strongly endorsed multi-dimensional reforms, prioritizing compulsory human rights training, independent oversight of detention practices, sanctions for offending officers, enhanced funding, and public awareness campaigns. The study recommends immediate interventions focusing on training and accountability mechanisms, alongside long-term reforms encompassing institutional restructuring and strengthened legal enforcement, to restore citizens' rights, confidence, and trust in policing.

Keywords: Nigerian Police Force, Human Rights Compliance, Arrest, Detention, Police Reform

INTRODUCTION

Arrest and detention are central procedures within the criminal justice system that aim to uphold justice, law, and public order. Arrest refers to the lawful deprivation of liberty to bring an individual before a competent authority, while detention involves holding a person in custody pending investigation or trial. These powers are essential for maintaining social order; however, their misuse has generated global concern over human rights violations. International frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) safeguard rights to liberty, dignity, fair trial, and protection from torture or cruel treatment. These principles are expected to guide police conduct, ensuring that the use of coercive powers aligns with legality and humanity. Persistent

breaches of these standards across jurisdictions have, however, weakened public confidence in policing institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Reports from diverse regions including the United States, Brazil, and Southeast Asia reveal recurrent misconduct in law enforcement practices, encompassing arbitrary arrests, torture, and prolonged detention without trial (United Nations Human Rights Office, 2020; Amnesty International, 2021). Comparable problems persist across Africa, where weak institutional accountability allows systemic abuse. Evidence from Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana shows that extrajudicial killings, custodial torture, and arbitrary arrests continue to undermine citizens' rights (Aning & Kwarkye, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2021). These patterns suggest that the existence of human rights laws alone does not ensure compliance unless institutional mechanisms translate these norms into measurable police behaviour.

Nigeria reflects these global and regional trends, with persistent violations rooted in structural and institutional deficiencies. Despite constitutional guarantees under Section 35 of the 1999 Constitution and safeguards in the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA, 2015), widespread abuses continue. Empirical studies show that arrests without warrants, prolonged detentions, and custodial torture remain common features of police practice (CLEEN Foundation, 2021). The gap between legal standards and actual behaviour within the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) indicates a failure to internalise human rights principles within daily operations. Reform initiatives such as the Police Act of 2020, the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission, and the Police Service Commission were designed to promote accountability, yet implementation challenges persist. Poor institutional monitoring, corruption, inadequate training, and entrenched impunity weaken their impact (Ajala & Akinyemi, 2023). Human rights training has been introduced into police curricula, but evidence suggests that these efforts have not significantly altered operational culture (Onyeozili & Ebbe, 2020). Understanding the degree to which these reforms have influenced everyday policing practices is therefore critical.

Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, provides a strategic location for such assessment. It hosts the Police Force Headquarters, the Ministry of Police Affairs, and several oversight and judicial institutions, making it the administrative heart of the country. The city symbolises the expected model of rights-based policing and governance. Despite this institutional concentration, reports continue to highlight unlawful arrests, harassment, and degrading detention conditions (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The persistence of such violations within Nigeria's political and administrative centre exposes a fundamental contradiction between reform aspirations and operational realities. Persistent abuses in Abuja raise vital questions about the actual effectiveness of reforms, the institutional obstacles to compliance, and the extent to which human rights norms guide policing behaviour. The present study addresses these concerns through an empirical investigation of compliance with human rights standards during arrest and detention in Abuja. The central inquiry focuses on assessing the extent of police compliance with human rights standards, identifying institutional and structural barriers to adherence, and evaluating the effectiveness of reform measures in promoting accountability and public trust.

Evidence from human rights monitoring organisations indicates that constitutional protections have not translated into consistent behavioural change. Reports by Human Rights Watch (2022) and

CLEEN Foundation (2021) confirm recurring cases of illegal detention, denial of legal representation, and custodial abuse. The #EndSARS protests of 2020 revealed entrenched patterns of impunity and police brutality, while the revised Police Act (2020) and the establishment of the Police Complaints Response Unit (CRU) have yet to produce significant progress in rights compliance. Most prior research on police misconduct in Nigeria has concentrated on Lagos and Port Harcourt, leaving Abuja relatively underexplored despite its national significance. Limited empirical data exist on how the NPF operationalises human rights standards during arrest and detention within the city or how these practices affect public trust in law enforcement. The absence of rigorous, Abuja-focused research constrains evidence-based policymaking and restricts the capacity of advocacy groups and reform agencies to design context-specific interventions.

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Determine the level of compliance of the Nigerian Police Force with human rights standards during arrest and detention in Abuja.
- ii. Identify the institutional, cultural, and operational barriers to compliance.
- iii. Examine the effects of rights violations on public trust and community cooperation.
- iv. Propose evidence-based strategies for improving rights protection and reform implementation in policing practice.

The research offers both theoretical and practical significance. It contributes to understanding how human rights norms can be operationalised within law enforcement systems and provides empirical data to inform policy reform and institutional accountability. Findings from the study are expected to guide national and subnational actors in strengthening human rights protection, fostering transparency, and cultivating a rights-respecting police culture within Nigeria's most politically symbolic urban centre.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Legal and Normative Frameworks

The global foundation for protecting individuals during arrest and detention rests on a network of international, regional, and national human rights instruments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) provide universal guarantees against arbitrary arrest, torture, and inhumane treatment, obligating states to ensure due process. These principles are further operationalised through the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, also known as the Nelson Mandela Rules (UN General Assembly, 2015), which specify standards for humane detention, including access to medical care and legal representation. Regionally, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) adopted the Luanda Guidelines (2014) to provide practical safeguards for arrest, police custody, and pre-trial detention within African jurisdictions.

Although these frameworks are widely ratified, studies reveal that their practical translation into police behaviour remains inconsistent. Olong (2017) argues that while Nigeria has incorporated international human rights norms into domestic law—particularly through Section 35 of the 1999

Constitution and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA, 2015)—implementation gaps persist. These gaps are attributed to weak institutional oversight, poor funding, and entrenched authoritarian policing cultures. Comparative evidence from Jordan and Indonesia supports this observation, where formal adherence to international human rights standards did not correspond with improvements in policing behaviour (Al-Adwan & Al-Najjar, 2020). The literature thus converges on the recognition that robust legal instruments alone are insufficient without mechanisms that translate abstract norms into measurable standards of police conduct. In Nigeria's context, the divergence arises over whether the root of the problem lies in structural deficiencies or attitudinal resistance among police officers. Chukwu and Amadi (2021) link persistent abuse to inadequate resources and corruption, whereas Reiman and Leighton (2017) argue that systemic impunity and coercive institutional norms perpetuate misconduct. These insights reveal that the operationalisation of human rights law is contingent on institutional culture and accountability, both of which remain weak within the Nigerian Police Force.

Empirical Studies on Police Compliance and Misconduct

Empirical research globally and across Africa underscores a persistent gap between legal safeguards and actual police practice. In Europe and North America, Smith et al. (2021) found that procedural justice—manifested through fairness, respect, and transparency—directly correlates with public trust in law enforcement. However, when police officers disregard due process, the legitimacy of policing declines. In Southeast Asia and Latin America, similar findings emerge: Almeida and Chen (2020) documented patterns of arbitrary detention and custodial torture despite extensive human rights training, underscoring the limits of formal reform. These studies converge on the idea that institutional culture, not merely law, shapes police compliance. Within Africa, police misconduct remains widespread despite human rights awareness. Research from Kenya and South Africa identifies recurring patterns of torture, prolonged detention, and extrajudicial killings (Khuhalo & Mwangi, 2022). Aning and Kwarkye (2020) observed modest improvements in Ghana following the establishment of internal oversight bureaus, yet reports of rights violations persist. These comparative findings illustrate that structural impunity and weak supervision are continental concerns.

Nigeria mirrors these patterns, with several studies documenting systematic violations of human rights during arrest and detention. Amnesty International (2020) found that over 50 percent of detainees reported torture or ill-treatment. Eke and Okoro (2023) discovered that citizens largely perceive the police as the main violators of human rights, particularly during custodial procedures. Adebayo and Bello (2022) demonstrated that victims rarely pursue justice due to low awareness of rights and fear of reprisal, while Ibrahim and Adeoye (2023) revealed that human rights training for police officers does not always translate into behavioural compliance. Synthesising these findings suggests that while awareness of rights has grown, behavioural change within law enforcement has lagged. Despite extensive scholarship, a gap persists regarding location-specific analyses. Most Nigerian studies focus on Lagos or Port Harcourt, while Abuja—the administrative and policy hub—remains underexamined. Given Abuja's concentration of federal agencies and oversight bodies, it represents a critical case for assessing whether reform frameworks translate into compliant police behaviour. This absence of localised, empirical evidence justifies the need for the

present study, which evaluates compliance levels, institutional barriers, and the implications for public trust in Abuja's policing system.

Reform Interventions and Accountability Mechanisms

Contemporary scholarship emphasises reform and accountability as prerequisites for improving human rights compliance in policing. Nigeria's recent legislative and policy reforms, such as the Police Act (2020) and the establishment of the Police Complaints Response Unit (CRU), were designed to address systemic abuse. However, evidence indicates that reform success has been limited. Moses et al. (2024) reported that weak institutional capacity and lack of political commitment undermine the implementation of these frameworks, especially in the Federal Capital Territory. Similarly, Eze and Nwafor (2023) found that despite the existence of oversight mechanisms, incidents of unlawful detention remain prevalent. International experience suggests that independent oversight enhances police accountability. The United Kingdom's Independent Office for Police Conduct and South Africa's Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID, 2022) demonstrate that autonomy, transparency, and legal enforcement mechanisms are key to ensuring compliance. Khumalo et al. (2023) confirmed that countries with independent complaint systems exhibit higher procedural justice and lower rates of custodial abuse. Yet, in Nigeria, oversight mechanisms remain politically influenced and underfunded, weakening deterrence against misconduct.

Scholars diverge on the optimal path to reform. Akinlabi and Soyombo (2021) highlight the role of social movements—such as the #EndSARS protests—in drawing attention to systemic abuse, whereas Eke and Okoro (2023) argue that enduring change requires transforming institutional culture rather than relying on external pressure. These perspectives converge on the view that accountability must extend beyond formal mechanisms to include cultural reorientation, leadership ethics, and operational monitoring. Synthesis of the reform literature indicates that Nigeria's police reforms have largely been procedural rather than behavioural. Despite the introduction of new policies, actual compliance with human rights norms remains inconsistent. The Abuja context, with its dense network of law enforcement and oversight institutions, provides a unique opportunity to evaluate how reform measures function in practice and whether they have influenced operational behaviour within the Nigerian Police Force.

Theoretical Framework: Conflict Theory

Conflict theory provides the analytical foundation for this study. Originating from the works of Karl Marx in the nineteenth century, the theory critiques capitalist societies for sustaining inequality through institutional structures that privilege dominant classes. Marx posited that institutions of law and order, including the police, are instruments through which the ruling class maintains control, suppresses dissent, and protects its economic and political dominance. The police, therefore, function not as neutral enforcers of justice but as agents that uphold existing hierarchies and preserve the status quo. Subsequent theorists such as C. Wright Mills, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Lewis Coser extended the conflict perspective beyond economic relations to encompass power struggles rooted in race, gender, politics, and institutional authority. Their contributions emphasised that conflict is inherent in all social systems because competing groups continuously vie for access to

resources, legitimacy, and influence. Within this framework, social institutions—including the criminal justice system—become arenas where inequalities are reproduced and legitimised through coercive or ideological means.

At its core, conflict theory asserts that the legal system, rather than being impartial, reflects and enforces the values of those in positions of power. Law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, often exercise discretion in ways that favour dominant groups while criminalising or marginalising weaker populations. In this regard, human rights violations during arrest and detention are not random acts of misconduct but structural outcomes of institutionalised inequality. As Reiman and Leighton (2017) argue, the criminal justice system selectively enforces laws that sustain social hierarchies, while Chan (1996) demonstrates that over-policing, arbitrary arrests, and excessive use of force disproportionately target disadvantaged communities. Applied to this study, conflict theory illuminates how systemic imbalances within the Nigerian Police Force shape patterns of human rights compliance and violation. It suggests that abuses during arrest and detention in Abuja are linked not only to individual misconduct but to broader institutional and societal dynamics—such as hierarchical command structures, political interference, and unequal access to justice. This theoretical lens provides a critical foundation for examining how power relations, institutional culture, and policy implementation interact to influence police behaviour and citizens' experiences of justice within Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to assess the Nigerian Police Force's compliance with human rights standards during arrest and detention in Abuja. This design facilitated systematic data collection from a diverse cross-section of residents and stakeholders to capture perceptions, experiences, and institutional practices. Abuja was purposively selected as the study area because it hosts critical national policing and oversight institutions, including the Nigeria Police Force Headquarters, the Police Service Commission, and the National Human Rights Commission, making it an appropriate context for evaluating operational adherence to human rights obligations. The study population comprised adults aged 18 years and above residing in the six area councils of the Federal Capital Territory (Abaji, Abuja Municipal, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, and Kwali). Respondents included residents with direct or indirect experiences of arrest or detention, legal practitioners, civil society members, and human rights advocates. A total sample of 400 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) statistical table. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, the six area councils were stratified into urban and semi-urban categories. Second, wards were selected proportionately within each stratum based on population size. Third, households were chosen systematically using an interval derived from population listings, and individual respondents were randomly selected within the sampled households. This process ensured balanced representation of demographic and spatial diversity.

Out of 400 distributed questionnaires, 397 were validly retrieved, representing a 99.25% response rate. Non-responses were primarily due to unavailability or unwillingness to participate. To minimise bias, trained research assistants conducted follow-up visits, explained the study purpose clearly, and reassured participants of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed in alignment with the study objectives. The

instrument consisted of four sections covering socio-demographic characteristics, experiences of arrest or detention, perceptions of human rights compliance, and trust in law enforcement. The questionnaire comprised mainly closed-ended and five-point Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The instrument was pre-tested among 30 respondents in Gwagwalada Area Council to assess clarity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness. The pilot test yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. Based on pilot feedback, minor adjustments were made before final administration. The final questionnaire is included as an appendix to facilitate transparency and replicability.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. All participants provided written informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw without consequences. No identifying information was collected, and completed questionnaires were securely stored to maintain anonymity and data protection. Data were coded and analysed using the SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarise responses. To explore associations between socio-demographic factors and perceptions of compliance, cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were conducted. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was employed to identify predictors of perceived police non-compliance and trust in the police. The five-point Likert scale was interpreted using a cut-off mean value of 2.50, representing the statistical midpoint distinguishing agreement from disagreement, thus providing a valid threshold for analytical interpretation. This methodological process ensured transparency, validity, and replicability, offering a robust empirical foundation for analysing the institutional, operational, and cultural dimensions of human rights compliance in policing within Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory.

RESULTS

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	210	52.9
	Female	187	47.1
	Total	397	100.0
Age	18–25	95	23.9
	26–35	130	32.7
	36–45	90	22.7
	46–60	60	15.1
	61+	22	5.5
	Total	397	100.0
Marital Status	Single	170	42.8
	Married	180	45.3
	Divorced	25	6.3
	Widowed	22	5.5
	Total	397	100.0

Educational Level	No Formal Education	30	7.6
	Primary	60	15.1
	Secondary	120	30.2
	Tertiary	150	37.8
	Postgraduate	37	9.3
	Total	397	100.0
Occupation	Student	100	25.2
	Civil Servant	80	20.2
	Trader	70	17.6
	Private Sector	90	22.7
	Unemployed	40	10.1
	Other	17	4.3
	Total	397	100.0
Area Council	AMAC	100	25.2
	Bwari	75	18.9
	Gwagwalada	65	16.4
	Kuje	60	15.1
	Kwali	50	12.6
	Abaji	47	11.8
	Total	397	100.0
Religion	Christianity	230	57.9
	Islam	150	37.8
	African Traditional	17	4.3
	Total	397	100.0
Arrested Before	Yes	160	40.3
	No	237	59.7
	Total	397	100.0

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 397 respondents surveyed across the six Area Councils of Abuja. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 52.9% male and 47.1% female respondents, suggesting equitable representation of perspectives. Age distribution showed that 32.7% were between 26 and 35 years, followed by 23.9% aged 18–25 and 22.7% aged 36–45. Respondents aged 46–60 and above 60 accounted for 15.1% and 5.5%, respectively. This demographic spread indicates that most participants were within the active working-age population, more likely to engage with public authorities and have first-hand or vicarious experiences of arrest and detention. In terms of marital status, 45.3% were married, 42.8% single, 6.3% divorced, and 5.5% widowed, reflecting diversity in social background and family responsibilities that may influence perceptions of law enforcement. Educational attainment was relatively high: 37.8% had tertiary education, 30.2% secondary education, and 9.3% postgraduate qualifications, while 15.1% had primary education and 7.6% no formal education. The high literacy level suggests an informed population capable of articulating rights-based assessments. Occupationally, 25.2% were students, 22.7% private sector employees, 20.2% civil servants, and 17.6% traders, while 10.1% were unemployed. This range demonstrates broad occupational diversity, capturing different socio-economic strata. Representation across Area Councils was adequate, with AMAC (25.2%)

recording the highest number of respondents, followed by Bwari (18.9%), Gwagwalada (16.4%), Kuje (15.1%), Kwali (12.6%), and Abaji (11.8%). Christianity was the most reported religion (57.9%), followed by Islam (37.8%) and African Traditional Religion (4.3%). Importantly, 40.3% reported having been arrested or detained, providing direct experiential data on police practices.

Table 2: Respondents' Views on Police Compliance with Human Rights Standards

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	SD
Police respect the right to liberty during arrest	42.8	57.2	2.66	1.00
Suspects are informed of reasons for arrest	47.3	52.7	2.80	1.00
Suspects are taken to court within 48 hours	38.5	61.5	2.60	1.05
Detainees have access to legal counsel	37.3	62.7	2.59	1.00
Police avoid torture or physical abuse	33.2	66.8	2.36	1.07
Human rights principles guide arrest procedures	48.0	52.0	2.83	0.99
Police officers are trained in human rights compliance	52.6	47.4	2.89	0.96
Arrests are conducted with warrants	40.0	60.0	2.64	1.03
Female suspects are treated with dignity	53.5	46.5	2.90	0.99

The data in Table 2 show a fragile pattern of human rights compliance within police operations in Abuja, with mean values ranging from 2.36 to 2.90 and a general tendency toward marginal agreement on most indicators. Only three items—training in human rights compliance (mean = 2.89, SD = 0.96), treatment of female suspects with dignity (mean = 2.90, SD = 0.99), and adherence to human rights principles in arrest procedures (mean = 2.83, SD = 0.99)—recorded relatively strong perceptions of compliance, as 48–53.5% of respondents agreed with these statements. However, other indicators reveal deep institutional weaknesses: 61.5% disagreed that suspects are taken to court within 48 hours (mean = 2.60), 62.7% disagreed that detainees have access to legal counsel (mean = 2.59), and 66.8% rejected the claim that police avoid torture (mean = 2.36). These figures highlight that, while procedural awareness exists, implementation remains inconsistent and selective. The narrow margins between agreement and disagreement across most items—such as informing suspects of reasons for arrest (47.3% agree; 52.7% disagree, mean = 2.80)—illustrate fluctuating practices that depend more on individual discretion than institutional discipline. The findings suggest that human rights compliance within the Nigerian Police Force is largely rhetorical rather than operational, characterised by uneven enforcement and weak accountability mechanisms that fail to translate formal training and policies into consistent, rights-based policing behaviour.

Table 3: Barriers to Police Compliance with Human Rights Standards

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	SD
Lack of HR training contributes to violations	78.6	21.4	3.17	0.86
Inadequate funding limits police capacity	80.9	19.1	3.21	0.85
Outdated policing methods hinder compliance	72.1	27.9	2.92	0.97
Corruption among officers promotes abuse	78.0	22.0	3.17	0.88

Ethnic/religious bias influences treatment	69.3	30.7	2.93	1.01
Cultural acceptance of police brutality	66.5	33.5	2.80	1.04
Impunity discourages victims from reporting	77.0	23.0	3.16	0.91
Limited public awareness of rights	74.6	25.4	3.06	0.95
Weak internal disciplinary measures	70.3	29.7	2.92	1.01
Political interference undermines compliance	75.3	24.7	3.07	0.95

Table 3 reveals an overwhelming consensus among respondents that multiple structural, operational, and cultural constraints undermine the police's compliance with human rights standards in Abuja. All listed barriers recorded mean values above the 2.50 cut-off, indicating general agreement on their significance, with the highest levels of concurrence observed for inadequate funding (80.9% agree, mean = 3.21, SD = 0.85), corruption among officers (78.0%, mean = 3.17, SD = 0.88), and lack of human rights training (78.6%, mean = 3.17, SD = 0.86). These figures point to systemic deficiencies in institutional capacity and integrity, suggesting that even when individual officers are aware of human rights norms, they operate in environments that make compliance difficult or unrewarding. High agreement rates on issues such as political interference (75.3%, mean = 3.07) and impunity (77.0%, mean = 3.16) reflect perceptions that accountability mechanisms are weak or manipulated, allowing violations to persist without consequence. The moderate yet notable agreement on cultural acceptance of police brutality (66.5%, mean = 2.80) and ethnic or religious bias (69.3%, mean = 2.93) indicates that societal norms and identity politics continue to legitimise abusive practices. Together, these statistics illustrate that the challenge of police reform in Nigeria is multifaceted: inadequate resources, poor supervision, and entrenched cultural attitudes combine to sustain patterns of misconduct and human rights violations, thereby reinforcing public distrust and institutional inertia.

Table 4: Impact of Human Rights Violations on Public Trust and Confidence

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	SD
Arbitrary arrests reduce public trust	76.6	23.4	3.12	0.89
Human rights abuse causes fear among citizens	81.4	18.6	3.22	0.84
Fear of police abuse deters crime reporting	74.0	26.0	3.02	0.94
Police brutality discourages cooperation	76.1	23.9	3.06	0.91
I feel safe contacting the police	38.5	61.5	2.43	1.06
Protests are linked to rights abuse	72.3	27.7	2.97	0.98
Misconduct worsened in the last five years	70.3	29.7	2.96	0.97
Rights violations damage Nigeria's image	77.3	22.7	3.12	0.93

Table 4 complements the insights from Table 3 by demonstrating the tangible consequences of these structural, operational, and cultural deficiencies on public trust and confidence in law enforcement. Respondents overwhelmingly associate human rights violations with diminished legitimacy, as reflected in high agreement that arbitrary arrests reduce trust (76.6%, mean = 3.12, SD = 0.89), police brutality discourages cooperation (76.1%, mean = 3.06, SD = 0.91), and fear of abuse deters crime reporting (74.0%, mean = 3.02, SD = 0.94). The exceptionally high recognition of human rights abuses causing fear among citizens (81.4%, mean = 3.22, SD = 0.84) signals a climate of

pervasive apprehension that directly undermines the police–community relationship. Low confidence in personal safety when contacting the police (38.5% agree, mean = 2.43, SD = 1.06) highlights the erosion of institutional legitimacy and the psychological barriers preventing citizens from engaging with law enforcement. Respondents also link rights violations to broader socio-political consequences, including increased protests (72.3%, mean = 2.97, SD = 0.98) and the deterioration of Nigeria’s international image (77.3%, mean = 3.12, SD = 0.93), reinforcing the notion that misconduct extends beyond immediate interactions to affect national stability and reputation. When interpreted alongside the systemic barriers identified in Table 3—such as inadequate funding, corruption, lack of training, impunity, and cultural tolerance of brutality—these findings indicate a cyclical dynamic: structural weaknesses and entrenched norms foster violations, which in turn generate fear, inhibit cooperation, and erode public trust. The data suggest that meaningful reform requires simultaneous interventions targeting institutional capacity, accountability mechanisms, and cultural attitudes to break this cycle and restore both functional and symbolic legitimacy to policing in Nigeria.

Table 5: Preferred Strategies for Enhancing Police Compliance with Human Rights

Strategy	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	SD
Compulsory HR education in police training	85.6	14.4	3.31	0.77
Independent oversight of detention practices	80.6	19.4	3.21	0.83
Strict sanctions for offending officers	82.1	17.9	3.26	0.80
Community policing to improve trust	78.3	21.7	3.14	0.84
Better funding for professionalism	79.4	20.6	3.18	0.83
Public awareness campaigns	76.8	23.2	3.08	0.90
Free legal services for victims	81.0	19.0	3.25	0.81
Improved welfare to reduce corruption	77.0	23.0	3.11	0.89
Civil society monitoring of police cells	78.8	21.2	3.14	0.88
Strengthening legal reforms	80.5	19.5	3.22	0.83

Table 5 illustrates respondents’ robust endorsement of multi-pronged strategies to enhance police compliance with human rights, reflecting a clear recognition that addressing structural, operational, and cultural deficits requires both preventative and corrective measures. The highest support emerged for compulsory human rights education within police training (85.6%, mean = 3.31, SD = 0.77), indicating that equipping officers with formal knowledge of human rights norms is viewed as foundational for behaviour change. Strong concurrence also exists for imposing strict sanctions on offending officers (82.1%, mean = 3.26, SD = 0.80) and providing free legal services to victims (81.0%, mean = 3.25, SD = 0.81), highlighting the dual importance of accountability mechanisms and access to justice in fostering compliance. Respondents equally emphasised structural and operational reforms, including independent oversight of detention practices (80.6%, mean = 3.21, SD = 0.83), strengthening legal frameworks (80.5%, mean = 3.22, SD = 0.83), better funding to promote professionalism (79.4%, mean = 3.18, SD = 0.83), and welfare improvements to reduce corruption (77.0%, mean = 3.11, SD = 0.89). Strategies aimed at rebuilding community relations, such as community policing (78.3%, mean = 3.14, SD = 0.84) and public awareness campaigns (76.8%, mean = 3.08, SD = 0.90), further underscore the recognition that legitimacy and trust are

as critical as formal enforcement of standards. Civil society monitoring of police cells (78.8%, mean = 3.14, SD = 0.88) reinforces the call for external accountability to complement internal reforms. Collectively, these preferences suggest that citizens perceive human rights compliance not as a single-faceted problem but as a systemic challenge that demands integrated interventions spanning education, oversight, legal reform, institutional resourcing, welfare, and community engagement. When interpreted alongside the systemic constraints identified in Table 3 and the consequences for public trust documented in Table 4, the data imply that sustained improvement in police conduct hinges on simultaneously addressing knowledge deficits, accountability gaps, resource limitations, and societal attitudes that currently enable misconduct.

Table 6: Chi-Square Analysis of Socio-Demographic Variables and Perception of Compliance

Variable	df	χ^2	p	Cramer's V	Interpretation
Education Level	3	18.62	< .001	.216	Significant; higher education linked to greater awareness of violations.
Gender	1	0.06	.804	.012	Not significant; perception consistent across sexes.
Prior Arrest Experience	1	22.45	< .001	.238	Significant; victims report more negative perceptions.
Area Council	5	11.28	.047	.169	Significant; compliance perceptions vary by location.

The chi-square analysis in Table 6 provides critical insights into how socio-demographic factors shape public perceptions of police compliance with human rights standards. Education level emerged as a significant predictor ($\chi^2 = 18.62$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .216$), indicating that individuals with higher educational attainment tend to demonstrate greater awareness of rights violations, likely reflecting enhanced critical engagement with civic norms and media discourse. Prior arrest experience also significantly influenced perceptions ($\chi^2 = 22.45$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .238$), with respondents who had been arrested reporting more negative evaluations of police compliance, underscoring the experiential dimension of trust and legitimacy formation; direct exposure to law enforcement misconduct appears to amplify sensitivity to human rights breaches. Geographical location, represented by area council, produced a marginal but statistically significant effect ($\chi^2 = 11.28$, $p = .047$, Cramer's $V = .169$), suggesting that localised variations in policing practices, resource allocation, or community engagement shape citizens' perceptions, highlighting the uneven distribution of compliance across administrative units. In contrast, gender was not a significant factor ($\chi^2 = 0.06$, $p = .804$, Cramer's $V = .012$), indicating broadly consistent perceptions of police behaviour across male and female respondents. These results imply that perceptions of human rights compliance are mediated more strongly by education, personal experience with law enforcement, and local context than by gender, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions that account for experiential and spatial disparities in shaping public trust and engagement with policing institutions.

Table 7: Regression Analysis of Predictors of Perceived Police Non-Compliance

Predictor	Unstandardized β	Std. Error	Standardised β	t	p
Constant	1.02	0.12	—	8.50	.000
Lack of HR Training	0.38	0.05	0.42	7.60	.000
Inadequate Funding	0.27	0.06	0.31	4.50	.001
Corruption	0.25	0.05	0.29	5.00	.001
Political Interference	0.19	0.07	0.28	2.45	.014
Prior Arrest Experience	0.21	0.06	0.21	3.50	.001
Model Summary					
R = .67	R ² = .45		Adjusted R ² = .44		
F(5, 391) = 64.28	p < .001		—		

The regression analysis in Table 7 identifies the key predictors of perceived police non-compliance with human rights standards and quantifies their relative influence. Lack of human rights training emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.42$, $t = 7.60$, $p < .001$), indicating that deficiencies in formal education and awareness of rights norms significantly heighten perceptions of misconduct. Inadequate funding ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 4.50$, $p = .001$) and corruption ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 5.00$, $p = .001$) also exert substantial influence, reflecting systemic and structural constraints that undermine officers' capacity and motivation to comply with standards. Political interference, though comparatively lower ($\beta = 0.28$, $t = 2.45$, $p = .014$), remains a significant factor, suggesting that external pressures distort operational independence and contribute to public perceptions of arbitrariness. Prior arrest experience maintains an independent predictive effect ($\beta = 0.21$, $t = 3.50$, $p = .001$), corroborating the chi-square finding that direct exposure to law enforcement misconduct intensifies negative evaluations of compliance. The model demonstrates robust explanatory power, with $R^2 = 0.45$ and an adjusted $R^2 = 0.44$, indicating that approximately 44–45% of the variance in perceived non-compliance is accounted for by these predictors, and the overall model is highly significant ($F(5, 391) = 64.28$, $p < .001$). These findings underscore the interplay of institutional deficiencies, governance failures, and experiential factors in shaping public perceptions, reinforcing the imperative for integrated interventions addressing training, resourcing, accountability, and political insulation to improve both actual compliance and citizen trust in policing.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the Nigerian Police Force's compliance with human rights standards during arrest and detention in Abuja, revealing persistent structural, operational, and cultural deficiencies consistent with Conflict Theory. In relation to the first objective, respondents acknowledged procedural mechanisms such as human rights training and gender-sensitive practices, yet compliance was inconsistent, particularly regarding access to legal counsel, timely presentation of suspects to court, and equitable treatment of detainees. Only treatment of female suspects and formal adherence to arrest procedures showed relatively stronger compliance, reflecting partial success of gender-focused reforms. These findings converge with Akinlabi and Soyombo (2021) and Amnesty International (2021), which documented weak enforcement of legal protections and entrenched brutality, while diverging from earlier studies by highlighting modest progress in gender-sensitive practices. Conflict Theory elucidates these patterns by demonstrating how police

behaviour reproduces social hierarchies and reinforces structural inequalities in power, justice, and access to state protection.

Regarding the second objective, institutional, operational, and cultural barriers—including lack of human rights training, inadequate funding, corruption, weak internal disciplinary systems, political interference, and societal tolerance for brutality—emerged as critical impediments to compliance. This aligns with Ibeanu (2020), who emphasised the influence of structural inequality and political pressures in sustaining police impunity. The study diverges from earlier work that prioritised public ignorance as the main driver of non-compliance (Akinlabi & Soyombo, 2021), instead demonstrating that enforcement gaps result from a complex interplay of organizational deficiencies, systemic corruption, and cultural norms.

Concerning the third objective, violations of human rights were found to erode public trust and reduce community cooperation. Respondents reported fear of abuse, reluctance to report crimes, and perceptions that misconduct has worsened over time. These findings converge with Adebani and Obadare (2021), linking frontline police misconduct to civic alienation, fear, and reputational damage for Nigeria, while illustrating Conflict Theory's proposition that institutions reproduce and sustain social hierarchies. Regression and chi-square analyses further indicate that prior arrest experience, education level, and geographic location significantly shape perceptions of non-compliance, showing that experiential and contextual factors compound institutional mistrust.

Aligned with the fourth objective, respondents strongly endorsed multi-pronged strategies to enhance compliance, including compulsory human rights training, independent oversight, sanctions for offending officers, improved welfare and funding, civil society monitoring, free legal services, public awareness campaigns, and community policing. These recommendations converge with Ibeanu (2020) in advocating holistic reforms addressing structural, behavioural, and societal dimensions of policing. Policy-wise, these strategies are consistent with the Police Act 2020, which codifies professionalization, community-oriented policing, and human rights compliance, highlighting the potential for citizen-driven engagement to reinforce accountability and sustainable reform. The study's cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences about the relationships between systemic barriers, police non-compliance, and public perceptions. Self-reported data may be influenced by recall or social desirability biases, while sampling constraints limit generalisability across Nigeria. Future research should employ longitudinal, multi-city, and mixed-methods approaches, including qualitative interviews and official record reviews, to evaluate the impact of Police Act 2020 reforms on compliance, accountability, and community trust.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study demonstrates that the Nigerian Police Force's compliance with human rights standards during arrest and detention in Abuja remains deficient. Unlawful detention, denial of legal counsel, torture, and arrests without warrants persist, driven by systemic institutional weaknesses, political interference, insufficient funding, and cultural norms that normalize abuse. These practices have eroded public trust, reduced community cooperation, and undermined both safety and institutional legitimacy, reflecting Conflict Theory's premise that policing reproduces social hierarchies and maintains power asymmetries. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated short- and long-

term interventions. Short-term measures should prioritise compulsory human rights training for officers, public awareness campaigns, and provision of free legal services for victims, implemented by the Police Service Commission, National Human Rights Commission, and civil society organisations. Long-term reforms must focus on institutional restructuring, enhanced funding, independent oversight, and strengthened internal disciplinary mechanisms, in alignment with the Police Act 2020 to institutionalize rights-based policing, professionalisation, and accountability. Future research should adopt qualitative interviews, official record reviews, and multi-city comparative designs to examine variations in compliance and evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing reforms. Despite limitations arising from the cross-sectional design, self-reported data, and potential sampling bias, the study provides evidence-based guidance for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and civil society actors committed to promoting sustainable human rights compliance, enhancing accountability, and restoring public trust in Nigerian policing.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire

Title: Assessment of Nigerian Police Force Compliance with Human Rights Standards during Arrest and Detention in Abuja

Introduction to Respondents:

This questionnaire is designed for an academic study assessing the Nigerian Police Force's compliance with human rights standards during arrest and detention in Abuja. Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for research purposes. Please answer honestly based on your personal experience or perception. Do not write your name or any identifying information.

Section A: Socio-Demographic Information

Please tick (✓) the appropriate option.

1. Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: ☐ 18–25 ☐ 26–35 ☐ 36–45 ☐ 46–55 ☐ 56 and above
3. Marital Status: ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed
4. Educational Level: ☐ No formal education ☐ Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Tertiary ☐ Postgraduate
5. Occupation: ☐ Student ☐ Civil servant ☐ Self-employed ☐ Unemployed ☐ Others (specify) _____
6. Area Council of residence: ☐ Abaji ☐ Abuja Municipal ☐ Bwari ☐ Gwagwalada
☐ Kuje ☐ Kwali
7. Have you ever been arrested or detained by the Nigerian Police Force?
☐ Yes ☐ No

Section B: Compliance with Human Rights Standards during Arrest and Detention

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. Police officers usually inform suspects of the reason for their arrest.					
2. Arrests are generally conducted with valid warrants.					
3. Detainees are allowed access to legal counsel.					

4. Detainees are brought before a court within 48 hours.					
5. Female suspects are treated with dignity and fairness.					
6. Torture or coercion is used during interrogation. (reverse-coded)					
7. Detention conditions meet minimum human rights standards.					

Section C: Institutional, Cultural, and Operational Barriers to Compliance

Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Lack of human rights training contributes to violations.					
Inadequate funding limits police capacity to comply.					
Corruption undermines compliance with due process.					
Political interference affects police neutrality.					
Weak disciplinary mechanisms allow misconduct to persist.					
Cultural beliefs and social tolerance normalise abuse.					
Poor welfare and working conditions encourage violations.					

Section D: Effects of Rights Violations on Public Trust and Cooperation

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly
1. Human rights violations have reduced public trust in the police.					
2. Fear of police abuse discourages crime reporting.					

3. Citizens cooperate less with police because of misconduct.					
4. Unlawful detention contributes to public resentment.					
5. Respect for human rights increases police legitimacy.					
6. Lack of accountability leads to community disengagement.					

Section E: Strategies for Enhancing Compliance and Reform Implementation

Strategies	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Compulsory human rights education for all police officers.					
Independent oversight of police detention practices.					
3. Strict sanctions for officers who violate rights.					
Improved funding for police operations and welfare.					
Community policing to rebuild public trust.					
Public awareness campaigns on rights during arrest and detention.					
Free legal services for victims of police abuse.					
Civil society monitoring of police cells.					
Strengthening of internal disciplinary mechanisms.					

Section F: Open-Ended Questions

1. In your opinion, what is the most serious human rights violation committed by the Nigerian Police during arrest or detention?

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2. What do you think should be done to improve police compliance with human rights standards in Nigeria?

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