

Institutional Factors influencing Extra-Judicial Killings by Law Enforcement Agents in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated institutional factors influencing extra-judicial killings in South-East, Nigeria. The incidence of extra-judicial killings especially by the Nigerian Police is a recurring phenomenon since the inception of the Nigerian Fourth Republic in 1999 and it refers to the unlawful deprivation of life without recourse to judicial or legal processes. The social conflict theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. The study employed the sequential mixed methods research design, and the sample size of 1051 was statistically determined using Fisher's statistical method while the study participants include the town union members and self-employed youths resident in South-East Nigeria. The questionnaire and the In-Depth Interview (IDI) Guide were the major instruments for data collection. The quantitative data collected were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20 software and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and simple percentages while manual content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. The study found that the institutional factors influencing extra-judicial killings in South-East Nigeria are corruption within the law enforcement agency and inadequate training. These significantly explain the prevalence of extra-judicial killings in the region. The findings from the study indicated that extra-judicial killings affect public trust in law enforcement and the criminal justice system in South-East Nigeria. This highlights that something needs to be done urgently to restore confidence in the law enforcement and the criminal justice system. This study strongly recommends a proper police reform and this should not be a mere change of name and uniform as it has been in the past but a total overhaul of the Nigeria Police Force which will include periodic mental and psychological examination to ascertain the mental fitness of the officers. Also, the use of vigilante and militia forces should be abolished in the country, the existing ones should be disbanded and disarmed and subsequently trained and if found fit should be incorporated into the force as that will play a key role in curbing the culture of impunity witnessed in the region.

Keywords: criminal justice system, extra-judicial killings, law enforcement, Nigerian Police Force, public trust

Introduction

The term extra-judicial means an act carried out, given, or effected outside the course of regular judicial proceedings. It refers to actions outside the judicial system. If a death is caused by a law enforcement authority without following the legal rules or due judicial process, it can be considered as extra-judicial killing. Extra-judicial killings are unlawful by nature, because they break the process of legal jurisdiction. Extra judicial killing, otherwise extralegal killing refers to the unlawful deprivation of life without recourse to judicial or legal processes. It is, illegal and directly impinges on a victim's fundamental human rights in its entirety (Igbo, 2017).

Extra-judicial killings are global phenomenon. Countries with high incidences of extra-judicial killings in the world, include Nigeria, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Colombia, Honduras, Syria, Sudan and the United States of America (Early Warning Project, 2017; World Organization Against Torture, 2019; US Department of State, 2021). The US Department of State Services (2021) noted that between 2018 and 2020, 606 cases of extra-judicial killings were recorded in Bangladesh; 29 in Colombia; 15 in Honduras; 217 in South Africa; 1,116 in Syria and 180 in the Philippines. In the case of Nigeria, the Centre for Democracy and Development (2021) submits that 13,241 lives were lost to extra-judicial killings between 2011 and 2021.

Fair Trials (2020), states that by claiming to enforce the lockdown protocols occasioned by the corona virus pandemic, the police in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa engaged in human rights violations and extra-judicial killings. The report further shows that as of May 2020, a total of 209 complaints were in Nigeria while 29 extra-judicial killings were recorded; and in South Africa, at least 10 unlawful killings were recorded (Fair Trials, 2020). More so, the police in India exercise unrestrained power and as such assume an abounding role. Like in Nigeria, Kenya and the Philippines, the police in India engage in extra-judicial killings and can deploy unlimited force due to its presence. Meanwhile, in the United States, the cases of extra-judicial killings by the police abound. A perfect instance is the killing of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin on 25th May 2020 which led to a spiral protest against police brutality around the world (Bhargava, 2021).

Furthermore, informal policing structures such as vigilantes have further contributed to the incessant extra-judicial killings in Nigeria. This sentiment was re-echoed by Shinde and Tayde (2022) who opined that whenever informally organized groups such as the vigilante have attempted to supplement or replace legal procedures or authorities as well as fill the void where institutional justice mostly did not exist, such conditions commonly give rise to acts of lynching or genocide. Following suit, Zakaria (2024) avers that vigilante groups often engage in acts of intimidation, violence and extra-judicial enforcement, undermining the rule of law and eroding public trust in state institutions. These re-emphasize the fact that the operations of vigilante groups stir concern regarding human rights protection, observance of the rule of law and due process. A recurring feature among informal policing structure methods of handling cases is that of inflicting corporal punishment on suspects in the mistaken belief of administering justice (Chikwendu; Oli & Nwankwo, 2016).

Extra-judicial killings and police brutality are topical issues in the society as witnessed in the year 2020 The End SARS Narrative in Nigeria. This has provoked questions why cases of extra-judicial killings and police brutality dominate the headlines in the national dailies. Interestingly, organizations, initiatives and reforms such as, National Human Right Commission (NHRC), Amnesty International, CLEEN Foundation, The Police Reform Act and other stakeholders have made commendable efforts to mitigate the prevalence of extra-judicial killings and uphold human rights in Nigeria. However, it is noteworthy that the governments of several administrations, NGOs and stakeholders have proffered measures to manage the menace of extra-judicial killings by coming up with different Codes and Reform Acts at intervals in various levels which include the latest Police Reform Act of 2020. These reforms include: police training and development, police accountability and transparency in operation, protection of human rights and prohibition of torture, cruel, inhumane and degrading of suspects, abolition of arrest based on civil wrongs, the cessation of police obtaining forced statements from the suspects at police stations among others (Adejuwon, 2019; Police Reform Act, 2020).

Despite the effort made by various organizations and other stakeholders in managing the menace of extra-judicial killings in the country, the phenomenon is still worsening such as; extra-judicial killings by security forces, the use of excessive force including torture by security forces, vigilante killings, impunity for abuses by security forces, arbitrary arrest

and prolonged pretrial detention among others. This reoccurring menace can be attributed to challenges related to the medium of instruction, insufficient training, inadequate infrastructure, ineffective new salary scheme, and lack of motivation among others (Osimen & Asiedion, 2021). It is against this background that this study examines the institutional factors influencing extra-judicial killings in South-East, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In any given society, policing is fundamental for both law enforcement and criminal justice. The law enforcement agents have a wide-ranging mandate to protect internal security, control riots and engage with communities to reinforce friendly relations and public trust. Alongside this broad mandate, the respect of human rights, communal relations, and upholding the rule of law are key policing values (Osimen, 2021). However, the use of the law enforcement agents by the strong to change the course of justice against the weak is rampant (Aina, 2013). Also, the extra-judicial killings by officers of the Nigerian police against the citizens' they swore to protect in South-East region of the country have not only questioned the efficiency required by the police in discharging their duty but have also undermined human security (Ogori, 2017). The law enforcement agents are too ready to be used for various illegal or questionable enforcement procedures. The use of the police by repressive governments especially during the military era further shows the negative use of police powers.

Amnesty International documented that at least 115 persons have been unlawfully killed by security forces between March and June 2021 in an attempt to tame the activities of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), the armed wing of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in South-East, Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2021). The Nigerian police, law enforcement agencies and the informal security agents have also been involved in frequent human rights violations including extra-judicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, and extortion-related abuses. Consequently, despite the dismantling of many road blocks by the Inspector General of Police and the disbandment of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) Unit of the police in Nigeria, extra-judicial killing remains a serious problem. The activities of the recently approved informal security agents in South-East (*Ebubeagu and Agunecheibe*) have also worsened the incessant extra-judicial killings and corporal punishment inflicted

on suspects in the belief of administering justice. Sadly, across the nation and in South-East in particular, extra judicial killings have been a peril and the casualties keep soaring, this lawless situation in the South-East region and Nigeria at large has instigated weak relationship between the security agents and the people which has further heightened the security dilemma in all ramifications. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing problems that this study is designed to investigate the institutional factors influencing extra-judicial killings in South-East, Nigeria.

Research Questions

Based on the foregoing, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. How do institutional factors influence extra-judicial killings in South-East, Nigeria?
2. How efficient are the existing institutional mechanisms in addressing extra-judicial killings in South-East Nigeria?
3. How do extra-judicial killings affect public trust in law enforcement and criminal justice system in South-East, Nigeria?
4. How have extra-judicial killings by law enforcement agents affected the police-civilian relationship in South-East Nigeria?

Review of Relevant Literature

Institutional Factors Influencing Extra-judicial Killings

A comparative study was conducted by Okorie (2019) on extra-judicial killings in Nigeria and Kenya, examining their implications for human rights and state legitimacy. The study adopted a qualitative comparative case study research design, using a sample of official data from reported cases of extra-judicial killings in both countries, and supplemented by semi-structured interviews. The participants for the interviews were selected through purposive sampling to highlight significant instances of extra-judicial killings. Data collected from the study were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify patterns and impacts of extra-judicial killings. The study found that extra-judicial killings in Nigeria and Kenya are systematic and widespread, violating the right to life and

undermining state legitimacy. It highlighted that these killings, often perpetrated by state security forces, are enabled by weak institutional accountability and a culture of impunity, posing significant threats to democratic governance and human rights protections in both countries.

A study was also conducted by Igbo (2017) on the use and abuse of police powers in Nigeria, with a focus on extra-judicial killings. The study adopted a qualitative case study research design, using a sample of four typical case studies of live events reported in Nigerian newspapers. The cases were selected through purposive sampling to illustrate instances of extra-judicial killings. Data for the study were collected through the analysis of newspaper reports, and data collected were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify patterns of police behavior and impunity. The study found that extra-judicial killing is a significant abuse of police power in Nigeria, violating victims' rights to life and fair hearing. Importantly, it highlighted that Nigerian police frequently adopt a doctrine of maximum force, killing suspects and non-suspects on flimsy pretexts, driven by an institutionalized culture of impunity rooted in a government-authorized "shoot-to-kill" policy against armed robbers and dangerous criminals.

Effects of Extra-judicial Killings on Public Trust in Law Enforcement Agency and Criminal Justice System

Branton, Carey, and Martinez-Ebers (2023) conducted an empirical investigation into how contextual exposure to police killings affects citizens' external political efficacy (individuals' beliefs about the responsiveness and accountability of political institutions), particularly law enforcement agencies in the United States. The study employed a quantitative research design, analyzing data drawn from a combination of survey responses and geographic crime statistics across multiple communities in the United States. Using advanced statistical modeling techniques, the researchers examined the relationship between exposure to police killings within local contexts and the degree to which individuals trust and feel politically empowered by government institutions. The study found a clear and troubling association between greater exposures to police killings and diminished external political efficacy among community members. Specifically, residents in areas with higher incidences of police killings reported lower confidence in the ability of

political institutions, especially law enforcement agencies to act fairly and be held accountable. Findings of this research suggest that contextual exposure to police extra-judicial killings significantly undermines citizens' perceptions of political institutions' responsiveness and accountability.

A study was conducted by Ulu, Enechi, Ezeonuegbu, and Sancar (2024) on determining the influence of extra-judicial justice on the perception of police among Nigerian citizens through the development and validation of the Extra-judicial Justice Scale (EJS). The study adopted a scale development research design, using a sample of 600 respondents, who were selected through a convenience sampling technique. Data for the study were collected through structured questionnaire, specifically the EJS, and data collected were analysed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Cronbach's Alpha, Spearman-Brown Coefficient, Pearson's correlation, Intra-class Correlation Coefficient (ICC), and t-tests, conducted with SPSS (version 24) and R Studio (version 4.1.1). The study found that the Extra-judicial Justice Scale is a valid and reliable instrument, consisting of 14 items across four factors-Illegal Execution, Indictment, Unlawful Arrest, and Intimidation-with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.859 and factor-specific Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.714 to 0.782. The scale exhibited good model fit (e.g., $\chi^2/df = 2.020$, RMSEA = 0.058, CFI = 0.961), convergent and discriminant validity, and a significant positive correlation with the Police Perception Scale ($r = 0.701$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its utility for assessing extra-judicial justice's impact on police perceptions in Nigeria.

Theoretical Orientation

This research adopted the social conflict theory by Marx (1998) as its theoretical framework. The social conflict theory was adopted to explain the fact that the law enforcement agents as an institution are often regarded as an instrument of oppression by the ruling class and bureaucrats and most times used to extra-judicially brutalize and kill citizens. The social conflict theory focuses on the fact that government institutions which include the police force and other law enforcement agencies are the product of political processes which reveal the interests of the powerful in the society. In this sense, the law enforcement agents most times preserve the status quo of inequality and impunity as well as assist the powerful to exploit the powerless in order to prevent their resistance to the

exploitation that they suffer which is why the economically marginalized, politically powerless and basically the members of the middle and lower class are more likely to experience serious acts of police violence as well as cases of extra-judicial killings than those with greater power and more resources. There are differentials in police treatment of high profile and low profile citizens. The respect for human rights is often extended to rich citizens as against the poor that are often subjected to different forms of extortions, abuses, violations, brutality and extra-judicial killings. Therefore, the social conflict theory has been adopted because it is relevant and suitable in explaining the institutional factors influencing extra-judicial killings and its effect on public trust in law enforcement agents and the criminal justice system in South-East, Nigeria.

Method

The study adopted sequential mixed methods research design. It involved administering of questionnaire and interviewing respondents. This research design was adopted so that the short comings of quantitative method can be complemented by the qualitative method and vice versa. Questionnaire was employed so as to elicit responses and other opinions different from that of the researcher, interview sessions were held in order to get full responses concerning the objectives of the study. The study area is South-East Nigeria. The South-East was selected as the study area for this research work because of the high rate of extra-judicial killings observed in the geo-political zone.

According to National Population Commission (NPC, 2020) the population of South-East Nigeria was reported to be estimated at 21,026,032. However, the sample size for this study was 1051, this was statistically determined using the Fisher (1967) Formula, drawn from relevant population categories from the selected urban areas in South-East Nigeria. This is because members of these population categories are well informed about the research topic and are mentally developed enough to participate in a study of this nature and also they constitute the main victims of extra-judicial killings by security agents. This study employed both the probability and non-probability sampling methods. The probability sampling method gave every element of the population an equal chance of being selected. It also made it possible to generalize findings gotten from the research as

the data were reliable due to the representative nature of the entire population. While the non-probability sampling method allowed the researcher to arbitrarily include any element he thinks will provide more insight to the phenomenon under study. Thus the multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted.

In the first stage, South-East geo-political zone which is made up of five states was clustered into two clusters. Cluster A consisted of Anambra State, Abia State and Ebonyi State while Cluster B consisted of Enugu State and Imo State. Using a balloting method the researcher selected two states from each cluster which is Anambra State and Enugu State after which three urban areas were selected from the already selected States. In Anambra State, Nnewi, Onitsha and Ekwulobia were selected as the three urban areas while Trans-Ekulu, Achala Layout and New Heaven were selected as the three urban areas in Enugu State. The Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling (PSRS) technique was used to determine the size for each stratum based on the relative size of the stratum and the total population. On the hand, purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents for the qualitative aspect of the study based on their knowledge of the theme of the study.

The researcher developed questionnaire which was used to collect the quantitative data, while the In-depth Interview (IDI) was used to collect the qualitative data. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Sections A and B. Section A consisted of items designed to obtain data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents while Section B consisted of substantive issues of the research. The quantitative data collected from the field were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20 software. However, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and simple percentages while the qualitative data collected through IDIs were analyzed using the manual content analysis.

Results

In this study, 1051 copies of questionnaire were administered by the researcher. However, 915 copies of the questionnaire were correctly filled and returned. Eighty four (84) copies of the questionnaire were lost in the field work while fifty two (52) were incorrectly filled. Consequently, the quantitative analysis for this study was carried out with the 915 correctly filled and returned questionnaire. This shows a response rate of 87.1%.

Personal Data of the Respondents

This section deals with personal data of the respondents such as gender, age, marital status, religious affiliation, level of educational attainment, place of residence of the respondents. The personal data of the respondents are presented in Table 1 below

Table 1: Personal Data of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	480	52.5
Female	435	47.5
Total	915	100
Age		
18-22	177	19.3
23-27	259	28.3
28-32	200	21.9
33-37	102	11.1
38-42	91	9.9
43 and above	86	9.4
Total	915	100
Marital status		
Single	618	67.5
Married	210	22.9
Separated	50	5.5

Divorced	17	1.9
Widowed	20	2.2
Total	915	100

Level of Education

No formal education	63	6.9
FSLC	150	16.4
WASSCE/SSCE	345	37.7
OND/NCE	117	12.8
B.Sc./HND	215	23.5
M.Sc. / Ph.D	25	2.7
Total	915	100

Religious affiliation

Christianity	821	89.7
Islamic Religion	10	1.1
African Traditional Religion (ATR)	51	5.6
Atheist	33	3.6
Total	915	100

Occupation

Unemployed	125	13.7
Civil Servant	79	8.6
Entrepreneur	229	25.0
Artisan	112	12.2
Business	310	33.9
Student	60	6.6
Total	915	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents the personal data of respondents. The sex distribution indicates that 52.5% of the respondents are males while 47.5% of the respondents are females. This shows that male respondents are slightly more than female respondents in the study. The

age distribution of respondents shows that the largest proportion 28.3% of the respondents, are within the age group of 23–27 years. This is closely followed by 21.9% of the respondents who are aged between 28–32 years. Those within 18–22 years make up 19.3% of the respondents, while 11.1% of the respondents are between 33–37 years. In addition, 9.9% of the respondents fall within 38–42 years while the least group is those aged 43 years and above, constituting 9.4% of the respondents. In terms of marital status, 67.5% of the respondents are single, 22.9% of the respondents are married, while a smaller proportion are separated 5.5%, divorced 1.9%, or widowed 2.2%. The educational qualifications of respondents reveal that 37.7% of the respondents hold WASSCE/SSCE qualifications making it the largest group while 23.5% of the respondents hold B.Sc. or HND qualifications. About 16.4% of the respondents have FSLC, 12.8% of the respondents possess OND/NCE while 6.9% of the respondents have no formal education. Only 2.7% of the respondents hold M.Sc. or Ph.D. degrees. This distribution shows that most respondents have at least secondary school education, which enhances their ability to provide informed responses to the study. The small proportion with no formal education highlights the persistence of educational disadvantage in some segments of the population.

The religious affiliation shows that 89.7% of the respondents are Christians, 5.6% of the respondents practices African Traditional Religion, 3.6% of the respondents are Atheists, and 1.1% of the respondents are Muslims. The overwhelming dominance of Christians is expected, as the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria is predominantly Christian. The presence of other religious groups, although small, reflects the diversity of religious affiliations within the area. The occupational distribution reveals that 33.9% of the respondents are engaged in business, which forms the largest category. This is followed by 25.0% of the respondents who are entrepreneurs, 13.7% of the respondents are unemployed, 12.2% of the respondents are artisans, 8.6% of the respondents are civil servants, and 6.6% of the respondents are students. This indicates that majority of the respondents are engaged in private businesses and entrepreneurial ventures, which is typical of the socio-economic structure of the Southeast where trading and self-employment are common. However, the significant proportion of unemployed respondents also reflects economic challenges in the area.

Table 2: Respondents' views on the institutional factors influencing extra-judicial killings by security agents in South-East Nigeria

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Weak judiciary	112	12.2
Corrupt law enforcement	217	23.7
Inadequate training	129	14.1
Militarization of law enforcement	89	9.7
Ineffective oversight	112	12.7
Lack of transparency and accountability	96	10.5
All of the above	160	17.5
Total	915	100

Field Survey, 2025

Data in Table 2 show that 23.7% of the respondents' indicated that corrupt law enforcement is the major institutional factor contributing to the emergence of extra-judicial killings by security agents in South-East Nigeria, while 17.5% of the respondents indicated that all the aforementioned institutional factors contribute to the emergence of the phenomenon. However, 14.1% of the respondents answered inadequate training, 12.2% of the respondents indicated weak judiciary, another 12.7% answered ineffective oversight, while 10.5% of the respondents indicated lack of transparency and accountability, the remaining 9.7% answered militarization of law enforcement 9.7%. This indicates that respondents believe that a combination of institutional failures, particularly corruption within law enforcement and inadequate training, significantly contributes to the prevalence of extra-judicial killings in the region.

An interviewee stated:

The police and other security agents act like they are above the law because the system lets them. Many are corrupt, taking bribes and targeting innocent people for money. They are not trained well—some don't even know how to handle a situation without using their

gun. And when they kill someone, the courts do nothing because the judiciary is weak. Nobody checks their actions, so they keep doing it. It's a broken system from top to bottom (Male, 55 Years, Married, Retired Police Officer, Nnewi, Anambra State).

Another interviewee stated:

You see soldiers and police acting like they are in a war zone, carrying big guns and treating everyone like an enemy. This militarization is a problem because it makes them too quick to shoot. And there's no transparency; we don't even know who gives them orders to act this way. When they kill someone, nobody explains what happened, and nobody is punished. It's like they operate in the dark (Male, 24 Years, Single, Student, Trans-Ekulu, Enugu State).

Another interviewee also stated:

The whole system is rotten. The police are corrupt, asking for money at every checkpoint, and if you don't pay, you're in trouble. The courts can't help because they are weak and sometimes part of the corruption. There's no proper training for these officers, so they act anyhow because nobody is watching them. All these things together make it easy for them to kill and get away with it (Female, 35 Years, Married, Trader, Onitsha, Anambra State).

Table 3: Respondents' views on effectiveness of the existing institutional mechanisms in addressing extra-judicial killings in South-East Nigeria

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Not effective	588	64.3
Effective	144	15.7
Very effective	213	23.3
Total	915	100

Field Survey, 2025

Data in Table 3 show that 64.3% of the respondents indicated that the existing institutional mechanisms in addressing extra-judicial killings in South-East Nigeria are not effective, while 23.3% of the respondents indicated that the existing institutional mechanisms are very effective. The remaining 15.7% of the respondents answered effective to the question. This indicates that a majority of respondents believe the current institutional mechanisms are largely ineffective in curbing extra-judicial killings in the region. This is corroborated by data from the qualitative instrument.

An interviewee stated:

The system we have now is a complete failure. When someone is killed by security agents, you hear of investigations, but nothing comes out of it. The courts are slow, and most times, they don't even punish the officers involved. Oversight bodies like the Police Service Commission are just there for show as they don't have the power or will to enforce anything. As a policeman, I see this every day, and it's frustrating because the system doesn't help us do our job right or hold the bad ones accountable (Male, 44 Years, Married, Police Officer, Nnewi, Anambra State).

Another interviewee stated:

I don't trust the system at all. Every time we hear of these killings, the government says they will investigate, but it's all talk. Nothing changes. The police oversight is weak, and the courts are too corrupt or scared to take on these cases. For me, the mechanisms are useless because they don't stop the killings or bring justice to the victims (Male, 24 Years, Single, Student, Trans-Ekulu, Enugu State).

Another interviewee also stated:

Sometimes, you hear of a case where the police are disciplined or a victim's family gets justice, so I won't say the system is completely useless. There are a few good officers and judges trying their best, but

it's rare. The problem is that most times, the mechanisms don't work fast enough or at all. So, I think they are effective only in some cases, but not enough to make a real difference. (Female, 35 Years, Married, Trader, Onitsha, Anambra State).

Table 4: Respondents' views on whether they think that residents of South-East Nigeria trust the law enforcement and the criminal justice system to protect their rights, lives and properties

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	50	5.5
No	860	94.0
I don't know	5	0.5
Total	915	100.0

Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 shows that majority (94.01%) of the respondents indicated that they think that residents of South-East Nigeria do not trust the law enforcement and the criminal justice system to protect their rights, lives and properties, while 5.5% of the respondents indicated yes showing that they still trust the law enforcement and the criminal justice system to protect their rights. However, 0.5% of the respondents were uncertain and said that they did not know This indicates that an overwhelming majority of respondents believe that residents of South-East Nigeria lack trust in law enforcement and the criminal justice system to safeguard their rights, lives, and properties. This is supported by the interviews conducted.

An interviewee stated:

As a policeman, I can tell you that people here don't trust us at all. They see us as the problem, not the solution. When someone is killed or harassed, the courts do nothing, so why would anyone believe the system will protect them? Residents feel we're more likely to harm

them than save their lives or property. It's a sad truth, but that's how bad things have gotten (Male, 44 Years, Married, Police Officer, Nnewi, Anambra State).

Another interviewee stated:

Nobody in my community trusts the police or the courts. You can't rely on them to protect your life or property. If something happens, like a killing or robbery, the police might even make it worse, and the courts are useless. People here feel abandoned by the system, so we protect ourselves instead (Male, 24 Years, Single, Student, Trans-Ekulu, Enugu State).

Table 5: Respondents' views on whether extra-judicial killings by law enforcement agents have affected the police-civilian relationship in South-East, Nigeria.

Responses	Frequenc	
	y	Percentage
Yes	845	92.3
No	16	1.7
I don't know	54	5.9
Total	915	100.0

Field Survey, 2025

Data in Table 5 show that majority (92.3%) of the respondents indicated that extra-judicial killings by the police have affected the police-civilian relationship in South-East, Nigeria while 5.9% of the respondents were unsure about whether or not the phenomenon have affected police-civilian relationship in the region. However, 1.7% of the population indicated that extra-judicial killings by the police have not affected the police-civilian relationship in South-East, Nigeria. This result implies that majority of the respondents agreed that extra-judicial killings by the police have affected the police-civilian relationship in South-East, Nigeria.

These data are corroborated by the interview conducted. Finding from the interviewee is presented below.

An interviewee stated:

These days, citizens are reluctant to call the police officers when their rights are being trampled upon or even when they are in danger. The most popular slogan now especially in South-East is “let’s leave it for God”. It also has a ripple effect on the judiciary also; people prefer to stay away from the courts or the police because they don’t believe that they will get justice and in some cases they are right because they won’t get justice, this is even worse if you are poor or the son of a nobody. Though, I always encourage them to try first, but the truth is that most Nigerians have lost hope. (Male, 32 Years, Single, Lawyer, Ekwulobia, Anambra State).

Discussion

The study focused on the institutional factors influencing extra-judicial killings in South-East, Nigeria. It was observed from the study that extra-judicial killings are prevalent in South-East region, and the two major institutional factors were corruption within law enforcement and inadequate training. It was found that corruption is the most significant institutional factor contributing to extra-judicial killings. This is because corrupt practices such as bribery and extortion create an environment where security agents act with impunity. This finding corroborates that of Tusalem (2019) who noted that political incentives tied to winning public support through promises of law and order create an environment conducive for extra-judicial killings and human right abuses. The study showed that weak accountability systems and inadequate legal frameworks further perpetuate the problem.

This then implies that institutional failures, particularly corruption and lack of accountability, are central to the prevalence of extra-judicial killings. The study also sheds

light on the role of the judiciary. The majority of the respondents indicated a lack of confidence in the judiciary's ability to hold security agents accountable, primarily due to corruption. This implies that the judiciary's ineffectiveness in prosecuting erring officers encourages further extra-judicial killings. This finding is corroborated by the qualitative study conducted by Ogori (2017) on the prevalence of extra-judicial killing on legal protection, which found that extra-judicial killing is never a solution to fighting criminality and that the judiciary often fails to bring culprits to justice. The study further shed light on how these consequences affect the public. A large majority of the respondents opined that extra-judicial killings lead to a lack of trust in law enforcement agents. This finding underscores the findings gotten by Anabiri (2024), which stated that extortion and other corrupt practices by the Nigerian police undermine the fundamental human rights of Nigerians. The implication of this is that extra-judicial killings erode public trust and create social unrest.

Conclusion

Extra-judicial killings by law enforcement agents have been a constant phenomenon undermining peace and security of lives and properties in the region. The findings of this study highlighted a ubiquitous abuse of power by law enforcement agents which has magnified the distrust of security personnels and the criminal justice system in the region.

Addressing this multifaceted problem requires an extensive overhaul geared at enhancing training for security agents, curbing corruption and micromanaging shoddy recruitment of security agents with the aim of safeguarding human rights. Adopting these measures would not only halt the impunity perpetrated by security agents in the region, it will also go a long way in restoring confidence in the security agents and usher in a new dawn in South-East Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are made for possible implementation;

1. There should be a proper police reform and this should not be a mere change of name and uniform as it has been in the past but a total overhaul of the Nigeria Police Force which will include periodic mental and psychological examination to ascertain the mental fitness of the officers.
2. University graduates should be considered as the minimum and prioritized during the recruitment process as the educational expulsion of the officers plays a key role in determining how they discharge their duties.
3. The salaries, benefits and allowances of the police officers should be reviewed to capture the economic realities and situations in Nigeria, an upward review of their salaries would eradicate the need for extortion and bribery in the course of discharging their duties.
4. The Nigeria Police Commission should strictly investigate and sanction erring officers as this would serve as a deterrent to other officers and re-emphasize the need to adhere to the law and guidelines of the Police Act as enshrined in the Constitution.
5. The use of vigilante and militia forces should be abolished in the country, the existing ones should be disbanded and disarmed and subsequently trained and if found fit should be incorporated into the force as that will play a key role in curbing the culture of impunity witnessed in the region.
6. The government should promote community engagement that is geared at fostering collaborations between security agencies and local communities to rebuild trust and improve intelligence gathering.
7. The government should also review and amend existing legislations as well as implement new laws to ensure they provide safeguards against extra-judicial killings and other human rights abuses.

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