



Article

Political Patronage and Human Resource Governance in the Nigeria Police Force: A Qualitative Study of Recruitment, Promotion and Internal Security Performance, 2015–2025

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Abstract: This paper is an analysis of the impact of political patronage pressures on recruitment, promotion and internal security performance of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) from 2015 to 2025. The study is qualitative and documentary in nature and relies on official documents of the Police Service Commission (PSC), Nigeria Police Force, Afrobarometer surveys and peer-reviewed policing and public-administration literature as well as the National Security Strategy of Nigeria. The analytical framework is taken from Weberian Bureaucratic Theory. The study is guided by two propositions: The first is that patronage pressures and institutional contestation undermine merit-based recruitment and promotion by making procedures less transparent and less fair and less rewarding for professional careers. The second suggests that weak human resource governance has a negative impact on the internal security performance by reducing competence, morale, organisational legitimacy and the public's willingness to cooperate with the police. The results indicate that formal rules focus on merit, seniority, transparency, federal character and redress, but there were recurring governance pressure points: the 2017 claims of payments for special promotion; the PSC–NPF recruitment saga, which went all the way to the Supreme Court; the controversial 2024 constable list; and the official warnings about promotion lobbying in 2025. These episodes are not evidence of systematic political capture, but are indications of the weaknesses in personnel governance. The study finds that the professional policing needs are not just for more recruitment but also for transparent selection, auditable promotion, institutional role clarity and credible accountability of personnel decisions to public-security outcomes.

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1. Introduction

The integrity and professional incentives of individuals recruited, trained, deployed and promoted are a critical component of police organisations. The significance of this relationship is particularly profound in the Nigeria Police Force, which is tasked with a pivotal role in crime prevention, law enforcement, public order and overall internal security. The NPF has been identified as one of the key institutions in ensuring internal security in Nigeria, while the National Security Strategy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria [1] specifically ties the future of the police to recruitment, training, modernisation of equipment, data management and technology-driven command systems. But growth in the number of officers is no guarantee of good policing. The utilisation and management of police personnel are important to crime control as shown by Chinwokwu [2], and

questionable recruitment and promotion, corruption and weak police–community relations are some of the traditional challenges that threaten police integrity as identified by Ojo [3].

The next 10 years from 2015 to 2025 is a critical window for research on these questions. The Police Service Commission (PSC) in 2015 had a joint committee with the NPF to develop the modalities for recruitment of 10,000 police officers as directed by President Muhammadu Buhari. By 2018, the federal government had approved the recruitment of 10,000 constables each year for six years due to the manpower shortages and the growing menace of banditry, terrorism and kidnapping [4]. The decisions were made for a valid policy reason: a large and complex country with significant internal-security challenges needed more people. But, who should recruit, how candidates should be chosen and how personnel decisions should be shielded from unacceptable influence was a growing point of contention.

An institutional issue at the center arose regarding the recruitment authority. The PSC [5] reported that the recruitment of 10,000 constables started with nationwide screening, but the medical-screening phase was delayed by the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) and his management team for judicial interpretation. Following years of litigation, on 11 July 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that the PSC indeed had the statutory authority to recruit police constables, which the Commission itself termed “an embarrassing inter-agency controversy with ramifications for national security” [6]. Analytically, the dispute is important because the governance of professionals, such as HR managers, needs stable institutional rules. Even formally merit-based procedures can be subject to duplication, uncertainty, politicisation and public suspicion where agencies are challenging control over recruitment.

The court ruling wasn't the end of the controversy. The PSC has announced that 10,000 candidates were released in June 2024, comprising 9,000 general duty and 1,000 specialists, according to the results of the exercise guided by merit, gender sensitivity and federal character [7]. The NPF then disowned the list and made public claims that some of the individuals on the list were not applicants, that some were not successful in screening processes, and that some were previously declared unfit medically, apart from the allegations of financial transactions [8], [9]. The PSC denied any wrongdoing, called for evidence and insisted that proper procedure was followed, even suggesting a forensic audit of the computer-based test records [10], [11]. The competing claims were institutional allegations, not judicial findings and therefore cannot be construed as proof of patronage. They did, however, reveal significant issues with process confidence, inter-agency coordination and auditability.

A similar issue is promotion governance. PSC's official guidelines specify that the selection must be based on merit, hierarchy and seniority, vacancy, openness, opportunities for redress and compliance with the federal character, if applicable [12]. However, rules do not have the effect of removing pressure from the promotion process. In 2017, based on reports of bribery paid to officers for special promotion, the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) has formed a special investigation panel to ascertain the truth of the complaints and identify the officers involved [13]. However, the NPF once again alerted officers to the danger of engaging in lobbying or using unofficial means to secure special promotion in August 2025, but supported accelerated promotion for officers recognized for exceptional service [14]. This indicates that there were ongoing struggles between the formal meritocratic values and the informal influence.

This tension is relevant for internal security as the impact of human-resource governance does not limit itself to administrative fairness. Rauch and Evans [15] demonstrate in a comparative fashion that meritocratic recruitment is significantly linked to the performance of the bureaucracy, and the OECD [16] claim that objective recruitment and promotion secure public institutions from patronage, nepotism and undue political interference. In Nigeria in particular, Louis et al. [17] reported that promotion strategy has a significant impact on job satisfaction and job performance of Police officers and Ramoni

[18] also emphasizes the importance of promotion and other motivational factors. Organisational incentives may be skewed even if individual decisions are not corrupt, if officers believe recruitment, posting or advancement is based on connections, rather than on competence and performance. The issue of performance is also evident from citizens' point of view. Afrobarometer recorded trust in the police at 21 per cent in 2015, 27 per cent in 2017, 24 per cent in 2020 and only 15 per cent in 2022 [19], [20]. The 2022 survey showed that only 13 per cent considered the police to be often or always working professionally and respecting citizens' rights, with 21 per cent rating the government's performance in reducing crime positively [20]. According to the 2024 Afrobarometer survey (reported 2025), 70 per cent of Nigerians believed that most or all police officials were corrupt, while 67 per cent of those who sought police assistance said they had paid a bribe. The results of these data do not prove the patronage in recruitment or promotion to cause any distrust, but they do demonstrate that the personnel-governance debate is part of a broader organisational legitimacy crisis.

This paper does not therefore seek to ask the question whether or not all recruitment or promotion decisions in the NPF are politically manipulated. This would be beyond available evidence. Instead, it asks whether there are documented instances of patronage pressures, lobbying, institutional contestation and perceived failures in recruitment and promotion governance that jeopardise the meritocratic foundations essential for professional policing and if there are plausible implications for internal-security performance. The analysis runs from 2015 to 2025 and is designed specifically to separate formal rules from the informal pressure, allegations from actual misconduct, and the impact of personnel-governance from other factors that lead to insecurity, like funding, equipment, criminal sophistication and broader socioeconomic conditions.

Literature Review

Political Patronage

Political patronage is the granting of public offices or opportunities to reward, sustain or extend political or organisational influence. Kopecký and Mair [22] specify party patronage as the ability of political parties to place people in public and semi-public offices and as a particularistic exchange of state resources for political support, the latter being the traditional definition of party patronage. When it comes to police officers' governance, it does not mean that all appointments must be made at the behest of a political party. It also highlights the informal networks, lobbying, personal sponsorship and other non-merit factors that may impact recruitment, promotion or preferential treatment of careers. This is in contrast to public employment based on merit, which is defined by the OECD [16] by recruitment and promotion based on pre-established qualifications, objective performance standards, open recruitment and procedures shielded from undue political influence. In this study, political patronage is thus defined as informal or partisan influence that seems to replace, distort or have the potential to override legitimate professional criteria in personnel decisions.

Human Resource Governance

Human resource governance is the set of institutional rules, decision-making structures, accountability mechanisms and standards of procedure for the recruitment, selection, deployment, assessment, promotion, discipline and retention of people in public organisations. The OECD [16] defines merit-based human-resource management as one that is objective and transparent throughout the recruitment, promotion, performance management, training, discipline and dismissal process. Human resource governance is institutionally split between the constitutional role of the PSC and the operational structure of the police in the NPF. The PSC has its own recruitment and promotion departments, appeals and petitions are processed and examinations and interviews are conducted [23], [24]. Human resource governance is therefore more than simply the administration of personnel: it is about who has authority, what rules limit authority, how decisions can be checked and questioned, and whether officers and citizens are satisfied with the results.

This distinction provides a foundation for exploring how formally valid rules can lead to weak governance in the face of challenges to institutional mandates or informal pressures on implementation.

Recruitment

Recruitment is the process of attracting, evaluating and selecting qualified candidates for the jobs needed in an institution in an organised way. The OECD [16] highlights that in a merit-based public service, open access, predetermined qualifications, objective assessment and oversight are mechanisms that help to prevent nepotism and patronage. The PSC's Recruitment Department is officially tasked with recruiting constables, appointing cadets, appointing specialists, conducting security checks, validating candidate information and administering recruitment processes within the NPF [23]. The Commission's 2018 guidelines and recruitment statements also incorporate merit and inclusive representation and federal character [12], [4]. Therefore, recruitment needs to be done for two valid reasons: professional competence and national representativeness. The analytical problem is that federal character is not synonymous with patronage; representation based on the Constitution is not synonymous with unofficial influence. However, a gap does exist when recruitment decisions are called into question, are not easily auditable, or are institutionally disjointed and when public trust in merit and representativeness is undermined.

Promotion

Promotion is the movement to a higher rank or responsibility that is based on career criteria and organisational needs. PSC guidelines list merit, hierarchy and seniority, availability of vacancies, regularity, openness, federal character and access to redress as the principles of police promotion [12]. The Promotion Department receives recommendations, carries out or is involved in promotion examinations and interviews and acts on appeals from officers who believe they have not been promoted on time, or have been demoted or placed incorrectly [24]. Promotion thus has two roles: it is distributive and it communicates what is rewarded by the organisation. Louis et al. [17] discovered that promotion strategy had a significant impact on job satisfaction and performance of the police officers and suggested that there should be more transparency and fairness in the promotion of the police officers. The conceptual tension is therefore very simple. Where promotion is consistently based on ability, discipline and performance, it can be a positive incentive for professional behavior; where officers believe that promotion is based on lobbying, special access or personal sponsorship, it can be a negative incentive and lead to informal career paths and reduced morale.

Internal Security Performance

The performance of internal security is the ability of security institutions to provide a safe environment for the nation by preventing crime, law enforcement, public order, protection of life and property, intelligence cooperation and legitimate relations with citizens. The National Security Strategy of Nigeria considers the NPF as one of the key institutions for internal-security and the state of internal security should be measured by the level of reduction of crimes and insecurity, enhanced public perception of security and increased public confidence and trust in the security agencies, especially the police [1]. Therefore, this study considers performance to be multidimensional and not simply arrest totals or crime statistics. Effectiveness, professionalism, responsiveness, public trust and willingness to cooperate with the police are all important. Tiwa [25] reveals that the widespread distrust can also affect policing by causing citizens and policemen to resort to informal practices, while Bakare and Aderinola [26] list manpower shortage, politicisation, poor public perception and leadership that is not based on merit among the factors that limit the effectiveness of policing.

Empirical Review

The empirical studies on police personnel management in Nigeria have been consistent in identifying the weaknesses of the police but vary in emphasis. Chinwokwu

[2] identified factors that limit personnel management through questionnaires and interviews in three geopolitical regions of the country which include corruption, political interference, ethno-religious considerations, inadequate funding and weak facilities. His study is important because it has concluded that the number of officers does not equal the control of crime, but effective utilisation and management is important. Ojo [3] also notes that questionable recruitment and promotion, corruption, brutality and poor community relations are threats to institutional integrity. While these studies confirm the notion that personnel systems do have an impact on performance, they are prior to key developments discussed herein, such as the Police Act era, the Supreme Court recruitment judgment and the institutional confrontation of 2024.

Subsequent studies confirm the personnel-performance relationship. Louis et al. [17] discovered that promotion strategy was more associated with job satisfaction and performance compared to the other motivational strategies that were studied and Ramoni [18] identified career advancement as one of the factors that are relevant to the job performance of police. Akinyetun [27] expands on the weak performance to socioeconomic, ecological and sociocultural factors such as lack of training, political interference, poor equipment, lack of accountability, and weak reward systems. Bakare and Aderinola [26] also emphasize centralisation, politicisation, manpower shortage and leadership that is not based on merit. The literature thus warns against a one-causal explanation: whilst patronage pressure may be important, it is acting in conjunction with welfare, logistics, training, command structures and the broader political economy of policing.

There is another set of evidence on legitimacy and public cooperation. In his qualitative study, Tiwa [25] proposes a distrust trap whereby citizens' reluctance to trust formal policing leads to informal policing reactions, which further undermines the legitimacy of the formal police. Afrobarometer evidence provides a measureable Nigerian context for this argument: Citizen trust in the police dropped from 27 per cent in 2017 to 15 per cent in 2022, and citizens reported high levels of perceived corruption and bribery during police interactions [19], [20]. In 2024, 70 per cent rated the majority or all police officers as corrupt [21]. However, the literature on these legitimacy outcomes is often not combined with a chronological overview of the recruitment- and promotion-governance controversies from 2015 to 2025. The present study addresses this gap by linking personnel-governance pressure points to the organisational mechanisms that might impact on police performance and legitimacy.

2.7 Theoretical Framework: Weberian Bureaucratic Theory

The study is based on Weberian Bureaucratic Theory which was associated with the German sociologist Max Weber and his posthumously published work *Economy and Society* in 1921-1922. Weber's ideal type of rational bureaucracy is defined by hierarchy, specialized competence, impersonal rules, professional administration, discipline and separation of official duties from personal and political interests [28]. It is particularly pertinent to the governance of human resources as both meritocratic recruitment and rule-governed career progression are ways in which the authority of the bureaucracy is professionalized rather than personalized. Rauch and Evans [15] operationalised this Weberian logic comparatively, and discovered that meritocratic recruitment was an important predictor of the performance of the bureaucracy in developing countries. The theory, when applied to the NPF, creates a clear expectation that recruitment and promotion should be done on the basis of transparent rules and competence and institutional authority, not on the basis of patronage or informal lobbying. When decisions about personnel are challenged or seen as being based on relationships, the rational-legal basis of administration is undermined, which may impact on morale, competence and public trust. Weberian theory is thus used as a benchmark for the study to determine the extent of the discrepancy between formal personnel rules and the pressures of governance.

Research Gap and Propositions

Research Gap

The literature has three distinct and well-supported propositions: Nigerian policing is plagued by personnel-management problems; merit-based recruitment and promotion can enhance the performance of the organisation; and citizens' lack of trust in the police undermines effective police–citizen relationships. What has not been sufficiently studied is the relationship between these problems during the time frame of 2015–2025. Previous research often focuses on corruption, deployment, promotion motivation or police legitimacy in isolation, and official documents show that for 10 years there have been institutional disputes about who has the authority to recruit, regular complaints about special promotion, and disputed selection results. Thus, an integrated qualitative analysis is needed to differentiate between legitimate federal-character representation and patronage, between allegations and proven wrongdoing, and to see how governance uncertainty can impact on professional incentives and on internal-security performance. This study tries to fill this void with two propositions: the first is that there is a relationship between patronage pressures and human resource governance, and the second is that there is a relationship between human resource governance and police performance.

Propositions

Proposition 2: Political pressures and institutional contestation in the recruitment and promotion of officers dampen the merit-based human resource governance in the Nigeria Police Force, which led to low level of perceived fairness and procedural clarity, and weak professional career incentives.

Proposition 2: The weak merit based human resource governance is a negative influence on the internal security performance of the Nigeria Police Force as it reduces competence, morale, organisational legitimacy and citizens' willingness to rely on and cooperate with the Nigeria Police Force.

2. Materials and Method

Research Approach

This study is conducted using qualitative research approach. It explores formal personnel rules, institutional conflicts, official declarations, cases that were litigated and academic evaluations to gain insight into the processes of political patronage pressures, recruitment, promotion and police performance. This is a suitable method as patronage can be expressed in institutional practices, perceptions and informal influence, which cannot be properly measured by a single numerical indicator.

Sources of Data

Secondary data has been used in the study only. The sources of the core evidence were Police Service Commission annual reports, Police Service Commission and National Police Force official statements, Nigeria's National Security Strategy, Afrobarometer survey reports and peer-reviewed literature on police management, public administration and bureaucratic performance. Media reports were only included if they were a copy of an identifiable official statement and were triangulated with institutional records, where available.

Pictorial Evidence

There are two evidence visuals that are embedded in the Results and Discussions. The first is a qualitative time line of documented human-resource governance pressure points from 2015 to 2025. The second is a line graph of Afrobarometer measures of public trust in the police in 2015, 2017, 2020 and 2022. The timeline does not reflect the amount of patronage, and the trust graph is not a direct measure of the quality of recruitment, but rather of the legitimacy of the organisation.

Analytical Procedure

Content and thematic analysis was used to analyse the evidence. Documents were coded with regard to formal merit rules, institutional authority, pressure of patronage or lobbying, recruitment controversy, promotion fairness, motivation, professionalism, and public-trust/internal-security performance. This evidence was then arranged under the two propositions, and the materials which supported and contradicted each proposition were compared before each proposition was evaluated.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Triangulation of sources was used to enhance trustworthiness. Peer-reviewed studies and evidence from public opinion was compared to official institutional records, and allegations were clearly distinguished from findings. Special attention was paid to avoiding the use of the term patronage to refer to federal character, and to not consider public accusations made in the 2017 or 2024 controversies as evidence of corruption in the absence of an adjudicated finding.

Limitations of the Method

It is impossible to measure the degree of patronage in the study because informal political networks are not directly observable, nor are confidential personnel decisions. Afrobarometer data do not capture the causal impact of recruitment or promotion policies, but rather citizens' perceptions and experiences. Funding, technology, equipment, criminal dynamics, welfare, training and the wider justice system also have an impact on internal security. Findings thus reveal institutional mechanisms and potential relationships and not monocausal statistical impacts.

3. Results and Discussion

Proposition 1: Patronage Pressures, Institutional Contestation and Merit-Based Human Resource Governance

The evidence is quite strong for Proposition 1, but it is important to add the following qualification: the formal personnel structure of the NPF is not a patronage system. The PSC's guidelines include merit, hierarchy, seniority, vacancies, openness, regularity, and opportunities for redress; and the PSC's recruitment policy is based on merit, federal character and inclusive representation [12], [4]. This architecture is in line with the OECD's definition of public service based on merit, which includes the following elements: Objective criteria, open procedures, and protection from favouritism and undue political interference [16], [15]. Therefore, political patronage should be regarded as a pressure on implementation and not with the formal rules. This is important because if all the geographically representative appointments were patronage, a study that presumed that would be a misreading of the legitimate federal-character principle in Nigeria.

However, there are some documented promotion controversies, which show that there is a recurring informal pressure. In 2017, the NPF itself set up an investigation panel, tasked it to investigate complaints, ascertain their validity and identify those responsible for the complaints [13], [3]. The opening of an inquiry does not in itself mean allegations are true but it does show that the senior police leadership took the allegations seriously and felt they warranted a formal investigation. This is consistent with the general argument of Kopecký and Mair [22] about the role of patronage, which is based on particularistic access to public offices, and with the OECD's concern about the need to protect merit systems not only during the recruitment process, but also during promotion and career advancement [16]. Even if officers believe that promotion is possible to buy or sponsor, this undermines their belief in fair promotion based on performance, in organisational terms.

A second pressure on merit governance was the result of institutional contestation over recruitment. The PSC's 2019 Annual Report shows that a recruitment exercise that was approved for 10,000 constables was stuck at the medical screening stage by the Inspector-General of Police and management team and was awaiting judicial

interpretation [5], [2]. This conflict was no mere administrative hassle. Weberian administration requires transparent legal competence and consistent lines of authority; if two public bodies have a say in the same appointment process, then it is more difficult to identify the accountability procedures [28], [15]. The war also posed a risk to continuity in a recruitment programme that was meant to fill the manpower gaps due to the escalating cases of banditry, terrorism and kidnapping [4], [1].

This authority was clarified in the Supreme Court decision of 11 July 2023, which confirmed the PSC's statutory role to recruit constables, and the Commission described the judgment as putting an end to a controversy which had damaged inter-agency relations [6], [7]. Judgment from a human-resource governance point of view, the judgment should have enhanced the clarity of roles as the legal responsibilities of selection became less ambiguous. However, the 2024 recruitment battle shows that judicial rulings alone failed to establish a consensus on how to run the operations. The governance issue moves from the formal competence to collaboration when institutions continue to disagree with the results of recruitment after the legal mandate has been settled [10], [9]. This is a typical example of an implementation gap which a Weberian framework reveals: rules may be unambiguous, but administrative practices may be conflictual.

The 2024 episode is the best example of the first proposition. Following the release of the 10,000 successful candidates by the PSC, the NPF pointed to the fact that some of the successful candidates were not even on the list of those who applied, others failed the computer-based and physical screening, and some were declared medically unfit; it also cited allegations of financial dealings [9], [8]. The PSC dismissed the allegation, insisted that the selection was based on merit and federal character and called for verifiable evidence to substantiate the claim, and suggested that the two lists be put under the microscope as part of a forensic investigation against the computer-based test scores [10], [11]. Thus, there is no evidence that would support a determination that patronage or corruption was established. What it does do, however, is create a lack of trust in the recruitment data and process integrity, which in turn undermines human-resource governance, as candidates, officers and the public are given mixed messages about whether merit has been adhered to in the recruitment process.

The separation of proven corruption and governance vulnerability is corroborated by the broader literature. Chinwoku [2] enumerates corruption, political interference and ethno-religious considerations as some of the challenges to effective personnel management of the police while Ojo [3] mentions questionable recruitment and promotion as some of the factors affecting the integrity of the police. The two studies do not imply that all challenged personnel actions are "politically captured. Instead, they suggest that transparency of processes is particularly significant as it is possible to exert informal influence on stakeholders, given the lack of trust that exists in the system [25], [16]. In this context, the worst thing that can happen in the midst of institutional conflict is to lose the legitimacy of the appointment process, even if it is technically sound, because audit trails, decision rights and inter-agency verification are not transparent and accepted.

At the end of the study period, the same tension is present between formal merit and informal pressure in the case of promotion governance. The NPF in August 2025 cautioned officers against lobbying for or making unofficial requests for special promotion, emphasising that such promotions should be based on outstanding performance and exemplary service [14], [12]. The warning is analytically helpful because it helps to differentiate between legitimate exceptional advancement and patronage. Systems can reward bravery or exceptional performance, without losing sight of merit, as long as the criteria are clear and applied uniformly. This is important because Louis et al. [17] demonstrate the impact of promotion strategy on police motivation and performance and Ramoni [18] highlights that career advancement is a factor that relates to job performance. Even if an organisation has formal rules, if officers feel that connections are more important than performance, then the incentive effect of promotion is diminished.

Selected Human-Resource Governance Pressure Points in the Nigeria Police Force, 2015–2025

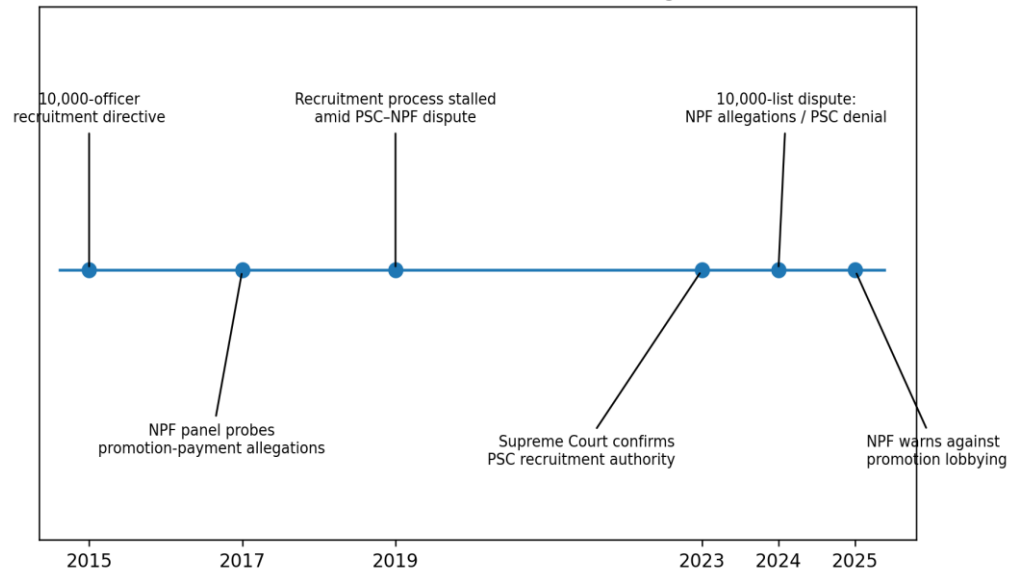


Figure 1. Selected Human-Resource Governance Pressure Points in the Nigeria Police Force, 2015–2025

Source: Author's qualitative chronology based on PSC [29], [5]–[7], NPF [13], [8] and Odeniyi [14]. The figure records documented governance events; it is not a numerical index of patronage.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the pressure on personnel governance was not limited to a single administration or a specific type of decision. The saga started with the expansion of the recruitment in 2015, followed by allegations of special promotion in 2017, the institutional recruitment dispute in 2019, the judicial settlement in 2023 and the list controversy in 2024 and the warning against promotion lobbying in 2025 [29], [13], [5], [6], [9], [14]. The visual should not be interpreted to mean that patronage grew over time. Rather, it illustrates that recruitment and promotion were both an ongoing need for governance interventions. This pattern confirms the theory that effective professional public personnel management relies not only on written merit rules, but also on consistent inter-agency authority, transparent data and trustworthy implementation of merit rules that prevents informal influence [16], [15].

So, Proposition 1 is accepted with qualification. While there is ample evidence of patronage pressure, lobbying issues and institutional contestation, there is no evidence that suggests that the recruitment and promotion of NPF were systematically captured by political patrons during 2015–2025. The more robust one is institutional: Procedural clarity and perceived fairness are undermined where there is role conflict, opaque influence or contested selection outcomes [12], [10]. Weberian theory, indeed, predicts just this outcome, as professional administration requires impersonal rules and competence, and empirical studies of public administration have found that merit-based recruitment is associated with better bureaucratic performance [28], [15].

Proposition 2 – Human Resource Governance and Internal Security Performance

The second proposition is also confirmed, but the human-resource governance is considered as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for effective internal security. Nigeria's National Security Strategy clearly outlines the capacities that must be improved in the NPF, and one of the indicators of success in internal security is a decrease in crime, enhanced public perception and increased trust in security institutions [1], [26]. This policy logic is in line with the comparative findings of Rauch and Evans [15] that meritocratic recruitment is linked to better bureaucratic performance and with the OECD [16] that merit-based personnel systems are linked to better public services. The mechanism is plausible: recruitment influences who is in the organisation, promotion influences which

behaviours/competencies are rewarded, and both influence the quality of personnel available for policing tasks.

The mechanism is supported by empirical research in Nigeria. Chinwokwu [2] concludes that the effective control of crime requires proper utilisation and management of the police officers and there are some challenges such as political interference, corruption and weak facilities. Louis et al. [17] indicate that promotion strategy has a significant impact on job satisfaction and performance, implying that career governance impacts the reactions of personnel to the needs of the organisation. Motivation and career related factors are also found to predict police job performance by Ramoni [18]. These studies show that even if the numbers of recruits are high, there is a possibility of a weak internal security if the selection, deployment and advancement do not consistently reinforce competence, motivation and professional conduct [27], [3].

The frequent recruitment of large cohorts of constables is an example of this difference between manpower and performance. The 2015 presidential directive was for 10,000 more officers, while the policy approved recruitment of 10,000 constables annually to fill gaps in manpower due to insecurity and personnel attrition [29], [4]. However, the National Security Strategy also requires strengthening of training, intelligence, forensic capability, technology, equipment and community partnership, which is the multidimensionality of security capacity [1], [27]. Thus, the 2024 spat on the quality of the candidates is not just about institutional rivalry. When there is a disagreement between the recruiting authority and the operational police force regarding the screening of the selected entrants, the disagreement goes straight to the questions of trainability, competence and future service delivery [9], [10].

Another pathway through which personnel governance can impact performance is through public trust. Afrobarometer's time series indicates that the proportion of Nigerians who trust the police 'somewhat' or 'a lot' was 21 per cent in 2015, increased to 27 per cent in 2017, dropped to 24 per cent in 2020 and further dropped to 15 per cent in 2022 [19], [20]. As Tiwa [25] notes, this is of operational relevance because if citizens do not trust formal policing, they might not use police institutions and instead resort to informal security or justice mechanisms, which in turn can create a vicious circle of distrust. Public confidence is also an indicator of internal security in Nigeria's National Security Strategy as intelligence-led and community policing rely on citizens' cooperation with the police [1], [26].

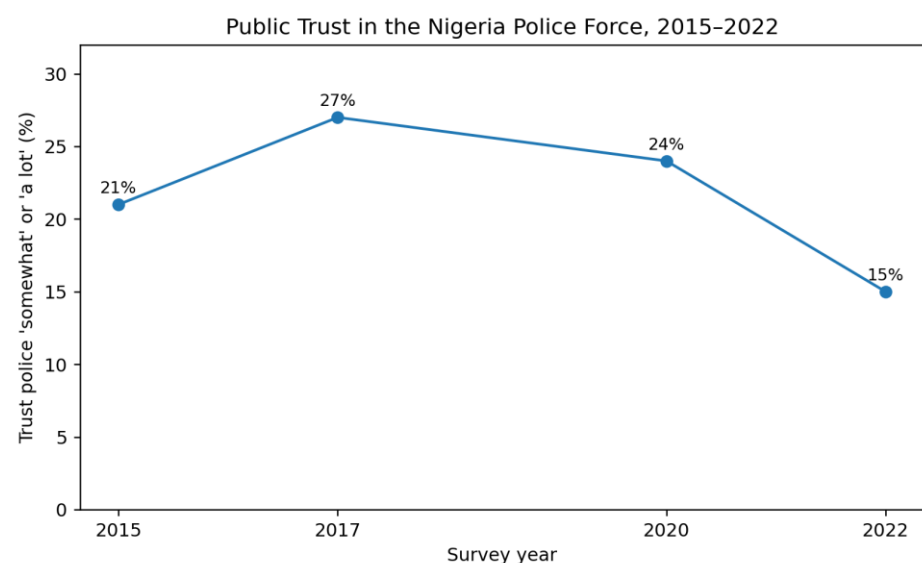


Figure 2. Public Trust in the Nigeria Police Force, 2015–2022

Source: Author's line graph based on Afrobarometer [19] and Kweitsu [20]. Values show respondents who trusted the police 'somewhat' or 'a lot'.

As seen in Figure 2, there was no sustainable increase in police legitimacy over the time period for which comparable Afrobarometer data are available. After a rise in 2017, the rate fell by 12 percentage points to 15 per cent in 2022, the lowest level in the period plotted [19], [20]. This is not statistically ascribable to recruitment or promotion policies and would be an exaggeration of the facts. However, it is in line with the proposition's organisational-legitimacy mechanism as personnel behaviour is the key point of contact for citizens with the police. Ojo [3] indicates that questionable recruitment, promotion and poor management leads to damaged institutional integrity and Tiwa [25] reveals that distrust affects citizens' security behaviour. Human-resource governance is therefore pertinent not only because it does not account for all distrust, but because recruitment and promotion contribute to the determination of who will exercise police power and what conduct will be rewarded.

This is confirmed by the overall 2022 performance indicators. According to Kweitsu [20], Nigerians believe that the police are not often or at all professional and respectful of citizens' rights (13 per cent) and that government is not doing a good job of reducing crime (21 per cent). In an Afrobarometer report on the same topic, less than one-fifth (17 per cent) of respondents said they would turn to the police as their first choice for assistance in the event of a threat to their personal or family security; many would instead seek out community or traditional leaders and relatives [30], [25]. The results are not just human resource issues; operational resources, police welfare, insecurity patterns and criminal-justice delays are significant [27], [26]. Nevertheless, the professional legitimacy of a police organisation cannot be established if the selection of personnel, career rewards and accountability are not seen as credible.

The fact that corruption perceptions have remained constant in 2024 shows the extent of the legitimacy challenge. Afrobarometer [21] revealed that 70 per cent of the population thought that most or all police officials are corrupt and 67 per cent of those who sought police help said they paid a bribe. Previously, Kweitsu [20] revealed that 73 per cent believed that most or all police were corrupt and three-quarters of the people who sought police help reported that they paid a bribe. While these are just figures for frontline interactions and not for promotion decisions, they do give a good indication as to why the human-resource governance of merit is important. It is believed that merit systems contribute to integrity as it helps to minimize favouritism and uphold professional norms [16], and a weak recruitment, promotion and accountability system is associated with problems of police integrity [3]. While recruitment and promotion cannot eradicate bribery on their own, they do shape the culture of the organisation that tolerates, sanctions or rewards bribery.

Another performance impact is the morale and organisational commitment. Promotion can incentivize training, discipline and service if officers perceive it to be fair and based on performance; if they feel they need to lobby or have connections to get promoted, rational career behaviour may shift to cultivating sponsors instead of enhancing professional competence [17], [14]. According to Weberian theory, impersonality and rule-governed career systems are the ones that are supposed to prevent organisations from being displaced by these professional incentives [28], [15]. The NPF warning, therefore, for 2025 against unofficial promotion lobbying is not just a moral statement. It acknowledges that the legitimacy of promotion criteria is an organisational resource, especially in a hierarchical organisation like the police where rank is a measure of authority, responsibility and command.

The proposition must however be limited by the multi-causal nature of insecurity. According to Bakare and Aderinola [26], these issues are all occurring simultaneously, which includes centralisation, manpower shortage, politicisation and poor public perception, while Akinyetun [27] adds inadequate training, equipment, remuneration, intelligence capability and accountability. The National Security Strategy also considers technology, intelligence, equipment, data systems, community partnership and training as essential components in addition to recruitment [1], [2]. Therefore, improved merit

governance alone will not eradicate kidnapping, banditry, terrorism and organised crime. Its contribution is foundational – it makes it more likely that limited training, equipment and authority is delegated to capable hands in the context of credible professional incentives.

Proposition 2 is thus accepted as a mechanism of institutions and not as a monocausal statement. Poorly managed recruitment and promotion can lead to a lack of competence, low morale and professional motivation, which can in turn result in a loss of citizens' trust and cooperation, affecting the capacity to police through intelligence and communities [17], [25]. On the other hand, transparent personnel governance can give the organisation credibility, however, this must be complemented with other reforms such as welfare, training, technology, logistics and accountability to yield internal-security gains [1], [27]. The evidence thus suggests a partial causal chain: Merit-based human-resource governance is a necessary but insufficient condition for professional internal-security performance.

4. Conclusion

Political patronage, human-resource governance and internal-security performance in the Nigeria Police Force (2015 – 2025) was the subject of this study. It concludes that there are significant merit protections in the formal personnel system, such as competitive assessment, seniority, vacancies, promotion examinations, federal character, openness and avenues for redress. The main problem is not so much that there are no rules but that there is constant pressure on the enforcement of rules. The decade saw claims of special-promotion payments, a long-running battle over recruitment powers between the institutions, a Supreme Court ruling, a much-publicised battle over the 2024 constable list, and a rehashing of promotion lobbying concerns in 2025. They are not necessarily evidence of systematic patronage, but they do indicate that the credibility of personnel governance has been under attack time and again. The second proposition is also supported: recruitment and promotion impact on competence, motivation and organisational legitimacy, and a lack of public trust diminishes cooperative relationships needed for effective policing. Human-resource governance is a prerequisite but not the only factor that influences Nigeria's internal-security outcomes. Increased numbers through police reform can lead to increased size of organisations without proportionate increased professional capacity, if there is no protection of merit, role clarity and career fairness.

Research Limitations

The analysis is constrained by the use of secondary evidence which is publicly available. Informal patronage relations are hard to document and the study cannot confirm personnel interventions that are made in confidence. There are allegations and counter-allegations in some of the important episodes, such as the 2017 and 2024 controversies, without adjudicated findings. Any data that is in the public domain will not be able to separate the impact of human-resource governance from broader policing experiences. These restrictions impose a cautionary note in drawing conclusions and account for the fact that the study does not attempt to estimate the extent of political patronage, but rather institutional vulnerability.

Suggestions for further research

Future research should be based on personnel-record analysis and confidential interviews with serving and retired officers, PSC officials, police unions or associations and civil-society monitors. A quantitative study with a longitudinal design could be used to test the hypothesis that transparent promotion procedures are related to disciplinary outcomes, retention, morale or command performance. Cross-sectoral analyses of federal security agencies could also be conducted to assess whether perceptions of patronage are lower and public-sector legitimacy is higher when there is clear authority for appointing officials and digital audit trails are in place.

Recommendations

1. The PSC and NPF should put in place a single digital recruitment architecture with role-based access, immutable audit trail and independent verification of application, examination, physical-screening and medical-screening records. The PSC's constitutional recruitment mandate should be retained and operational police representatives should be involved via formally structured quality-assurance roles. Inter-agency disputes would be minimised and confidence in merit and federal-character compliance would be enhanced if there were greater transparency in the publication of aggregate screening statistics and audit outcomes.
2. The criteria for eligibility, schedule of vacancies, examination requirements and standardised scorecards for regular and accelerated promotion should be published to make the promotion governance more transparent. Un-official lobbying should be subject to enforceable sanctions and exceptional promotion for bravery or distinguished performance should be based on documented criteria and be subject to reviewable evidence. A believable appeals process would ensure that deserving officers are protected, enhance career incentives and decrease the notion that access to influential sponsors is the key to promotion.
3. Human-resource reform must be directly related to the performance of internal security. Competency based training, ethical screening, deployment analysis, officer welfare and periodic performance review should accompany the recruitment targets. PSC and NPF should monitor together indicators that are relevant to citizens, including professionalism, complaint resolution and public trust, as well as operational indicators. Tying personnel decisions to proven performance would make recruitment and promotion from administrative processes to tools for professional policing and public-security enhancement.

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