

Categorisation of Police Misconduct in Nigeria

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This study conducts an integrative literature review to address the absence of a comprehensive and systematic classification of police misconduct in Nigeria. Using the PRISMA framework, peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025 were analysed, and thematic analysis uncovered nine distinct categories of misconduct. Each category comprises multiple subcategories that reflect structural, behavioural, and institutional dimensions of deviant policing across Nigeria's geopolitical regions. Institutional theory and broken windows theory provide the theoretical interpretations of these patterns. The nine categories are: corruption and financial misconduct, extrajudicial and lethal misconduct, physical and psychological abuse, sexual misconduct, abuse of power and authoritarianism, human rights violations, operational and institutional failure, systemic and political issues, and residual misconduct. A frequency analysis of the literature shows that corruption and financial misconduct attracted the highest documentation (15 sources), confirming it as the most pervasive category. This study concludes that the documented patterns of misconduct reflect deep institutional conditions within the Nigerian Police Force that continue to enable and sustain deviant conduct, and therefore recommends systemic and collaborative approaches that involve the specific, actionable, and coordinated efforts of the National Assembly, the Police Service Commission, the Ministry of Police Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Interior, civil society organisations, and the National Judicial Council.

Keywords: Policing, police misconduct, Nigeria police, law enforcement, police deviance

Introduction

Police misconduct broadly refers to behaviours by law enforcement officers that violate established legal, ethical, and organisational norms. It depicts a wide range of actions, from minor procedural violations to serious human rights abuses such as excessive use of force, corruption, and discrimination (Harris, 2014; Akinlabi, 2017; Aborisade, 2021; Ojedokun *et al.*, 2023; Juliet *et al.*, 2024). Globally, police misconduct dents the legitimacy of policing institutions, erodes public trust, and weakens law enforcement capacity to maintain social order (Davids & McMahon, 2014). The issue raises urgent questions around accountability, oversight, and the role policing plays within democratic societies. While police misconduct is a global phenomenon, its forms and causes reflect distinct socio-political contexts. In North America and Europe, research documents persistent patterns of racial profiling, excessive

use of lethal force, and institutional racism (Legewie, 2016; Paull, 2020; Oramas-Mora *et al.*, 2023).

In Africa, policing systems face acute challenges shaped by historical legacies, governance deficits, and resource constraints (Berg & Howell, 2016; Kwaja, 2022; Cunneen, 2025). Most African police forces grapple with chronic underfunding, insufficient training, and personnel shortages. These conditions degrade operational effectiveness and create fertile ground for corruption and abuse (Kwaja, 2022; Mofokeng *et al.*, 2023). Nigeria exemplifies these challenges with a police-to-population ratio of approximately 1:650, falling short of the United Nations recommended ratio of 1:450 for effective community policing (Dakuku, 2024). This figure is not impressive when compared with South Africa, which maintains a ratio of 1:423 (South African Police Service, 2024), while Kenya's

stands at 1:800 (Africa Check, 2024). The African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum (APCOF) reports widespread human rights violations and weak accountability mechanisms across African police services (APCOF, 2024). In Nigeria specifically, public trust in the police is extremely low, with only 12% of citizens expressing confidence in the police, which is the lowest level in West Africa, and 68% reporting bribery as their most common form of police interaction (Afrobarometer, 2023).

Nigeria's position as Africa's most populous nation, with an estimated 227,882,945 in 2023 according to World Bank development indicators compiled from officially recognised sources (Trading Economics, 2025), underscores the scale and significance of policing challenges. The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) consists of over 371,800 officers (Shehu, 2023), yet the force's capacity is constrained by inadequate funding and a personnel shortage that contributes to excessive workloads, operational inefficiencies, and environments prone to misconduct (Anzizi, 2024). Empirical studies reveal that police misconduct in Nigeria manifests through bribery, extortion, unlawful detention, torture, extrajudicial killings, and intimidation, among others (Aborisade, 2021; Ojedokun *et al.*, 2023; Juliet *et al.*, 2024). The nationwide #EndSARS protests of 2020 brought international attention to police brutality and structural abuses, as well as extrajudicial killings by police officers (Ojedokun *et al.*, 2021; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021). There were also reported cases of police abuse and use of force during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aborisade, 2021; Ojedokun, 2021). These incidents illustrate the depth of police misconduct and the fragmented, reactive nature of reform responses, which focus narrowly on isolated cases without addressing systemic root causes.

Academic enquiries into Nigerian police misconduct have examined discrete dimensions such as corruption (Shodunke, 2024), inadequate training and professional development (Oghogho *et al.*, 2024), and political manipulation of policing institutions alongside weak accountability frameworks (Amusan & Saka, 2018; Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2024; Anzizi, 2024), among others. However, these studies rarely synthesise the complex, multifaceted nature of police misconduct into comprehensive categories that link

misconduct forms with underlying institutional and contextual drivers. Prior typological efforts in the broader police deviance literature have largely been developed in Western policing contexts and do not adequately account for the structural realities of post-colonial African policing environments. In a setting like Nigeria's, political interference, resource poverty, and informal institutional norms shape misconduct in ways that existing frameworks from the North American and European contexts do not fully explain. Without such integrated, Nigeria-specific analyses, understanding and addressing police misconduct remains fragmented and insufficient.

Bridging this gap through a broad categorisation of police misconduct is essential for advancing scholarly understanding and forming more effective policies and reform initiatives. This study contributes to the clarification of the spectrum of misconduct, spanning from administrative breaches to egregious human rights violations, and relates these to institutional factors such as funding shortfalls, political interference, and accountability weaknesses. The nine categories identified in this study are not arbitrary divisions. Each category reflects a distinct cluster of behaviours that share common institutional drivers, operational patterns, and legal implications. The boundaries between categories were determined through iterative thematic coding, ensuring that each category is sufficiently distinct from the others while remaining internally coherent. Practically, this categorisation can guide policymakers, government ministries, oversight agencies, and civil society in prioritising reforms and allocating resources more strategically. In addition, the taxonomy holds potential for empirical operationalisation in future audit frameworks and misconduct measurement instruments for oversight agencies such as the Police Service Commission and the National Human Rights Commission.

Theoretical Interpretations of Patterns in Police Misconduct

The categorisation of police misconduct in this study is anchored on institutional theory and broken windows theory. Both theories reveal how internal structures and external neglect jointly sustain and escalate deviant behaviours within the Nigerian Police Force. Rather than applying these

frameworks sequentially, this study integrates them into a unified explanatory model where institutional theory addresses the structural and normative conditions that allow deviance to become embedded, and broken windows theory explains how the absence of corrective action triggers escalation from minor misconduct to severe abuse.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory was introduced by John Meyer and Brian Rowan in 1977 to provide a foundational perspective on how organisations are influenced by their external institutional environments (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Now widely applied across the social sciences, the theory explores how established social structures, norms, and expectations guide and shape organizational behaviour. It emphasises the role of formal and informal rules in shaping decision-making processes and the tendency of organisations to conform to prevailing societal pressures in order to maintain acceptance and credibility within their operational contexts (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer *et al.*, 2015; Herranen, 2022).

The widespread misconduct explored in this study points to a deeply entrenched institutional culture where unethical actions are not only practised but gradually accepted as standard operational behaviour. Through the lens of institutional theory, it becomes clear that the Nigerian Police Force operates in an environment where external political pressures, inadequate supervisory structures, and informal norms significantly shape officer conduct. In such a setting, behaviours like extortion, torture, and illegal detention are not perceived as violations but as strategic adaptations to institutional expectations. Officers learn early in their careers that conformity to these unofficial rules secures acceptance, protection, and even upward mobility within the force. What appears on the surface as isolated wrongdoing is, in reality, a reflection of an organisation whose informal codes carry more weight than formal policies. The failure of internal oversight bodies and the performative nature of disciplinary frameworks only reinforce this system, thereby allowing misconduct to thrive under a veil of bureaucratic legitimacy. This

institutional environment does not merely tolerate abuse; it reproduces abuse through a structure where deviance is rewarded and compliance with ethical standards is marginalised.

Broken Windows Theory

The Broken Windows theory was proposed by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling in 1982 through a widely cited article in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Originally, the theory proposed that addressing minor forms of disorder could prevent more serious crimes (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Over time, the theory has gained significant relevance in criminology and related fields, providing a framework for understanding how visible signs of antisocial behaviour and low-level neglect in an urban setting can foster an environment where more severe criminal activities are likely to emerge (Gau & Pratt, 2010; Ren *et al.*, 2019; Piston, 2023).

This study shows how a pattern of seemingly minor police misconduct gradually creates a climate that tolerates and even encourages severe abuses. The frequent neglect of everyday misconduct such as arbitrary arrests and verbal abuse sends a clear message to officers that these acts are acceptable, thereby lowering the threshold for more serious violations. In this context, the Nigerian Police Force becomes an organisation whose early signs of disorder are ignored, paving the way for more destructive practices like custodial violence and sexual exploitation. These behaviours escalate not because they are planned but because the system fails to correct the initial breakdown in professional discipline. The message conveyed to both officers and the public is that misconduct carries no consequences. Over time, this neglect becomes part of the operational identity of the force, creating a culture of normalised abuse that weakens any sense of accountability. Just as physical disorder in a neighbourhood signals vulnerability, the unchecked misconduct within police ranks signals institutional decay that invites more harmful actions and erodes public trust with every unaddressed violation.

Methodology

This study employed an integrative literature review to develop a comprehensive categorisation

of police misconduct based on patterns identified in existing scholarly research. The integrative review method facilitates the synthesis of diverse empirical and theoretical studies and enables a holistic understanding of the complexities that surround police misconduct. While there is no universally accepted structure for conducting integrative reviews, this study adopted the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to enhance reporting transparency, improve methodological clarity, and ensure replicability.

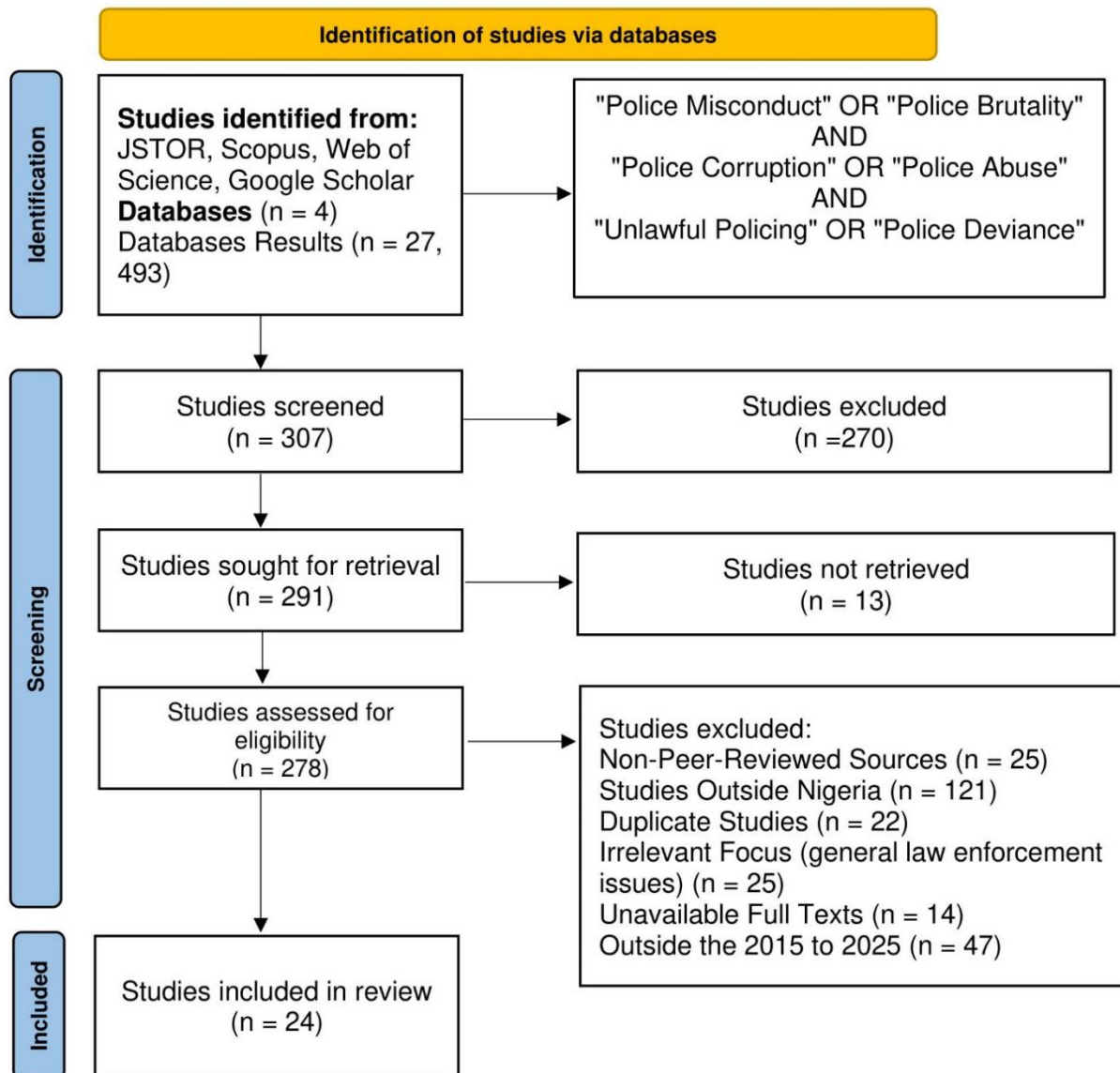
A systematic search was conducted across multiple established academic databases, including JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, to ensure extensive coverage of relevant literature. The search was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025 to allow the inclusion of contemporary research reflecting recent developments in policing practices and misconduct. A carefully constructed set of keywords guided the search, comprising terms such as "police misconduct", "police corruption", "excessive use of force", "police brutality", "accountability", and "law enforcement abuse". This combination of keywords was designed to capture a broad range of misconduct types and associated issues within policing systems.

The PRISMA flow diagram was used to guide the literature selection process, including identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion phases, thereby ensuring a systematic and accountable review process. Inclusion criteria required that articles explicitly address police misconduct in conceptual, empirical, and case study forms. In terms of contextual focus, priority was given to studies conducted within low-income developing countries, post-colonial policing systems, and contexts characterised by weak accountability structures and governance deficits. This operationalisation of comparable contexts ensures that the review captures experiences most relevant to the Nigerian policing environment. Studies focusing on unrelated topics, non-peer-reviewed sources, and those outside the specified timeframe were excluded to maintain the review's relevance and academic integrity.

Data extraction involved detailed examination of each article to identify descriptions, typologies,

and contributing factors of police misconduct. Thematic analysis was then conducted by the lead researcher to identify, analyse, and report recurring patterns across the literature. The coding process proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, open codes were assigned to specific behaviours, institutional conditions, and contextual factors identified across the sources. In the second stage, these codes were grouped into coherent thematic clusters through a process of comparative analysis and conceptual refinement. Where findings across sources appeared to conflict, reconciliation was achieved by examining the contextual specificity of each study, considering whether differences reflected regional variation, methodological divergence, and differing periods of data collection. No data synthesis software was used during this process. The thematic analysis was conducted manually to preserve the interpretive rigour of the review. Although integrative reviews are typically flexible in methodological application, the incorporation of PRISMA enhances the reliability of findings by providing a structured protocol for literature appraisal and documentation.

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram



Findings

Categories and Subcategories of Police Misconduct in Nigeria

The figure and table below present the categories and subcategories of police misconduct in Nigeria, drawn from literature published between 2015 and 2025. They reveal the breadth and depth of professional and ethical breaches within the Nigerian Police Force, as well as the institutional, operational, and political failures that enable these practices to persist. These findings directly address

the study's research objective of systematically categorising police misconduct in Nigeria through an integrative review of recent scholarly literature.

The nine categories identified are corruption and financial misconduct, extrajudicial and lethal misconduct, physical and psychological abuse, sexual misconduct, abuse of power and authoritarianism, human rights violations, operational and institutional failure, systemic and political issues, and residual misconduct. The boundaries of each category were determined

through iterative thematic coding. Where subcategories appeared across more than one category, placement was determined by the primary institutional driver and operational context of the behaviour. For instance, "use of force" appears in both Category 3 (as a tool of physical abuse during interrogation) and Category 5 (as a means of authoritarian enforcement during civilian interactions). These represent distinct behavioural contexts despite sharing a label. Category 9, which captures misconducts that do not conform neatly to the preceding eight categories, is retained as a methodologically justified residual category. Behaviours such as kidnapping, destruction of property, and abuse of organisational goods share no common institutional driver sufficient to warrant a standalone category, yet they are too significant to be omitted from the taxonomy.

A frequency analysis of the literature sources reveals that corruption and financial misconduct attracted the highest number of documented references, with 15 sources. Physical and psychological abuse followed with 12 sources, while abuse of power attracted 11 sources. Operational and institutional failure was documented in 8 sources, as were human rights violations. Extrajudicial and lethal misconduct, sexual misconduct, and systemic and political issues each attracted 6 sources, while residual misconduct was referenced in 4 sources. This distribution confirms that corruption and physical violence constitute the most extensively documented dimensions of police misconduct in Nigeria, a finding consistent with the broader African policing literature.

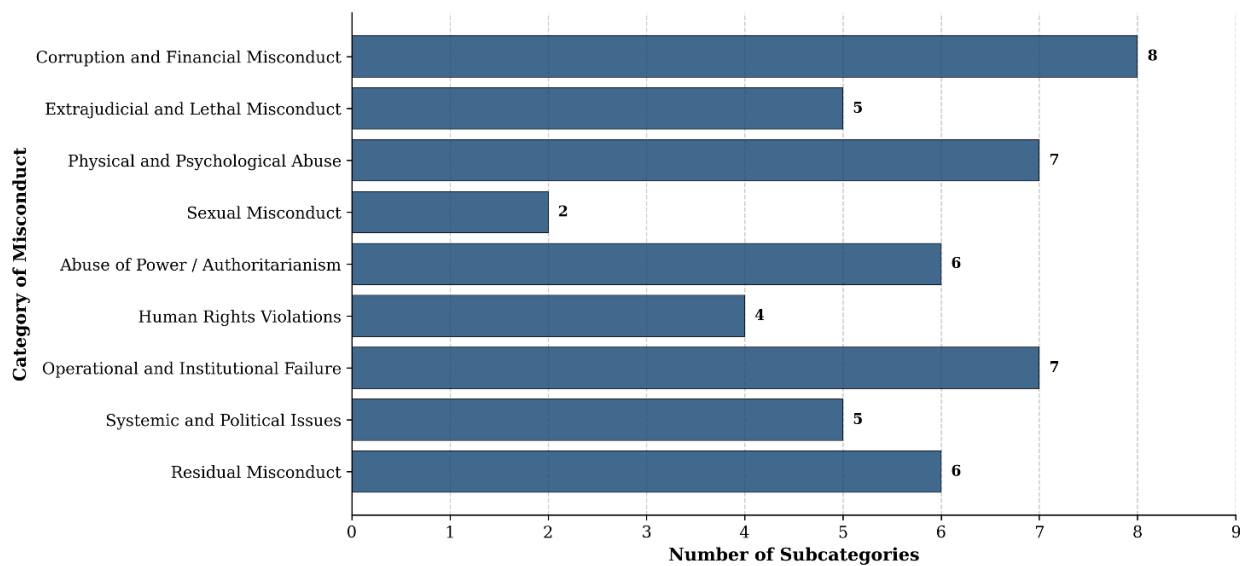


Figure 1: Categories and Subcategories of Police Misconduct in Nigeria

Source: Created by the Authors

Table 1: Categories, Subcategories and Sources

S/N	Category	Subcategories	Sources
1	Corruption and Financial Misconduct	Bribery at checkpoints and arrests Extortion (motorists, victims, suspects) Embezzlement of police funds Kickbacks/returns system Selling police weapons/postings Theft (from suspects, corpses, crime scenes) Payment to close case files Fraud and falsification of evidence	Ojedokun <i>et al.</i> (2023); Akamike <i>et al.</i> (2023); Asanebi (2023); Ezeugwu & Amunnadi (2020); Akinlabi (2020); Agbibo (2015); Akinyetun (2022); Aborisade & Gbahabo (2021); Aborisade & Fayemi (2015); Juliet <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ezech <i>et al.</i> (2018); Akinlabi (2017); Anaeke & Oli (2024); Shodunke (2024); Danbaba <i>et al.</i> (2025)
2	Extrajudicial and Lethal Misconduct	Extrajudicial killings Disappearance of suspects Deaths in custody Killings disguised as confrontations Retaliatory killings	Ojedokun <i>et al.</i> (2023); Asanebi (2023); Akinyetun (2022); Ariyoosu <i>et al.</i> (2024); Agbibo (2015); Amusan & Saka (2018)
3	Physical and Psychological Abuse	Torture to extract confessions Beatings and physical assault (slaps, kicks, flogging) Use of weapons/tools (e.g., cutlasses, irons) Threats with firearms Forced kneeling/intimidation Humiliation and parading of suspects	Danbaba <i>et al.</i> (2025); Aborisade & Obileye (2017); Ariyoosu <i>et al.</i> (2024); Anaeke & Oli (2024); Ulo (2021); Amusan & Saka (2018); Ezech <i>et al.</i> (2018); Asanebi (2023); Ijalana & Fayomi (2025); Aborisade & Gbahabo (2021); Shodunke (2024); Akinlabi (2020)
4	Sexual Misconduct	Sexual harassment (citizens and colleagues) Sexual assault (especially in custody)	Juliet <i>et al.</i> (2024); Akinyetun (2022); Aborisade & Oni (2020); Aborisade & Obileye (2017); Ariyoosu <i>et al.</i> (2024); Aborisade (2024)
5	Abuse of Power/ Authoritarianism	Arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention Framing individuals Fabrication of charges Oppressive enforcement (e.g. COVID-19 rules) Intimidation of citizens and families Use of Force (during civilian interactions)	Oghogho <i>et al.</i> (2024); Agbibo (2015); Akinyetun (2022); Juliet <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ariyoosu <i>et al.</i> (2024); Anaeke & Oli (2024); Aborisade & Oni (2020); Asanebi (2023); Danbaba <i>et al.</i> (2025); Ijalana & Fayomi (2025); Aborisade & Gbahabo (2021)
6	Human Rights Violations	Inhumane cell conditions Use of force on unarmed civilians Denial of compensation orders Parading suspects as guilty	Danbaba <i>et al.</i> (2025); Akinyetun (2022); Asanebi (2023); Ariyoosu <i>et al.</i> (2024); Amusan & Saka (2018); Ijalana & Fayomi (2025); Aborisade (2024); Anaeke & Oli (2024)
7	Operational and Institutional Failure	Failure to investigate misconduct Inadequate funding Poor training and facilities Misuse of task forces Arrests without proper tools Internal control failure Neglect of reforms/inquiries	Amusan & Saka (2018); Akinyetun (2022); Aborisade & Fayemi (2015); Ijalana & Fayomi (2025); Asanebi (2023); Danbaba <i>et al.</i> (2025); Anzizi (2024); Ojedokun & Aderinto (2024)
8	Systemic and Political Issues	Impunity/lack of sanctions Political protection of abusers Over-centralisation of police Corruption favouring elites	Ezeugwu & Amunnadi (2020); Aborisade & Fayemi (2015); Danbaba <i>et al.</i> (2025); Ezech <i>et al.</i> (2018); Amusan & Saka (2018); Asanebi (2023)

		Poor public-police relations	
9	Residual Misconduct	Destruction of personal property Abuse of information Kidnapping Abuse of organisational goods Private misconduct Waste of public resources	Juliet <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ariyoosu <i>et al.</i> (2024); Asanebi (2023); Ijalana & Fayomi (2025)

Source: Created by the Authors

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that police misconduct in Nigeria is not a collection of isolated incidents. It is a deeply embedded institutional phenomenon that operates across multiple behavioural domains. The discussion that follows moves beyond a narration of the categories to engage with the theoretical and contextual significance of what the findings reveal about the Nigerian police institution. Where applicable, the discussion situates these findings within the broader African policing context.

Institutional Embeddedness of Corruption

Corruption emerges as the most extensively documented category in this review, referenced in 15 of the studies examined. This finding is consistent with what is known about comparable African policing contexts. In Ghana, police extortion at checkpoints and during investigations has been documented as a systemic phenomenon tied to institutional underfunding and hierarchical toleration of illicit gains (Kwaja, 2022). In South Africa, similar dynamics of corruption and preferential enforcement have been attributed to structural conditions within the police service (Mofokeng *et al.*, 2023). The Nigerian context, however, presents a particularly institutionalised variant of this problem. The "returns system," through which lower-ranked officers are compelled to remit portions of illicitly acquired funds to senior officers, transforms individual corrupt acts into a structured financial arrangement embedded within the police hierarchy (Aborisade & Fayemi, 2015; Shodunke, 2024). Corruption is evident at roadblocks, during arrests, and throughout investigations, and it is driven in part by inadequate remuneration and poor working conditions (Akinyetun, 2022).

From the perspective of institutional theory, this arrangement constitutes an informal institutional norm that carries greater operational

authority than formal anti-corruption policies. Officers who comply with this system are rewarded with protection, postings, and promotion. Officers who resist face professional marginalisation. What begins as a violation of formal rules gradually becomes a structural expectation, reproduced through the very mechanisms meant to enforce discipline. These practices also divert essential resources, erode operational effectiveness, and worsen social inequality by privileging elites who can afford protection over the general populace (Agbibo, 2015; Akinlabi, 2017; Akamike *et al.*, 2023). This analysis suggests that corruption in the Nigerian Police Force is not merely a behavioural problem. It is an institutional design problem. The formal architecture of discipline and oversight has been colonised by informal norms that sustain misconduct. Without transforming the institutional environment in which officers operate, reform initiatives that focus exclusively on individual officers are unlikely to produce lasting change.

Escalation of Violence and the Broken Windows Dynamic

The categories of extrajudicial killings, physical abuse, and psychological torture reveal a pattern of escalating violence that broken windows theory explains with considerable clarity. The theory holds that uncorrected minor misconduct signals to officers that deviance carries no consequences. This signal lowers the threshold for more serious violations over time. The Nigerian evidence supports this trajectory. What begins as arbitrary detention and verbal intimidation progresses to torture and, in extreme cases, to extrajudicial killings (Ariyoosu *et al.*, 2024; Danbaba *et al.*, 2025; Ijalana & Fayomi, 2025). The scale of extrajudicial killings, which constituted 36.5% of documented professional misconduct in the study by Ojedokun *et al.* (2023), is not incidental. It reflects a policing culture where the use of lethal

force has become a normalised response to enforcement challenges, especially in controversial units such as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Abiodun *et al.*, 2020). Such killings are frequently accompanied by tacit political endorsement and the absence of independent investigations (Oghogho *et al.*, 2024).

This pattern parallels experiences in Kenya, where unchecked minor misconduct by security forces has been associated with escalating extrajudicial violence, particularly in contexts of armed confrontation (Kwaja, 2022). Physical violence and torture are employed as systematic methods of interrogation through the use of batons, knives, electric shocks, suspension techniques, and other instruments to coerce confessions and intimidate detainees (Aborisade & Obileye, 2017; Akinlabi, 2020; Anaekwe & Oli, 2024; Ijalana & Fayomi, 2025). Psychological abuse, including humiliation and threats, further dehumanises suspects (Ulo, 2021). Broken windows theory, therefore, offers a compelling explanation for why Nigeria's most egregious police abuses do not emerge in isolation. They are the product of an escalation process enabled by institutional tolerance of minor deviance at every level of the police hierarchy.

Operational Failure as a Driver of Misconduct

The category of operational and institutional failure is not peripheral to the misconduct problem. It is central to it. The absence of forensic tools, adequate training, and investigative resources leaves officers with few legitimate options for producing evidence and resolving cases (Amusan & Saka, 2018; Usman *et al.*, 2023). In this context, torture and coercive interrogation become functional substitutes for professional investigation. The reliance on confessions extracted through physical abuse reflects an institutional failure to equip the police with the tools necessary for lawful policing (Ijalana & Fayomi, 2025; Oghogho *et al.*, 2024). From the perspective of institutional theory, this operational void creates a condition in which officers develop informal adaptive strategies. Coercion, extortion, and abuse are not random deviances. They are strategic responses to an institutional environment that demands results without providing the means to achieve them lawfully. Weak internal affairs

mechanisms and politicised disciplinary processes allow these violations to go unpunished (Agbibo, 2015; Anzizi, 2024). This finding is consistent with the broader African policing literature, which identifies resource poverty as a structural enabler of misconduct across multiple policing environments (Berg & Howell, 2016; Mofokeng *et al.*, 2023).

Sexual Misconduct as a Gendered Institutional Problem

Sexual misconduct constitutes a distinct and critically underreported dimension of police deviance in Nigeria. The literature documents patterns of sexual harassment and assault perpetrated against detainees and members of the public, as well as against female colleagues within the force (Aborisade & Oni, 2020; Aborisade, 2024; Juliet *et al.*, 2024). The power asymmetry inherent in police-citizen interactions creates particular vulnerability for women and other marginalised groups. This form of misconduct is not separate from the institutional dynamics identified in other categories. It is a product of the same culture of impunity and normalised deviance that sustains corruption and physical abuse (Ariyoosu *et al.*, 2024; Aborisade, 2024). The patriarchal character of the Nigerian Police Force, combined with the absence of robust internal reporting mechanisms, ensures that sexual misconduct remains largely invisible in formal records and disciplinary proceedings. This invisibility reinforces the broken windows dynamic in a gendered dimension. The systematic non-response to sexual misconduct signals to officers that this category of abuse is not subject to accountability, and this signal perpetuates a cycle of unpunished violation.

Political Shielding and the Reproduction of Systemic Impunity

The systemic and political issues category reveals the most structurally entrenched dimension of police misconduct in Nigeria. Political elites have historically exploited the police to maintain power, suppress opposition, and protect privileged interests (Agbibo, 2015; Amusan & Saka, 2018; Ezeugwu & Amunnadi, 2020). This political instrumentalisation of the police creates a condition where senior officers accused of

misconduct are shielded from accountability by political patrons. The over-centralisation of policing authority at the federal level further weakens accountability, because it concentrates both operational control and disciplinary authority within a single chain of command that is susceptible to political manipulation (Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2024; Anzizi, 2024). This finding carries important comparative significance. In South Africa, political interference in policing was identified as a key driver of misconduct during the post-apartheid transition, with similar effects on internal accountability mechanisms (Mofokeng *et al.*, 2023). In Nigeria, the political dimension of police misconduct is arguably more pervasive because the centralised structure of the NPF leaves officers with fewer institutional buffers against political pressure.

From the perspective of institutional theory, political shielding constitutes an external institutional pressure that overrides the formal rules of accountability within the police. When officers observe that misconduct connected to elite interests goes unpunished, the informal norm of political compliance overrides the formal norm of professional conduct. This dynamic reproduces impunity at every level of the police hierarchy and makes internal reform extremely difficult to sustain without parallel political reform. Inhumane detention conditions, including overcrowding, unsanitary facilities, and denial of medical care, intensify the human rights dimension of these abuses (Ariyoosu *et al.*, 2024; Danbaba *et al.*, 2025). The failure to comply with court-ordered compensation for victims of police brutality reveals institutional resistance to accountability that arises from chronic underfunding and neglect within Nigeria's criminal justice infrastructure (Okosa, 2022). Such neglect violates international human rights obligations and contributes to severe physical and psychological harm among detainees. The additional misconduct captured in the residual category, including destruction of property, abuse of information, misuse of organisational goods, and private improprieties, reinforces a broader culture of lawlessness that further diminishes public trust in the police (Juliet *et al.*, 2024; Ariyoosu *et al.*, 2024).

Conclusion

The categories of police misconduct identified in this study reveal more than just institutional failure. They constitute an evidential exposure of a reality where corruption, authoritarianism, operational weakness, and political shielding have become deeply embedded features of the Nigerian Police Force's institutional identity. These categories are not random and they are not occasional. They are systemic, normalised, and protected by informal norms that have accumulated over decades of political exploitation and structural neglect. Such patterns reflect a culture where deviance is expected and tolerated, which indicates the fragility of state institutions meant to uphold order. In truth, police misconduct in Nigeria is both a consequence and a tool of broader state dysfunction. This reality must be confronted directly if meaningful reform is to be achieved. This study therefore recommends the following systemic and collaborative approaches:

- The National Assembly should enact a bill establishing an Independent Police Accountability Commission with investigative and prosecutorial powers to review complaints, investigate extrajudicial actions, and ensure transparent disciplinary measures. This body must be financially autonomous and legally protected from executive interference.
- The Police Service Commission (PSC), in conjunction with the Federal Character Commission, must adopt a merit-based, transparent recruitment system that depoliticises appointments and raises entry standards, particularly in ethics, education, and psychological screening. This should be coupled with regular performance evaluations and an internal affairs review process.
- The Ministry of Police Affairs, in partnership with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), must institutionalise continuous human rights and community policing training for officers. This must move beyond one-off seminars and be embedded into annual certification and promotion criteria.
- The Federal Executive Council, through the Ministry of Interior, should approve and fund the nationwide implementation of body-worn cameras, digital patrol monitoring, and evidence management systems. These tools

would provide objective documentation of police-citizen interactions and serve as deterrents against misconduct.

- The National Assembly must pass a Comprehensive Whistleblower Protection Act tailored to security agencies, while the Attorney General's Office must ensure that whistleblowers are shielded from retaliation through secure reporting channels and legal aid support.
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-based groups, supported by legal frameworks and grants from the Ministry of Justice and international development partners, should be empowered to conduct independent police oversight, publish misconduct indexes, and serve as liaison platforms for victim reporting.
- The judiciary, especially through the National Judicial Council, must be integrated into reform processes to ensure the swift prosecution of erring officers, judicial transparency in police-related cases, and collaboration with the new accountability commission.

Limitations of the Study

This study has a number of limitations that future research should address. First, the review relies exclusively on published peer-reviewed literature and does not account for grey literature, government reports, court records, and investigative journalism outputs that may contain significant empirical data on police misconduct. Second, the scope of published literature on certain categories, particularly sexual misconduct and residual misconduct, is relatively limited, which may lead to an underrepresentation of these dimensions in the taxonomy. Third, the integrative review methodology, while appropriate for the study's synthetic objectives, is subject to publication bias. Studies that document extreme cases of misconduct are more likely to be published than those that report less dramatic findings, and this may inflate the apparent severity of some categories. Fourth, the thematic analysis was conducted by the lead researcher without the involvement of a second coder, and no inter-coder reliability assessment was performed. This represents a methodological limitation that future

studies should address through collaborative coding frameworks. These limitations notwithstanding, the taxonomy developed in this study represents a meaningful and practically useful contribution to the understanding of police misconduct in Nigeria.

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