

## NETIZENS PERCEPTION OF NIGERIAN SECURITY AGENCIES' REPRESENTATION IN THE NEW MEDIA

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### ABSTRACT

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The interaction between the Nigerian Security Forces and the civilian population has increased in recent years. This relationship has been characterized by conflicts, debates, accusations and counter-accusations. Besides other security forces, the military and police have about 223,000 and 370,000 active personnel respectively. The military alone is estimated to have between 250 and 330 bases that are dispersed across the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory, thereby increasing their contact with the public. In spite of many interventions to reposition their public reputation, some plausible voices still assert that the security forces have problematic image as they still follow the all-too-familiar path of perpetrating violence against the very people they have sworn to protect. Since 2002, more than 5000 police officers have been dismissed for misconduct following public complaints. Against this narrative, this study sought to examine the perception of civilians on Nigerian Security Forces. Anchored on Implicit Personality and Media Cultivation theories, the study utilized the quantitative research methodology, while the data collection instrument was survey questionnaire which was administered to 400 netizens who were purposively selected. Findings show that though cooperation between the forces and the public is a prerequisite for their success, many respondents have lost confidence on the security forces as they perceive them to be brutal, contemptuous of civilians, manipulative, lawless, propagandist and corrupt. Among other pragmatic means, the study recommends that the Nigerian government reform the forces, bring to book corrupt officers and change its approach of immediately responding to conflict with kinetic force. In addition, the security forces, especially the military and police should strive to understand the perception of the public beyond empty rhetoric, they should adopt international best practices in their engagements with the civilian population, while strategically striving to redeem and sustain a positive public image.

**Keywords:** Identity, Media Representation, Netizens, New Media, Nigerian Security Forces

## INTRODUCTION

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In an ideal nation, security forces are set up to ensure the maintenance of internal security and to protect the state from external aggression amongst other responsibilities. National security is a vital part of the architecture of any nation-state. This has been the assumption since the creation of official or state-controlled police and other security agencies in Ancient Greece in the fifth century BC for citizenship administration, and civil polity.

On the global scene, security forces have been observed to use excessive force in dealing with civilians. Cases in point include the killing of Amadou Diallo in 1999, Patrick Dorismond in 2000 and the forceful arrest of George Floyd in 2020 by the Police in the United States of America (USA), an arrest which led to his gruesome murder. This narrative contradicts the historical objective of the security agencies globally. They were and are still principally constituted to safeguard life and property of the citizenry.

In Nigeria, it appears that security forces are perceived as an antitype of the above description. Officials of security forces have been alleged to habitually engage in activities that undermine their integrity; activities like the arbitrary arrest of citizens and extortion, extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force, degrading treatment to suspects in custody or even using their official status or power to mete out punishment on enemies in personal disputes.

An unusual protest with the hashtag #ENDSARS erupted in Nigeria in 2020 championed by the youth in response to their frustration with the security agencies. A protest that was expected to engineer sanity ended up consuming more lives as Amnesty International reports that at least 50 people were killed by the Nigerian Army at the Lekki Peninsula Tollgate (Ojewale, 2020; Sule, 2020 & Adalaku, 2022). Again, on September 23rd, 2021, a video clip went viral on social media showing a Military Officer, Lt. Ezeiruaku Ifeyinwa Fidelia of the 13th Brigade Command of the Nigeria Army in Calabar, dehumanizing a female youth corps member, Chika Viola Anele, on account of a personal dispute. The video sparked up lots of public outcry, to the extent that the Nigerian Army publicly condemned the act and promised that the identified officer would be made to undergo regimental orders (trial) in line with the extant provisions of the Armed Forces Act and sanctioned accordingly. Several months after that ordeal, the issue seems to have been forgotten.

The presence of officers of security forces in a community or neighbourhood should give citizens a sense of safety but the reverse is often the case. Several pieces of evidence from mainstream media and social media portray officers of security forces manhandling or brutalizing citizens, even when there is no justification for acting in such

a manner. This work attempts to unravel this baffling trend by examining the perception of netizens toward Nigerian security forces.

### Research Objectives

1. To examine the perception of netizens on Nigeria's Security Forces.
2. To ascertain new media representation of the Nigerian Security Forces.
3. To identify the reputation-management strategies adoptable by Nigeria's Security Forces.

### Research Questions

1. What is your perception of the Nigerian Security Forces?
2. How are the security agencies portrayed in the new media?
3. What reputation-management strategies are available to Nigeria's Security agencies?

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Implicit Personality and Media Cultivation theories.

**Implicit Personality Theory:** This theory is built on the idea that people form general assumptions or social inferences about other people on the basis of some limited amount of initial information they have about them (Bruner & Tagiuri, 1954; Schneider, 1973). The notion of implicit personality theories was introduced into modern psychology by Lee Cronbach in the 1950s, with his notion of "the generalized other." This "other" contains the person's beliefs about the attributes and abilities that the typical person exhibits, along with how those attributes and abilities interrelate.

There are two primary approaches to the understanding of implicit personality theory.

- **Consistency Theory:** This approach suggests that the perceptions we form about other people are primarily informed by what we already know about them. It is based on the premise that people will exhibit consistency in their personal characteristics. If a person is observed to possess a positive trait, the observer's

impression of them may be positive overall. It will be assumed that such person's characteristics will be consistent and he/she will possess other positive traits linked to that primary trait that has already been observed. On the converse, if a person exhibits a few undesirable traits, the observer's impression will be negative overall. Creating an overall impression about a person or persons on the basis of a positive or negative first impression is known as the halo effect. The halo effect can be understood as the tendency to conclude that a person has several positive attributes if they exhibit a few good traits or the disposition to conclude that just because a person possesses one negative trait, the rest of their characteristics are also negative.

The halo effect can lead to erroneous impressions and poor judgments when a first impression is formed based on skewed or inaccurate information. Because these impressions are implicit and automatic, they can sometimes be quite difficult to change. A good example of the halo effect is what is called the physical attractiveness stereotype where, physically attractive people are perceived and thought to be more intelligent, more likely to do better in school, happier, better adjusted, socially competent and more successful than others who are less attractive. However, in reality, physical attractiveness is not related to intelligence, happiness mental health, or self-esteem. A person who appears to be the least attractive may be the most skillful but a biased observer will most likely neglect that person and his/her skills due to the existing biased mindset of the observer.

- Attribution Theory: This approach suggests that people tend to believe that traits remain stable over time. Once an overall impression about a person has been formed, attribution theory suggests that such a person will be assumed to remain the same across different times and situations.

One major controversy regarding implicit personality theories is whether they reflect reality or distort it. The attribution theory can be applied to our attempt at understanding of citizens' perception about Nigerian Security Forces (NSF). Overtime, negative stereotypes regarding the behaviour of some NSF personnel have come to be accepted, by the generality of Nigerian citizens, as the overall normal behaviour for all personnel. The consequence of accepting negative stereotypes is that citizens will hastily conclude that all personnel of NSF are mean, unfriendly, corrupt and brutal in the way that they treat civilians when in reality, not all NSF personnel exhibit these negative traits.

Media Cultivation Theory: Media cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner

in the year 1976. The theory is hinged on the idea that media content, channelled through technology specifically through Television broadcasts, shapes the way that people perceive or view the world. TV broadcasting is therefore portrayed as a dominant force which shapes modern society. TV viewing, according to this theory, has gradual but long-term effects on the viewing audience.

Proponents of this theory hold that media content, especially TV stories, animate people's cultural environment. In essence, media content is often presented in ways that help to co-construct people's worldviews and opinions about the social world. Media content is used by gatekeepers to reinforce existing attitudes, norms and values in society.

The mass media is seen as a strong force in shaping societal attitudes and values which are already present in culture; this implies that dominating cultural standards are infused into media content and these in turn aid to reinforce the existing attitudes and opinions that people hold about social reality.

Gerbner (1976) developed a concept which he called the Mean World Syndrome, to portray the idea that repeated exposure to violent media content programs the human mind to live in constant apprehension, thereby enhancing people's worst fears and paranoia.

This concept is used to draw a direct correlation between the amount of TV that one watches and the level of fear one has of being victimised. It is argued that levels of exposure to media content influences people's perception of social reality. Gerbner posited that people exposed to the TV version such as Heavy TV viewers of social reality over long periods will have an exaggerated belief in a mean and scary world due to extensive broadcast of violent media content. To him, repeated exposure to violent media content reinforces the belief that the world is a place of constant danger, where people live with anxiety and the fear of violence. Thus, the consequence of repeated exposure to violent media content over long periods is that people come to live with the imminent threat of looming danger and impending doom.

Citizens' perception about Nigerian Security Forces (NSF) can also be viewed through the lenses of the Mean World Syndrome i.e., the idea that repeated exposure to violent media content programs the human mind to live in constant apprehension. Repeated exposure to negative news and to media content that portrays personnel of Nigerian Security Forces as mean, unfriendly, corrupt and brutal reinforces citizens' fear of the threat of being victimised.

The consequence of repeated exposure to such negative news is that it makes citizens live in constant fear of violence in the hands of security agents or to show extreme fear, distrust or anxiety at the sight of them. The conception that these NSF personnel are violent as portrayed by the media ultimately reinforces the public perception that it is unsafe to be in the presence of such personnel.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

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### Perception of Nigerians towards Nigerian Security Forces

Events over the years have shown that contact between officers of Nigerian Security forces and civilians is characterised by fear, anxiety and distrust. According to Phinos and Collins (2019), once a soldier is dressed and well kitted, he or she becomes a monster and scary to the average civilian. It is almost a norm for soldiers to treat civilians in inhumane ways. They could ask defaulting car drivers on the highway to do 'frog jumps' as a form of punishment. Women and girls are raped on several occasions by military men. Some girls were reportedly raped in Abuja by soldiers under the guise that the girls were prostitutes (CKN News, 2013).

With the Nigerian Police Force, the case is no different. Events have shown that there is a wide feeling of distrust and despair among members of society on issues regarding the police. There are reports and insinuations that police officers engage in activities that undermine the integrity of what the ideal police organization should be (Human Rights Watch, 2016). There are cases of illegal extortion of money from unsuspecting public members, roadblocks that have led to avoidable accidents on the highways, illegal arrests of unsuspecting citizens in disguise of police raids, intimidation of law-abiding citizens, forceful collection of money from commercial motorists and so on. These practices further add to the negative public image of the police (John, 2017).

According to Obijiofor (2005), the Nigeria Police has suffered severe public contempt as a result of the inhumane and unprofessional conduct of its operatives. The Force is widely reported in the media as the most corrupt and hated organization in Nigeria because operatives of the force have a penchant for various atrocities.

The Punch in its editorial of August 5, 2005, titled: "Police and Rights Violations" captured the brutal activities of police against members of the public. The editorial reports that the Police Mobile Force is nicknamed "Kill and Go" because its members are notorious for extra-judicial killings. For refusing to part with N20 gratification, they have sent many commercial drivers to their early graves. Daily, policemen harass law-abiding citizens and boast that they can "waste you and nothing will happen". When

the police arrest bandits or illegally raid streets, drinking parlours and joints, most of those arrested, who could not bribe their way to freedom are often tortured and dumped in the prison for years without any credible evidence to prosecute them (Johnson, Johnson & Ifedayo 2013, p. 55).

Research carried out by Nyam (2020) shows that the public has a negative perception of policing in Nigeria which they believe is caused by the failure of the police force to obey laws in dealing with the people. Respondents in the study believed that “the Nigeria police do not act in a professional manner” and this is against the provisions of the Code of Conduct. The Police are expected to apply minimal force in restricting suspects in cases where an alleged offence has been committed and to treat such people as innocent until proven guilty by a court of competent jurisdiction, but in practice they have been found to use excessive force in handling suspects. Such behaviour has earned them a defamatory image in the eyes of the public.

The then Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police force, now Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) is a unit of the force notorious for maltreating citizens. Suspects detained in SARS custody are held in a variety of locations, including a grim detention centre in Abuja popularly known as the ‘Abattoir’. Amnesty International paid a visit to this SARS detention centre in the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja in July 2009 and discovered that suspects were held in a neglected warehouse located outside the city. Amnesty International delegates saw at least 30 empty bullet cases on the floor, chains hanging on the wall with visible signs of blood in the gutter; a clear indication that the detainees had been tortured in that warehouse turned cell.

It is not enough for government to simply prohibit these practices under national law. States must take decisive steps to formulate and implement a variety of definite measures to protect citizens and prevent all forms of human rights abuses. The neglect of these kinds of concerns on the part of government is why the civilian populace lives in perpetual fear of security forces.

### **Negative News on Nigeria’s Security Agencies**

The involvement of security forces in internal security operations must be such that the fundamental human rights of the civilians are respected however, reports have shown that security forces use excessive force to the extent that civilians are killed, injured, or suffer property damage. One popular case in point is the Odi Massacre of November 20, 1999. This was an attack carried out by the Nigerian military in Odi village, Bayelsa State. The attack came as a consequence of the conflict in the Niger Delta over the indigenous rights to oil resources and environmental protection. Before this attack,

twelve members of the Nigerian police were murdered by a gang of restive youths near that village. In a vengeful mission, the military acting on the directive of the federal government invaded the village unleashing terror on scores of unarmed civilians, including women and children. Twenty-one people were killed and several buildings in the village, except for the bank, the Anglican Church and the Community Health Centre, were destroyed leaving the village desolate (Okoli and Orinya, 2013).

Soldiers involved in internal security operations also arrest citizens arbitrarily. For instance, at Odi and Zaki-Biam, many young people were arrested and falsely accused of being masterminds of the killing of security personnel. At Onitsha, a number of youths were arrested and falsely accused of being members of MASSOB (Okoli and Orinya, 2013).

Violations of the right to life have come in various forms such as extrajudicial killings, shootings of protesters, and other random, unprovoked killings. The Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI) found in a 2010 report that extrajudicial executions are a routine feature of policing in Nigeria. Human Rights Watch estimates that over 10,000 people were killed by the Nigerian police in the eight years spanning 2000 through 2007 (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

Military in internal security operations have also been characterized by extra judicial killings. The Borno State Governor, Kashim Shettima, said in April 2013 that over 100 people were killed in Baga during a clash between officers of the Joint Task Force and insurgents. Residents of the village said they buried 185 people after the battle, while the Red Cross said 187 people were killed (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The Human Rights Watch also reported that during a military operation which began on October 22, 2001, soldiers from the 23rd Armoured Brigade of the 3rd Armoured Division rounded up villagers at Gbeji, Zaki-Biam area of Benue State) in what turned out to be a ploy. The soldiers made the villagers to sit on the ground, separating men from the rest and opening fire on the men indiscriminately.

A more recent case of extrajudicial killings by the military in Nigeria is the Lekki Tollgate Massacre of 2020 during the #EndSARS protest. This protest started as a call for the disbandment of Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigerian Police Force which had earned some ill repute for its brutality and human rights violations. Though the federal government had earlier announced structural changes to SARS, the alleged human rights violations continued.

In October 2020, the cruel shooting of a young man in a street of Delta State by SARS operatives was disseminated on social media (BBC News 2020). Even though the



Nigerian Police denied the shooting in this particular case, it was not sufficient to quell public rage as more videos of police shootings were circulated across social media platforms. Celebrities and activists rallied for support on social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook and, in a few days, protesters emerged in large numbers lining up the streets of Lagos and Abuja demanding an end to SARS. Bowing to the pressure of the protests, the Nigerian government swiftly announced the disbandment of SARS.

This action did not pacify the protesters in light of similar pronouncements made by the government in the recent past. For instance, in December 2017, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) announced that SARS had been banned from conducting stop and search operations following several reports of harassment. This ban was publicly re-announced by the IGP in June 2018, January 2019 and February 2020, thereby reflecting the ineffectiveness of previous orders.

Particularly, in August 2018, Nigeria's Acting President, Yemi Osinbajo announced an overhaul of SARS, stating that the National Human Rights Commission would investigate cases of abuse. This statement was followed shortly by the announcement of a centralized FSARS (Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad) which would be overseen by the Inspector General of Police as opposed to the previous version which was superintended by State Commissioners of Police. A few months later, January 2019, the IGP announced the disbandment of FSARS, stating that the unit would go back to being decentralized and placed under the command of state commissioners (Olatunji, Olabulo & Akinselure, 2020).

When the #EndSARS protests commenced in October 2020, the government hurriedly announced that it was disbanding SARS and replacing it with a new Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team. This announcement further provoked protestors who feared that SARS personnel would simply be drafted into the new SWAT team. Rather than end the protests, the announcement amplified public demonstrations across several states in Nigeria where the Nigerian government cracked down on the protesters. The crackdown was preceded by the declaration of curfews in nine states across the country. One of these states was Lagos, the commercial hub of Nigeria. At dusk, the Nigerian army opened fire on peaceful protesters at Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos, the epicentre of the protests. Videos of soldiers shooting and protesters trying to revive fallen compatriots were broadcast on Instagram Live and viewed in real time by hundreds of thousands (Punch News, 2020).

The Nigerian Police force has equally been known to use excessive force in their operations. Ideally, the activities of the police as an institution are meant to be guided

at the national and international level by conventions, standards and treaties (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966). Despite state prohibitions against torture and custodial misconduct by the police, torture-based interrogation has been reported as the most common method used during investigations and this is a main reason behind deaths of suspects in custody (Amnesty International, 2014).

A study carried out by Aborisade & Obileye (2017) found that the Nigeria Police mainly rely on a confessional approach when conducting its investigation; ex-detainees revealed that while in police custody they were subjected to various forms of torture to make them confess to alleged crimes. During such torture-based interrogation, police officers were said to use weapons like clubs, batons, knives, cutlasses, horsewhips, ropes, electric iron or boiling rings to forcefully elicit confessions from suspects.

In February 2020, BBC Africa published a damning documentary on the use of torture techniques by Nigerian security forces (BBC Africa, 2020). The video focused on the wide and uniform use of a technique known as 'Tabay'. The technique involves binding detainees in a crude and painful fashion: the arms are forced back and tied at the elbows, cutting circulation to the hands and immobilizing the victim. The feet are then tied back, arching the spine and contorting the body into a triangle. Victims can be suspended, forcing the full weight of the body on the arms. A heavy block, usually wood or concrete, is often placed on the victim's back to intensify the pain. The documentary implicated several arms of the Nigerian security forces including the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Mobile Police, the Nigerian Air Force, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps and, of course, the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS).

Aside the severe physical injuries sustained by detainees in the process of such torture-based interrogation, research shows that many ex-detainees suffer from post-detention trauma from these gruesome treatments in police cells (Egede, 2007; Boxer, Middlemass & Delorenzo, 2009). Numerous reports by lawyers, human rights activists, social analysts, and journalists about police regularly demanding bribes, stealing, extorting money and engaging in different forms of brutality and abuse of rights attest to this (Amnesty International, 2014; Aborisade & Fayemi, 2015).

### **Strategies for improved relations between Security Forces and Civilians in Nigeria**

Several attempts have been made by security forces to redeem their public image. In the Nigeria Police Force for instance, the late Kam Salem, former Inspector-General of Police (1966-1975) established the Nigeria Police Public Relations Department (NPPRD)

as a statutory function of the Force and expanded its services to state commands.

Despite the existence of these departments within the Nigerian Army, civilians still suffer dreadful human rights abuses in the hands of operatives of the Army. It is not enough to set up these departments, it must ensure that cases reported to these departments are treated with the utmost urgency and that erring officers are made to face the full penalty of the law for violating the rights of citizens.

Several authors (Belch & Belch, 2005, Aniele, 2004 & Awa, 2006) have offered strategies that can be used to redeem the public image of an organization. Some of the strategies which the Nigerian security agencies could decisively and purposefully utilize to reposition themselves in the minds of the civilian populace include:

1. Establish a feasible Public Relations (PR) policy: To ensure that security agencies foster a good public image, they can design specific PR policies that boost their public reputation using unique public relations strategies like campaigns, investment in innovations and technology, and engagement in corporate social responsibility activities which contribute to the societal goals of a philanthropic, activist, or charitable nature by engaging in or supporting volunteering or ethically-oriented practices.
2. Rejig the public complaint units: The public complaints units of NSFs should be structured in a manner which ensures that complaints are handled objectively and fairly with appropriate confidentiality and that remedies are provided where complainants have been found to be unjustly treated.
3. Enhance online presence: Nigerian Security agencies need to establish and enhance their online presence so that it can be felt by the civilian populace. These agencies can promote their social media presence using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to reach the public. These platforms can be used to make announcements, connect and publish content.
4. Think like the audience: Awareness campaigns regarding the activities of Nigerian security agencies should be designed from the point of view of the civilian populace. Such campaigns should contain wordings that convey a solidly positive image for the agencies.
5. Community Relations: Nigerian Security Forces can enhance their public image by designing and implementing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies like providing financial support for small and medium scale enterprises and promoting philanthropic causes.

## METHODS

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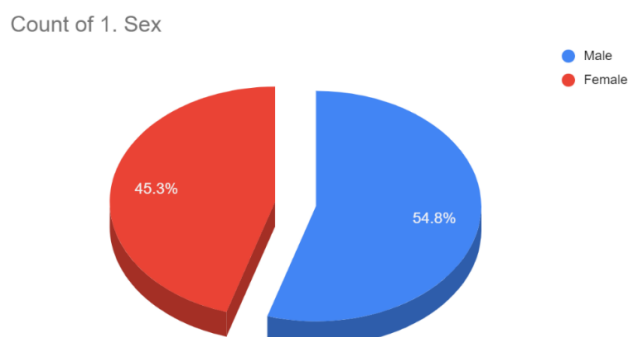
The survey research design was adopted for this study with questionnaire as instrument for data collection on a sample size of 400 respondents purposively drawn from the six geopolitical zones of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The respondents comprise academics, students, civil servants among others. The sample size of 400 was determined using a digital sample size calculator which is a similitude of Cochran's formular with a Confidence Level of 95% allowing for a 5% margin of error.

The Sampling method was the Purposive; the sampling was adopted because it is a non-probability sampling process that will allow the researcher to identify eligible adults and experts across the country. Respondents were selected from across the six (6) geopolitical zones in Nigeria to ensure the results will be a representation from North Central (NC), Northeast (NE), Northwest (NW), Southwest (SW), Southeast (SE) and South (SS).

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

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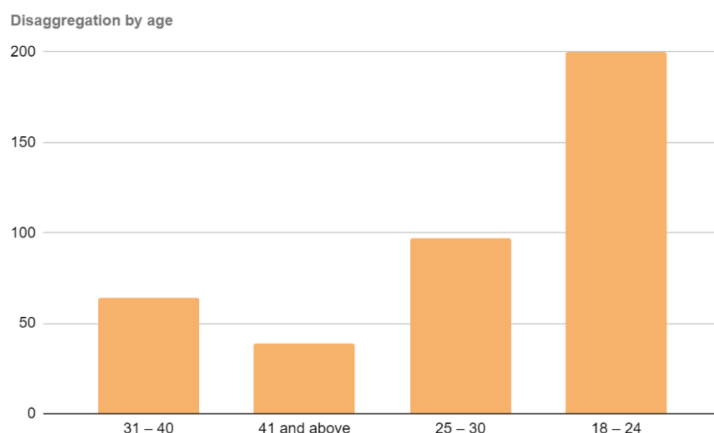
**Figure 1: Pie chart showing disaggregation by sex**



*Source: Field Study, 2022*

The chart above shows that 181 (45%) females with 219 (55%) males participated in the survey making a total of 400 respondents. The male gender participated more.

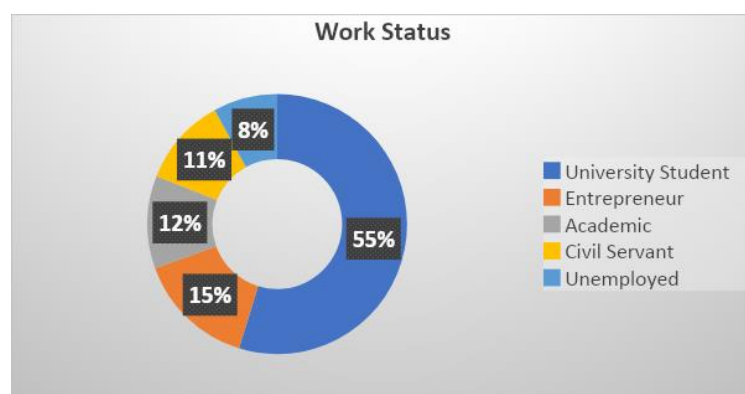
**Figure 2: Bar chart showing disaggregation by age**



Source: Field Study, 2022

The highest respondents are between 18 – 24 years of age who make up 50% of the respondents, followed by those between 25 – 30 years who made up 24.3%, those between 31 – 40 years of age, made up 16%. The least were those 41 years and older who made up 9.8% of the respondents.

**Figure 3: Disaggregation by work status**



Source: Field Study, 2022

University Students accounted for the majority of the respondents as shown from the responses to the 'Work Status' with 219 (55%) followed by 59 (15%) who are entrepreneurs. Academics were 46 (12%) and 44 (11%) were civil servants 32 (8%) were unemployed. This shows that students formed a large percentage of the netizen population.

**Figure 4: Distribution of Respondents by Geopolitical Zone**

ZONES	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	Percentage (%)
North-Central	39	21	60	15
North-West	30	25	55	13.5
North-East	30	28	58	14.5
South-West	40	35	75	19
South-South	40	40	80	20
South-East	40	32	72	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Study, 2022

Data in figure four shows that respondents from South-West, South-South and South-East participated more in the survey with 75 (19%), 80 (20%) and 72 (18%) respectively, followed by North-Central 60 (15%), North-East 58 (14.5%) and North-West 55 (13.5%) as the least.

**Figure 5: Social media platforms usage**

Social Media Usage	Frequency	%
Facebook	313	77.9
Instagram	296	73.6
Twitter	190	47.3
LinkedIn	98	24.4
Pinterest	84	20.9
YouTube	240	59.7
Snapchat	193	48
Telegram	224	55.7
WhatsApp	380	94.5
Reddit	11	2.7
TikTok	155	38.6

Source: Field Study, 2022

WhatsApp usage accounted for a mode of 380 (94.5%) followed by Facebook users with 313 (77.9%), Instagram and YouTube with 296 (73.6%) and 240 (59.7%). Twitter & Snapchat users accounted for a mean of 191 (47.6%). Telegram had 224 (55.7%) while other platforms include: Thriller, Clubhouse, Wattpad, Vskit, Sasai, Imo, Hangout and Tinder with a mean of 0.2%. Reddit accounted for 2.7% (11) with TikTok having 155 users at 38.6%.

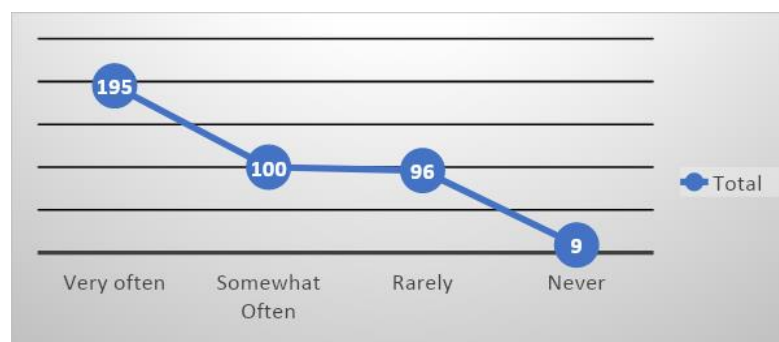
**Figure 6: Frequency & social media usage**

Row Labels	How often do you use social media?
Daily	367
3 to 5 times in a week	24
Weekly	6
Never	2
Monthly	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>400</b>

Source: Field Study, 2022

From the table above, majority of the responses were 367(92%) for daily usage of social media. This shows that the majority of people use social media every day.

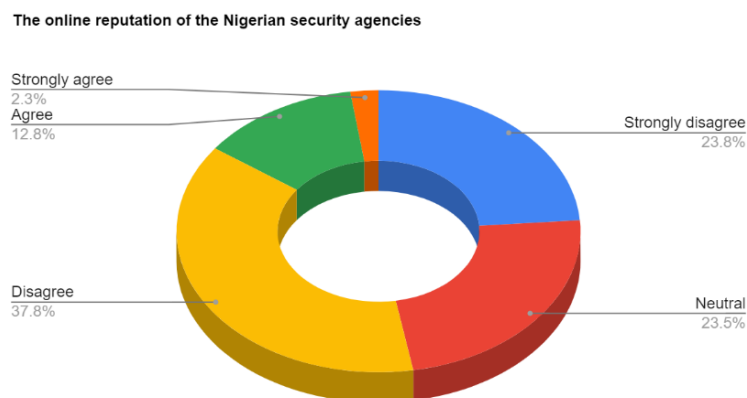
**Figure 7: Line chart showing exposure to online news about Nigerian security agencies**



Source: Field Study, 2022

About 195 (49%) of respondents admitted to they have seen online news about security agencies in the last 12 months as ‘very often’ while only 9 of the respondents (2%) said they had never seen online news about Nigerian security agencies.

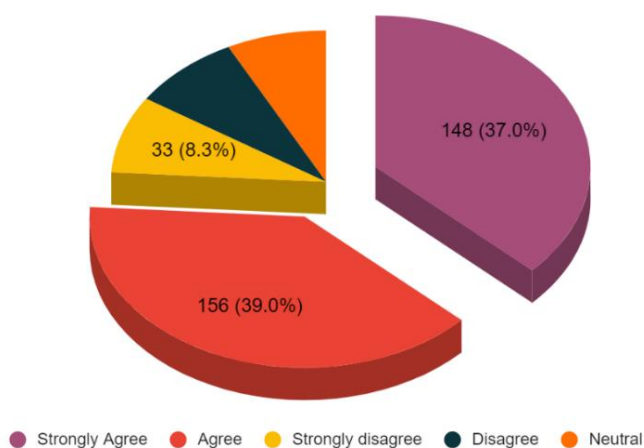
**Figure 8: Pie chart showing responses on the online reputation of the NSAs**



Source: Field Study, 2022

The chart shows the response in respect of the online reputation of the Nigerian security agencies. A total of 23.8% respondents strongly disagreed that the online reputation of Nigerian security agencies was positive, while 37.8% disagreed. Only 15.1% agreed that the online reputation of the Nigerian security agencies was positive.

**Figure 9: Online news on Nigerian Security agencies' brutality during ENDSARS**

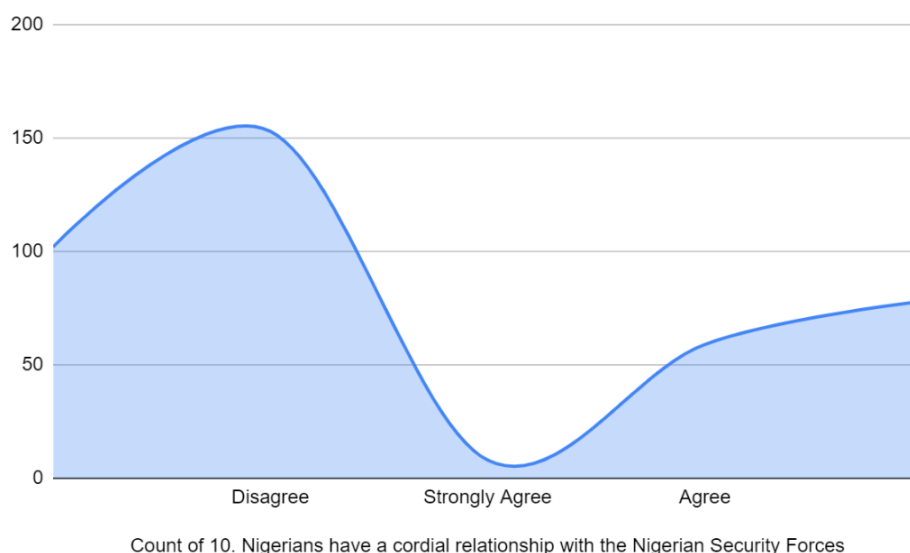


Source: Field Study, 2022



This data reveals that Online news have shown that Nigerian security agencies brutalized Nigerians during the #EndSAR protest with a total of 304 (76%) respondents in agreement.

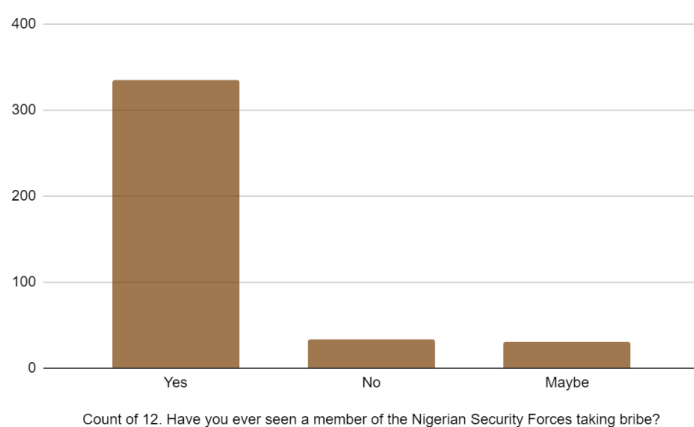
**Figure 10: Line graph showing perceived relationship between Nigerian security agencies and Nigerians**



Source: Field Study, 2022

From the above data, 64% of the respondents believe there is no cordial relationship between Nigerian security forces and Nigerians.

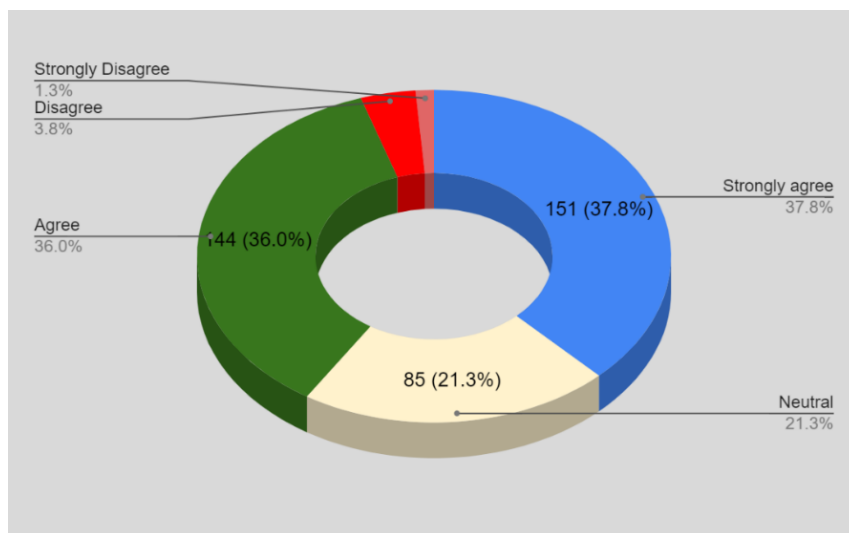
**Figure 11: Bar chart showing respondents' reference to bribe taking by members of the NSF**



Source: Field Study, 2022

On bribe taking, 335 (83.8%) respondents noted that they have seen members of the Nigerian Security Forces take bribes.

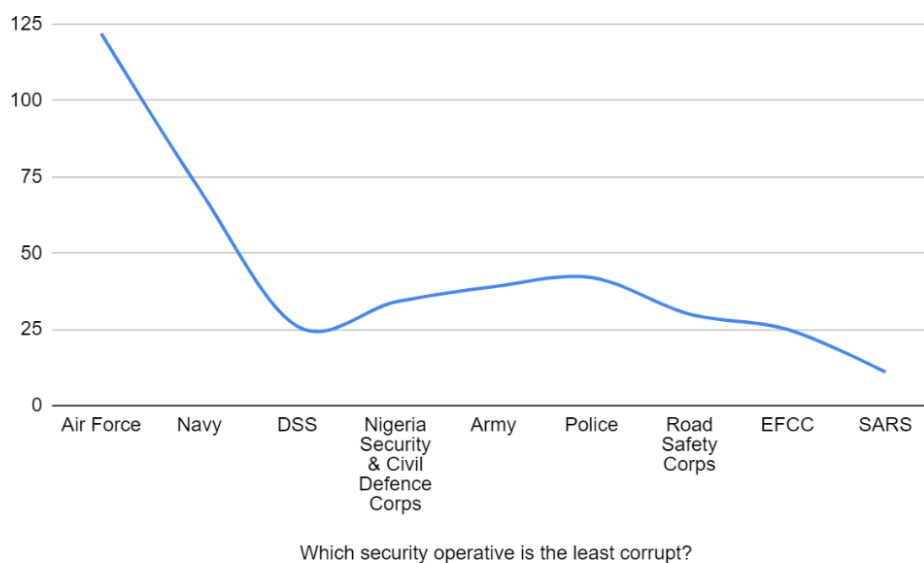
**Figure 12: Pie chart showing perception on NSF conspiring with elites to oppress citizens.**



Source: Field Study, 2022

Data on the pie chart shows a total of 295 (73.8%) responses to agree and strongly agree that Nigerian security agencies collaborate with elites to oppress the masses.

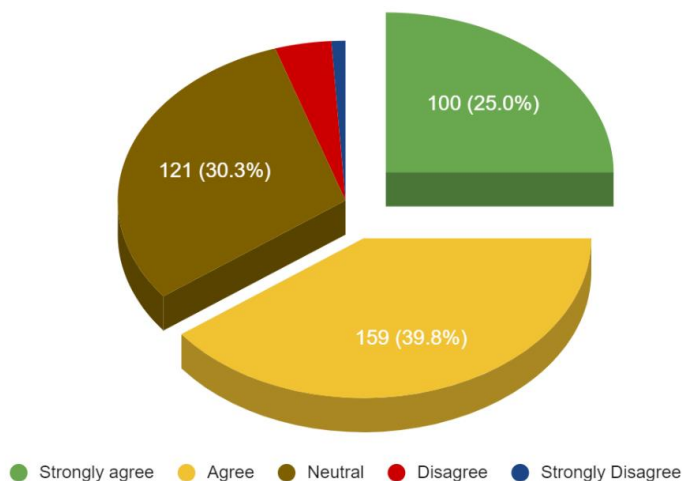
**Figure 13: Smooth line graph showing the security operative ranking as corrupt**



Source: Field Study, 2022

Data here reveals that the Air Force was considered as the security operative that is the least corrupt by 122 (30.5%) responses. Over 370 (92.5%) respondents did not consider the Federal Roads Safety Corps void of corruption as only 30 (7.5%) of the respondents affirmed that the agency is not corrupt.

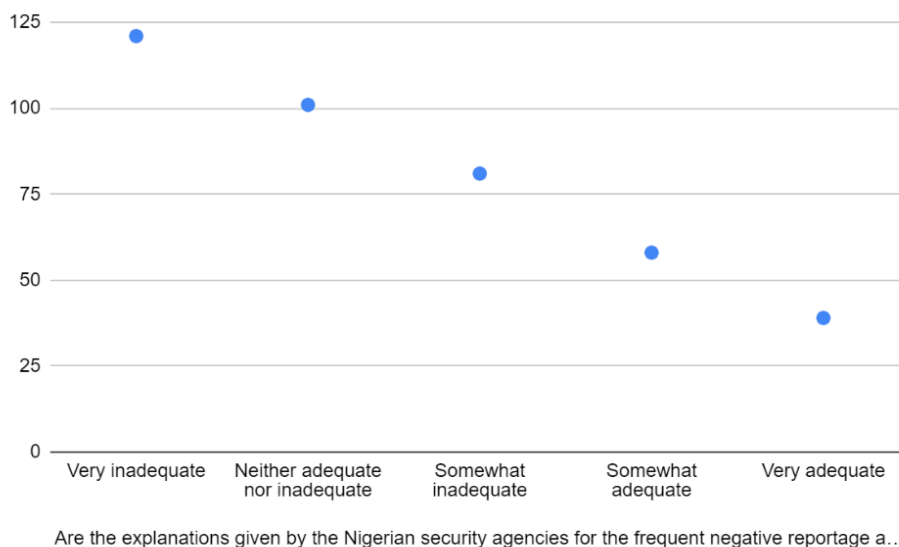
**Figure 14:** Pie chart on *whether the Public Relations Units of the Nigerian Security Agencies are perceived as being involved in propaganda*



Source: Field Study, 2022

Gauged from the premise that the Public Relations Units of the Nigerian Security Agencies are involved in propaganda, a total of 259 (64%) respondents ‘strongly agree’ and others also ‘agree’ that the PR Units of the Nigerian Security Agencies are involved in propaganda.

**Figure 15: Scatter chart showing the dissatisfaction of respondents towards explanations given by the Nigerian security agencies on the frequent negative reportage**



Source: Field Study, 2022

The data in the chart shows the dissatisfaction of respondents towards the explanations given by the Nigerian security agencies on the frequent negative reportage where 202 (50.6%) respondents affirmed that the explanations were inadequate.

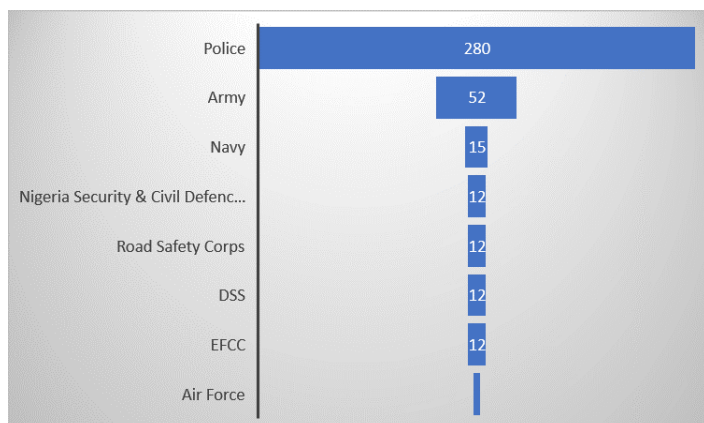
**Figure 16: Showing which security force is the most corrupt**

Row Labels	Count of 17. Which of these security forces is the most corrupt?
Police	342
EFCC	27
Road Safety Corps	13
Army	10
Air Force	3
DSS	3
Nigeria Security & Civil Defence Corps	1
Navy	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>400</b>

Source: Field Study, 2022

A total of 342 (85.5%) respondents agreed that the Nigerian Police Force was the most corrupt, while 399 (99.7%) respondents considered the Navy as being the least corrupt.

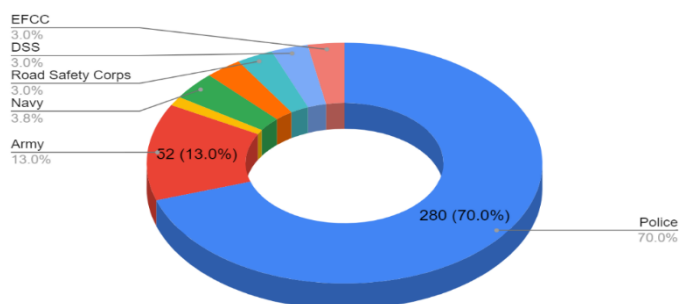
**Figure 17: Showing the security forces one will never encourage anyone to enlist into**



Source: Field Study, 2022

The chart represents respondents' views on the security forces they will never encourage anyone to enlist in and 280 of the respondents that is, (70%) said they would not encourage anyone to enlist into The Nigerian Police Force.

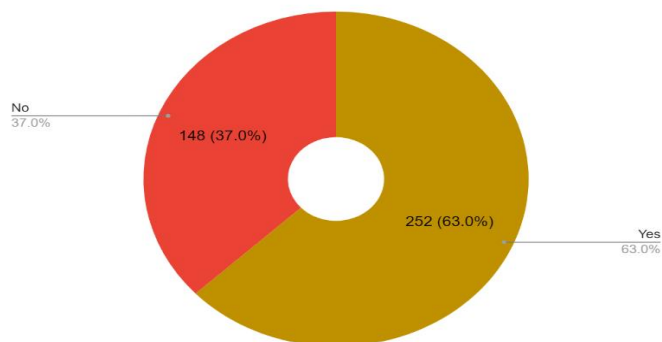
**Figure 18: Negative experience in the hands of any of the Nigerian Security Forces**



Source: Field Study, 2022

The Pie Chart shows the response of people who had encountered any negative experience in the hands of any of the Nigerian Security Forces. Most of the respondents 280 (70%) stated that they had suffered negative experience with the Police while 52 (13%) affirmed that they did not undergo any negative experience.

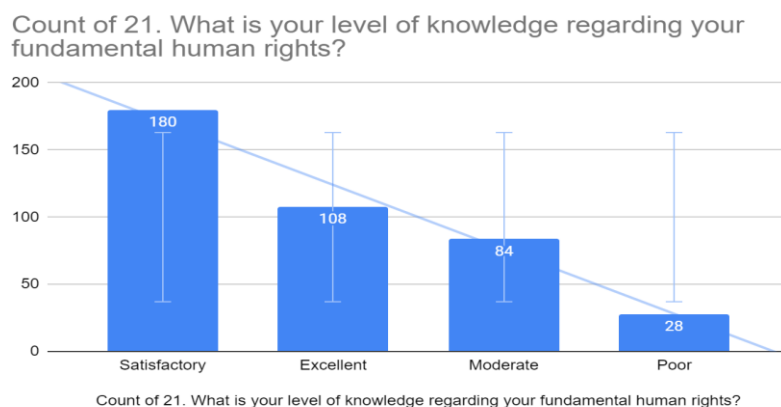
**Figure 19: Showing the perceived reputation of the Nigerian Security Forces**



Source: Field Study, 2022

The pie chart shows responses to perceived reputation of the Nigerian security forces and 252 (63.0%) respondents agreed that the security forces have a negative reputation, while 148 (37.0%) disagreed with the statement.

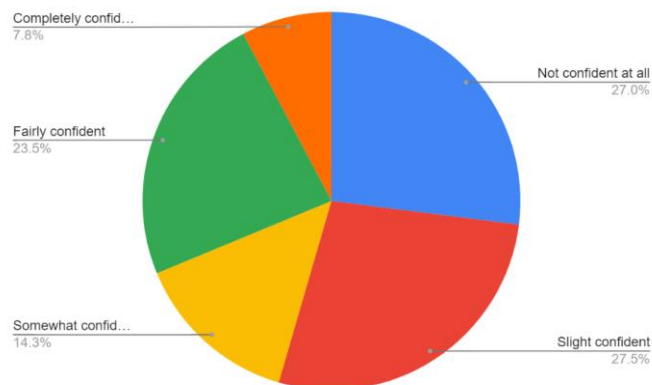
**Figure 20: Citizens' knowledge of their fundamental human rights**



Source: Field Study, 2022

The column of the graph above with 108 (27%) shows respondents' awareness of their fundamental human rights was excellent. Respondents' knowledge of their fundamental human rights was satisfactory by 180 (45%) responses and the largest number, while 84(21%) responses was moderate and other respondents' awareness of their human rights was 28(7%) respectively.

**Figure 21: Confidence in the Nigerian Justice System**



Source: Field Study, 2022

This chart shows respondents' confidence in the justice system in Nigeria. 'Slight confident' was an option for 110 (27%), 'Not confident at all' and 'fairly confident' options were indicated by 108 (27%) and 94 (24%) respectively, while 57(14%) admitted they were 'somewhat confident', and 31(8%) respondents were 'completely confident' in the justice system of Nigeria.

**Figure 22: perception of Netizens on sundry issues concerning the Nigerian Security Forces**

Which of these statements do you agree with	Freq.
Nigerian security forces are Corrupt	324
Nigerian security forces offer more protection to foreigners than citizens	223
Nigerian security forces are tools in the hands of politicians to oppress the masses	294
Nigerian security forces do conspire/connive with criminals	251
Nigerian security forces frequently blackmail innocent citizens	236
Nigerian security forces are implicated in many of the jailbreaks	104
Nigerian security forces hardly reprimand their officers involved in illegalities	195
Nigerian security forces are aiding banditry and insurgency in the North	181
Nigerian security forces are civilian friendly	42
Nigerian security forces are doing enough to redeem their reputation	33
Nigerian security forces abide by international rules of engagement	26
Nigerian security forces promote human rights	25
Nigerian security forces obey court orders	39
News coming from the information units of the Nigeria Security forces should be believed	27
It is safe to report crimes to the Nigerian Security Forces	56
Members of the Nigerian Security Forces are well trained	47
Members of the Nigerian Security Forces are well equipped	24

Source: Field Study, 2022

The above depicts the perception of netizens on sundry issues concerning the Nigerian security agencies. 324(81%) which is the highest response, express their opinions on the corruption of the police while 24(6%) express their views on how equipped the security forces are.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first objective of the study was to examine the netizens' perception of the Nigerian security agencies. From the analysis, it is evident that findings on the perception of the Nigerians towards the Nigerian Security Forces echo Nyam (2020) who asserted that the public has a negative perception of policing in Nigeria. The negative perception which the public has of The Nigerian Security Forces is emphasized by the brutal way they handle offenders. Ideally, the NSF's are expected to apply minimal force since the



constitution declares that people are innocent until proven guilty by a court of competent jurisdiction but, this is hardly practiced by the NSFs as they sometimes resort to excessive force in handling suspects. This negative perception is reinforced by findings from Figures 9 which emphasized the brutality of the NSFs during the End SARS protest and Figure 12 which showed that 73.8 % of the respondents affirmed that the Nigerian security agencies collaborate with elites to oppress the masses. Similarly, it was observed that 83.8 % considered the receiving of bribes by the security forces as a negative act.

All of these indices point to the fact that the netizens have a negative perception of the security agencies, an opinion which is sustained by the Consistency Theory, an approach that suggests that the perceptions we form about other people are primarily informed by what we already know about them. This is not far from the reality of the NSFs which exhibit consistency in their operational behavior. The theory accentuates the idea that a person is consistent in exhibiting traits that are linked to the primary trait that has already been observed. Thus, the negative perception which the netizens have is justified having examined the consistent negative behavior of the Nigerian security agencies.

The second objective was to ascertain the new media representation of the Nigerian Security Forces and findings from the study demonstrated that the NSFs are adequately represented in the media. To achieve this objective, questions to ascertain the frequency of access to social media as well as exposure to social media were asked. Having confirmed that people had impressive access to the social media, the respondents were equally asked to comment on the media representation of the NSFs. It was observed that NSFs made concerted effort to remain relevant in the media by devising various ways of being visible to the public. Belch & Belch, (2005), Aniele, (2004) & Awa, (2006) suggested some useful strategies to help in redeeming the public image of the Nigerian security agencies. One approach was to establish a feasible Public Relations (PR) policy to boost their public reputation. The NSF tried to be civil in to approach to have a new media representation or conception by introducing innovative ways to reach the citizens hence Public Relations departments have been established and replicated in all arms of the security agencies in order to give them a human face. Another way of reaching the citizenry was through online presence which is of great concern to this study. The netizens do not have confidence in this process as they see the NSFs as corrupt and so view their media presence as an ulterior motive to achieve other goals. As shown in Figure 10, 64 % of the respondents opine that there is no cordial relationship between the NSFs and the netizens. Equally, Figure 22 reveals that the netizens consider corruption rather than inadequate equipment as the main reason

for the unfriendly assessment of the NSFs.

The Media Cultivation Theory developed by George Gerbner in the year 1976 submits that media content, channeled through technology specifically through television broadcasts, shapes the way that people perceive or view the world. Proponents of this theory hold that media content, especially TV stories, animate people's cultural environment. In essence, media content is often presented in ways that help to co-construct people's worldviews and opinions about the social world. Media content is used by gatekeepers to reinforce existing attitudes, norms and values in society. This theory is constructive in the analysis of the second objective as it illustrates the attitude of the netizens to the image laundering effort of the NSFs.

The third objective of the study was to identify the reputation management strategy of the NSFs. Their incursion in the new media through the establishment of the Public Relations Units of the Nigerian Security Agencies is a reflection of their desire to launder their image so that the ordinary citizen can actually see them as the 'friends' they were meant to be. The netizens perception of their new media was assessed from the premise that they were involved in propaganda in an attempt to realize their desired goals of being seen as socially responsible, people friendly and professionally driven. The findings of some respondents as shown in Figure 8 which has only 15.1 % agree that the NSF has positive reputation which implies that the remaining 85% believe that they have negative reputation. In the same manner, 63 % of the respondents in Figure 19 acknowledged that the reputation of the NSF is negative. In the same way, 70% of the respondents confirmed that they knew people who had encountered negative experience in the hands of the Nigerian Security Forces. These statistics present a dismal image of the NSFs that it appears as if their reputation management strategy may not be effective when these uncomplimentary acts are evaluated.

It will therefore, not be out of place to stress that the implicit personality theory of Bruner & Tagiuri (1954) & Schneider, (1973) clearly elucidates this objective. The theory is built on the idea that people form general assumptions or social inferences about other people on the basis of some limited amount of initial information they have about them. The netizens already have an implicit idea of the NSFs based on their antecedents such that even though they desire to launder their image, the netizens cannot readily accept it as genuine hence the tag of propaganda which is used to describe their altruistic action.

## CONCLUSION

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It has been well established from this study that the perception of Nigeria's Security Forces is quite negative. They are not trusted and are seen as unapproachable, distant and unfriendly. The portrayal by the new media especially on various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter show that attempt is being made regarding the existing public relations efforts of Nigeria's Security Forces particularly concerning what most of people perceive are mere propaganda. The agencies, except for the Air Force and Navy are considered as corrupt and involved in illegalities. Although there are positive stories about the activities of security operatives, what most of the respondents believe are the negative ones.

It has therefore become necessary that the reputation management strategies available to the Nigerian Security Agencies in building relations with the civilian public should be activated through the various recommendations above.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. In the area of training, only a few Nigerians 11.7% of the respondents agreed that Nigerian security forces were well trained and equipped. Therefore, adequate training is needful so that they could shun corruption.
2. Seeing most people now access social media platforms daily, contents on fundamental human rights should be designed and shared on the various platforms.
3. Confidentiality platforms should be created and managed by the government to ensure that citizens know the lawful ways to seek redress when their rights are abused.
4. In the area of reputation management strategies, NSF outfits should be prompt to reprimand members when involved in illegalities.

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