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Assessment of Civil-Police Relations and Conflict in Greater Banjul Area, the Gambia (2019-2024)

Hassan M Jarra¹

Abstract

The police force is established to protect the lives and properties of the people and maintain law and order. In recent times, there have been conflicts between the police personnel and civilian population in Gambia. This study examined civil-police relations in the Gambia. The study was hinged on the social contract theory which has a central focus that the police force is a brain-child of the collective resolve of the people. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, utilizing both primary and secondary data. The primary data were gathered through the administration of questionnaire while article journals, books and periodicals served as secondary data. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample size of 300 out of a population of 459,000 in Greater Banjul Area, Gambia. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (cumulative frequency tables, simple percentage and mean average. The study found that the civilian population has not been too satisfied with the police efforts in combating crime. Also, there has been conflicting issues between the police force and civilians which is escalated by the inadequate conflict management skills on some police officers to manage crises. The study recommended that proper training on conflict management should be implemented for police personnel as well as the police force should ensure conflicts with the civilians are resolved amicably.

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Introduction

Civil-police relations play a crucial role in ensuring public safety, democratic governance, and sustainable peace in any society. In transitional democracies such as The Gambia, where decades of authoritarian rule were followed by a democratic opening in 2017, the relationship between law enforcement agencies and the civilian population remains a delicate and evolving dynamic. The Greater Banjul Area which includes Banjul, Kanifing Municipality, and parts of the West Coast Region has witnessed increasing incidents of tension, confrontation, and mistrust between the police and sections of the civilian population, especially from 2019 to 2024.

The period under review has been marked by several high-profile incidents involving police use of force, suppression of protests, and allegations of corruption and misconduct. These events have contributed to a growing public perception of the police as instruments of political control rather than protectors of public interest. At the same time, the police face challenges such as inadequate resources, limited training, and high expectations to manage a growing urban population facing youth unemployment, drug-related crimes, and civic unrest.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of civil-police relations and the nature of conflict in the Greater Banjul Area between 2019 and 2024. Specifically, it examines the causes of conflict between civilians and the police, the institutional responses to these tensions, the role of civil society in mitigating disputes, and the impact of on-going police reforms. By analysing key incidents, legal frameworks, and community perspectives, this study seeks to identify the structural challenges and opportunities for improving civil-police relations in The Gambia.

In doing so, the paper contributes to broader discussions on post-authoritarian reform, accountability in law enforcement, and conflict prevention in urban contexts. The assessment is grounded in conflict resolution theory, public security literature, and human rights principles, with a view toward informing policy and practice in the country's on-going democratic transition.

One of the primary functions of every government is to safeguard the lives

and assets of its population from both foreign and internal threats. There are established security services that undergo training to uphold peace and preserve order. According to Reiner (2021) the police and other Para-military organisations are responsible for preserving security within the country. Recently, there have been instances where the Police have been mobilized to address incidents of internal or domestic violence, unrest, and rioting. For Jose (2019), in situations of violence, it is often believed by policy makers and the wider population that the Police should be deployed to manage the crisis. The involvement of the police in domestic security matters may be attributed to the Cold War era. The primary purpose of the police force is to address internal acts of violence. However, due to a decrease in external threats and an increase in internal disputes, they have been overburdened and strained beyond their capacity. As a result, governments have enlisted the Police Intervention Unit to address domestic problems.

Jose (2019) documented cases in Los Angeles and the United Kingdom when the police have been summoned to intervene in domestic problems. The Los Angeles riot of 1992, sometimes referred to as the “Rodney King” riots, was a notable instance of civil unrest in the United States that necessitated military action. The police and other paramilitary authorities were unable to effectively manage the extensive looting of stores and vandalism of properties until the military intervened. Jose (2019) asserted that the security personnel brought back order on the fourth day of the unrest, however this action resulted in several negative outcomes, including fatalities and injuries. Reiner (2021) posits that the police lacked sufficient training and equipment for that specific mission especially in many African states and the Gambia is really not an exception.

The African continent has witnessed police intervention in response to civil unrest, rallies, or riots. Countries throughout the continent, such as Guinea, Senegal, Algeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Gambia and others, have witnessed uprisings in which the police have actively participated in managing conflicts. Kristen (2023) said that the recent large-scale uprisings had exerted significant pressure on long-established tyrants, leading to the overthrow of autocratic leaders in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. A 2020 study of U.S. racial justice demonstrations reports police using excessive force even against clearly peaceful or symbolic protesters

(Kajeeepeta & Johnson 2020). They contended that the use of coercive powers by the State security apparatus (Police force) had led to extensive extrajudicial deaths and injuries.

Gambia has witnessed a multitude of kidnappings, terrorist incidents, election violence, livestock theft, banditry, armed robbery, and other societal ills that pose a threat to the country's overall survival. The Gambian police force has long been afflicted by a lack of adequately trained personnel, training, and other necessary resources required to effectively safeguard the lives and possessions of residents. The police force has been sent several times to uphold peace in volatile regions (Musa, 2014; Nwolise, 2007). However, despite the efforts of the police force, their civil relationship with the civilians have been called to question by many as reports of clashes, distrust have been reported in recent times (Ayuk, 2024). This study seeks to examine the civil-police relations in the Gambia, Greater Banjul Area.

Historical Background of Civil-Police Relations in the Gambia

The historical evolution of civil-police relations in The Gambia is deeply rooted in its colonial and post-colonial experiences. Policing in The Gambia, as in most British West African colonies, was designed to maintain order and protect colonial interests. According to Killingray (1986), colonial policing in British Africa was highly militarized, racially hierarchical, and focused more on suppressing dissent than providing security to the local population. This legacy shaped The Gambia's early police institutions and their approach to civil order.

After independence in 1965, the structure of the police remained largely intact, reflecting the continuity of colonial administrative institutions. Despite being under civilian leadership during President Jawara's era, the Gambian Police Force (GPF) continued to function as a centralized and command-driven institution with limited public accountability (Jallow, 2003). Scholars argue that while the Jawara government was relatively democratic, it did little to transform the police from a control-oriented institution into a service-oriented one (Perfect, 2010).

The Jammeh era (1994–2016) severely damaged public trust in law enforcement institutions. The culture of fear, impunity, and human rights violations became

widespread, with little to no accountability mechanisms in place. The police, in many instances, operated under directives from the executive without independent oversight, contributing to a breakdown in community relations and undermining the legitimacy of the force. Reports from Amnesty International (2015) and the Gambia Centre for Human Rights and the Rule of Law document widespread abuses by police, including torture, unlawful detention, and harassment of journalists and opposition figures. Mendy (2018) explains that during this period, civil-police relations deteriorated due to the pervasive culture of fear and impunity. The police were viewed less as protectors of public safety and more as agents of state-sponsored violence. The TRRC (Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission) findings have further confirmed that the police often acted outside the law, with little regard for human rights norms.

The political transition that began in 2017, following the electoral defeat of Jammeh and the ascension of President Adama Barrow, was seen as a critical turning point. Promises of democratic reform, security sector transformation, and greater accountability raised hopes for a new era in civil-police relations. Efforts were made to restructure the GPF, including community policing initiatives, human rights training, and collaboration with civil society organizations. However, despite these positive intentions, progress has been uneven.

Between 2019 and 2024, historical patterns of mistrust and conflict continued to shape interactions between civilians and the police. The lingering influence of authoritarian practices, insufficient institutional reforms, and emerging socio-political tensions have contributed to a volatile environment. Understanding this historical context is essential to fully grasp the complexities of civil-police relations in the Greater Banjul Area today. According to the **Security Sector Reform (SSR) Baseline Report** (2018) prepared by the Ministry of Justice with international support, there were significant gaps in oversight, training, and operational standards in the GPF. Civil society organizations such as the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** have since played an increasing role in documenting and addressing police misconduct, though progress has been slow.

Conceptual Review

Security

Security, in the context of civil-police relations, refers to the protection of individuals, communities, and the state from threats that undermine peace, safety, and social stability. Traditionally viewed in terms of crime control and state sovereignty, security today includes broader dimensions such as human dignity, justice, and freedom from fear (UNDP, 1994).

In fragile and transitioning democracies, police institutions play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of security. When police uphold justice and human rights, they contribute to peace and societal cohesion. However, when their actions are repressive or politically motivated, they become sources of insecurity. In The Gambia, where past policing practices were associated with state violence, the challenge is to rebuild a security system based on service, not domination. The democratic transition since 2017 provides a unique opportunity to promote inclusive and human-centred security by aligning policing with the rule of law and citizen welfare.

Various scholars have provided definitions for the idea of security. However, the notion of security may be defined by some factors - tranquilly, protection, happiness, and societal progress achieved by safeguarding and preserving human life. It is also related to the promotion of human dignity in the face of threats to life or physical harm. Security encompasses the progress and advancement of the society in which we reside (Otu & Apeh, 2022).

Buzan (2021) defines security as the condition in which nations are free from dangers and have the ability to maintain their sovereign identity and functional integrity in order to counter hostile developments that pose a danger to human life. According to this definition, security refers to the state in which individuals in a society are protected from many negative experiences such as fear, harm, oppression, anxiety, danger, poverty, injury, and maybe even death (Bodunde et al, 2014).

Conflict

Conflict, within the context of civil-police relations, refers to tensions, confrontations, or violence that arises from disputes between the police and civilians. These conflicts may stem from systemic inequalities, excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, or biased law enforcement (Nwolise, 2008). In urban centres like the Greater Banjul Area, these dynamics are exacerbated by youth marginalization, political protests, and unresolved grievances, which often trigger police responses that intensify hostilities rather than resolve them.

Internal Security Operations

Internal security operations include the efforts of domestic security services, such as the Police, Customs, and Immigration Services, to counteract threats originating within a state or country. The Gambian Police Force is founded to uphold law and order, as well as apprehend and detain those who have committed offences. Azinge (2013) observed that internal insecurity risks encompass incidents such as riots, strikes, religious confrontations, communal clashes, terrorism, and protests. These events often lie beyond the authority and constitutional responsibilities of the police force (Azinge, 2013). According to the Gambian constitution, the police have the overall responsibility of maintaining peace and order, safeguarding lives and property, and ensuring the appropriate implementation of all laws and regulations within the community. Internal security operations are specifically formulated to address internal problems inside a nation. Gambia has been afflicted by a multitude of religious crises, post-election violence, disputes between farmers and herders, ethnic conflicts, and other issues.

According to Ogaba (2020), internal security is the state of being free from any factors that could disrupt internal unity and the overall existence of a nation. It is also the ability of a nation to maintain its core institutions in order to achieve socio-political, economic objectives, uphold important values, and meet the needs of its citizens. Regardless of the many schools of thought, such as classical, traditionalist, non-traditionalist, or state-centric, it can be deduced that security primarily focuses on safeguarding both living and non-living entities from harm or damage.

Police

Anderson (2013) defines police as a civil force entrusted with the task of monitoring public order and law enforcement for the prevention and punishment of their breaches. Adedipe (2005) defined police as an organ of government that is charged with public safety. They are responsible for the civil society security. The constitution defines police clearly in terms of prevention and detection of crime, preservation of law and order, protection of lives and property, and enforcement of law and order.

Civil-Police Relations

Civil-police relations describe the nature and quality of interaction between police institutions and civilian populations. This interaction is shaped by mutual perceptions, institutional conduct, historical legacies, and societal expectations. In democratic societies, civil-police relations should be rooted in mutual respect, transparency, and accountability (Bittner, 1970; Abolurin, 2010). However, in post-authoritarian states like The Gambia, past abuses, lack of reform and mistrust continue to influence how citizens perceive and interact with police forces.

Community Policing

Community policing is a strategy that promotes collaboration between the police and the community to proactively address safety concerns and reduce crime (Skolnick & Bayley, 1988). It emphasizes prevention, decentralization, and partnership-building. In post-2017 Gambia, efforts to implement community policing have faced challenges such as resource limitations, lack of training, and resistance to institutional change. However, when effectively implemented, community policing enhances mutual trust and reduces conflict potential.

Trust and Police Legitimacy

Trust is the belief that the police will act fairly, lawfully, and in the best interests of the public (Tyler, 2006). Legitimacy is closely related, referring to the public's

perception that the police have a rightful authority to enforce laws and maintain order. When trust erodes due to police misconduct, corruption, or lack of responsiveness, legitimacy suffers (Tankebe, 2013). In The Gambia, rebuilding trust after years of impunity under the former regime remains a pressing challenge.

Security and Human Rights Nexus

The balance between maintaining public order and respecting civil liberties is critical in democratic governance. Policing in fragile democracies must adhere to principles of proportionality, necessity, and legality (Buzan, 2021). When security forces prioritize regime protection over human rights, it undermines democratic norms and exacerbates social tensions. In The Gambia, the challenge is to reform the security sector to align with democratic values and ensure that policing respects constitutional rights.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on the idea of Social Contract proposed by Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679), John Locke (1632 – 1704), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778). Ogunnoki (2018) observed that social contract theory is a widely utilized framework for elucidating the genesis of the State. The contributions of Thomas Hobbes will have a major influence on this research. The English Civil War between 1642 and 1651 had a profound impact on Thomas Hobbes' thinking. As a result of the conflict, he published a work called 'Leviathan', which was inspired by the Holy Bible and refers to a sea monster. The publication was a work of fiction in which Hobbes provided a justification for the existence of an absolute sovereign with the authority to uphold law and order. He expressed his belief that the condition of nature is a result of his interpretation of human nature, and that all individuals are equal in both intellect and physicality (Otu & Apeh, 2022).

According to Hobbes, man is inherently self-interested and he argued that in a state of nature, his actions are driven by emotions, cravings, and appetites rather than intellect or reasonable thinking (Gaubu, 2003). Existence in the state of nature was characterized by perpetual hardship, ceaseless strife, and a state known as 'Warre',

in which individuals were pitted against one another. The human existence in this state was described as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short,” since there was no universally recognized governing authority. In the state of nature, there was a notable absence of moral principles, and progress in industry was severely hindered due to the pervasive psychological fear of violence and death. Hobbes theorized that three factors contribute to the emergence of conflict, which he referred to as ‘Warre’: i) competition, ii) difference, and iii) love of glory. Therefore, those who desired to protect themselves chose to leave the state of nature and form a society and government by entering into a social compact. The social contract is a binding agreement in which individuals willingly relinquish their inherent rights and authority. This agreement is irrevocable by the parties involved or their descendants (Otu & Apeh, 2022).

The police are an instrument of the state to maintain law and order in the society. The civilians are to be protected by the state (police) but in a situation whereby there is distrust, conflicts between the police and civilians, there is bound to be anarchy.

Overview of Gambian Police Force and Civilian Complaints

The main autonomous internal security, law enforcement, and intelligence organisation in The Gambia is The Gambia Police Force. An inspector general of police is in charge of the force and reports to the Ministry of the Interior. There are now 5,000 officers in the force, both plain clothed and in uniform. A special squad dedicated to fraud and commercial offences combats corruption on behalf of the Gambia Police Force. The Gambia River Police, established in 1855, was the country’s first law enforcement agency. Previously, British troops and a small local militia made up of traders, freed slaves, and other residents provided security in the small colonial settlements. The duties of the River Police included preventing insurrection, enforcing taxation, and managing smuggling. The paramilitary Gambia Constabulary was established in 1866 to further reinforce its 10 soldiers, who received assistance from the local militia (Hughes, A., & Perfect, D. 2006). The number of constables was raised from 40 at the founding to 100 in 1870. At this point, the colony was cleared of all imperial forces, and local militia and the

Constabulary were left to handle law enforcement (Davidheiser & Hultin, 2012).

In 1895, the Frontier Police were established. The Gambia Company was founded in 1901 as a result of the West African Frontier Force's 1900 formation, and it too contributed to the colony's security. The district head in the Protectorate was in charge of security. The British enacted an ordinance in 1909 allowing the chiefs to choose "badge messengers," who were given the same powers as the colony police and could maintain order. Francis has observed that "the local population perceived the police and security services, despite their limited presence, as essentially foreign, even though Gambians staffed the lower level of the force" (Davidheiser & Hultin, 2012).

In response to a widely circulated video on social media depicting officers of the Police Intervention Unit in full riot gear physically assaulting an unarmed and non-aggressive civilian, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued a strong condemnation of the act. The incident, reportedly occurring on 10 March 2022, is under investigation by the Commission. In its statement, the NHRC asserted that the use of excessive force by law enforcement officials constitutes a serious violation of human rights and cannot be justified under any circumstances. The Commission described the conduct of the officers as inhumane, degrading, and a clear breach of legal and ethical standards. It further confirmed that the matter had been raised with the Office of the Inspector General of Police for appropriate action (NHRC, 2022). A Police Officer is not only a guardian of the law but is also expected, as a duty bearer, to respect and protect the human rights of all people, including those who are even suspected of breaking the law. By the adoption in 2020 of the Guidelines on Policing Public Assemblies in The Gambia, the Gambia Police has placed upon itself the obligation to put in place mechanisms and standards for the peaceful management of assemblies and demonstrations. Having a group of officers acting contrary to the spirit of the Guidelines is both disheartening and disturbing.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) reaffirms its firm stance against impunity and all forms of human rights violations, emphasizing that police brutality is unacceptable in any democratic society. Law enforcement officers are expected to operate within the bounds of the law, observing due

process and upholding the rule of law, even when dealing with individuals suspected of criminal activity. The NHRC urges the Inspector General of Police to promptly identify and hold accountable the officers involved in the incident captured on video, where a civilian was seen being assaulted. Such actions are unlawful and must be met with appropriate disciplinary and legal consequences (NHRC, 2022).

Furthermore, the Commission reminds all members of the security forces of their responsibility to uphold and protect human rights at all times, regardless of whether violations occur under command authority or personal initiative. As The Gambia continues to consolidate democratic governance and the rule of law, it is imperative for all citizens and institutions to act lawfully and responsibly. Resorting to violence undermines national peace, security, and sustainable development (NHRC, 2022).

Methodology

Methodology is a crucial aspect of research that focuses on the framework of the research process. Goundar (2012) defines research methodology as the comprehensive phrase that describes the systematic process of conducting research. Researchers have several options when it comes to doing research. Typically, a research methodology comprises a study plan, means for collecting data, and data analysis techniques. This work utilizes a survey research strategy, collecting primary data through the distribution of questionnaires and obtaining secondary data from various sources such as journals, textbooks, government documents, online articles, and magazines. The Likert scale format of questionnaire was utilizing and the coding is as follows: 5 = strongly, 4 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Disagree and 1 = Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 23. The survey was conducted in the Greater Banjul Area, which includes the capital city of The Gambia and its surrounding communities. As of 2024, the estimated population of this region is approximately 459,000 (Worldometer, 2024). Due to the large population size, the study employed purposive sampling to select a targeted sample of 300 participants, consisting of both police officers and civilians. Purposive sampling was employed to select respondents based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives.

The sample comprised police officers currently serving in the Greater Banjul Area, as well as civilians residing in the same region who have direct experience or knowledge of civil-police relations. Participants were chosen for their ability to provide rich, detailed information pertinent to the study's focus. Additionally, the selection considered factors such as rank, age, and background to ensure a diverse range of perspectives within the sample. Only individuals who were available and willing to participate were included to facilitate meaningful data collection.

Data Presentation and Analysis

2.7 Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Analysis of Respondents by Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	175	53.7	53.7	53.7
	Female	125	46.3	46.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS Output (Version 23)

Table 1 displayed the analysis of respondents' gender. Male respondents were 175 representing 53.7% of the sample while female respondents were 125 representing 46.3%. This implies that male respondents were the majority.

Table 2: Analysis of Respondents' Age Bracket

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16 - 25 years	70	16.7	16.7	16.7
	26 - 35 years	95	53.7	53.7	70.4
	36 - 45 years	70	16.7	16.7	87.0
	46 years and above	65	13.0	13.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS Output (Version 23)

Table 2 displayed the analysis of respondents' age bracket. Respondents within the age bracket of 16-25 years were 70 and this represent 16.7%, 26 – 35 years age bracket were 95 (53.7%), 36 – 45 years were 70 (16.7%) while 46 years and above were 65 (13.0%). From the results it showed that majority of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 26 – 35 years old. This implies that youth respondents were the majority.

Table 3: Analysis of Respondents' Educational Qualification

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	First School Leaving Cert	65	20.4	20.4	20.4
	Secondary School	60	16.7	16.7	37.0
	Diploma	36	9.3	9.3	75.9
	First Degree	89	38.9	38.9	85.2
	Postgraduate	50	14.8	14.8	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS Output (Version 23).

Table 3 displayed the analysis of respondents' educational qualification. First school leaving certificates were 65 (20.4%), Secondary school holders were 60 (16.7%), Diploma holders were 36 (9.3%), and First degree holders were 89 (38.9%) while holders of postgraduate certificates were 50 (14.8%). This implies that majority of the respondents are first degree holders.

Table 4: Analysis of Respondents' Occupation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Senior Police personnel	96	31.5	31.5	31.5
	Junior Police Personnel	85	24.1	24.1	55.6
	Civilians	119	44.4	44.4	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS Output (Version 23)

Table 4 displayed the analysis of respondents' occupation. Senior police personnel were 96 (31.5%), junior police personnel were 85 (24.1%) while civilians were 119 (44.4%). This indicates that majority of the respondents were civilians.

Table5: Descriptive Analysis of Civil-Police Relations in Gambia (GBA)

Items	N	Mean	Decision
Residents are satisfied with the police efforts to curtail conflicts	300	2.4	Disagree
The police force has been proactive in managing conflicts between them and civilians	300	2.7	Disagree
The police force do not have adequate skills to manage conflicts between them and civilians	300	3.1	Undecided
The police force has a good cordial relationship with the civilians	300	3.2	Undecided
Civilians clash with the police force has been frequent in recent times	300	4.0	Agree
Clash between the police and civilians are usually not properly resolved amicably	300	2.8	Disagree
The police force and the civilians share security information often in order to reduce crime	300	3.4	Undecided
Valid N (list wise)	300		

Source: SPSS Output (Version 23).

Table 5 above displayed the descriptive analysis on civil-police relations in the Gambia. From the result, majority of the respondents disagreed that they are satisfied with the police efforts to curtail conflict as shown by the mean score of **2.4** (Disagreed).

The mean score of **2.7** (Disagreed) revealed that majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the police force has not been proactive in managing conflicts between them and civilian.

The mean score of **3.1** (Undecided) indicated that there are divided opinions on whether the Gambian police force have the requisite skills to manage conflicts between them and civilians.

Also, the mean score of **3.1** (Undecided) indicated that there are divided opinions from the respondents on whether the Gambian police force has a good cordial relationship with the civilians.

Civilians clash with the police force has been frequent in recent times as revealed by the mean score of **4.0** (Agreed).

The mean score of **2.8** (Disagreed) indicated that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that clashes between the police and civil population are sometimes not resolved amicably.

There is divided opinion on whether the police force and civilians share security information often in order to reduce crime as this is shown by the mean score of **3.4** (Undecided).

Discussion of Findings

The study utilized a survey design and copies of questionnaire were administered to both police officers and civilians in Greater Banjul, Gambia. From the findings, it showed that both male and female participated in the survey. Also, the study ensured the youths participate in this survey as respondents of 26-35 years old were the majority in the distribution. Besides, the respondents' level of education cut across first school leaving education to tertiary education. This was done to ensure respondents opinions on civil-police relations is well informed on their personal experience and the ability for them to express their perceptions or opinions on the dealings of the police force in Gambia.

From the results regarding the research questions, findings revealed that there have been conflicts between the police force and civilian population in the Gambia in recent times and there are factors that could be attributed to this frosty relationship. From the study findings, the relationship between the police and civilians has not be totally friendly or cordial and some police personnel do not have adequate conflict management skills to resolve conflicts with civilian population and being proactive to nipping conflicting issues in the board. These findings collaborated with that of Ayuk (2024) report which revealed that victims of police brutality sue Gambia

before the ECOWAS court for remedy. Despite this shortcoming on the part of the police force, some civilians are ready to share relevant security information with the police force to combat criminal activities.

Conclusion

Improving civil-police relations in The Gambia requires a multi-faceted approach that includes training, community engagement, accountability, and socioeconomic development. By prioritizing trust-building measures and fostering collaboration between law enforcement and citizens, The Gambia can create a safer and more harmonious society. All stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and the general public, must work together to achieve this goal.

Recommendations

The police play very important function in our society by maintaining law and order and roles prescribed by the constitution. The civilians are to be protected by the police force and those who go against the law ought to be sanctioned according to the existing laws of the state. This study examined the civil-police relations in Gambia. From the findings the study concludes that conflicts between the police force and civilian populations have been frequent in recent times and inadequate conflict management skills on the part of the police force have been one of the major reasons why their relationship with the civilians is frosty.

Civil-police relations are crucial for ensuring public safety, fostering trust, and maintaining societal order. In The Gambia, strengthening these relations is essential to build confidence in law enforcement and ensure the security of all citizens. In enhancing better police-relations with the civilian population, this study outlined the Following key recommendations to improve civil-police relations in the country.

Enhance Police Training and Education

To build trust, police officers must be well-trained in community policing, conflict resolution, and cultural sensitivity. Training programs should emphasize

the importance of human rights, ethical conduct, and effective communication. Continuous professional development can help officers adapt to evolving societal challenges and maintain a high standard of service.

Promote Community Policing

Community policing involves law enforcement working collaboratively with local communities to solve problems and prevent crime. This approach can be fostered by organizing regular town hall meetings where citizens can voice concerns and offer feedback, assigning officers to specific neighbourhoods to build familiarity and trust, and encouraging officers to participate in community events and activities.

Establish Accountability Mechanisms

Transparency and accountability are fundamental to gaining public trust. The following measures should be implemented to Setting up independent oversight bodies to investigate complaints against police misconduct, ensuring that disciplinary actions for misconduct are fair, consistent, and well-communicated to the public, and providing public access to police performance reports.

Leverage Technology for Transparency

Modern technology can help bridge the gap between the police and the public by equipping officers with body cameras to document interactions with civilians, utilizing social media platforms to communicate directly with the public, share updates, and address concerns, and developing mobile applications that allow citizens to report crimes, provide feedback, or request assistance easily.

Invest in Public Awareness Campaigns

Educational campaigns can help improve mutual understanding between the police and the public to highlight the role of law enforcement in society and the challenges they face, promote awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities, and showcase

positive stories and examples of effective police-community collaboration.

Improve Working Conditions for Police Officers

The morale and effectiveness of police officers are directly tied to their working conditions. To enhance their performance, provide competitive salaries and benefits to reduce susceptibility to corruption, ensure access to proper equipment and resources, and offer psychological support and counselling services for officers dealing with job-related stress.

Address Underlying Socioeconomic Issues

Crime and mistrust often stem from broader societal issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Collaborative efforts between the government, law enforcement, and community organizations should aim to create job opportunities and support youth programs, provide education and skills training, and foster dialogue to address grievances and reduce tensions.

Strengthen Laws and Policies

Legislation should support efforts to improve civil-police relations by defining clear guidelines for police conduct and use of force, ensuring legal protection for whistle-blowers who report police misconduct, and establishing mandatory conflict resolution protocols for police-civilian disputes.

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