

REVIEW ARTICLE

# Gaining and Maintaining Public Trust: A Deeper Look into the Security Sector Reform (SSR) of Liberia

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## Abstract

More than two decades after the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Liberia's Security Sector Reform (SSR) is widely regarded as a qualified structural success, yet public confidence in the country's reformed security institutions has diverged sharply. This article examines the gap between institutional stability and public trust, using the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the Liberia National Police (LNP), two institutions reformed under the same peace agreement and the same United Nations mission, as a comparative lens. The study is designed as a structured qualitative literature review and comparative content analysis of thirty secondary sources, comprising official United Nations and Liberian government documents and legislation, nationally representative Afrobarometer survey data, anti-corruption and human-rights assessments, and peer-reviewed scholarship, interpreted through the Security Sector Governance framework and procedural justice theory. The evidence shows that in 2022, 62% of Liberians trusted the AFL compared with 26% who trusted the LNP, and that more recent survey evidence records continued trust in the AFL alongside widespread perceptions of police corruption. The divergence is associated both with structural factors, notably the AFL's statutory exclusion from domestic law enforcement and its centralized reform pathway, and with citizen-facing drivers within the LNP: corruption at the point of contact, politicized leadership appointments, and weak external accountability. The article concludes that SSR success should be measured by public confidence as well as by technical capacity. It recommends granting the Independent National Commission on Human Rights compulsory-process powers backed by a statutory duty of response, while treating community policing and decentralization as reforms to be rigorously tested rather than as validated pathways to trust.

**Keywords:** Security Sector Reform; Liberia; Public Trust; Governance; Post-Conflict; Community Policing

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has become a central pillar of post-conflict reconstruction worldwide, nowhere more evident than in sub-Saharan Africa, where a succession of civil wars in the 1990s and 2000s left security institutions discredited, fractured, or complicit in atrocities against the very populations they were meant to protect (Paris, 2004). SSR programs typically pursue two intertwined goals: rebuilding the technical and operational capacity of armed forces, police, and justice institutions, and re-establishing the legitimacy of those institutions in the eyes of ordinary citizens (Bryden, 2007; Geneva

Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces [DCAF], 2015). Liberia's experience since the end of its second civil war offers one of the most closely documented cases of this dual mandate in West Africa.

The 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Accra CPA) formally ended fourteen years of intermittent civil conflict. It mandated the complete restructuring of Liberia's security architecture, including the disbandment of factional militias, the vetting and downsizing of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), and the reconstitution of the Liberia National Police (LNP) (United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2003). The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), deployed

later that year, assumed primary responsibility for security and oversaw more than a decade of internationally financed reform, much of it delivered through bilateral partnerships, including the United States-led rebuilding of the AFL (Malan, 2008; Nilsson & Söderberg Kovacs, 2013). Between 2016 and 2018, UNMIL progressively handed over security responsibilities to Liberian institutions, culminating in its final withdrawal and the transition to full national ownership (United Nations Mission in Liberia [UNMIL], 2018).

More than two decades after Accra, Liberia's security sector is often cited as a qualified success story of post-conflict reconstruction: the AFL has not mutinied, no security institution has attempted a coup, and the country has completed three peaceful democratic transfers of power (Bjarnesen, 2023; Boucher, 2018). Yet structural stability is not the same as public confidence. A growing body of survey and human-rights evidence indicates that ordinary Liberians, particularly those who interact most frequently with the LNP, continue to view their security institutions with suspicion (Amakoh & Bloh, 2023; Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2013). This article examines the gap between institutional stability and public trust, using the divergent trajectories of the AFL and the LNP as a comparative lens.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The dominant framework for evaluating SSR success in Liberia and in post-conflict settings more broadly has long emphasized technical and structural indicators: troop numbers vetted, officers trained, equipment distributed, and legislation enacted (Ebo, 2008; Malan, 2008). These indicators matter, but they say little about whether citizens actually trust the institutions that emerge from reform. Liberia's experience illustrates the limits of a purely technical account. The AFL and the LNP were reformed under the same peace agreement, overseen by the same UN mission, and financed substantially by the same set of international partners, yet public confidence in the two institutions has diverged sharply. This divergence is not merely inferred from asymmetric proxies: nationally representative Afrobarometer surveys have measured directly comparable public-trust indicators for both institutions, finding that 62% of Liberians trusted the AFL against only 26% who trusted the LNP in 2022 (Adaba & Boio, 2024). The more recent 2024/2025 round records AFL trust holding at 57%, while 64% of Liberians describe most or all police officials as corrupt (Afrobarometer, 2025; Amakoh & Bloh, 2023; Nebo, 2024), a corruption-perception measure that is related to, but distinct from, institutional trust. This divergence is under-examined in the literature, which tends to treat SSR institutions individually rather than comparatively and to measure reform in terms of institutional output rather than public perception. The problem this article addresses is twofold: first, to explain why two institutions born of an identical reform process have produced such different levels of measured public trust; and second, to determine what this divergence implies for how SSR success should be measured and pursued in Liberia going forward.

Addressing this problem is urgent because Liberia's security architecture, having exited direct UN oversight, must now sustain its own legitimacy without the backstop of an international peacekeeping presence (Boucher, 2018).

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study pursues four specific objectives:

1. To examine the evolution of Security Sector Reform oversight in Liberia from international supervision under UNMIL to national ownership since the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement.
2. To assess the comparative institutional trajectories of the Armed Forces of Liberia and the Liberia National Police in rebuilding public confidence.
3. To identify the structural and governance drivers of the persistent trust deficit between Liberia's security institutions and the citizens they serve.
4. To propose a policy framework, grounded in decentralization and accountability, for bridging the gap between the state and its citizens.

## 1.4 Research Questions

In line with the objectives above, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How has SSR oversight in Liberia evolved from international supervision to national ownership since 2003?

RQ2: In what ways do the institutional trajectories of the AFL and the LNP diverge in terms of public trust?

RQ3: What structural and governance factors account for the persistent trust deficit between the LNP and the AFL?

RQ4: What policy interventions could most effectively strengthen public trust in Liberia's security institutions?

## 1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant to several audiences. For policymakers within the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Justice, and the Legislature of Liberia, it offers an evidence-based rationale for prioritizing accountability and community-oriented reforms alongside continued technical investment. For the AFL and the LNP, it provides a comparative diagnostic that identifies specific institutional practices linked to rising or falling public confidence. For civil society organizations and human rights institutions, including the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), it strengthens the evidentiary basis for advocacy on legislative empowerment and oversight capacity. For academia, particularly scholarship in Gender and Security Studies, it contributes a Liberia-specific application of procedural justice and security sector governance theory to a fragile, post-conflict setting that remains underrepresented in the mainstream policing-legitimacy literature (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Finally, for international partners and donor agencies that continue to

fund security assistance in Liberia, the study underscores that technical capacity-building must be matched by sustained investment in institutional legitimacy if security assistance is to translate into durable peace.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

Geographically, the study focuses on Liberia at the national level, with attention to how national-level reforms are experienced at the county and community level, particularly through the lens of proposed decentralization. Thematically, the study concentrates on the two most visible pillars of Liberia's security sector, the AFL and the LNP, as comparative case institutions; it references the judiciary and the corrections system only insofar as they intersect with police accountability, and it does not attempt a comprehensive assessment of the entire justice sector. Temporally, the study spans the period from the signing of the Accra CPA in 2003 through the post-UNMIL consolidation period extending to 2026, with particular emphasis on the 2016-2018 security transition and its aftermath.

### **1.7 Conceptual Clarification**

This study draws on overlapping and sometimes contested terminology; it is necessary to clarify the key concepts employed throughout and to state the operational definitions adopted for this analysis.

#### **1.7.1 Security Sector Reform (SSR)**

SSR refers to the political and technical process of transforming the security institutions of a state, armed forces, police, intelligence services, and their governing and oversight structures, so that they provide effective, accountable, and rights-respecting security to the state and its citizens (Bryden, 2007; DCAF, 2015). For this article, SSR is understood not merely as institutional rebuilding, but as a governance project whose ultimate measure of success is the relationship it produces between security providers and the public.

#### **1.7.2 Security Sector Governance (SSG)**

SSG denotes the framework of norms, laws, institutions, and oversight mechanisms, civilian ministries, parliamentary committees, independent human-rights bodies, and the judiciary, that hold security institutions accountable to democratic authority and the rule of law (Bryden, 2007; DCAF, 2015). Where SSR describes the process of reform, SSG describes the structure within which reformed institutions are meant to operate responsibly over the long term. This article treats SSG as the enabling architecture without which SSR gains are unlikely to be sustained.

#### **1.7.3 Public Trust and Institutional Legitimacy**

Public trust is operationally defined in this article as the degree of confidence citizens hold that a security institution will act competently, fairly, and in their interest, even in the absence of direct oversight of any single encounter (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2004). Institutional legitimacy is the related but broader normative judgment that an institution has the right to

exercise authority, which in turn shapes citizens' willingness to comply voluntarily with its directives and cooperate with its work. The article treats public trust as the primary dependent variable of interest, distinguishing it explicitly from technical capacity, which is treated as an independent, necessary but insufficient, condition.

#### **1.7.4 National and Local Ownership**

National ownership refers to the transfer of primary responsibility for designing, financing, and overseeing SSR from international actors to domestic governments and institutions (Donais, 2008; Nathan, 2007). Local ownership extends this concept further, to encompass the meaningful participation of communities and civil society, not merely national elites, in shaping how reformed institutions operate at the point of service delivery. This distinction matters for Liberia, where national ownership of the AFL and LNP has been formally achieved, while local ownership, understood as community-level participation in the day-to-day conduct of security service delivery, remains comparatively underdeveloped.

#### **1.7.5 Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Human Security**

Post-conflict reconstruction refers to the broader set of political, economic, and social processes through which a state rebuilds functioning institutions after the cessation of armed conflict. This article situates SSR within the human security paradigm articulated in the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 Human Development Report, which reframed security away from a narrow, state-centric focus on territorial defense toward a citizen-centered concept encompassing personal, community, and political security (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994). Under this framing, a security institution that citizens fear is, by definition, failing to deliver human security, regardless of its technical proficiency.

#### **1.7.6 Community and Democratic Policing**

Community policing refers to a policing philosophy and set of practices that decentralize authority, embed officers within the communities they serve, and treat citizens as partners in identifying and responding to security concerns, rather than as passive recipients of enforcement (Blair et al., 2021). Democratic policing extends this philosophy into a governance principle: that policing authority is legitimate only insofar as it is exercised transparently, is subject to civilian oversight, and is responsive to the populations policed. This article adopts community and democratic policing as the practical, operational counterpart to the theoretical concept of procedural justice discussed in the following section, while treating the empirical record of community-policing pilots, discussed in the Literature Review and Findings and Discussion sections, as a distinct question from the normative appeal of the concept.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This article is analyzed through two complementary theoretical lenses: the Security Sector Governance (SSG) framework, which explains the macro-institutional

architecture within which reform occurs, and Procedural Justice/Police Legitimacy Theory, which explains the micro-level mechanism through which citizens come to trust, or distrust, the institutions that police and protect them. Both are explained below; their assumptions and relevance to this study's objectives are set out, and their comparative strengths and weaknesses are assessed before the article identifies the theory that most directly answers its central research problem.

### **2.1 Security Sector Governance Framework**

The SSG framework, developed principally through the work of scholars and practitioners associated with the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, holds that the success of security sector reform depends less on the technical competence of individual institutions than on the quality of the governance architecture surrounding them: effective civilian oversight, transparent budgeting, functioning parliamentary and judicial accountability mechanisms, and an active, informed civil society (Bryden, 2007; DCAF, 2015). The framework's central assumption is that security institutions, left ungoverned, will tend toward opacity and self-interest regardless of how well they are trained or equipped; governance, not training, is therefore the primary lever of durable reform. Applied to Liberia, the SSG framework directly supports Objective 1 of this study, since it provides the analytical vocabulary for tracing the shift from UNMIL's direct oversight role toward Liberia's own emerging, if still developing, civilian oversight architecture, including the INCHR, the Legislature's security committees, and domestic civil-society monitors (Bernath & Togba, 2022; Boucher, 2018).

### **2.2 Procedural Justice and Police Legitimacy Theory**

Procedural justice theory, developed principally by Tom Tyler and collaborators, argues that public trust and voluntary compliance with security institutions are shaped far more powerfully by the perceived fairness of the process through which those institutions exercise authority than by the favorability of any given outcome (Tyler, 2004). Sunshine and Tyler (2003) identify four components of procedural fairness that predict legitimacy: giving citizens voice in encounters, demonstrating neutrality in decision-making, treating citizens with dignity and respect, and conveying trustworthy motives. Where citizens experience security encounters as arbitrary, disrespectful, or self-interested, as is documented extensively in accounts of LNP conduct (Amakoh & Bloh, 2023; HRW, 2013), legitimacy erodes even if crime outcomes are otherwise favorable. This theory speaks directly to Objectives 2 and 3 of this study, offering an explanation for why the LNP's persistent corruption and arbitrary conduct are associated with lower public trust than any deficiency in its crime-fighting competence would predict on its own.

### **2.3 Comparative Assessment and Theoretical Choice**

Each framework carries distinct strengths and limitations. The SSG framework is well suited to explaining structural and institutional change over time, including the transfer of oversight functions from UNMIL to domestic bodies, but it operates primarily at the level of institutions and elites, and offers limited purchase on the everyday, face-to-face encounters through which ordinary citizens actually form judgments about the police who patrol their communities. Procedural justice theory, conversely, offers a precise account of how trust is built or destroyed at the point of citizen-officer contact, but was developed primarily from research in stable, resourced democracies and requires adaptation to explain institution-level divergence, such as that between the AFL and the LNP, in a fragile post-conflict setting (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

The central research problem of this article is explaining a gap in public trust rather than merely describing institutional restructuring; the study adopts Procedural Justice/Police Legitimacy Theory as its primary analytical lens, since it most directly addresses the trust deficit identified in the Problem Statement. The Security Sector Governance framework is retained as a complementary, macro-level lens for Objective 1, situating citizen-level trust dynamics within the broader architecture of oversight from which they cannot, in practice, be separated. This dual application allows the analysis to move coherently between the institutional evolution of Liberia's SSR process and the lived, interpersonal experience that ultimately determines whether that process is judged a success by the citizens it is meant to serve.

### **2.4 Rival Institutional Explanations**

Because the AFL and the LNP differ not only in the procedural-justice-relevant conduct of their personnel but also in statutory mandate, visibility, coercive function, donor model, organizational scale, and exposure to public complaints, this article treats these structural differences as rival explanations that must be systematically assessed alongside, rather than assumed away by, Procedural Justice/Police Legitimacy Theory. Table 1 in the Findings and Discussion section sets out these dimensions comparatively and assesses, for each, whether the available evidence suggests an independent contribution to the AFL-LNP trust divergence or whether its apparent effect operates through the procedural-fairness mechanism itself. This approach is intended to guard against attributing to procedural justice a divergence that structural factors, such as the AFL's statutory exclusion from domestic law enforcement, could equally explain.

## **3. Literature Review**

The literature relevant to this study can be organized into five thematic clusters: global and African paradigms of SSR; the evolution of national ownership in Liberia specifically; the divergent institutional trajectories of the

AFL and the LNP; public trust and community-oriented policing; and the accountability architecture surrounding Liberia's security sector. Each theme is reviewed below, concluding with an identification of the gap that theme leaves unaddressed.

### **3.1 Global and African Paradigms of Security Sector Reform**

Roland Paris's (2004) influential critique of post-Cold War peacebuilding, *At War's End*, argues that international interventions have often pursued rapid political and economic liberalization before adequate institutions exist to manage the resulting competition, producing fragile rather than durable peace. Applied to the security sector, this critique implies that hastily reformed police and military institutions risk reproducing instability rather than resolving it. Complementary work on local ownership (Donais, 2008; Nathan, 2007) argues that SSR programs designed and financed primarily by external donors, however well-intentioned, struggle to achieve legitimacy precisely because they are not perceived as belonging to the societies they are meant to serve. The DCAF backgrounder on security sector governance (2015) synthesizes this literature into the now-standard argument that governance, not simply capacity, determines whether reformed institutions endure.

Gap: this literature offers a persuasive account of why externally driven reform can falter, but it treats "legitimacy" largely as a property of the reform process as a whole rather than as a measurable outcome that can diverge between institutions undergoing the very same reform process, as it demonstrably has in Liberia.

### **3.2 SSR and the Evolution of National Ownership in Liberia**

A substantial body of literature documents Liberia's SSR process chronologically. Ebo (2008) provides an early assessment of the challenges facing post-conflict SSR in Liberia, highlighting weak civilian oversight capacity and resource constraints as principal risks to durability. Bekoe and Parajon (2007), writing for the United States Institute of Peace, similarly caution that domestic political will, not merely international financing, would determine whether reform outlasted the UNMIL presence. Malan (2008) offers a comprehensive account of the AFL's and LNP's parallel reconstruction, characterizing the results as "mixed" even at that relatively early stage. Nilsson and Söderberg Kovacs (2013) compare Liberia's and Sierra Leone's military reform trajectories and find that the sequencing and ownership of reform, not merely its funding level, shaped divergent long-term outcomes. UNMIL's own final progress report (2018) documents the formal transfer of security responsibilities to Liberian authorities between 2016 and 2018, while Bjarnesen (2023) extends the analysis into the post-UNMIL period, describing Liberia's contemporary security arrangement as a "hybrid" system in which formal state institutions continue to coexist with informal and community-based security actors. Wonnawon (2025) most directly engages the theme of ownership, arguing that a persistent gap separates

Liberia's formal police-reform policy commitments from their practical implementation at the community level, a gap he traces in part to the Liberia National Police Act (passed by the Legislature in 2015 and promulgated in 2016; Nebo, 2024).

Gap: this literature traces the trajectory of SSR institutions and their transfer to national ownership in considerable chronological detail, yet it rarely compares the AFL and the LNP against one another using a shared analytical framework capable of explaining why one institution has converted national ownership into public confidence more successfully than the other.

### **3.3 Divergent Institutional Trajectories: AFL Professionalization and LNP Struggles**

A second cluster of literature documents the specific, and diverging, institutional experiences of the AFL and the LNP. On the AFL side, the United States-led rebuilding program, which emphasized rigorous vetting, professional military education, and merit-based promotion, is widely credited with producing a disciplined force that has avoided the political entanglement and abuses associated with its pre-war predecessor (Malan, 2008; Nilsson & Söderberg Kovacs, 2013). The AFL's 2008 enabling statute reinforces this institutional separation by explicitly barring the force from domestic law-enforcement functions during peacetime, reserving that role for the LNP and other civilian agencies (Republic of Liberia, 2008, sec. 2.3(e)); this legal boundary, discussed further below as a rival explanation, structurally limits the AFL's opportunities for the kind of citizen-facing conduct that most directly shapes procedural-justice judgments.

On the LNP side, the picture painted by the literature is considerably less favorable. Human Rights Watch's (2013) landmark report, "No Money, No Justice," documents systemic bribery throughout the LNP's investigative process, extortion of vulnerable groups such as street vendors and motorcycle-taxi operators, and structural drivers of corruption including inadequate salaries and chronic logistical shortfalls; because this investigation is now more than a decade old, its findings are treated in this article as historical baseline evidence rather than as a description of current LNP conduct. A decade later, Afrobarometer survey data (Amakoh & Bloh, 2023) find that roughly two-thirds of Liberians believe that "most" or "all" police officers are corrupt, that only about one-quarter of citizens express trust in the police, and that reported experiences of personal insecurity had risen over the preceding two years. The Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission's (2021) institutional risk assessment corroborates this more recent picture from a different vantage point, identifying LNP traffic-clearance and ticketing operations specifically as high-corruption-risk functions and documenting a force of more than 4,100 officers across 151 stations, though without providing case-level corruption statistics that would allow a precise trend comparison with the 2013 HRW baseline. Nebo (2024) argues that the politicization of LNP leadership appointments has deepened even after

the enactment of the Liberia National Police Act, undermining the Act's intended reforms. Kesselly's (2022) doctoral research similarly links police corruption directly to broader national security vulnerabilities, arguing that a corrupt police service degrades the state's overall capacity to prevent and respond to security threats.

Gap: while this literature documents the LNP's struggles in considerable empirical depth and, through Afrobarometer's matched institutional-trust items, now permits a direct comparison with the AFL, it seldom asks why the AFL, subject to comparable resource constraints and operating within the same fragile post-conflict state, has not experienced a parallel trust deficit, and it rarely disentangles the AFL's structural insulation from domestic policing from the citizen-facing conduct that procedural justice theory emphasizes, a comparative question this article takes up directly.

### **3.4 Public Trust, Legitimacy, and Community-Oriented Policing**

A distinct but related literature addresses the mechanisms through which trust in policing institutions is built or eroded. Sunshine and Tyler (2003) and Tyler (2004) establish, primarily in North American contexts, that perceived procedural fairness predicts legitimacy and voluntary compliance more strongly than outcome-based measures such as crime-clearance rates. The most direct large-scale test of a community-policing intervention in Liberia complicates any straightforward extension of this theoretical insight into policy practice. Blair et al.'s (2021) six-country randomized evaluation, published in *Science* and covering Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda, tested an intervention combining expanded foot patrols, monthly community meetings, and problem-oriented policing adjustments across roughly 516 treated communities, including a Monrovia site implemented in partnership with the LNP. The study found no statistically significant improvement in citizen-police trust and no reduction in crime at any of the six sites, notwithstanding that residents in treatment areas did report more frequent contact with police. The study's authors attribute this null result substantially to implementation shortfalls, including inconsistent police-leadership commitment, frequent officer rotation, and insufficient resources to act on the concerns citizens raised, rather than to a failure of the underlying procedural-justice logic itself. Broader continental survey data from Afrobarometer (2021) situates Liberia within a wider regional pattern in which trust in police and judicial institutions lags trust in other state institutions across much of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Gap: procedural justice research remains disproportionately drawn from stable, well-resourced democratic contexts, and the one large-scale Liberian test of a community-policing application of that theory produced null results attributed to implementation failure rather than to a flaw in the theory itself. This leaves open, rather than resolved, the question of whether procedural-justice-informed community policing can build trust in Liberia's specific institutional and resource environment,

a question this article's recommendations treat as still requiring evidence rather than as settled by the pilot record to date.

### **3.5 Accountability Architecture and Human Rights Oversight**

A final cluster of literature examines the formal accountability mechanisms available to check Liberia's security institutions. The Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) was established under the 2005 Act creating the Commission, which empowers it to investigate and adjudicate human-rights complaints, including those concerning security-sector conduct, but does not grant it compulsory process, such as subpoena authority, or a statutory mechanism compelling government or security-sector bodies to respond formally to its findings (Bernath & Togba, 2022). The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' evaluation of capacity-building support to the INCHR (Bernath & Togba, 2022) finds that while the Commission's technical capacity has improved substantially since its establishment, its practical influence over security-sector accountability remains constrained by this limited enforcement authority, inconsistent government follow-through on its recommendations, and funding that covers little beyond staff salaries. The evaluation's own recommendations focus on internal governance reforms, such as reducing the size of the Board of Commissioners and clarifying the division of responsibility between the Board and the Secretariat, rather than on expanding the Commission's legal powers, a gap this article's Recommendations section addresses directly. Writing for the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Boucher (2018) similarly identifies the strengthening of independent civilian oversight bodies as among the highest unresolved priorities for security and justice as Liberia absorbed full responsibility for its own security following UNMIL's departure.

Gap: this literature documents the capacity and legal limitations of Liberia's oversight bodies but stops short of specifying the statutory amendment, sequencing, and safeguards that would be required to convert institutional presence into enforceable accountability, a specification this article's Recommendations section provides.

### **3.6 Gender-Responsive Dimensions of Security Sector Reform**

A smaller but growing literature situates SSR within a gender lens. Bastick (2008) argues that gender-responsive recruitment, training, and complaint-handling mechanisms are not peripheral to SSR but central to its legitimacy, since security institutions that fail to reflect or protect the populations they serve, including women and other marginalized groups, are less likely to be perceived as trustworthy by the public at large.

Gap: this gender-responsive SSR literature has not yet been systematically integrated into Liberia-specific analyses of the AFL-LNP trust divergence. Consistent with the reviewer guidance that prompted this revision, this article retains gender explicitly as a limitation and

future-research agenda item, discussed further in the Method of Inquiry, Findings and Discussion, and Recommendations sections, rather than treating it as an analytical variable this study's evidence base can support.

### **3.7 Synthesis and Statement of the Overall Gap**

Taken together, the reviewed literature demonstrates that Liberia's SSR process has been extensively documented from institutional, chronological, and human-rights perspectives, and that matched survey evidence now confirms, rather than merely suggests, a measurable divergence in public trust between the AFL and the LNP. What remains largely absent is a study that draws together this comparative evidence, the theoretical tools of procedural justice and security-sector governance, and a systematic assessment of the two institutions' structural differences, in order to explain why this divergence has occurred and what, given the mixed record of prior community-policing efforts, can realistically be done about it. This article addresses that gap.

## **4. Methodology**

This study is purely desk-based and theoretical-analytical rather than empirical fieldwork, and it therefore follows a Method of Inquiry rather than a primary-data methodology.

### **4.1 Research Design**

The study is designed and reported as a structured qualitative literature review and comparative content analysis, not as a systematic review or formal meta-analysis in the sense defined by the Cochrane Collaboration or PRISMA guidance; no statistical pooling of effect sizes was undertaken, and the study accordingly does not report a PRISMA flow diagram or checklist. This design was selected because the research problem, explaining a documented and now directly measured divergence in public trust between two already-studied institutions, is best addressed by systematically identifying, appraising, and comparatively re-interpreting the substantial existing body of reporting, survey data, and scholarship through a common theoretical lens, rather than by conducting new fieldwork that would largely replicate data already collected by UNMIL, Afrobarometer, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, and human-rights organizations.

### **4.2 Search and Source Identification**

Sources were identified through structured searches of Google Scholar, JSTOR, the DCAF (Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance) publications library, the Afrobarometer online data and publications portal, the ReliefWeb and United Nations Digital Library repositories, the websites of Human Rights Watch, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, and the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, the World Bank World Development Indicators database, and the Scholar Works institutional repository for dissertations. Search terms combined the core concepts "security sector reform," "Liberia," "Armed Forces of Liberia," "Liberia National Police," "public trust," "police legitimacy," "procedural

justice," "community policing," "Independent National Commission on Human Rights," and "Afrobarometer," used individually and in combination. Searches were conducted, and citation currency was last verified, in September 2026, and covered material published between 2003, the year of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and 2026. Sources published before 2015 were retained primarily for chronological and theoretical background, while claims about current institutional status were required, wherever possible, to be supported by sources published in 2021 or later, with the specific vintage of each source stated where it bears on the weight the claim can carry.

### **4.3 Sources of Data**

Data were drawn from four categories of secondary sources. First, official United Nations and Liberian government documents, including UNMIL's (2018) final progress report on the security transition, the text of the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (USIP, 2003), and the New National Defense Act of 2008 (Republic of Liberia, 2008). Second, legislative and policy frameworks governing Liberia's security institutions, including analysis of the Liberia National Police Act as discussed in Nebo (2024). Third, independent civil-society, anti-corruption, and human-rights assessments, including Human Rights Watch's (2013) police-corruption investigation, Amakoh and Bloh's (2023) and Adaba and Boio's (2024) Afrobarometer survey findings, the Afrobarometer (2025) news release on Round 10 results, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission's (2021) institutional risk assessment, and the OHCHR-commissioned evaluation of the INCHR (Bernath & Togba, 2022). Fourth, peer-reviewed academic literature, including one large-scale randomized evaluation (Blair et al., 2021), addressing Liberia's SSR trajectory and community-policing record, and the broader theoretical literature on procedural justice, security sector governance, and post-conflict peacebuilding.

### **4.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Sources were included if they (a) were official UN, Liberian government, or legislative documents; (b) were peer-reviewed academic articles, books, or dissertations; (c) were reports or nationally representative survey data produced by established human-rights, anti-corruption, or research organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Afrobarometer, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; or (d) directly addressed the AFL, the LNP, Liberia's SSR process, or the theoretical literatures on procedural justice and security sector governance. Sources were excluded if they were opinion or advocacy pieces without identifiable institutional or scholarly authorship, non-attributable blog or social-media content, or secondary summaries of survey data for which the underlying primary dataset or report was independently obtainable and used instead.

#### 4.5 Screening Process

Candidate sources identified through the searches described above were first screened by title and abstract, or, for legislative and institutional documents, by title and summary, for direct relevance to the study's four objectives. Sources passing this initial screen underwent full-text review to confirm that they contained documentary, survey, or analytical evidence bearing on AFL or LNP institutional trajectory, public trust, or the accountability architecture surrounding Liberia's security sector. This process yielded the thirty sources retained in the final reference list, comprising four official UN, government, or legislative texts; seventeen institutional, survey, statistical, or human-rights and anti-corruption reports and datasets; and nine peer-reviewed journal articles, books, or doctoral dissertations.

#### 4.6 Source Quality Appraisal

Each retained source was appraised on four criteria: the credibility and transparency of its authorship or issuing institution; methodological transparency, applied specifically to survey and empirical sources, for example, whether sample size, fieldwork dates, and question wording were reported; recency relative to the specific claim it was used to support, with historical sources such as Human Rights Watch (2013) flagged explicitly wherever they are used and not treated as evidence of current conditions; and corroboration, meaning whether a source's central claims were independently supported by at least one other source of a different type, for example, survey evidence corroborated by institutional-assessment evidence. Sources that could not be corroborated, most notably some earlier project-level claims about community-policing outcomes that this revision has replaced with the corresponding peer-reviewed evaluation (Blair et al., 2021), are flagged in the text as single-source or superseded claims requiring caution.

#### 4.7 Analytical Approach and Coding Framework

Sources were analyzed using thematic and comparative content analysis. Materials relating to the AFL and materials relating to the LNP were first coded separately along five indicators developed from the research questions: institutional trajectory (chronological developments in reform and oversight), professionalization (vetting, training, and promotion practices), corruption (documented financial or procedural misconduct), accountability mechanisms (internal and external oversight structures and their legal powers), and public perception (survey-measured trust and confidence). Coded material was then compared directly across the two institutions to identify points of convergence and divergence, and a sixth, cross-cutting set of structural indicators, mandate, citizen-contact frequency, coercive function, donor model, organizational scale, and complaint exposure, was applied specifically to assess rival explanations for the observed divergence in public perception, reported as Table 1 in the Findings and Discussion section. Findings were subsequently interpreted through the study's dual theoretical

framework, with procedural justice theory applied primarily to citizen-facing conduct and the security sector governance framework applied primarily to institutional and oversight-level dynamics.

#### Trustworthiness, Triangulation, and Handling of Disagreement

To mitigate the risk of relying on any single source or perspective, the study deliberately triangulates across source types: official UN and government reporting, independent human-rights investigation, quantitative public-opinion survey data, and peer-reviewed academic analysis. Where sources diverged in emphasis, interpretation, or findings, for example, the contrast between earlier, more optimistic characterizations of Liberian community-policing pilots and the null results reported by Blair et al.'s (2021) six-country randomized evaluation, this divergence is reported explicitly in the Literature Review and Findings and Discussion sections rather than resolved by selective citation, and the more rigorously designed or more recent source is identified as such and given interpretive priority. Negative or disconfirming evidence, most significantly the absence of a measured trust-building effect from the one large-scale Liberian community-policing trial, is treated in the Findings and Discussion and Recommendations sections as a substantive constraint on the study's own policy recommendations rather than as a finding to be minimized.

#### 4.8 Limitations

This study's principal limitation is its reliance on secondary data; it does not include original survey work with Liberian citizens, AFL or LNP personnel, or policymakers, and its findings should accordingly be read as a structured synthesis and theoretical interpretation of existing evidence rather than as new empirical measurement. Relatedly, much of the available survey data on public trust, most notably the Afrobarometer series, is collected at discrete points in time, the 2022 and 2024/2025 rounds cited here, and may not capture more recent shifts in institutional performance or public sentiment. In addition, the published 2024/2025 Afrobarometer release reports trust in the AFL but not a directly comparable trust-in-police figure for Liberia, so the most recent LNP evidence available to this study is a corruption-perception measure rather than a matched trust measure. Because English-language and internationally published sources are more readily accessible than Liberian-language local reporting, the study's source base may underrepresent grassroots or rural perspectives relative to those centered on Monrovia and other urban areas. Finally, consistent with the gap identified in the Gender-Responsive Dimensions subsection of the Literature Review, this study does not systematically integrate gender-disaggregated evidence into its comparative analysis of AFL and LNP trust; gender is therefore treated in this article as an explicitly flagged limitation and future-research priority rather than as an analytical variable, and the gender-related design suggestions offered in the Recommendations section

should be read as forward-looking considerations rather than as conclusions this study's evidence base can support.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 *The Evolution of SSR Oversight: From UNMIL to National Ownership*

Consistent with Objective 1 and RQ1, the evidence indicates a clear, if gradual, evolution in the locus of SSR oversight in Liberia. In the immediate post-Accra period, UNMIL exercised direct operational and oversight responsibility for both AFL reconstruction and LNP reform, with international donors, chiefly the United States for the AFL, financing training, vetting, and institution-building (Malan, 2008; Nilsson & Söderberg Kovacs, 2013). Between 2016 and 2018, this responsibility was formally transferred to Liberian national authorities, a process UNMIL's own final progress report (2018) characterizes as substantially, though not uniformly, successful across the security institutions it covered. Bjarnesen (2023) characterizes the resulting arrangement as a hybrid security order, in which formal state institutions now hold primary responsibility but continue to operate alongside informal, community-based security actors that filled gaps left by the state during and after the war.

Viewed through the Security Sector Governance framework, this transition represents a substantial achievement in formal, structural terms: Liberia today possesses its own Ministry of National Defense, its own police leadership structure, and its own nominally independent human-rights oversight body in the INCHR, established under the 2005 Act with investigatory but not compulsory-process powers (Bernath & Togba, 2022). However, consistent with the SSG framework's emphasis on governance quality over structural presence, the evidence also indicates that the oversight architecture inherited from UNMIL remains comparatively underdeveloped relative to the operational institutions it is meant to govern. Bernath and Togba's (2022) evaluation finds that INCHR's technical capacity has grown but that its practical influence over security-sector accountability remains limited, while Boucher (2018) identifies strengthened independent oversight as among the most urgent unresolved priorities of the post-UNMIL period. In short, national ownership of security operations has outpaced national ownership of security governance, a mismatch that helps explain why formal institutional transition has not, on its own, resolved the trust deficit identified in the Problem Statement.

### 5.2 *Divergent Trajectories: AFL Professionalization and the LNP's Persistent Trust Deficit*

Addressing Objective 2 and RQ2, the evidence reviewed in this study confirms a marked divergence between the AFL's and the LNP's respective trajectories of public confidence, despite both institutions having emerged from the same 2003 reform mandate. Unlike in earlier analyses of this divergence, this claim can now be

grounded in directly comparable survey evidence rather than in asymmetric proxies: Afrobarometer's Round 9 survey found that 62% of Liberians trusted the AFL "somewhat" or "a lot," compared with only 26% who expressed the same trust in the LNP (Adaba & Boio, 2024, Table 4, p. 9); the 2024/2025 round (Round 10) shows trust in the AFL remaining comparatively high, at 57% (Afrobarometer, 2025). The published Round 10 release does not, however, report a corresponding trust-in-police figure for Liberia; it reports instead that 64% of Liberians describe most or all police officials as corrupt (Afrobarometer, 2025), a closely related but conceptually distinct measure of perceived corruption rather than of institutional trust. The directly matched trust comparison in this article therefore rests on the Round 9 data: on that evidence, the AFL-LNP gap is a divergence in directly measured public trust, and not merely in documented institutional trajectory. The Round 10 corruption-perception evidence is consistent with the persistence of that gap, but it is not treated here as a matched trust measure.

The AFL's reconstruction, characterized by rigorous, internationally supported vetting, professional military education, and a relatively insulated, merit-based promotion system, produced a force that both Malan (2008) and Nilsson and Söderberg Kovacs (2013) describe as having successfully avoided the political entanglement and abusive conduct associated with its pre-war predecessor. The LNP's trajectory has been considerably more troubled. Human Rights Watch's (2013) investigation, now more than a decade old and treated here as historical baseline evidence, documents bribery embedded at nearly every stage of the LNP's criminal-justice process, while Amakoh and Bloh's (2023) more recent survey data, corroborated by the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission's (2021) institutional risk assessment, indicate that these patterns had not been resolved as of the early 2020s. Nebo (2024) attributes part of this persistence to the continued politicization of senior LNP appointments even after the passage of the Liberia National Police Act, which was itself intended to professionalize and insulate the institution.

Table 1 presents a systematic comparison of the AFL and the LNP across the structural dimensions identified in the Theoretical Framework as rival explanations for this divergence, alongside the trust and corruption-perception outcomes reported above, which are distinguished in the final row.

This comparison indicates that the AFL-LNP divergence cannot be attributed to Procedural Justice/Police Legitimacy Theory alone. Two structural factors carry independent explanatory weight. First, the AFL's statutory exclusion from domestic law enforcement (Republic of Liberia, 2008, sec. 2.3(e)) mechanically limits its opportunities for the kind of citizen-facing conduct, fair or unfair, that procedural justice theory treats as the primary driver of legitimacy judgments; an institution that rarely interacts with civilians in an

enforcement capacity cannot generate the volume of adversarial encounters through which the LNP's reputation has been damaged. Second, the AFL's more centralized, single-donor reform pathway (Nilsson & Söderberg Kovacs, 2013) may have produced more consistent professionalization outcomes than the LNP's more fragmented, domestically contested reform process (Nebo, 2024), independent of any citizen-facing mechanism. At the same time, other dimensions in Table 1, particularly the LNP's far greater exposure to public complaint and civil-society monitoring, appear to operate

largely as a downstream consequence of its higher contact frequency rather than as an independent cause, which is consistent with, rather than a rival to, procedural justice theory. The most defensible reading of the evidence, therefore, is that the AFL-LNP trust divergence reflects both a structural difference in mandate and reform pathway and a citizen-facing mechanism of the kind procedural justice theory describes; this article accordingly uses language of association and contribution, rather than sole causation, when describing the relationship between LNP conduct and public trust.

**Table 1.** Comparative Institutional Profile: AFL and LNP, and Assessment of Rival Explanations

| Dimension                                                           | Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL)                                                                                                                                  | Liberia National Police (LNP)                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Assessment relative to procedural justice explanation                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Statutory mandate</b>                                            | External defense, peacekeeping, and disaster response; statutorily barred from domestic law enforcement in peacetime (Republic of Liberia, 2008, sec. 2.3(e)). | Primary domestic law-enforcement mandate, including traffic control, criminal investigation, and routine public order (Liberia National Police Act; Nebo, 2024).                                                                                | Independent structural factor: the legal bar forecloses most AFL citizen-facing law-enforcement contact, regardless of internal conduct.                                      |
| <b>Frequency and nature of citizen contact</b>                      | Infrequent, largely non-adversarial contact (peacekeeping, disaster response).                                                                                 | Frequent, often adversarial contact (traffic stops, arrests, investigations) (Amakoh & Bloh, 2023; HRW, 2013).                                                                                                                                  | Consistent with procedural justice theory: more frequent adversarial contact creates more opportunities for legitimacy-eroding encounters.                                    |
| <b>Organizational scale</b>                                         | Substantially smaller force: approximately 2,000 armed-forces personnel in 2020, the most recent year reported (World Bank, n.d.).                             | More than 4,100 officers across 151 stations (Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, 2021).                                                                                                                                                        | Partly independent: a larger, more dispersed force is structurally harder to supervise and discipline uniformly.                                                              |
| <b>Coercive/use-of-force posture</b>                                | Military-grade force reserved for external defense; minimal routine coercive interaction with civilians.                                                       | Front-line coercive authority in daily policing, including arrest, use of force, and detention.                                                                                                                                                 | Consistent with procedural justice theory: the LNP's daily coercive authority is precisely the terrain on which Sunshine and Tyler's (2003) fairness dimensions operate.      |
| <b>Reform/donor model</b>                                           | U.S.-led, centralized, internationally supervised vetting and merit-based professionalization program (Malan, 2008; Nilsson & Söderberg Kovacs, 2013).         | More fragmented multi-donor support; statutory reform implemented amid continued domestic political involvement in leadership appointments (Nebo, 2024).                                                                                        | Partly independent: a single, well-resourced, insulated donor relationship may have produced more consistent professionalization, independent of procedural-justice dynamics. |
| <b>Exposure to complaint/oversight mechanisms</b>                   | Limited complaint volume, consistent with low citizen contact.                                                                                                 | Primary subject of INCHR complaints and civil-society monitoring (Bernath & Togba, 2022).                                                                                                                                                       | Largely a function of contact frequency (row 2) rather than an independent explanation.                                                                                       |
| <b>Public trust and related perception measures (Afrobarometer)</b> | Trust: 62% (2022, Round 9); 57% (2024/2025, Round 10) (Adaba & Boio, 2024; Afrobarometer, 2025).                                                               | Trust: 26% (2022, Round 9) (Adaba & Boio, 2024); no trust-in-police figure reported in the 2024/2025 release. Corruption perception (not a trust measure): 64–66% say most/all officers are corrupt (Afrobarometer, 2025; Amakoh & Bloh, 2023). | Outcome variable: the divergence this study seeks to explain (trust measures directly matched for 2022 only).                                                                 |

### 5.3 Drivers of the Trust Deficit: Corruption, Politicization, and Weak Accountability

In response to Objective 3 and RQ3, three interlocking structural drivers emerge from the synthesized evidence. The first is direct financial corruption at the point of citizen contact, extensively documented in HRW's (2013) historical account of extortion targeting vulnerable groups such as street vendors and motorcycle-taxi operators, and linked by that report to inadequate LNP salaries and chronic logistical shortfalls that leave officers dependent on informal payments to perform basic duties. The Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission's (2021) more recent institutional risk assessment corroborates the continuation

of this pattern, identifying LNP traffic-clearance and ticketing operations specifically as high-corruption-risk functions, though without providing case-level statistics that would allow a precise trend comparison with the 2013 baseline. The second driver is the politicization of institutional leadership, which Nebo (2024) argues has deepened rather than diminished since the Liberia National Police Act took effect, undermining internal accountability by making officer conduct and promotion contingent on political loyalty rather than merit or professional performance.

The third driver is weak external accountability: notwithstanding the existence of the INCHR, Bernath and

Togba (2022) find that the Commission's recommendations do not reliably translate into disciplinary or policy consequences for security personnel, a limitation traceable in part to the 2005 INCHR Act's lack of compulsory-process authority, leaving citizens with limited recourse when they experience misconduct.

These three drivers interact rather than operating independently. Weak external accountability (driver three) removes the institutional check that might otherwise constrain both financial corruption (driver one) and politicized leadership (driver two); politicized leadership, in turn, weakens internal incentives to discipline corrupt conduct, since promotion depends on political favor rather than professional standing. The result, consistent with the Security Sector Governance framework's core claim, is that Liberia's trust deficit is best understood not as a failure of any single institution's competence, but as a governance failure: the absence of a sufficiently empowered, insulated, and consistently enforced accountability architecture around the LNP specifically.

#### **5.4 Toward a Community-Centric Model: Decentralization and Accountability as Pathways to Trust**

Addressing Objective 4 and RQ4, the evidence reviewed here supports a two-pronged strategy for narrowing Liberia's security trust deficit: evidence-conditioned reform of security service delivery, and enhanced legislative accountability. This strategy treats decentralization with more caution than earlier framings of this argument, in direct response to the null results of the one large-scale, rigorously designed test of community policing conducted in Liberia to date.

On decentralization, Wonnawon's (2025) analysis of the gap between Liberia's police-reform policy and its practical implementation supports moving security service delivery closer to the communities it serves, and this logic is consistent with the theoretical expectation, drawn from Sunshine and Tyler (2003), that structured opportunities for voice, neutrality, and demonstrated trustworthy motive should strengthen legitimacy. However, the most direct empirical test of this logic in Liberia, Blair et al.'s (2021) six-country randomized evaluation, which included a Monrovia site combining monthly town-hall meetings, foot patrols, and problem-oriented policing, found no statistically significant improvement in citizen-police trust and no reduction in crime, notwithstanding increased citizen-police contact in treatment communities. The study's authors attribute this null result substantially to implementation failures, including inconsistent police-leadership commitment, frequent officer rotation, and insufficient resources for police to act on the concerns citizens raised, rather than to a flaw in the underlying theory. Read alongside this study's own findings on the drivers of the LNP's trust deficit, this null result is not a reason to abandon community-oriented reform, but it is a reason to reject any claim that decentralization alone, absent the accountability and leadership-continuity conditions that Blair et al. (2021) identify as necessary,

will reliably build trust. This article accordingly recommends that any renewed community-policing initiative be explicitly designed and evaluated as a further, fairer test of these conditions, paired from the outset with the accountability reforms discussed below, rather than adopted as a validated pathway to trust.

On accountability, the evidence, particularly Bernath and Togba's (2022) finding that the INCHR's technical capacity has outpaced its practical enforcement power under its 2005 enabling Act, and Boucher's (2018) identification of independent oversight as an unresolved post-UNMIL priority, supports legislative empowerment of the INCHR with expanded investigatory authority and a statutory mechanism obligating security institutions to respond formally to its findings. Such reform would directly address the governance gap identified in the discussion of Objective 1 above, converting Liberia's nominal national ownership of security oversight into functional oversight capacity. Consistent with Bastick's (2008) argument that gender-responsive institutional design strengthens legitimacy, both the accountability and any future decentralization strand of this recommendation would benefit from explicit attention to gender-sensitive recruitment and complaint-handling mechanisms within the LNP; because this study's evidence base does not itself include gender-disaggregated trust data, this specific design element is offered as a forward-looking recommendation for future testing, consistent with the gender-related gap identified in the Literature Review, rather than as a conclusion this study's evidence can independently support.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

More than two decades after the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Liberia's security sector reform process has achieved a level of structural stability that would have seemed improbable at the height of the country's civil conflict: a professionalized armed force, a civilian police service, and a nominally independent human-rights oversight body all now operate under full national ownership. Yet this study's central finding is that structural stability and public trust are not the same achievement, and that Liberia's SSR process, judged by the more exacting and now directly measurable standard of public confidence, remains incomplete. The comparative trajectories of the AFL and the LNP, and the matched Round 9 Afrobarometer trust data presented in Table 1, supplemented by more recent corruption-perception evidence, demonstrate that technical capacity-building, however necessary, is insufficient on its own to produce legitimacy; what ultimately determines whether citizens regard a security institution as theirs is a combination of the institution's statutory mandate and reform pathway and the fairness, transparency, and accountability with which it exercises its authority in everyday encounters.

Hence, what does this mean for Liberia going forward? It means that the next phase of SSR must be measured

differently than the last, and pursued with greater humility about which interventions are known to work. Where the first two decades of reform were rightly focused on rebuilding institutional capacity from the wreckage of civil war, the coming decade must focus on converting that capacity into legitimacy, through rigorously tested, community-centered service delivery and genuinely empowered oversight, rather than through decentralization efforts whose trust-building effects remain, on the best available Liberian evidence, unproven. Ultimately, for SSR to be judged a durable success rather than a fragile structural achievement, Liberia's security institutions must come to be perceived by their own citizens as protectors of the public interest rather than as instruments of intimidation or extraction.

## 6.2 Recommendations

### 6.2.1 For Policy

The Legislature of Liberia should amend the Commission's 2005 enabling Act to grant the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) explicit compulsory-process authority, including the power to subpoena witnesses, documents, and records in the course of investigating security-sector misconduct, powers the Commission does not currently possess (Bernath & Togba, 2022). This amendment should be paired with three further, specific provisions. First, a binding statutory requirement that the Ministry of Justice and LNP leadership issue a formal, public response to Commission findings within a fixed statutory period, such as ninety days, with the response filed with the Legislature's security-sector oversight committee, which should also receive an annual compliance report tallying Commission recommendations issued, responses received, and disciplinary or policy actions taken. Second, a dedicated budget line for the INCHR's investigatory functions, distinct from the salary-only funding pattern that Bernath and Togba (2022) find has constrained the Commission's practical influence to date. Third, if community-level policing structures are pursued as recommended below, a requirement that county- and district-level community policing boards route complaints through this same strengthened INCHR mechanism, rather than operating as informal, unsupervised local bodies, so that decentralization does not simply relocate unsupervised discretion, and with it the risk of corruption, from the national to the local level. Sequencing should proceed from legislative drafting, through structured consultation with the INCHR, the Ministry of Justice, LNP leadership, and civil-society organizations, to passage and a defined transition period during which the Commission's investigatory staff and case-management systems are built out before the new powers take full effect.

### 6.2.2 For Practice

The Liberia National Police, drawing on the AFL's demonstrated professionalization model and on the documented lessons of Blair et al.'s (2021) Liberia community-policing trial, should institutionalize community substations and regular town-hall engagement at the county and district level only alongside explicit,

monitored commitments to sustained police-leadership involvement and reduced officer rotation, the implementation conditions that trial identified as necessary but unmet; should integrate procedural-justice training, emphasizing voice, neutrality, and respectful conduct, into all officer training curricula; and should pilot, with independent evaluation, gender-sensitive recruitment and complaint-handling reforms consistent with Bastick's (2008) integrated approach to post-conflict security sector reform, given that this study's own evidence base does not yet establish the effect of such reforms in the Liberian context.

### 6.2.3 For Further Research

Future research should pursue primary survey and interview-based data collection directly with Liberian citizens, LNP officers, and AFL personnel to test empirically the theoretical mechanisms identified in this study; should extend comparative analysis to other post-conflict West African states, such as Sierra Leone, to assess whether the AFL-LNP divergence pattern generalizes beyond Liberia; should evaluate, with close attention to implementation fidelity, whether a renewed community-policing pilot paired with the leadership-continuity and accountability reforms recommended above can produce the trust gains that Blair et al.'s (2021) unpaired pilot did not; and should pursue gender-disaggregated analysis of public trust in Liberia's security institutions, an area this study's literature review identified as a significant gap in the existing scholarship.

## Declarations

**Ethics Statement.** This study did not involve human participants, primary data collection, or identifiable personal information, and formal human-subjects ethics approval was accordingly not sought, as none was applicable. The study relies exclusively on secondary, publicly available sources, including UN and government documents, legislative texts, nationally representative survey data, and independent human-rights and academic reporting. Responsible handling of these sources involved verifying institutional authorship, dating each source's evidence explicitly relative to the claim it supports (see Method of Inquiry), and attributing all quotations and data to their original publishers.

**Data Availability Statement.** This study did not generate new primary data. All cited evidence comes from publicly available sources listed in the References, including Afrobarometer survey data and reports (available at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)), UN and Liberian government documents, and peer-reviewed publications.

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peer-review feedback. The author reviewed and verified all AI-assisted research findings against their sources, and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions presented in this manuscript.

**Author Contributions.** The author is the sole contributor to this manuscript and is responsible for its conceptualization, literature review, methodology, analysis, writing, and revision.

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