

**POLICE CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA:
A PERSPECTIVE ON ITS NATURE AND
CONTROL**

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Abstract

Documented evidences of endemic police corruption and its devastating effects on the rule of law in Nigeria abounds. Overtime, policing in the country has developed and changed, but corruption within its system has continued virtually unabated and largely unchanged in form and format. Rather, it has merely adjusted and adapted to developments in the Nigerian society. However, in spite of the growing rate of corrupt practices perpetrated by the police on daily basis, empirical interests on this subject of concern has continued to wane. In this paper, an attempt has been made to discuss the various aspects of police corruption in Nigeria. The main objective of the paper is to discuss the extent, causes and remedies to police corruption. We also examined if social learning theory can account for police deviance in the country. The basis of the discussion is from secondary sources like police commission reports, books, magazines, newspaper, and other sources. The authors conclude that general submission and acceptance of police corruption as an endemic problem that has defied solutions would not make the menace to abate. Therefore, it is suggested that a value reorientation need to be introduced into the

system. Also, transparency in posting and promotion of officers; automation of crime and complain reporting; reduction in political interferences with police operations; and monitoring of operations and performance of the police by both internal and external agencies, were some of cogent recommendations made.

Introduction

Indeed, police corruption is a universal problem. However, it is a particular challenge in Nigeria with an ever increasing misconduct that impacts on the development of police institution in the country. Corruption, generally defined as abuse of authority for private gain, is among the world's oldest practices (Spector, 2011). It has been identified as the biggest challenge that confronts governance machinery of Nigeria. Nigeria, as a nation, is ranked 139th out of 176 countries in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index, tied with Azerbaijan, Kenya, Nepal, and Pakistan. Corruption in the administration of law means that equal access is denied. It undermines fair trials, fair elections, economic and social opportunities, cultural expression, and access to the necessities of food, housing, health, education, and water (International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2009).

The corrupt practices of the Nigerian Police has been identified as one the most visible manifestation of corruption in the country (Ladapo, 2013) with the erstwhile Inspector General of Police noting that "corruption has come to characterise the behaviour of the average policeman" (Okiro, 2007). Accurate information about the prevalence of police corruption is hard to come by, since the corrupt activities tend to happen in secret and police organizations have little incentive to publish information about corruption (Kratcoski, 2012). Police officials and researchers alike have argued that in some countries, large-scale corruption involving the police not only exist but can even become institutionalized (Skolnick, 2002; Wang, 2013).

It is a common sight in the country for police officers to be seen collecting money from private and commercial motorists at checkpoints mounted across the country. However, beyond the checkpoints, officers of the police are in the habit of displaying their

corrupt tendencies in criminal investigations and other sundry duties (Ladapo, 2013). So many crimes go un-investigated by the police where influential persons, including persons in government are fingered as suspects or where the suspects "sort the police investigators", a slang for bribe payment (Ladapo, 2013). According to a recent Human Rights Watch report (2012), officers of the Nigerian Police often commit crimes against the very citizens that they are mandated to protect. On several occasions, Nigerians that are only making efforts to make ends meet are accosted on a daily basis by armed police officers who demands bribes, threatening those that refuse with arrest or physical harm. On a good number of occasions, the level of police brutality has been exposed through the killing and maiming of those that refuses to 'settle' police officers when they make such demands. Meanwhile, high-level police officers embezzle public funds meant to pay for police operations. The Human Rights Watch report (2012) concludes that in Nigeria, the police have become "a symbol of unfettered corruption, mismanagement, and abuse."

It has been noted by empirical studies and practitioners that there is often a widespread existence of a Blue Code of Silence among the police wherever corruption exists (Alemika, 1988; Ahire, 1991). This is in order to prevent the corruption from coming to light. Officers in these situations commonly fail to report corrupt behaviour or provide false testimony to external investigators to cover up criminal activity by their fellow officers. However, the level of corruption among the Nigerian police is such that hiding the trend and extent is practically impossible. This is consequent upon the openness in the display of corrupt practices by police officers who demand rather than solicit for bribes on the roads and other public places.

Empirical studies have posited that police corruption wastes resources, undermines security, makes a mockery of justice, slows economic development, and alienates populations from their governments (Ibrahim, 2003, Wang, 2013). Based on the fact that the police are the primary institutions for implementing laws in any society, corrupt practices by the police inhibits the implementation of the rule of law in place. It is common knowledge that the rule of law ceases to exist when police sell their services for private profit (Okeshola, 2008). This therefore underscores the relevance of studies

directed at this subject as eliminating police corruption is required for any country that has establishing the rule of law as a national objective. Consequently, this present paper discusses the various aspect of police corruption in Nigeria. The main objective of the paper is to discuss the extent, causes and remedies of police corruption and explain the extent of distrust that is created against police due to corruption.

The History and Trends of Police Corruption in Nigeria

In 1861, the British colonial administration in the country established what is acknowledged as the first police force in Nigeria. As the British expanded their reach to the east and north, they formed additional police forces comprised largely of recruits from outside the communities in which they were to be deployed. It was noted that these early forces were known for their general lawlessness and abuses. On the account of the Human Rights Watch (2012):

In 1891, the consul general of the Oil Rivers Protectorate in what is presently eastern Nigeria expressed shock at the “numerous acts of lawlessness and pillage” by the police, who were commonly referred to in the community as the “forty thieves” in police uniform. Similarly, the governor of Lagos colony acknowledged in 1897 that the Hausa Force “no doubt behaved very badly in the hinterland by looting, stealing and generally taking advantage of their positions.” The primary purpose of the colonial police was to protect British economic and political interests. The police accomplished this objective through the often brutal subjugation of indigenous communities that resisted colonial occupation. The use of violence, repression, and excessive use of force by the police has characterized law enforcement in Nigeria ever since.

During the colonial period, both the local police forces and the NPF were implicated in numerous acts of abuse and corruption. For example, in 1952, a member of the Nigerian parliament decried the “old sergeants” in the NPF who he claimed, were “steeped in corruption.” During this period, the traffic division of the NPF was criticised by the

members of the parliament for having “exposed itself to bribery and corruption and thus lowered the prestige of the force.”

Upon independence in 1960, though substantial power were devolved to three regional governments, known as the Northern, Western, and Eastern regions, the Federal government retained control of the NPF, but the regional governments still maintained their own local police forces. The emergence of the military government after two military coups in 1966 saw to the disbandment of the local police forces consequent on daunting allegations that the local police had been used for partisan purposes by the regional governments against their political rivals.

Several military incursions and dictatorships in Nigeria since independence has been attributed as being responsible for the underfunding and marginalisation of the NPF which further watered down the effectiveness of the police and increased its corrupt practices (Human Rights Watch, 2012; Ladapo, 2013). Internal government and civil society reports during this time consistently identified problems of misconduct within the NPF. A commission set up by the military government in 1967, for example, found that the “despicable image of the police” was in part attributable to “bribery and corruption.”

According to Human Rights Watch (2012), the report of the commission concluded:

Unsuitable candidates had bribed their way into the force; “lucrative” stations are bought. The term “lucrative” applies to border stations such as Idiroko and Calabar where smuggling is rampant. ... Bribes are offered to affect assignment to duties with opportunities for extra income, otherwise styled “moving line” duties. They include traffic, vehicle inspection and criminal investigation duties. By the early 1990s, the Nigerian police had established a reputation for being “consistently repressive, corrupt, and ineffective,” for taking kickbacks, and also for accepting bribes from criminal suspects to avoid prosecution and other forms of case fixing.

There were few checks put in place by successive military

governments to address the excessive abuses of police authority, however, leaving out corruption and other misconducts to thrive. As time went by, the public image and morale of the police declined and this affected the attractiveness of the job to quality candidates. As one former senior police official described to Human Rights Watch, "It ended up with most of the people who were joining the Nigerian police, joined it simply because it was a very easy way of making money."

Under the democratic dispensation, the series of recruitment drives into the NPF has often failed to screen candidates for criminal backgrounds, while many recruits virtually bribed their way into the force. Though, the number of police officers in the country has doubled over time, the Nigerian government has failed to provide a commensurate increase in funding to equip, train, and manage the vastly enlarged force. The 2008 Presidential Committee on the Reform of the Nigeria Police Force noted that police training became further overstretched during this period, and that "very little, if any, attempt was made to upgrade the police training institutions." As a result, the committee concluded, Nigeria is now "saddled with a very large number of unqualified, under-trained and ill-equipped officers and men many of whose suitability to wear the respected uniform of the Force is in doubt."

Social Learning Theory and the Growth of Police Corruption in Nigeria

Similar to other norms and values, attitudes toward corruption are bound by context and learned by observing others. It is the position of this paper to try to locate the conditions that facilitate the growth of police corruption in Nigeria around the postulation of social learning theory. Akers (1998, 2000) developed social learning theory as an extension of Sutherland's differential association theory to explain acts that violate social norms. Akers (2000) stated that there are four variables that function to instigate and strengthen attitudes toward social behaviour; differential association, definitions, reinforcement, and modelling. The balance of these influences determines whether one will be prone to engage in conforming or deviant behaviour. The central variable in social learning theory is differential association, or the influence of those with whom one associates frequently. Akers

(1998) argues that individuals develop favourable or unfavourable definitions to deviance in interactions with their peers. These definitions are then reinforced, positively or negatively, by the rewards or punishments.

This theory applies to the police as it recognizes the subculture as the primary peer group in which officers learn definitions. Alpert and Dunham (1997) opined that one of the most profound pressures that operate in police agencies is peer influence. In this vein, most researchers and police officers acknowledge the existence of a police subculture (Conser 1980). Therefore, the development of deviant subculture and in particular, corrupt practices by the officers is facilitated by the departments they work in when they are engaged. This is done through the transmitting of the beliefs, values, definitions, and "manners of expression" that depart from acceptable behaviour. Consequent upon the argument of the theory, as the subculture is already formed, a new officer that is engaged enters the peer group and he or she is exposed to models of behaviour that will influence his or her own attitudes and behaviour.

Due to the fact that police officers are exposed to their co-workers much more than other people, it is likely that the officer will learn to accept and internalize the definitions shared by other officers. As observed privately by a senior police officer, "it is near impossible for a recruit not to align with a system of corruption that he is confronted with within the police if he wants a prolonged career in the force". According to this officer, the corrupt subculture is so grounded within the Nigerian police force that constables regard bribery as a fundamental right. This happens because the subculture shared value system allows such officers the opportunity to rationalize, excuse, and justify deviance (Kappeler, Sluder, & Alpert, 1998). Alpert and Dunham (1997) maintain that since social isolation is a feature of the police subculture, officers are likely to withdraw into the subculture for support and approval. The result is that the police officer is "subjected to intense peer influence and control," and this can involve the acceptance of deviance (Kappeler, Sluder, & Alpert 2001).

The Nigerian Police of Bribery and Corruption

Nigerian police officers are considered some of the most brazenly

corrupt in the world (The Africa Report, 2014). Overtime, policing in the country has developed and changed, but corruption within its system has continued virtually unabated and largely unchanged in form and format. Rather, it has merely adjusted and adapted to developments in the Nigerian society. On a weekly or even daily basis, the Nigerian media is awash with reports of one act of corruption or other illegality perpetrated by the police somewhere in the country. Transparency International, a body universally recognised as an authority on corruption and adjudging the extent of corrupt practices in countries around the world, not only listed Nigeria as one of the foremost nations afflicted by this malaise, but also ascribed to the Nigerian law enforcement a contributory percentage of the activity that caused the rating. Similarly, in a public opinion poll conducted by Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN), the police was identified as the most corrupt public institution in the country (The Africa Report, 2014).

Police checkpoints for motor vehicles, where money is required to avoid harassment and delay, are common sights along major roads in the country. Oftentimes, they arrest, detain, torture, maim, and kill for bribes at their "extortion roadblocks" when their demands are not met by the drivers of taxis, minibuses, and motorcycles, as well as private motorists (Human Rights Watch, 2010). These checkpoints, ostensibly put in place to combat rampant and rising crime, have in practice become a lucrative criminal venture for the police. As further reported by Human Right Watch (2012), people that are arbitrarily arrested for refusing to pay bribe are detained unlawfully until they or their family members negotiate payment for their release. Hence, for several Nigerians, the police are viewed more as predators than protectors. The extortion of money, frequent killing of innocent and unarmed citizens as well as cases of police brutality and threats is fast becoming a norm in our society.

It is common practice to observe Nigerian police soliciting or accepting bribe in exchange for not reporting organized kidnap, armed robbery, political corruption and other illegal activities (Okeshola, 2008). Opportunistic theft from arrestees, crime victims or even their corpses is not uncommon practice within the force. In some other instances, police officers may deliberately and methodically

falsify evidence to evade conviction of criminals who have given bribe. Planting, modifying or adding to evidence on innocent poor citizens is another immoral act commonly practiced by the police (Okeshola, 2008).

It is a public knowledge that there is a perverse system of “returns” instituted by some senior police officers, in which rank-and-file officers are compelled to pay up the chain of command a share of the money they extort from the public, thereby institutionalizing and promoting extortion-related abuses. According to Human Rights Watch (2012), former and current police officers interviewed have admitted that they must pay money to be assigned to “lucrative postings.” While they are there, the officers are mandated to meet daily or weekly monetary targets for their sponsors or risk being “punished” with transfer to a posting with lower extortion potentials. In the account of a police corporal interviewed by Human Right Watch, “we do everything we can to make sure that we meet the returns demanded by our superiors, if we don’t have money at the end of the week, we will get money. We will pick someone and arrest them.” It is the belief of a good numbers of those interviewed that the “returns” are passed up to the senior ranks in the force, which makes it morally inappropriate for such senior officers to hold subordinates accountable for extortion and other abuses (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

Apart from corrupt practices being perpetrated against the public, officers of the Nigerian police also indulge in corrupt practices against the Force. Periodically, staggering amounts of money meant to cover expenses for police operations are embezzled by those expected to arrest such financial misappropriation. In spite of the huge sums annually budgeted and allocated to the police, the frequent reality is that embezzlement and mismanagement has left the police with limited investigatory capacity and government forensic laboratories at a near standstill. The lack of needed resources appears to lead many police officers to adopt torture as their primary tool for collecting information from criminal suspects. Therefore, it is not surprising for police officers to complain of lack of basic needs for their operations such as fuel for their patrol vehicles, as well as their basic supplies for investigation which include writing materials.

Police Corruption and Rule of Law in Nigeria

The corruption of the police affects virtually every Nigerian, though at disproportionate level, as the impact weighs down more on the poor people. Those that are not in vantage economic position within the society, especially those that are day to day scrapping for a living are more susceptible to police extortion because of the profound effects that unlawful detention, or the mere threat of arbitrary arrest, have on their livelihoods. Considering the ways and manners that the police operate on Nigerian roads, questions have been raised as to the level of conscience and professional ethics possessed by the institution.

In respect of the police coverage of the society, this is grossly inadequate as ordinary Nigerians are denied equal protection under the law. This is as a result of a widespread practice whereby senior police officers sell police protection to Nigeria's wealthy elites for their own benefits and gratification. This further depletes the already low number of police officers available to provide protection in the society. By the accounts of inspector general of police, in 2009 at least 100,000 police officers were working as personal guards for the wealthy, at the expense of the majority (The Africa Report, 2014). In addition, the abject failure of the police to provide for the security of ordinary citizens has led some communities to turn for protection to armed vigilante groups who often operate outside the law and commit further abuses.

There is no gainsaying about the fact that to an ordinary man, the Nigerian police is not living up to expectation of providing security and ensuring rule of law. In the country, there have been several cases of people picked up indiscriminately on the street by the police and detained for unfounded charges until they are able to secure their release after paying demanded ransom. Meanwhile, social miscreants, otherwise known as area boys who disrupt law and order and often intimidate fellow citizens are spared without any arrest by these policemen.

Meanwhile, in their bid to get justice, victims of crimes are routinely forced to pay the police to conduct every stage of an investigation from the moment they enter a police station to report the crime until the day their case is handed on for prosecution. Victims that are not buoyant enough to "fund" their case are left without justice,

while criminal suspects with money or that are highly placed in the society simply bribe their way and the case against them is dropped, or they influence the outcome of criminal investigation, or in certain instances, turn the case against the victim. As one civil society activist concluded: "Justice is for sale to the highest bidder" (Ladapo, 2013).

Ironically, government agencies that are expected to monitor and ensure that the police perform its constitutional duties, oversight functions; discipline and reform have failed to root out systemic corruption. Mechanisms for public complaints, internal police controls, and civilian oversight has continued to be weakened, underfunded, and largely ineffective. Victims of police abuse and extortion also cited fear of further victimization as a key reason for not reporting these abuses (Ladapo, 2013). Successive governments and administrators have acknowledged several problems associated with policing Nigeria and have set up panels and committees to examine and make recommendations for police reform. However, the recommendations that have evolved from such panels, civil society groups, as well as other stakeholders in security in the country have been largely ignored.

Internally, in response to the growing need to meet with service expectation of the public, the Nigerian Police Force established a Human Rights Desk, which monitors police conduct, and an internal anti-graft unit known as the X-Squad. The inspector general of the police and each state commissioner of police also have monitoring teams to investigate incidents of police misconducts. Just as it is with the case of public complaints mechanisms, the internal monitoring units in the police force are poorly funded and lack support from the police leadership to effectively address systemic corruption and abuse within the police force.

Suggested Measures of Control of Police Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption with the police like crime within the society is unlikely to be eradicated; however, it can be controlled by the government, the police organisation, and with strong support of the society.

Police leadership's resolution to check corruption

At the organisational level, controlling corruption requires strong

and determined leadership, since corruption occurs at the very top as well as the bottom and all points in between in the hierarchy. If the top brass are able to stamp their feet against corruption and their intentions are sincere and resolute, the change will trickle down the ladder of the force. Thereon, officers that are caught exhibiting corrupt practices should be severely punished. Once the principle of severity and certainty of punishment is applied to police corruption by the administrators, the rank and file will be deterred from such practices.

Value reorientation of Police officers

Considering that corruption within the police has become systemic, hence, new recruits are socialised into it, it is the suggestion of this paper that a value reorientation need to be introduced into the system. This must be done with sincerity of purpose and intensity. In training, institutions of the force, ethical behaviour and decision should be rewarded, promoted and applauded because failing to make officers aware of the consequences of corruption will only serve to encourage it. This process must be allowed to have a stronghold and be intensified at police training schools, academy and staff colleges, and be totally consolidated in the larger society where perceptible and honest priorities must exist.

Prompt and adequate payment of salaries and other financial incentives of officers

Payments of salaries and other remunerations of the police should be made prompt and consistent while other welfare packages should be made attractive to ensure high level of job satisfaction and contentment within the officers. Government should ensure that police are able to live a worthy life that guarantees the meeting of basic needs if they choose to be honest and bribe-free. It will be difficult to enforce anti-graft when salaries are delayed and inadequate.

Transparency in posting and promotion of officers

It is public knowledge that officers engage in massive bribery to influence their posting and promotions. Consequently, officers that

have paid their way through their posting will make every effort towards recouping their money as soon as possible and corruption becomes a tool for getting better return on "investment." In addition, transfers or redeployment of staff are often used as a retribution tool against officers as a pressure tactic and to coerce officers that are reluctant to engage in corrupt practices. However, if there could be a design where postings are automatically generated by software after a given time interval for each officer, corruption in the police can be effectively combated. In the same manner, objective criteria for promotion could be developed and published so that individual judgement plays a very minor role in promotions. This will reduce the need for bribes or engage in other misconduct in order to get promotion.

Automation of Crime and complain reporting

The present system where the recording of crime and complains of the public is left at the discretion of officer is grossly inadequate. This has contributed to the growing rate of 'dark figures' of crime as well as increased corrupt practices among the officers. Since the registration of complaint is the first step towards receiving justice, citizens are compelled to pay bribe in order to get their complaints registered. The use of technology to automate the reporting and handling of cases can play a pivotal role in arresting corruption associated with crime reporting by the public. Filing of cases could be done through internet and if required, detailed information can be given later on. Case status could be made available online to bring in more transparency and make the police force more accountable. This would ease the trend of complainants being asked to buy report sheets and other writing materials when they try to register their complaints.

Operations and performance monitoring

Though, there are internal and external monitoring agencies being put in place to monitor and check the excesses of the police, independent and civil society groups should also be co-opted into the system by the government. Objective performance and efficiency indicators can be chosen and tracked to monitor the performance of the Police force. The monitoring of the performance of the police by governmental and non-

governmental agencies can substantially increase the accountability of the force. This will lead to having clear improvement goals for the force on objective and measurable parameters. In particular, government should give more recognition to the activities of the likes of Human Rights Watch and other nongovernment agencies that are equally stakeholders in ensuring proper service delivery of the police.

Reducing Political Interferences

There is a dire need for the police to be given adequate autonomy to operate without interferences from the political class in the country. At present, the political class has rendered the police into mere instruments that can be used at will to satisfy their selfish ends. In particular, the police are being used as agents of intimidation and torture against the perceived and real political enemies of the ruling political class. This present situation will do no good than to further strengthen the corrupt structures within the force. It has been commonplace in Nigeria for transfers and postings of officers to be used as a kind of reward and punishment, as a result of which, many senior police officers have had allegiances to political parties. A case in point is the recent transfer of the Commissioner of Police of Rivers State that has been accused by the State governor (who belongs to the opposition party) of insubordination and intimidation to Abuja (FCT) as commissioner. This is perceived by a large section of the public as a reward from the presidency to acknowledge the 'good job done' in frustrating the governor of Rivers who was at loggerheads with the presidency. Consequently, the selection of the inspector general of police, state commissioners, their transfers and redeployments should be entrusted to an independent expert committee that are apolitical.

Introducing greater accountability

In the present scenario, there is very little or no accountability of police to the citizen in respect of satisfactory delivery of services. For example, if a citizen's complaint is not recorded by the police under whatever guise, the citizen should have the option of going to an independent regulator that is empowered to check the police and ensure compliance to minimum standards of service delivery to the public. It is very essential that accountability of officials at different

levels be defined and a degree of immediate proximity to the people and third party intervention introduced. Public hearings could be an effective tool for this purpose, as shown in experiments with other services.

Conclusion

Knowledge about controlling police corruption is more limited than is generally recognized and especially thin in a country like Nigeria where corruption significantly impedes establishing the rule of law. People working in conflict intervention, human rights, governance reconstruction and even scholars tend to be pessimistic about the prospects for reducing police corruption in Nigeria. It seems to be an endemic problem over which successive governments have little leverage. This may explain the dearth of empirical studies committed at examining the nature and control of police corruption in the country. The pessimism is justified. Not only are there operational problems of insecurity, unreliable personnel, and dysfunctional institutions, but in Nigeria, police corruption is supported by social structures and attitudes that are embedded in local ways of life. However, general submission and acceptance of police corruption as an endemic problem that has defied solutions would not make the menace to abate. Hence, more efforts need to be made relentlessly to combat the problem and see to its reduction in the least. There is no gainsaying about the fact that the reduction of corruption requires ambitious nation building and the transformation of local cultures. Insufficient as knowledge is about reducing police corruption, any effort by the government and support agencies to foster and aid the rule of law must prioritize attacking police corruption. To do otherwise is to be as willfully blind as police authorities who constantly blame "few bad apples" for systemic misbehavior of men of the Nigerian police. All programmes that seek to strengthen the rule of law in the country should insist on creating platforms that will eliminate or at least reduce police corruption in the forms that matter most to local populations.

As with most research, several limitations of the current study should be recognized. This study relied heavily on ethnographic knowledge, reviews of Nigerian Newspapers, magazines, few

academic journal articles, books and archival materials and internet-based source materials. As a result, this work stands to be guilty of inherent prejudices that may exist in the source of the materials that were utilized. With these limitations in hand, it is hoped that interested researchers will continue to examine attitudes of officers about different types and levels of misconduct to fully gauge where attitudes begin to affect complaints on the continuum of police misconduct. It is also strongly recommended that future researchers should use more in-depth qualitative and quantitative techniques to control for validity and reliability of information.

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