CRIME CONTROL AND POLICING THE NATION STATES; THE NIGERIAN POLICE IN FOCUS

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Abstract
This paper x-rays the ability and strength of the Nigerian Police, its image and ability to fighting crime in Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to examine the nature causes and effects of the assessment of performance of Nigerian police by the populace. Study participants were randomly selected while data analysis was done quantitatively with simple frequency and percentage tables based on responses to the questionnaire which was the key instrument used. Generalizations were made on the sample drawn from the populace. The research findings revealed that the police was perceived as inefficient, corrupt and ineffective in crime control by respondents. Also they perceptions about ability of the police to provide overall security of lives and property in Nigeria. The study recommended for special seminars and workshop for police officers to stimulate discipline. Also, recruitment of more officials and corruption in the form of extortion and bribery should be discouraged. Furthermore, special police-public relations officers should investigate and serve complaints about the police and endeavour to see cases to a logical conclusion.

Introduction
The police are men and women organized by the state as a paramilitary force with the sole purpose of defending the state. They enforce laws, values and ideologies that justifies, legitimizes, and defend prevailing distribution of power and wealth in the society (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000).

The roles and responsibilities of the police in any society cannot be over emphasized. They are charged with the responsibility of prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders, protection of lives and properties, due enforcement of laws and regulation with which they are charged with the performance of military duties within or outside Nigeria as may be required by or under authority. Other roles required of them includes: The control of traffic and conduct of prosecution before any court in the country, as well as empowered to exercise state power if necessary through coercion and violence. (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2000).

The Problem
“The police are your friend” is a popular refrain by the police relations department of the Nigerian police force across the country.

However citizens who have cause to relate with the police either as accused persons may not totally agree with this. The general impression today in Nigeria is that with a friend like the police you really do not need an enemy.

The police job is tasked with two basic roles which can be classified as law enforcement and maintenance of order. To effectively discharge or carryout these roles, they are empowered to exercise state powers if necessary through coercion and violence and these act are not conducted in isolation but are done in direct confrontation of interpersonal relations with the civiliances (Hahnn, 1970).

There has been several interaction and confrontation between the police and the students of higher institutions in Nigeria. Such confrontations while carrying out their duties, and generally poor conduct of the police has attracted lots of criticism and discontent from students, police have been accused of incivility brutality and even killings, in cases such as when they are been called upon to stop or control students unrest. Situations like this only create a negative picture of the Nigerian police amongst students.

In an ideal society, the police t act time ought to be servant of the people, if this is the case there would be no antagonism and hostility between them and students or other members of the society.
The Nigerian police overtime have maintained a love-hate relationship with the civilians with an increasing breakdown of people’s confidence and co-operation. Consequently, the protection role and crime control role of the police is being questioned. It has been argued by various experts, civilians and students that the Nigerian police have not lived up to their expectation in the performance of their duties of protecting and safe guarding lives and properties.

Factors often seen as responsible for poor police roles, lack of decentralization, insufficient funding, poor managerial account, corruption, facility recruitment of police officers etc.

These factors also account for the negative assessment of the Nigeria police by different strata of Nigerian society students inclusive. Nonetheless there is two way traffic of accusations between the police and other members of the society. While the police have been accused of bribery, incivility to the students, rudeness and the ruthlessness in dealing with demonstrations even when peaceful, the police also have accused the undergraduates of refusing to co-operate with it as it tries to prevent and control crime.

Against the backdrop of problems stated about, this research is an attempt to revisit students awareness of police role in crime control. This is with a view to finding appropriate solutions.

CRIME

In ordinary language, a crime is an unlawful act punishable by a state or other authority, the term “crime” does not in modern criminal law have any simple and universally accepted definition, though statutory definitions have been provided for certain purposes. The most popular view is that crime is a category created by law, in other words, something is a crime if declared as such by the relevant and applicable law.

One proposal definition is that a crime or offences is an act harmful not only to some individual but also to a community, society or state such acts are forbidden and punishable by law. The state has the power to severely restrict one’s liberty for committing a crime. In modern societies, there are procedures to which investigations and trials must adhere, if found guilty, an offender may be sentenced to a form of reparation such as a community sentence or depending on the nature of their offence to undergo imprisonment, life imprisonment or in some jurisdictions execution.

While every crime violates the law, not every violation of the law counts as a crime. Breaches of private law (torts and breaches of contract) act not automatically punished by the state, but can be enforced through civil procedure.

Crime control

Crime control refers to methods taken to reduce crime in a society. Penology often focuses on the use of criminal penalties as a means of deterring people from committing crimes and temporarily or permanently incapacitating those who have already committed crimes from re-offending.

Crime prevention is also widely implemented in some countries through government police and in many cases, private policing methods such as private security and home defense.

History

There are several accounts on the evolution of the Nigerian police. However the central theme in all the extant researches revolves around the coercive activities of the colonial government which needed a brutal force to deal with the restive natives in other to facilitate the colonization of the country.

According to Nwanze (1994), Sir Stanhop Freeman the then governor of the British West Africa is credited with the initiative of forming the nucleus of what later became the Nigerian police force. In this account Sir Freeman wrote a memo requesting authority to create a force different from the Army to act as consular guard. His request was granted and the force which he formed was quell the EPE uprising of 1863. The activities of the consular guard drew the attention of the Governor of Lagos colony Captain John Clover it was Captain Clover who requested and received the permission of London to increase the number of force to a hundred shortly after the “Hausa Guard” and the constabulary of the Lagos colony were established. A legal instrument backed the new forces as ordinance was enacted in 1879 the law was however amended with another ordinance which created the Lagos police force and investigated in 1896. According to Tamuno (1970) says that the Nigerian police force had it origin in Lagos between 1845 and 1861, before then the efforts of the European traders to penetrate the hinterlands were frustrated by the African middlemen in what was increasingly becoming a lucrative trade.

In 1849, the British government appointed the consul General for the Bights of Benin and Biafra on the Atlantic Coast of West Africa to promote legitimate trade and prevent the incessant quarrels between the African Chiefs and the British traders in the area. When the clashes continued the British consul charged
with the administration of the administration of the Lagos colony William Mccosty whose duty among others included the maintenance of law and order requested for a small armed force to help maintain peace in the area. A consular guard comprising of 30 men was established in October 1861, in 1863, the consular guard was named the Rausa guard as they were constabulary for the colony of Lagos. This constabulary placed under the command of an Inspector General of Police performed mainly military duties.

Tamuno goes on to explain that the Lagos police was later created in 1896 headed by the commissioner of police. If performed the additional duties of sheriff, Inspector of weights and measures and officer in charge of prisons. A criminal investigation department was created in 1889 while a fire Brigade was added in 1901 with the creation of the Nigerian Coast protectorate in 1898 an armed constabulary fashion like the Rausa constabulary was formed for the area. The force which lasted six years featured in the British expedition to Benin in 1896. While this development was going on in the south, the Royal Niger company (now known as United African Company (UAC) was granted approval in 1886 by the colonial government to establish a protective force for it’s business interest in the North. Thus empowered the company founded the Royal Niger constabulary in 1888 with headquarters t Lakota to protect it’s installations along the banks of the River Niger.

When the protectorates of the Northern and Southern Nigeria were proclaimed in 1900, the Royal Niger constabulary was split into the Northern Nigeria police force and the Northern Nigerian Regiment. In the south, the Lagos police force and part of the Niger Coast constabulary formed the southern Nigerian Regiment. The new formations were responsible for dealing with internal disturbances and external aggression in addition to normal police duties. After the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914, the two police forces operated separately until April 1930 when they were merged to form the present Nigeria police force under the command of an Inspector General of Police.

The modern Nigerian police force therefore came into being by ordinance No. 3 of 1980, which brought together the various parts of the country. The newly created force was administered on a regional basis under the overall command of an Inspector General of Police with headquarters in Lagos. The police force also witnessed re-organization when the country adopted a federal constitution in 1954, the result was that both the federal and regional government shared responsibility in the maintenance of law and order and the preservation of public safety.

The Role of Nigerian Police

There is no doubt that for any meaningful development in economic and political sectors of a country to take place, it is desirable that the nation and its citizen are secured and freed from crime and criminals that might pose as threat to security, well being and welfare of such a nation. According to Reiner (2000) police plays important roles without which the sustenance of order will, legality, development and democracy may be difficult. Therefore any proper change initiative must take account of the facilitative and inhibitive roles of the police in the society. The primary role of the police is policing securing compliance with existing laws and conformity with precepts of social order. But the police are the only agency involved in policing in the broad sense of the term. Policing has always been necessary in all societies for the preservation of order, safety and social relations. Ahire (1993) to further reinforce this view above, community partnership is of great importance to the police in carrying out their function appropriately which will lead to building a mutually trustful and respectful relationship between law enforcement agencies and community members.

According to Susan Martin (1990:6) police work involves a variety of task and responsibilities officers are expected to prevent crime, protect life and property, enforce the laws, maintain peace and public order and also provide a wide range of services to citizens. A common trend unifying these diverse activities however is that potential for violence and the need and right to use coercive means in order to establish social control (Bitner 1970). Understanding that the police act as the representative of the coercive potential of the state and legitimate users of force, helps explain a number of their attitudes and characteristics. This is a key to analyzing police personal conduct philosophy and disposition.

In a democratic society the police are more likely to provide services that will enhance development and democracy.

By maintaining order and enforcing law in consonance with the principles and practices of the democratic society, police will faster entrepreneurial initiative and public safety which are critical to development and human co-operation in general.

It is in this respect that the police can make possible contributions towards proper change initiatives and according to Nigerian police force annual report (2007) police therefore ought to be providing social service as balm for sea of troubles.
Wherever policing was obtained by consensus police acceptance legitimacy becomes mutually interdependent eliciting wider and better pacification of social relation.

To further re-enforce the views expressed above in relation to Nigerian society, the 1999 Nigerian constitution like the 1960, 1963, 1979, 1989 constitution provided for a police force charged with the responsibility of performing the duties spelt in section 214(1) of the constitution establishing the Nigerian police provide inter alia that there shall be a police force for Nigerian which shall be known as a Nigeria police and subject to be provision of this section no other police force shall be established for the federation or any part there of accordingly, the power and responsibilities of the police are set under the police act (Cap 329) laws of the federation of Nigeria in section 4 thereof, the following duties are assigned to the Nigeria police force.

(a) Prevention and detection of crime,
(b) The preservation of law and order,
(c) Protection of life and properties,
(d) Apprehension and prosecution of offenders,
(e) Due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged,
(f) To perform such military duties within or without Nigeria as may be required by them, or under the authority of this or any other act.

The law of the federation of Nigeria also contains other laws that empower, streamline and guide the police in the discharge of it’s duties, this includes the Criminal Procedure Act (CPA) operation in the south, the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) operates in the North, the Evidence Act, the public order Act, the official secret Act, prevention of crime Act, among others.

The idea of police role, function, purpose or mission in the society requires us to think beyond the technical and operational aspects of police work and consider if you will the philosophy of policing or more generally the place of legitimate authority in the society. Policing is one of those few lines of work like teaching and medicine which have intimate connection with social life, social progress and social change.

Too narrow a view of the police role is bad and care must also be taken to avoid too broad a view (Goldstein 1977).

Furthermore, Sule (2002) in his study of the role of police in capitalist formation and development among scholars and commentators in police discourse in Nigeria and generally in the third world countries is of the view that the police emerged as integrative mechanism that is imperative and since scholars within the intellectual mould posit that the police are a benevolent agency of the state which controls crime, apprehend criminals and enforce law, prevent social dysfunction and disequilibrium in order to ensure development and democratic living. However, he asserted that the above position is not a true reflection of Nigeria and by reference of the third world countries.

Nevertheless, whatever the ration of the Nigeria police force is, their role and task is to ensure security through upholding the law, safe guarding peace and justice and protecting the lives, right and dignity of it’s citizens and visitors.

PUBLIC AWARENESS OF POLICE ROLE IN CRIME CONTROL

Security breaches, insecurity and increased rate of crime in Nigeria despite the introduction of community policing since 2004 makes it imperative to examine the awareness of the police personnel which is one of the active agency collaborating with the community. Awareness of the police on impact of community policing in controlling crime is very important considering that they are the main partner collaborating with the people. It is also an indirect way of having insight into their values, attitude and ultimately behaviours towards community policing in Nigeria. The success of the outcome of the partnership between the police and the general public largely lies on the amount of trust that exist in their relations without doubt between the police and general public, effective policing is impossible. The term “police is your friend should not only be used but also should be put into practice in other to help create a better relationship between the public and the police, this will give more insight and awareness in the police duty on crime control.

Human rights watch (2005) revealed that torture by the police to extort confessions is alarming and that thus accounted for poor police community relations in Nigeria. The report indicated that civil society perceives police as their opponents. The police who the people depend upon for safety of life and property and crime control became instrument of exploitation, the public has no more confidence in the police ability to control crime in the society, as a result individuals and even religious institution rake personal responsibilities for their security.
The public’s assessment of the Nigerian police is borne out of the various meanings and interpretation attached to their actions while the police on the other hand are motivated by the instrument.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Of the three theories reviewed in this work conflict theory is adopted as the theoretical framework for the study.

This theory assumes a system characterized by social inequality where some parts of the society benefits more than others. Thus, it sees society as being divided into classes based on their relationship to means of production it shows the pattern of inequality and how some categories of people (the upper class individuals) protect the status quo by enjoying police services to the detriment of the poor masses.

Thus, Chukwuma (2005) argued that in capitalist societies such as Nigeria today, the capitalist are the dominant and are controlling people in the society. They control not only politics, economy, religion but also law (including the police). The ruling class in Nigeria at large particular use the police to achieve their aim in controlling power and resources.

This largely explains why police brutality and high-handedness is concentrated on the poor and the undergraduates than the upper segment. The rein also control every institution of the state such as politics, economy, religion, educational sector, the police and so on in maintaining the status quo and to ensure continuous appendage and subordination of the poor masses on them with which the police is used to achieve the aim.

Conclusion

Based on the paper findings, the major factors in the crisis of the loss of public confidence in police authority has resulted from corruption, ineffectiveness in carrying out their duties, indiscipline of police personal, discrimination.

Other factors are police inability to promptly, and with reasonable level of efficiency investigate crime apprehend and prosecute offenders, and their failure to seize the advantage afforded them through the performance of community service activities. This could promote cordial and constructive police public relations and co-operation.

The police are charged with the protection and enforcement of laws and order in every society.

The findings revealed that the assessment of the public towards the police and their attitude is negative and this is attributed to the high level of corruption in the force, it is said that the police are corrupt, unfriendly, and do not carry out satisfying jobs to citizens, and this have affected the assessment and attitude of the public negatively towards the police force.

Recommendations

1. It is evident that for the police to effectively perform their duties, they require a popular acceptance and goodwill, and active approval and support from the public, to achieve this form of support, corruption among police officers especially in the form of extortion and bribery should be discouraged to effect this, the government should pay police officers well and as at when due to enhance their economic status.

2. The anti-corruption campaign should cover all levels of society. The federal government with modern arms and communication gadgets to effectively combat crime should equip the police, this also has to go along with constant retaining of police officers on how to effectively use them.

3. The government should also provide vehicles for swift movement of police officers to crime areas and for patrolling to eliminate or reduce the opportunity to commit crime. The apprehension of criminals should be done within the shortest possible time after the crime has been committed.
References