

The Political Economy of Police Corruption in Nigeria

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Abstract—The Nigeria Police Force bears the constitutional mandate as the primary policing agency for the protection of life and property within Nigeria; however, the police have an historical ill-reputation for corruption, ineptitude and impunity. Using the institutional theory of police as the framework of analysis, the paper argues that the performance of the police in Nigeria mirrors the dominant political, social and economic institutions and the structural environment of the Nigerian state. The article puts in perspective the deliberate political decision to underfund the police, leaving officers of the force the extra task of foraging for funds to undertake the duty that the Nigeria state primarily exists for; the article further explores the nexus between corruption in the police in Nigeria and the issue of funding. The article finds that the Nigerian state, by deliberately under-funding the police, while expecting the agency to perform its duties, has indirectly sanctioned the corruption of the force and approved the cooption of the institution of police and policing for private use in Nigeria.

Keywords—Funding, policing, Nigeria Police Force, corruption.

I. INTRODUCTION

PRECOLONIAL Nigeria is a collection of divergent communities each with its different versions of institutions tasked with the maintenance of public order, resolution of dispute and enforcement traditional customs and beliefs [1]. However, the ideological, structural and functional foundations of the Nigeria Police Force was laid by the British colonial administration in 1861 with the establishment of a 30-man Consular Guard in Lagos by the Police Act of 1861 to maintain law and order [2].

Scholars and policy analysts have identified the protection of the extractive colonial economy and its preferred political and cultural order and not particularly crime control as the ideological foundation of formal policing in colonial and subsequently postcolonial Nigeria [3]. The forbear of the current police force protected the commercial interests of colonial enterprises, supervised the forced labor necessary for the production and transportation of commodities for export, enforced the payment of colonial taxes and crushed agitations by different nationalist groups.

The Nigerian Police Force was created in 1930 as the primary policing agency with national jurisdiction across Nigeria. Between 1930 and 1966, the Nigerian police co-existed with regional police agencies- Local Government Police in Western Nigeria and Native Authority in Northern Nigeria. This dual system was discontinued in 1966 as local police forces were dissolved due to poor funding regime and

abuse by traditional institutions and political officeholders [4]. Successive Nigerian constitutions have equally made provision for a centralized police force and prohibited the establishment of local police authorities [5].

Beyond the constitutional mandate of the force as the primary policing outfit in Nigeria, the Police Act charges the force with the unique responsibility of protecting the life and property of everyone within the boundaries of the Nigerian State; detecting and preventing crime; arrest of offenders; maintenance of law and order and the performance of any other responsibility that the force is charged with under any law and by any constituted authority [6].

In terms of size, the Nigeria Police Force is the biggest policing outfit in Nigeria with a size of around 314,000 officers [6] and an unrivalled national geographical spread, with 127 area commands; 1,130 police divisions; 1,579 police stations, 2,165 police posts, and 1,591 village police posts [7]. Despite Nigeria's huge socio-cultural and religious diversity, the Nigeria Police Force operates a centralized command system with the Inspector-General of Police, a direct appointee of the president in charge of both operational and administrative control of the force [8].

Like its colonial forebear, public perception on the performance of the police in Nigeria is overwhelmingly negative and this is attributable to a number of factors: pervasive corruption, human rights violation and a culture of impunity, shocking underfunding among others. According to Obaro, policing in the country is characterized by a culture of impunity, corruption, incivility, brutality and lack of accountability [9]. Ibidapo-Obe argues that the Nigeria Police faces a tripartite crisis- 'performance, integrity and legitimacy' [10] that has negatively affected its performance. According to the former Attorney-General of Nigeria, Chief Olujimi, the Nigerian Police Force, remains overwhelmed and is far too reactive [11].

According to Ajayi and Olukayode, the police in Nigeria is "mistrusted and feared by the people instead of being friend to the general public" [12]. Odekunle puts it aptly when he said that [...] it has long been clear to a majority of Nigerians that the Nigeria Police Force falls short of optimum performance. There is abundant official and research confirmation of this assertion, apart from information in the daily newspapers, and there is no need to "prove" the non-optimum performance of the Nigeria Police Force in the present contribution." [13].

Not only is the Nigeria Police Force Mistrusted, it has equally performed poorly on all indicators benchmarking police performance. The Global Peace Index (GPI) of the Institute of Economics and Peace offers another quantitative

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mode of measuring the performance of the Nigeria Police and its overall contribution towards law and order. The Index which uses 22 indicators, such as level of perceived criminality in society, number of homicides per 1000, level of violent crime, performance of the police etc., indicates that there is a steady decline in Nigeria's global ranking on the Index and the performance of the Nigerian Police Force is one of the worst of the West African countries polled [57]. This bleak picture of policing in Nigeria carries enormous economic and social consequences, particularly for a country projected to reach a population of 200 million people in 2020. More than 2,152,000 Nigerian citizens are displaced internally because of conflict and insecurity; [14] Niger-Delta militants destroyed more 1,447 pipelines in 2016 [15] and impaired the implementation of the 2016 budget, that cost Nigeria N1.1 trillion; [16] the ongoing conflict between farmers and herdsmen across Nigeria is projected to cost at least \$14 billion in potential revenues annually; [17] the North East Nigeria Recovery and Peace Building Assessment (RPBA) team has put the cost of rebuilding destroyed infrastructure in the region blighted by Boko Haram insurgency at \$9 billion; [18] and nothing encapsulates Nigeria's security challenges better than the fact that Boko Haram insurgency is reported to have claimed more civilian lives in Nigeria than ISIS has done [19].

II. FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS: INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

Hall [20] conceptualized institutionalized organizations broadly as "organizational forms and behaviors take the form that they do because of prevailing values and beliefs that have become institutionalized". Institutionalized organizations reflect prevailing social values and belief systems, operate in complex environments and because they reflect the prevailing social value systems, they stop being just bureaucratic tools but organic communities with a natural life of their own [21].

According to Crank [22], institutionalized organizations have three elements: first, the organization, in its structure and performance reflects the dominant values in its environment. The organization responds to the complexity of issues faced through the development of an elaborate response mechanism. The second element focuses on the preservation of positive relations with conflicting constituencies (in this instance the wider citizenry); institutionalized organizations 'loosely couple formal practices with actual behavior.' Institutionalized organizations evolve informal processes and systems for handling the complexities of the working environment. A prime example of this is police officers responding to distress calls in patrol vehicles that have been fueled by themselves. The third element refers to the logic of good faith that pervades organizational practices, blocking attempt for critical evaluation and reform. The defense and excuses that is always put up by the Nigeria Police Force on allegation of corruption and abuse highlights this point.

Scholarship on police and policing institutions has traditionally been normative, mainly focusing on best practices and innovations for improving outcomes and best possible crime prevention strategies [23]. Normative scholars

have prioritized issues of efficiency and effectiveness of the organization structure of policing agencies and their operational strategies as measured by technical outputs, such as record of arrest, prosecution and conviction and record of crime trends [24].

One of the noticeable shortcomings of the normative theories is their failure to properly countenance the impact of context and environment in analyzing the performance of policing agencies. Langworthy [25], in analyzing this theoretical deficiency, highlighted the tendency to focus on "best practices" without putting in proper perspective the mediating effects of context and environment, he argued that interventions and strategies that might work well in Situation A might be ineffective in situation B.

Policing agencies are prime examples of institutionalized organizations and the Nigeria Police Force fits well into this paradigm. The Nigeria Police Force provides an irreplaceable social service and its line of successive Inspector Generals have framed the priority of the organization as the protection of life and property, the slant of that depending on their individual worldviews. Their conceptualization of protection of life and property has influenced public relations, recruitment and due process within the force. The bottom line is that whether each successive Inspector Generals of Police in Nigeria was implementing- 'operation fire-for-fire', 'Operation-to protect and serve in integrity' or any other fancy phases, the Nigeria Police Force in its organization behavior and design has at least made verbal commitments towards the provision of security.

Using institutional theory as the framework to discuss the complicated theme of police corruption in Nigeria is particularly useful as institutional theory explains not only the constraints that the organizational structure and process of Nigeria Police Force imposes, but also how environmental variable hobbles the police in Nigeria. The theory also directs the focus of the paper to look at legitimacy and performance not only from the prism of technical performance but also to look at institutional environment and to highlight the interplay between technical and environmental dynamics in evaluating the performance of the Nigeria Police Force.

III. THE POLICE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT IN NIGERIA

Police, as one of the most fundamental institutions of state, is established for the maintenance of order. Its performance mirrors the dominant political and economic structures of the state. In essence, the type of police a state gets is dependent on the contradiction and conflict of interests among its dominant groups and classes. Thus, it can be said that the police are a mirror of the relationships between the various components of a society and their struggles for control [26].

One of most discussed issues in governance in Nigeria is the political economy of corruption. This particular phenomenon has made it impossible for potentials to translate into concrete development [27]. There is a massive obstruction of fair access to government and power by political and economic interests who continue to take advantage of their positions to extract rent. The institutionalization of corruption

undermines government's socio-economic development strategies, hampers initiatives and causes institutional weakness. These weak institutions in turn are responsible for the ensconcing of massive poverty and reckless extortion which has become a feature of Nigerian federation today [28].

Another outstanding feature of the Nigerian political environment is the substantial reliance by the political elites on state power and institutions for survival rather than on the feedback from the Nigerian social structures whose diverse members clamor for elite responsiveness and responsibility. Scholars on political leadership in Nigeria have unanimously concluded that failure of leadership is one of Nigeria's great failings. Ebegbulem described leadership in Nigeria in uncharitable terms by stating that "the Nigerian society has never been well governed since independence from the British in 1960 because "good, strong leaders" have never been in charge" [29].

The Nigeria Police which operates in the aforementioned political environment cannot be expected to be any different. Corruption, ineptitude and impunity are the three words that have persistently been used to describe the Nigeria Police Force. Surveys and opinion polls have successively placed the Nigeria Police Force as the most corrupt public institution in Nigeria [30], [31]. Corruption in the police manifest across all facets of operation - from recruitment, where unfit candidates buy their way into the force and officers pay bribe to secure lucrative stations and postings [32] to police setting up checkpoints for motor vehicles, where officers demand money ostensibly in the guise of vehicle registration documents [33] and demand for 'mobilization fee' from victims of crime to enable investigation of complaints among others.

More worrisome is the cooption of the police as a tool for oppression and as agent of promoting the interest of the ruling elite. This explains the visibility of the policemen in Nigeria in large numbers around the abodes of the political and economic leadership and the concentration of officers in urban centers. According to Ibrahim Coomassie, a former Inspector-general of the Nigeria Police Force, "[...] Everybody wants to use the Police as status symbol, yet the members of the organization remain without accommodation, adequate remuneration, tools to work with, transport to patrol, effective communication and appropriate intelligence outfit to support their operations" [34].

Another feature of the Nigerian state is the concentration of political and economic power by the central government and the cohering of elites around this power hub. Ultimately, it comes as no surprise that the call for the decentralization of the Police Force has, so far, been rejected by political leadership in the national government which sees this proposed arrangement as an attempt to weaken its hold on the levers of power and dilute their ability to dispense patronage and protect their power bases [35].

The political elites in Nigeria have directly or indirectly profited from the unofficial policy to underfund the police and by extension, hamper it in its constitutional duty to effectively and efficiently prevent and detect crime by exploiting the fiscal and structural weaknesses of the police to evade

investigation [36]. The tale of the criminal justice system is one of a system that lacks the capacity and the will to conclude trials involving the rich and politically connected individuals while conversely increasing the number of indigent people held without trial in the prisons.

The outcome is a Nigerian Police Force in 2019 that mirrors its distant colonial progenitor- colonial British imperial guard- whose *raison d'être* was the subordination of Nigeria's multiple ethnic groups to the political and economic interest of the British Empire [37]. There is the need to further explore the link between the documented ills of the police force in Nigeria and government policies alongside other external institutional influence on the organization.

IV. CONTEXTUALIZING POLICE FUNDING IN NIGERIA

The central government has borne the major burden of financing the police force since 1999, even though the police in Nigeria as the most visible symbol of state power and the primary institution of social control is far more consequential at the state and local government level as indicated by crime data in Nigeria [38]. While all state governors and local government chairmen in Nigeria have budgetary and extra-budgetary allocation for the provision of security tagged 'security votes', no state budget has a line item for the police [39]. State governments only sporadically provide support for the police depending on the agenda of the governor of the state. The most regular form of support states give to the police is the provision of patrol vehicles and 9 states have provided 548 cars between 2015 and 2017[40].

As indicated in Table I, one critical feature of budgetary allocation is the almost total neglect of training, research and development, security Services, infrastructural and development, which constitute capital expenditure for salaries, which constitute recurrent expenditure.

TABLE I
POLICE BUDGET IN NIGERIA: 2005 – 2014 [41]

Year	Police Formations and Commands (Naira)	Recurrent Expenditure (%)	Capital Expenditure (%)
2014	292.4B	97.68%	2.32%
2013	311.2b	94.81%	5.19%
2012	307.9B	97.06%	2.94%
2011	304.8B	96.34%	3.66%
2010	245.1B	78.10%	21.90%
2009	195.4B	93.98%	6.02%
2008	-	-	-
2007	94.9B	89.49%	10.51%
2006	85.3B	94.1%	5.87%
2005	80.8B	88.17%	11.38%

The same skewed and insufficient budgetary allocation to the force continued in 2015 and 2016 under a different government and a political party that campaigned under the mantra of change. In 2015, N329.6 billion was appropriated as recurrent expenditure for the force and N5.9 billion was appropriated for capital expenditure. Despite the fact that the government's Medium-Term Sector Strategy required N218 billion as the minimum as capital expenditure in the same

year. The same story was repeated in 2016 budgetary allocation and the last IGP stated that the N18 billion allocated to the force in the year could only last for three months [41].

Comparatively, the police are appropriated far lower budget sums than other sections of the security services. In 2012, the federal government appropriated (on average) N1.6 million per soldier, N9.8 million per sailor and N7.1 million per air force personnel and N0.87 million per police personnel, which is nearly half of what was budgeted for a soldier. This budget expresses the value of a naval and air force officer as equal to twelve policemen. This budgetary pattern which has been customary since 1999 and across the tenure of three presidents shows a persistent policy that deprioritizes the police and internal domestic security threats for external and regional security.

Going by the assertion by Nigeria's former Inspector-General of Police, the amount provisioned for maintaining the approximately 317,515 vehicles and motorcycles in the fleet of the Nigerian Police Force in the 2016 budget can only sustain the force for 3 months [42] leaving police officers to forage for fund to operate. In 2017 the police were allocated less than one-tenth of what is required to function [43] and the same was repeated in 2018.

In spite of these continuous political and fiscal decisions to underfund the police, managers of governance in Nigeria have persistently criticized the police for underperforming, making continuous demands on the force to address crime in the society. President Buhari on March 24, 2017 ordered that the police should "deploy the facilities at its disposal to bring violence in the country under control." [44] President Goodluck Jonathan similarly gave numerous orders to the police, one of which is that 'cases of murders must be properly investigated in this country at the end of the day, we must know what happened; not just in Edo State, but other challenges that are facing us on a daily basis' [45]. Other relevant stakeholders have also persistently demanded effective response to crime from the police force notwithstanding the acute shortage of funds the force has to contend with.

To further compound the problem of underfunding is the inappropriate deployment of police personnel for protective security duties which puts a strain on the ability of the force to deliver efficient public service. Around a third of the force personnel are deployed for personal protection and guard duties. It has become a status symbol for politicians and rich Nigerians to pay for the services of Policemen and women to be attached to them on guard duty [46]. Yussuf in capturing this mismanagement of manpower stated that "use of the Police for inappropriate guard duty and protective security, often for the personal aggrandizement of the beneficiary, is very harmful to the image of the Police as an independent law and order institution, and disinterested ombudsman in Public Affairs" [47].

V. THE LINK BETWEEN UNDERFUNDING AND POLICE CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Globally, security is an expensive public enterprise that

governments across all systems fund through taxation and other means. In Nigeria, less than 12% of eligible citizens pay tax [48] and oil that accounts for 80% of government revenue has seen a record slump in price [49]. This has negatively affected the ability of the governments across all tiers in Nigeria to meet their obligations. This becomes starker when you consider Nigeria's unwieldy population growth and the implication of such growth on the ability of the government to fund public safety and security. The decision to underfund the police is deliberate and by extension the primary driver of police corruption in Nigeria.

According to a policeman, "Most of us buy our uniforms and shoes in the open market. For instance, I bought my uniform and shoes in Ariaria Market in Aba" [50]. Another Divisional Police Officer in charge of a police station equally stated that "People think we are miracle workers. We don't get any budgets here. People don't ask how we fuel the vehicles we use to patrol the streets and to chase after criminals. In fact, people should be praising us and asking how we do it" [51]. Another senior police officer stated that "Police can no longer go to the Police workshop to fuel its vehicles, because the company that supplied fuel, due to government indebtedness, had ceased to supply fuel to the Police" [52].

Invariably, the consequences of the deliberate political choice to underfund the police mean that police officers are responsible for bearing the financial burden of funding police operations. Since police officers, as civil servants cannot be reasonably expected to fund these services from their poor and often irregular salaries, they turn to levying the public to fund their services.

Ubiquitous checkpoints manned by armed policemen, extracting bribes and demanding vehicle registration documents is symbolic of Nigeria as windmills are emblematic of the Netherlands [53]. This is in spite of the constant and loud disavowal of these checkpoints by road users as extortionary and the instructions of successive Inspectors General of Police for their dismantling [54]; Nigerian road users lose billions of naira annually to extortions at these checkpoints [55]. Also, it is the norm for police officers to extort money from the members of public for services rendered; administrative bails issued by the police has to be paid for [56]; complaints and victims of crime have to fund investigation; logistical support has to be given by the interested parties in order to mobilize police units [56].

Deductively, extortion at police checkpoints and police stations is a form of crude security tax that the public pay for the indispensable services that the police render and which the state has deliberately refused to adequately budget for. The state, by deliberately underfunding the police, while expecting and demanding it to perform its duties has indirectly imposed on the citizenry a tax in the most ingenious.

VI. CONCLUSION

Security is a public good that the government in Nigeria has the primary mandate to provide. Efficient and effective delivery of that service presupposes that the government must prioritize the operational and administrative capacity of the

police to deliver on public safety and security. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case, as the central government which bears the constitutional responsibility for the maintenance and funding of the Nigeria Police Force has deliberately underfunded the organization, leaving the police to rely on unofficial tolls to fund its operations and this has gone a long way in shaping the force's overwhelming negative public perception in Nigeria. Moreover, the salience of the police due to its presence across all communities in the country and its centrality to public order makes its failings more visible than other institutions and agencies in Nigeria.

The question of performance of the police force in Nigeria is linked to the operational funding available to members of the force and there is no way the high level of corruption in the force would be solved without addressing the problems of poor service conditions and associated deprivations as well as the larger environmental and institutional malaise that bedevils the Nigerian body polity.

There exists a correlation between institutional accountability and public ownership and the financing of criminal justice institutions; in order to expect internationally comparable services from the Nigerian Police, it must be funded at optimal levels like its global counterparts. The starting point is to demand from the legislature appropriate and functional allocation to the police and not the yearly appropriation of a token to the primary agency that is charged with the maintenance of order in Nigeria. It is upon the latter that rests the attainment of all developmental goals. And since governance is a collective exercise, there is the need to include state governments, the private sector and other stakeholders in the financing of the police.

The bill introduced by the Inspector General of Police into the National Assembly in 2017 sought to deduce 1% of the total budget of the 36 states in the country to fund the police failed due to the underlying contradictions of Nigeria's governance system.

There is the need to create a structured system of involving the private sector and other component of the society in the funding of the police. The Lagos Security Trust Fund provides an example of this. The Fund was created to fund the operation of the Lagos State Rapid Response Squad. The fund provided necessary hardware, logistics and provided extra allowances to the police officers participating in the outfit.

The police are the most visible symbol of state power and a primary institution of social control in the hands of the managers of public safety and consciousness in Nigeria. Nigerians cannot talk away police checkpoints and police corruption-we must either fund the services or accept the fact that police services are only going to be free in theory.

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