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'The Police is your Friend': Analysis of Public Perception and the Police 'Image-Making' Campaign in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Nigeria Police Force exists to provide civil security through law enforcement and the maintenance of order. To what extent has the Nigeria Police Force served out these basic functions to the public? Given the rising incidence of crime reports in the media about Nigeria and the simultaneous rise in Police-public relations campaign, this paper seeks to understand prevailing public perception of the Nigeria Police and how such perception shapes the Police construction of its image. The paper uses Uyo urban, southern Nigeria, to

understand how the Police-public relations campaign relates to public construction and perception of its activities. A range of exploratory methods including interviews, informant discussions, researcher's background experiences in the area and a review of literature were used with specific focus on armed robbery experiences and narratives from the respondents in the study area. Findings showed that the image of the police from the public perspective and from within the police leadership and rank and file remain generally poor. Several factors commonly discussed in the literature including corruption, poor remuneration and a lack of capacity etc were identified as responsible. The paper argues that rising police-public relations campaign to strengthen its image may not provide helpful solutions as the core and fundamental problems bordering on the integrity, capacity and motivational factors still remain unchanged. More researches are recommended on this theme.

Keywords: The Nigeria Police Force, Crime rate, Public perception, Police-public relations campaign.

Introduction

The State basically serves to provide three critical functions namely; security, the provision of basic services, and the protection of essential civil freedoms. Security in the context of this paper is seen from the perspective of civil security and State security. Civil security works on the norms of the rule of law and includes law enforcement, the prevention of crime, the protection of human rights in homes and public places, and the creation and maintenance of orderly communities necessary for the flourishing and good

of the civil society. On the other hand, 'state security' is necessary for the defense and protection of the territorial integrity of the state, particularly against external threat to the State interest. It is common practice in state building project to ascribe responsibility for state security to military forces and intelligence agencies, while civil security is generally in the domain of the civilian police¹. This paper is mainly interested in the civil security functions normally performed by organized police service.

The policing² responsibility of the state basically involves 'law enforcement' and the maintenance of order. In a more nuanced categorization, Martin (1990:6) observed as follows: *'police work involves a variety of tasks and responsibilities. Officers are expected to prevent crime, protect life and property, enforce the laws, maintain peace and public order, and provide a wide range of services to citizens...a common trend unifying these diverse activities,*

¹ In a broad theoretical discourse police refers to a socio-political and quasi-legal institution-State agencies charged basically with the enforcement of criminal law and the maintenance of order. Many quasi-police agencies such as the custom and immigration organization and economic regulatory agencies are also involved in public policing (Alemika and Chukwuma, undated)

² Policing on the other hand refers to measures and actions taken by a variety of institutions and groups (both formal and informal) in society to regulate social relations and practices in order to secure the safety of members of community as well as conformity to norms and values of the society. It is a 'sub-set of control processes' which involves the creation of systems of surveillance coupled with the threat of sanctions for discovered deviance-either immediately or interms of the initiation of penal process or both (Reiner 2000: 3, cited in Alemika and Chukwuma, undated: 3).

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 representatives of the coercive potential of the state and the legitimate users of force helps explain a number of their attitudes and characteristics.' Theoretically, studies mostly from the anthropological perspectives have discussed some correlations between prevailing economic and political structures of a country, and the development, form, character and integrity of the police forces and the policing processes (see Schwartz and Miller 1964, Robinson and Scaglione 1987, Alemika and Chukwuma, undated; Eizenstat, et al 2005, Robinson et al, 1994 and Reiner, 2000). Reiner's (2005) distinction of 'communal' or 'collective' policing system of social control from the modern notion of specialized and highly formalized policing arrangements serve to throw light into the evolution processes of the human social and political organization from a communal system of social control to a highly privatized structural system of social hierarchy characterized by high level of inequality. The emergence of specialized state police system coexists with growing tendencies for economic specialization and differential access to resources that is at the core of societal transition from kinship-to a class- dominated system (Robinson and Scaglione, 1987 and Reiner, 2005). By these theoretical positions on the rationale for state policing, it is fair to argue that modern system of civil policing is the dominant idea of the political class not truly to serve the overall interest of the society and

the people, but to serve some parts of the society and certain classes of people at the expense of others: '...the main functions of the police has been to protect the property and well-being of those who benefit most from an economy based on the extraction of private profit. The police were created primarily in response to rioting and disorder, directed against oppressive working and living conditions' (Institute for the Study of Labour and Economic Crises, 1982:12).

From the diverse theoretical analyses above, the 'police duties' to the state and the citizens somehow connote ambivalent meanings. The Police constitutes an instrument of oppression on the one hand while at the same time perceived as essential for guaranteeing social order. In 'weak', 'failing' and 'failed' states, public perception of the police often tilts in the direction of the former-as instruments of oppression and suppression of dissents. This tends to create image problem leading to drastic reduction and weakening of public trust and support. But how does public perception of the functions of the police relate to theoretical construction of the ambivalence of its role in the society? What implications and consequences are public perceptions of police on its daily tasks of security functions? How does the police institution respond to public construction of its image and functions? These and related questions will be addressed by examining citizens' narratives, discourses, perceptions and attitudes to the Nigerian police in Akwa Ibom state.

The Structure of the Nigeria Police

Nigeria formally adopted a unified police structure at post-independence (between 1968 and 1972) when the working party of the federal military government of 1966 recommended the integration of local police forces, from all the diverse geopolitical nationalities, with the Nigeria Police Force. By the 1979 constitution, the Nigeria Police Force was formally recognized as the only police force in the country, with the Inspector General of the Police as the operational head directly responsible to the president and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed forces. The Nigeria Police is structured into thirty-seven commands corresponding to the thirty-six states and the federal capital (Abuja) of the federation. These commands are supervised by the Force Headquarters, headed by the Inspector-General and assisted by the several deputies and assistants. The thirty-six commands are further regionalized into eight zones with each zone headed by an Assistant Inspector-General. The chain of command starts with the commissioner of police (as the head of the state command) who is directly responsible to a zonal commander (Assistant Inspector-General) who is in turn responsible to the Inspector-General of Police, who himself is ultimately answerable to the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed forces. There are several other directorates within the police formation in charge of operations, finance and administration, investigation and intelligence, logistics and supply and training. Each of these directorates is headed by a Deputy Inspector-General of

Police, all of which are based at the Force headquarters at Abuja.

The Nigeria police force exists to prevent, investigate and detect crime; apprehend offenders, preserve law and order, protect life and property, enforce all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged; and to perform military duties (Police Act 1967: section 4). To properly discharge these functions, the Police Act empowers the Nigeria police force with extensive powers including: prosecution; arrest with or without warrant; serves court summons; grant bail to persons arrested without warrant; search and seize property believed to have been stolen; detain and search; apprehend deserter; take finger-print; interpose for purposes of preventing crimes; arrest persons with no ostensible means of subsistence and who cannot give a satisfactory account of himself; regulate assemblies including issuance of permission for assemblies and processions. A number of studies have demonstrated that the enormous and extensive powers bestowed on the Nigeria Police Force do not translate to best practices of security services (Alemika 1993, Alemika and Chukwuma, undated; Marenin, 1985 etc). Marenin (1985, cited in Alemika and Chukwuma, undated: 13) categorically captured, prevailing anomaly in police practices in Nigeria as follows: *the police in their routine work tend to protect the powerful. Police are visible enmasse during ceremonial occasions when they cordon off VIPs from the common folks; they are assigned to guard the homes of the powerful, government buildings and act as body guards*

for important officials. One rarely sees high ranking office without a police officer. Police are concentrated in urban areas and within urban areas concentrate on patrolling government residential areas (GRAs)-the home of indigenous and expatriate elites...such practices teach the rank and file who needs protection and who does not, who is entitled to services and whose demand can be rejected.'

Given these literature reports, it is clear the Nigeria Police Force is not functioning at optimum capacity in line with its laid out mandates. How does the general public construct the images of the police in their experiences? How does public perception of the police shape police-public relation practices? This study uses individual perspective of armed robbery experience and incidents to understand the overall public perception and attitudes toward the Nigerian Police Force.

Study Area and Methods

This study was based in Uyo, southern Nigeria. Uyo is the capital of Akwa Ibom State, one of the 36 states in Nigeria and which was created in 1987. It is located between latitudes 5° 01' and longitudes 7° 55' in south-south Nigeria. Climatically, Uyo has a humid tropical climate with high temperature (between 26° C and 33° C). Average annual rainfall ranges between 2000mm and 3000mm with duration concentrating between March and October of each year. Consequently, two marked seasons are recognized namely,

the dry (November-February) and wet seasons (March-October). The early period of the dry season usually witnesses the influence of the north east trade winds whose dry and cool condition (harmattan) contribute in moderating the high temperature of the city around November and sometimes could span till January of the following year. Over the years, and largely due to the phenomenon of climate change, the harmattan season is rarely experienced, and if it happens rarely lasts up to a week. The climatological implication of crime and crime rate in Uyo had been discussed in an earlier paper (Brown, Forthcoming).

Being the administrative capital of the state, Uyo has attracted migrants from diverse areas within Akwa Ibom State as well as other states in Nigeria. The 2006 population census puts Uyo at 436,606 people with the rate of growth at 3.2. As an emerging center of mostly small scale economic activities, the high population growth for the urban center carries many social, economic, ecological and infrastructural consequences. The quality of housing and other infrastructures are consequently stratified in a manner that reflects income and other socioeconomic characteristics of the residents. High quality houses are mostly occupied by high ranking public officials and wealthy business class with relative guarantees of stable power and water supplies either as private initiatives or publicly funded. In contrast, individuals with low income earnings are found in slum areas and squatter settlements with very irregular public power supply and commercial water services.

Given the economic realities of most low income earners and jobless youths, there emerged in the city diverse strategies for coping and criminal behaviours including pickpocketing, armed robbery, kidnapping and other financial and economic crimes including the popular '419' scam.

This study was initiated in 2011 in response to an informal conversation with a victim of armed robbery attack in Uyo urban, Nigeria. The rising wave of armed robbery in the city then attracted government ban on the commercial motor cycle services popularly called by various names including 'how far', 'okada', 'aka uke', etc.

In an attempt to establish the spatial and temporal aspects of armed robbery incidence in Uyo, an attitudinal survey was conducted with trained research assistants, and in three delineated areas which reflected income levels as well as housing and other infrastructural qualities. Such delineation led to three core regional areas namely Oron and Nwaniba roads axis including Ewet and Osongama housing estates (zone A); Ikot Ekpene road-wellington Bassey-Ikpà roads axis and environs (zone B); Abak-Aka-Babangida-Atiku Abubakar roads axis and environs (zone C).

Five (5) streets were randomly selected from each of the three zones leading to fifteen (15) streets in all. A further random selection of ten (10) households in each of the five streets led to a total of one hundred and fifty (150) households. The heads of the selected households or any representative member were interviewed in a semi-structured manner. The interview was based on a wide-range of issues

ranging from experiences of armed robbery incident, frequency of occurrence, notorious areas for robbery operation, seasonal factors, probable causes and solutions, among other questions. Interest was also focused on the state crime control efforts. At this point the respondents were treated to series of questions bordering on police crime control tactics, their effectiveness and general attitudes on crime control effort of the police. Informal discussions were also organized with the police and robbery victims.

Police records of robbery³ incidents in Uyo urban are very poor and largely depend on formal complaints by victims which, in most cases, are hardly forthcoming. Except for some high income and well-educated resident members, robbery attacks on individuals and households are hardly reported to the police by most urban residents unless it involves loss of lives and important properties. These practically render dependence on official statistics of armed robbery for the urban area unrealistic. Public attitude to crime reporting in Uyo is further undermined by a seeming lack of faith and trust in the criminal policing capacity of the Nigeria police authorities on the one hand and the economic constraints of most individuals, a lack of confidence on the ability of the police authorities to act, as well as concerns over the confidentiality of information released to the police authorities. These issues are fundamentally related to the

³ This study understands robbery to mean the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence or by putting the victim in fear (FBI, 2004).

wider image problem of the Nigerian police as a ‘corrupt institution’⁴. Given these limitations, the study opted for attitudinal survey of public perception of the security services functions and efforts of the police. It is important to note that the security functions of the police covers wider areas including crime control, maintenance of public order and protection of lives and properties. This study only focuses on one aspect of the crime control function of the police namely ‘armed robbery’ to measure public perception and attitudes relating to the efficiency of the police in its security functions.

Results

Perspectives on Armed Robbery Experiences

Armed robbery is one of the most common security challenges in the study area. There was a consensus among the respondents on this at least from the diverse narratives of experiences, as well as structural and spatial security manifestations at residential places. All the respondents interviewed claimed having experienced ‘armed robbery’ incidents either directly in their homes, neighborhood homes or street of residence. All the respondents equally emphasized on specific time period most favorable for robbery attack to include night hours, festive seasons (Christmas and Easter) and rainy periods. About 26% equally indicated ‘armed robbery’ can occur at any time depending on the notoriety of an area as well as specific other circumstances within the

⁴ By Transparency International (TI, 2012) ranking, Nigeria is placed at 139th position of 176 countries. Her police institution has been rated as the most corrupt.

calculation of the potential robbers. A woman in her early 30s explained this when she said, ‘...you cannot predict those who are monitoring you and your movements...they can attack any time...in fact we leave our security and safety in the hands of God...’

Beyond narratives of direct or indirect experiences, the physical security practices reflected in high walled fences, heavily gated doors, windows and an entire compound as well as the presence of private security attendants at some individual residential places and streets testify to general concerns and sense of insecurity at different levels of socio-economic circumstances. ‘Armed robbery’ is our greatest fear’, said one male respondent in his late 40s...‘people hardly sleep with all eyes closed’, he added. Most respondents (86.7%) believed robbers go for money than material items. Respondents who claimed having been attacked cited money as the major interest of the robbers during their different encounters. Respondents’ narratives of encounter with ‘armed robbers’ painted picture of danger and helplessness given that the robbers are most likely to be armed with guns, matchets or other dangerous weapons. One respondent (a man in his late 40s) observed as translated in English as follows: ‘...in such condition...you have to cooperate...negotiate and give them what they want...in short you must cooperate with them.’

Within the study area, the respondents were able to identify notorious streets and areas with various names and phrases e.g., ‘den of robbery’, ‘high crime areas’, ‘haven for

armed robbers, *‘areas for night boys’*, or *‘security areas’* (an indication of heavy police presence). Low quality residential areas occupied by the low socio-economic class were frequently referred to as most vulnerable for *‘armed robbery operation’* (see Brown, forthcoming for details of such areas). On the other hand, most other streets parade higher presence of the public security apparatus and personnel. These seem to be where important government infrastructures, housing estates, offices and business centers are located. Physical security practices around individual houses (reflected in heavily gated compounds and the presence of private security guards) were possible with individuals in high socio-economic class. But this may not offer 100% protection against attack given local narratives of the level of sophistication credited to most armed robbery operations. A male respondent in one of such high security residential buildings argued as follows: *‘...hmmm...my brother, if they [robbers] plan to attack your residence, they have several means of doing that...they have gone more advanced...God is the only source of protection...we do not have security at all.’*

Perspectives on Police Protection

All the respondents who claimed they were attacked said they did not call the police; only very few (about 2%) claimed they informed the police after their *‘attack’* experience. About 86% of those who claimed they have not been directly attacked by *‘armed robbers’*, but have had experience of armed robbery incidents in their neighborhood

said they did not call the police, but 9% claimed they made efforts to call the police. The commonest attitudes emerging about these groups of respondents in relation to police invitation to crime scene were marked by *‘doubts’* and a lack of confidence on the capacity of the police to respond effectively. One female respondent in her late 30s said thus: *‘...police?...these men [robbers] operated in this street last month for over 3 hours at night...robbing from house to house...do you think the police were not aware or were not informed?...forget the police...they cannot do anything...’* in another version, a man in his early 40s argued: *‘...why should I call the police?...they know these boys [robbers]...and they [the police] are regularly settled [financial reward]...at every operation...we do not have security at all...’*

Almost all the respondents’ attitudes on security from *‘armed robbery’* attacks were characterized by *‘helplessness’*, reflected in their various expression such as *‘we do not have security’*, *‘...we leave our security and safety in the hands of God.’* *‘...God is the only source of protection’*, etc. Given these observed tendencies of fatalism, there is high likelihood that incidents of armed robbery attack would not be reported to the police during and after each incident of attack. Apart from inadequate capacity to fight crime, the Police has been widely perceived as corrupt and incapable of being trusted with confidential information on *‘robbery suspects.’* This point is buttressed by the view of a respondent who claimed as follows: *‘...we know many of them [the robbery suspects]...we suspect some but we cannot do*

anything...some of them are highly connected to the state security network...and in such case where can they be reported to...you cannot report them to the police unless you want to put your life in danger...' Incidence of corruption in the Nigeria police and security services network has been widely reported in the literature (TI 2012, Ogbeyi 2012, ICPC 2008, Adeleke 2003) and has equally formed headline news within the local national and international media (see for instance <http://www.gistmania.com/talk/topic,45266.0.html>) (accessed 05-04-2014).

A lack of confidence and trust in the Police Force accounts for the thriving of self-help attitudes among individuals and community members in an effort to secure their private residence or residential streets. Incidence of 'high-fenced' and 'heavily-gated' and 'guarded' compounds are regular responsive behaviors among members in the high socio-economic class to minimize incidence on 'armed robbery' attacks of their residents. Collective action against 'armed robbery' has also been on the rise in forms of 'night vigilantes' and 'operation fish out criminal elements' in some well-coordinated streets and communities. About 84% of the respondents cited 'community action against crime' as important instrument in fighting 'armed robbery'. A respondent in her early 30s gave a short account of such community action (translated into English) as follows: '*... what is happening in some properly coordinated areas [streets] is the presence of constituted bodies who parade*

such areas at nights...they also look out for suspected criminal elements...but if you are caught...yours is finished...this helps some areas to be relatively free of robbery be it in the day or at night...' Community actions against 'suspected criminals' in most cases, result in 'jungle justice.' Narratives of how 'suspected criminals' are treated abound in local media, and range from lynching, pounding and many other means of inflicting hard and deadly pains. The following media report (laced with photos of suspected criminals in fire) supports this discussion: '...jungle justice: community in Akwa Ibom roast four kinsmen over alleged robbery...four alleged armed robbers were recently roasted to death in Ibianga Asakpa, Oruk Anam local government area, Akwa Ibom state. The alleged robbers were said to have gone to the community to rob residents of the area....*' (The Sensor Newspaper 28 February 2012: 1).*

Security challenges, police-public relations campaign and confidence-building measures

How do the police rate its image in the context of public negative perception? How do public perception and attitudes toward the police shape its daily policing task and responsibilities? Within its leadership and rank and file, the Nigeria Police Force rating of its image is as poor as the public construction of it. During informal discussions on this, all the police officers and members in the rank and file involved openly admitted the police is not serving the society and members of the public as was designed. One Senior

Police officer in the rank of Inspector felt he was not satisfied with his job as a police officer: *'...honestly, I hang on to this job because there is no alternative. I cannot say in my conscience we are doing the right thing in the police...'*, another officer (in the junior rank) observed: *'...yes, we know the police is not working but you cannot tell me to risk my life in the name of fighting armed robbers...how much am I paid? If you die, you don't die because that [Nigerian English version putting emphasis on the irreversibility of death]...nobody remembers your family again...'* *'Mehn, you do not have to blame me...you have to blame the rot in the police on the ogas [leaders] at the top'*, said yet another officer (a Police Superintendent). A total of eleven members of the police (seven junior officers and 4 senior officers) were interviewed at informal level. All the interviewees were not happy with the police service, and the list of comments was mostly in the negative.

Emerging issues that were gathered from the interviews include poor remuneration; faulty recruitment processes that mediate the enrolment of questionable persons into the force; a lack of capacity to fight crime; corruption and tendency for ethnic loyalties, among members of the police. The main concern was the lack of proper reward, motivation and discipline. The junior officer who claimed he would not want to take risk of fighting armed robbers directly and indirectly alluded to the prevalence of poor rewards, indiscipline and inadequate capacity in terms of equipment. The statement of one male civilian respondent (in his late

30s) best explain this: *'...no police would want to confront the superior fire power of the armed robbers who operate with modern equipments not used by the police...the police does not have anything even simple communication gadgets...that is why they run each time they are confronted with armed robbers...'* (English translation). Brown (forthcoming) has argued that public faith in the Nigeria police force will continue to be on a declining side given that the Nigeria Police is ranked as the most corrupt institution and inadequately equipped to cope with the rising challenges of social crime.

Aware of its dwindling public image, the Nigeria police has initiated series of public-relation campaign as an avenue of improving the image of the Force in the eyes and perception of the public. Radio Jingles, bill board messages at strategic locations, community policing initiatives and campaign against corruption in the Force are the commonest and most popular tools. Popular jingles such as *'the police is your friend...help the police by reporting crime and crime suspects...'*, etc run daily in the state owned Akwa Ibom State broadcasting corporation (AKBC). Same messages are posted on billboards at strategic locations. Probably in a reaction to the growing attitude that the police is exclusively reserved for the service of private individuals, top government officials and urban and high residential areas, a new initiative namely 'community policing' was launched in 2003 (Udofia, 2014). Within this framework, one or two junior police officers are sent to few local communities. In the context of available

information, 'community policing' project has no functional or utility basis especially as many communities have had long standing communal security system to check 'armed robbery', in addition to the grossly inadequate capacity of the police force in fighting crime. Going by the various accounts and narratives of the respondents, the police image-building strategies cannot productively restore public confidence when fundamental and core problems of corruption, indiscipline, a lack of capacity and ethnic loyalty are still not checked in the police force. As one female respondent (in her late 20s) argued: '*...how can the police be my friend when they even collude with armed robbers to rob you...*'

Conclusions

This paper was conceived to discuss the challenges of 'policing practices' in Nigeria using Uyo urban in Akwa Ibom State as a case study. Particular attention was paid on public perception and construction of the police in relation to crime control practice using armed robbery as a case. The paper also delved on the other side of how public perception and image of the police shape policing duties and responsibilities. Findings have shown the image of the police from the public perspectives and from within the police leadership, and rank and file remain very poor. A number of factors including, poor remuneration, corruption and indiscipline within the force, ethnic loyalties and a lack of capacity to secure the citizens, have been discussed as responsible for the poor image of the police in the eyes of the

public and within the organization. It was also discovered that the negative impact of public image of the Police services is mostly responsible for the rising tendency for Police-public relation campaign. Although the Police has initiated several public-relations campaign to improve its image, the paper argues that such efforts may not likely bring improvement given that the core and fundamental problems bordering on corruption and indiscipline, poor wages and remuneration, lack of capacity and ethnic loyalty, have remained unchanged.

It is important to caution against generalizing this findings to cover the entire geo-political entity of Nigeria with 36 states and 774 local governments areas with which sample was drawn from only one state and an urban area in one local government area. In spite of the structural and administrative uniformities of the Nigeria police force, the operational practices and integrity of each command may largely be shaped by the environmental and cultural contexts of specific areas and states of operation. It is, however, believed these findings will serve as useful starting points for more researches on this theme.

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