

INFLUENCING FACTORS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF POLICE CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Felix Akinwumi Orole, Kamisan Bin Gadar, Murray Hunter

Abstract— The Nigerian public has consistently perceived its police force as one of the least effective in the world, due largely to the endemic corruption that pervades the police architecture. This article is historically anchored on observations and a review of literature on police corruption, and simultaneously examines the factors influencing police corruption with two objectives; to explore and describe what constitutes corruption within the police force, and to make recommendation on what could be possibly done by Nigerian government to checkmate this phenomenon that has eating deep into the fabric of the Nigeria Police Force.

Keywords— Police Corruption, Embezzlement, Nigeria Police, Leadership, Reform, Transformation

I. Introduction

“The Nigeria Police Force has fallen to its lowest level and has indeed become a subject of ridicule within the law enforcement community and among members of the enlarged public”. “Police duties have become commercialized. Our men are deployed to rich individuals and corporate entities such that we lack manpower to provide security for the common man. Our investigations departments cannot equitably handle matters unless those involved have money to part with. Complainants suddenly become suspects at different investigation levels following spurious petitions filed with the connivance of police officers. Our police stations, State CID and operations offices have become business centres and collection points for rendering returns from all kinds of Squads and Teams set up for the benefit of superior officers. Our Special Anti-Robbery Squads (SARS) have become killer teams, engaging in deals for land speculators and debt collection. Toll stations in the name of check-points adorn our highways with policemen shamelessly collecting money from motorists in the full glare of the public.”

The above statement was made by the former Nigeria’s Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Abubakar when he assumed the leadership of the police force on 13th February, 2012. On assuming office, the former Police Chief acknowledged the failure, exploitive and regrettable state of policing as exemplified by the Nigeria Police Force. An independent research conducted by Human Rights Watch (2011) corroborated with Transparency International that while Nigeria consistently rank as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, its police force rank as the most corrupt institution in the country. Consequently, the Nigeria Police Force has suffered from a lack of public confidence due to the

endemic corruption that goes unchecked and unpunished within the institution. The police force is saddled with a very large number of unqualified, under-trained and ill-equipped officers, whose suitability to wear the respected uniform of the force is in doubt (Adebayo, 2005).

As Maljevic (2006) and Punch (2009) posit, the perennial problem with police corruption is that the phenomenon does not only destroy morality but also, represents a breach of the law and a threat to the security of individuals (Maljevic 2006; Punch, 2009). Subsequently, honest police officers with ethical qualities are discredited by the actions of corrupt fellow colleagues. Hughes (2012) asserts that the ability of these police officers to properly serve the public is degraded by corrupted policing systems. Thus, there is need to pragmatically describe what police corruption entails.

II. Description of Corruption within the Police Force

There has been definitional problem of the concept of corruption, especially within the law enforcement agencies. However, many organizations have attempted to describe or define corruption within the police force. Notable among these organizations is Transparency International (TI) which has conducted numerous conceptual and methodological researches around the world on corporate and political corruption. In its description, TI (2010) submitted that corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. This description provides a similar but condensed version of Roebuck & Barker’s (1974) definition, who believe that police corruption involves any improper conduct engaged-in by law enforcement officer. But Punch (1985) notes that a corrupt practice can involve the use of illegal means to achieve a legitimate or approved’ goals. Typically, the falsification of evidence to convict a criminal presumed guilty in noble cause corruption.

Newburn (1999) underlines the difficulty in defining corruption because its nature is anything but concrete. According to Newburn, whittling down the discourse to a specific definition for all cases is neither possible nor useful because corruption within the police force takes many forms and occurs in many situations and many different cultures. Therefore, it is more pragmatic to accept a broad definition that permits in-depth discussion.

The perpetual drawback of definition complicates the understanding of police corruption (Pyman, 2011). Given this, Pyman (2011) asked how can the damages caused by corruption be examined and fixed, when we are not clear on

what corrupt practices entails? Wilson (1963) made distinction between criminal actions, such as theft, and corrupt actions, which constitute an abuse of authority, such as bribe-taking. Previous studies on corruption (Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Quah, 2007) labeled corruption more broadly as any type of unacceptable behavior engaged-in by a law enforcement officer who receives or expects to receive, by virtue of his official position, an actual or potential unauthorized material reward or gain.

For his part, Ivkovic (2003) argues that corrupt practices are actions that involve abuse of authority for personal gain. Kleinig (1996) expanded the description to include any form of abuse for departmental or divisional benefits. From all these definitions and descriptions, it is noteworthy that it is the act of corruption itself that harm the society and not the personal gain or benefits of the officer. Meanwhile, it is the personal gain that drives the officer to commit the act of corruption.

Police corruption has been described as the abuse of police authority for personal gain (Quah, 2007). Police corruption involves profit or another type of material benefits gained illegally as a result of the authority of the police officer. Typical forms of corruption include bribery, extortion, selling drugs and receiving or fencing stolen goods. The term also signifies patterns of misconduct within a given police department or special unit, particularly where offenses are repeated with the acquiescence of superiors or through other on-going failure to reprove those actions by the police leaders. Though these descriptions of corruption appear plausible when accounting for prevalence of police corruption in Nigeria, they cannot be said to explain the phenomenon completely (Adebayo, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to highlight the types of corruption within the police force.

III. Typologies of Police Corruption

In order to facilitate change and reform, there is need for police leaders to have a common view of what constitutes police corruption. Researchers (Roebuck & Barker, (1974); Punch, (1985); and Barker, (1983)) agreed in their description of corrupt practices as police occupational deviance. This view is corroborated by a study on the typologies of corruption conducted by Prenzler & Ransley (2002). As indicated in Table 1 below, Prenzler & Ransley categorized corrupt practices as misconduct within the police force.

Table 1: Typology of Police Corruption and Misconduct

Type	Dimensions
Classic corruption	Bribery ⁴ or graft ⁴ - involves an officer receiving a personal benefit for not doing their duty. This may be organized (e.g. a protection racket ⁴) or opportunistic (e.g. accepting a bribe to waive a speeding ticket).
Process corruption	Involves the fabrication of evidence and other forms of perverting the course of justice (e.g. planting drugs or lying in court).
Brutality	Covers the full range of forms of unjustified violence related to a police officer's work (e.g. violent threats or assault).
Miscellaneous conduct	Covers remaining types of deviance (e.g. harassment, discriminatory law enforcement, drug abuse, racist slurs, neglect of detainees). It could also include criminal offences and unethical behavior committed off-duty but deemed to reflect adversely on the officer's work (e.g. abusive language, drunk driving).

Source: T. Prenzler, J. Ransley, *Police Reform: Building Integrity* (2002), pp.5-6.

Prenzler & Ransley (2002) categorized corruption and misconduct within the police force into four. The first type of corrupt practices and misconduct is classic corruption. Prenzler & Ransley (2002) contend that bribery or graft, which involves an officer receiving a personal benefit for not doing their duty, is classic corruption. This may be organized or opportunistic like protection racket or accepting a bribe to waive a speeding ticket. Another type of corruption and misconduct is process corruption. This involves the fabrication of evidence and other forms of perverting the course of justice. Typical example of process corruption is planting of drugs or lying in court by the police officers.

Other form of corruption in the police force is brutality (Prenzler & Ransley, 2002). Brutality encompasses the full range of unjustified violence like violent threats and assault that are related to a police officer's work. Other types of corrupt practices and misconduct are classified as miscellaneous conduct. This covers other forms of deviance like harassment, discriminatory law enforcement, drug abuse, racist slurs and neglect of detainees. It could also include criminal offences and unethical behavior committed off-duty like abusive language and drunk driving but deemed to reflect adversely on the officer's work.

IV. Factors Explaining Endemic Police Corruption in Nigeria - A Review of Literature

The problem of corruption is not idiosyncratic to the Nigerian police. For instance, developed countries like the UK, Canada and Australia have recently encountered problems with corruption and cover-ups of abuses. So, corruption within the Nigerian police is not unique for a developing country. By reviewing existing literature on

corruption, an analysis is made, based primarily upon views and feedbacks from the members of the Nigeria Police Force, especially those on the lower rung of the institutional ladder whose voices are not often heard. In previous literature, many factors have been identified to influence police corruption in the Nigeria Police Force. But for the purpose of this paper, only the following factors will be underscored.

a. Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is one of the most cited reasons for the prevalence of corruption within the police force. This ethos can be in various dimensions. Police culture includes values, customs, practices and traditions that defines and reflects in the actions of individuals or the organization. Within the organization, culture can play an important role in reducing opportunities for corruption. However, the paramilitary unenviable culture inherited by the Nigeria Police Force impedes the expected confidence and trust from the public. Many studies (Rawwas, 2001; Saleim & Bontis, 2009) have pointed out the role played by cultural values in reducing opportunities for corruption and guiding individual conduct towards preserving their reputation and the work environment.

Othman (2012) posits that there is a link between corruption and social diversity, ethnic fractionalization, and religious differences. A culture of selfishness and greed breeds corruption, the manifestation of which negatively impacts the leaders and followers decision to engage in corrupt practices. The political system and the Nigeria's many diverse cultures could make the police leaders and their subordinates to compromise and be more susceptible to corrupt practices. There is a popular norm within the Nigerian society commonly referred to as "chop-I-chop" which has become acceptable in many organizations in the country. This term coined by political leaders, especially during the regime of Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) – popularly referred to as "evil genius", has crept into the police institution.

Orole conducted research on transformational leadership and perception of corruption within the Nigeria Police Force in 2013. According to his findings, 2 out of 5 of the respondents (police officers) believe it is wrong to engage in bribery. Yet, almost all of the respondents (4 out of 5) participate in one kind of corrupt practices or the other. Many of the respondents believe that it is acceptable to use their positions to solicit for bribe. So, it has become a "dignified and glorified" practice among the police force to engage in corruption. Worst still, most of these practices go unchecked by the leaders who themselves, directly or indirectly, engage in gross misconduct.

Another popular culture that is worth addressing is the "cover up". This explains the situation whereby a number of police officers fail to report cases of misconduct within the police institution. On most occasions, this happens within a specific team under the nose of the team leaders or supervisors. In addition, there are other factors which influence corruption in Nigeria and which invariably affects

development of the country. Orole (2013) in his study found that 4 out of 5 police officers are willing to cover up misconducts by their colleagues as long as the cover-up does not jeopardize their jobs.

As Tankebe (2010) notes, while corruption is associated with cultural factors, they stop well short of explaining the biting corruption of the post-colonial state in Nigeria. More accurately, the displacement of traditional cultural values by what Assimeng (1986) describes as "rugged materialism" explains the kind of corruption as a terrible bane plaguing the Nigerian society. Rugged materialism refers to a condition of aggressive preoccupation and obsession with material accumulation without regard to moral values of probity and propriety (Assimeng, 1986). Brownsberger (1983) criticized studies that sought to explain corruption in the Third World (specifically Nigeria), by reference to anachronistic traditions and to the special pressures on officials in developing countries. He argues that the root of corruption in Nigeria is a result of deep materialism and political fragmentation. As Sheidu (1994) asserts, a society gets the kind of police it deserves. This implies that a nation that is inclined to materialism cannot but breed a corrupt police.

The inequality in the distribution of national wealth, where political offices provide a platform for those who occupy them to enrich their pockets, and the obsession with material possessions and individual's readiness to seek for shortcuts to financial freedom is another key point worth highlighting. The acceptable "*I must succeed at all cost*" mentality has made many Nigerians including the members of the police force to believe that there is nothing wrong in soliciting for bribe, and seeking personal gains at the expense of the public.

b. Organizational Structure

An organization without a tenable structure will find it difficult to make concerted effort to combat crime and corruption. The rudderlessness of the Nigeria Police Force has made a number of political and other external interferences possible which has hampered the crusade against corrupt practices. Loree (2006) notes that police officers in leadership positions wield considerable influence within the organization, directly in terms of their actions or inactions and indirectly in how they and their actions are perceived. While, most law enforcement agencies like the police force emphasizes team work, scholars like Moran (2002) states that "being part of a specific team" can lead to pressures to conform to the team culture with the possibility of pressure to engage in corrupt behaviour. It is however disheartening that most police leaders who are supposed to lead the campaign against proscribed behaviours among their team members and subordinates directly or indirectly absorbs those misconducts.

During and after independence, the Nigeria Police Force has been plagued with lots of interferences especially from the political corridors of power, where the police acts like a tool for carrying out the objectives of the political leaders. The precariously political meddling is worsened during election periods. According to the report from Oliver Owen (2013):

“political interference undermines the cohesion, effectiveness and performance of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). If publics see the police as partisan, this will deeply impact their trust permanently. The centralized and hierarchical accountability structure of the NPF renders it vulnerable to political interference, and certain officers may compromise their professionalism to curry political favour in the hope of future career advancement. The tone is set from the top – when politicians restrain political considerations and promote police leadership in order of seniority, this helps to depoliticize the whole system. Conversely, when officers perceived as ‘politically connected’ are advanced over seniors, this incentivizes other junior officers to make similar alliances, which compromise their independence”. (Owen, 2013).

On balance, as submitted by Agbibo (2013), the military interventions in Nigerian politics seem to have done more harm to the Nigerian political economy than any other single factor. An elongated and largely meaningless military dominance of the Nigerian political landscape merely served to precipitate the state’s collapse into unfettered prebendalism as well as the emergence of an increasingly predatory and self-interested armed force and ruling elites. By weakening the structures for rational government, accountability, and democratic participation, Nigeria’s governments inadvertently strengthened the institutions for arbitrary, oppressive, and insensitive personal rule, most exemplified today by the Nigeria Police Force (Agbibo, 2013). Police officers who carry out the bids of these political leaders are therefore guaranteed some sort of benefits in the form of promotion and immunity. This kind of interference breeds corruption and essentially exacerbates the awry environment for police officers to dutifully discharge their duties.

c. Underfunding and Poor Remunerations

Inadequate funding by the federal government due to corruption acts as catalyst for the members of the police force to seek alternative ways of meeting their needs through dubious means that cause harm to the police institution and the society. It is increasingly difficult when the wages are low and the same salary gets delayed, for members of the police force to sustain themselves and be able to work with integrity. Former Nigeria’s Police Chief, Mohammed Abubakar emphasized “the need for reform as good salary and other welfare packages encourage police officers to remain focused when performing their duties”. As an internal factor, poor remuneration has been cited by most police officers as a

demoralizing factor and a primary reason why they engage in corrupt practices (Orole, 2013).

For effectiveness in achieving organizational outcome within the law enforcement, it is noteworthy that good remuneration package can deter members of the police force from being deviant. By mere appearances, one could really tell that most of the police officers in Nigeria are indeed ill-trained and ill-equipped and very much unready to conscientiously discharge their duties. This is due largely to the fact that most of the funds for police departments are usually diverted into the pocket of those who are supposed to appropriately administer the funds, and a paltry amount is left to cater for over 400,000 police officers in the country.

Though, the pay for the Nigeria Police Force has improved, accommodation and allowances remain a hydra-headed problem for many of the officers. As reported by the Open Society Justice in 2010, an analysis of the national budgets for the Nigeria Police since 1980 reveals a pattern of continuous under-funding. Other than 1983, under the administration of Shehu Shagari, the police with over 400,000 employees have perpetually been allocated an average budget that is lower than 5% in the national budget. El-Rufai (2012) revealed that the funds are mostly withheld; in most cases delayed and when eventually released, the headquarters and various commands hold back substantial amounts of the money and leaving a paltry amount for intelligence gathering, street patrols, and policing.

v. Discussion and Conclusion

This article has attempted to examine some of the factors influencing corruption within the Nigeria Police Force. There are embedded implications of police deviance and corruption on the police institution, Nigerian economy and the distrust provoked among the public. These key points can be deduced from the review of literature: (a) it is the act of corruption itself that harm the society and not the personal gain or benefits of the officers. Meanwhile, it is the personal gain that drives the officer to commit the harmful act of corruption; (b) police deviance and corruption is an ongoing phenomenon in Nigeria that urgently have to be addressed; (c) despite some transformational measures to curb this cancer, police leaders are not doing enough as many of them have been indicted in corrupt practices; (d) corruption is not a problem unique to officers at the lower rank of the ladder but have been found at all levels of the police organization; (e) it is the public that bears the brunt of police corruption through unlawful arrest, harassments at checkpoints, and even detention if they chose not to part way with the solicited bribe from errant police officers; (f) police corruption has not done any good to the image and integrity of the police force and the perception of corruption within the force has provoked public distrust and disrespect towards the police. The question is whether Nigeria can overcome the protracted and cancerous conundrum of corruption in its police force. The way forward might be to

begin to look at the aforementioned recommendations which can act as a precursor to any logical short-term and long-term democratic reform to address corruption within the police organization. Corruption, though difficult to eradicate, yet, possible to be significantly reduced.

References

- [1] Adebayo, D.O. (2005). Ethical attitudes and prosocial behavior in the Nigeria police, moderator effects of perceived organizational support and public recognition, Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management, Vol.28,2005,684-705.
- [2] Adebayo, D. O. (2005). Gender and attitudes toward professional ethics - A Nigeria police perspective. *African Security Review*, 14(2), 2005
- [3] Adigun, B. (2005, November 22). Former Nigerian police chief sentence to six months in jail for graft. Abuja, Nigeria: Associated Press.
- [4] Agbiboa, D.E. (2013). Protector or Predator? The embedded Problem of Police Corruption and Deviance in Nigeria. Administration and Society, Online First Version, 2013
- [5] Anon, (2001). Principles for Promoting Police Integrity. Washington. US Department of Justice.
- [6] Assimeng, M. (1986). *Social structure of Ghana*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.
- [7] Brownsberger, W. N. (1983). Development and governmental corruption: Materialism and political fragmentation in Nigeria. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 21, 215-233.
- [8] Conditt, J. H. (2001). "Institutional Integrity: The Four Elements of Self-Policing." *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*. 70(11): 18-22.
- [9] el-Rufai, N. A. (2012, March 2). Budget 2012(7): Reforming the police. ThisDay Live. Retrieved from <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/budget-2012-7-reforming-the-police/110436/>
- [10] Forkum, P. N. (2007). Police corruption in Cameroon and Uganda: a comparative analysis. Published master dissertation, University of Pretoria.
- [11] Human Rights Watch. (2010, August 17). *Everyone's in on the game*. Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2010/08/17/everyone-s-game-0>
- [12] IGP: Removal of roadblocks reduced corruption in police by 80 percent. (2013, May 4). *Kuramo News*. Retrieved from <http://kuramonews.com/index.php/news/world/item/7636-removal-of-roadblocks-reduced-corruption-in-police-by-80-per-cent-says-igp>
- [13] Intersociety Statement. (2008, November 17). *Official armed robbery: How Anambra based police personnel reportedly "Generated" N3.3 billion from illegal tolls in past nine years*. Retrieved from <http://www.intersocietyng.org/download/Afticle%20official%20crimes.pdf>
- [14] Ivkovic, S.K. (2005). *Controlling police corruption* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
- [15] Kleinig, J. (1996). *The Ethics of Policing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [18] Loree, D. (2006). *Corruption in Policing: Causes and Consequences - A Review of the Literature*. Available at: <http://dSPACE.africaportal.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/22286/1/Corruption%20in%20Policing%20Causes%20and%20Consequences%20A%20Review%20of%20the%20Literature.pdf?1>
- [19] Maljevic, & Drake. (2006). *Overtly about police and corruption*. Association of criminalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, pp.1-265.
- [20] Miller, B. (1999). Police Leadership in the 21st Century: Achieving & Sustaining Executive Success. *International Associations of police chief, Global leadership in policing*.
- [20] Newburn, T. (1999). Understanding and Preventing Police Corruption: Lessons from the Literature. London: Home Office RDS. *Police Research Series, Paper 110*.
- [21] Ogunidiya, I. S (2009). Political Corruption in Nigeria: Theoretical Perspectives and Some Explanations. *Anthropologist*, 11(4): 281-292
- [23] Othman, D. O (2012). Factors Influencing Police Corruption in Libya – A Preliminary Study. *International Journal of Economics and Management Sciences*, Vol. 2, No.2, pp. 25-35
- [24] Oliver, O. (2014). The Nigeria police force: Predicaments and Possibilities. *A NRN Working Paper No.15*, pp. 1-21
- [25] Orilade, T. (2004). The Many Deals of Inspector General Tafa. Retrieved from <http://www.unitedijaw.com/corruptionarticles00001003.htm>
- [26] Open Society Justice Initiative. (2010). *Criminal force: Torture, abuse, and extrajudicial killings by the Nigeria Police Force*. New York, NY: Open Society Institute.
- [27] Orole, A. F. (2013). Transformational Leadership and Perception of Corruption: An empirical examination within the Nigeria Police Force. An Unpublished MM Thesis, University of Kuala Lumpur.
- [28] Osayande (2008). Factors Inhibiting Police Performance in Nigeria. A Paper Presented at the Occasion Of The Retreat With The Theme: "Understanding The Mandate And Operations Of The Police Service Commission In Context Of The Rule Of Law"
- [29] Pfeifer, J. & Owens, K. M. B. (2002). "Police Leadership and Ethics: Training and Police Recommendations." *The Canadian Journal of Police and Security Services*. 1(2): 124- 135.
- [30] Punch, M. (1985), *Conduct Unbecoming: The Social Construction of Police Deviance and Control*, Tavistock, London.
- [31] Punch, M. (1996), *Dirty Business: Exploring Corporate Misconduct*, Sage, London.
- [32] Pyman, M. (2012). *Arresting Corruption in the Police: The global experience of Police corruption reform effort*, pg 4
- [33] Quah, J. S.T. (2007). Preventing police corruption in Singapore: the role of recruitment, training and socialization, *The Asia Pacific Journal of Administration*, Vol. 28, 2006, 59-75
- [34] Roebuck, J. B., & Barker, T. (1974). A typology of police corruption. *Social Problems*, 21, 423-437.
- [35] Sheidu, A. (1994). Annexure III, a position paper presented at the African leadership forum. *Police and Administration Society*, 1994. Retrieved from <http://www.africaleadership.org/rc/FHD%20police%20and%20society.pdf>
- [36] Tankebe, J. (2010). Public confidence in the police: Testing the effects of public experiences of police corruption in Ghana. *British Journal of Criminology*, 50, 296-319.
- [37] Transparency International (2001). The National Integrity System: Concept and Practice, a report by Transparency International for the Global Forum II on Fighting Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity
- [38] Transparency International (2013). Corruption perception index results available at: http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2013/results
- [39] Tulley, E. J. 1999. "Misconduct, Corruption, Abuse of Power: What Can the Chief Do?" *Blue Line Magazine*. 11(2): 22-25.
- [40] William, H. (2002). Core Factors of Police Corruption across the World. *Forum of Crime and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp.85-99

About Author (s):

Felix Akinwumi Orole is a leadership researcher at the University of Kuala Lumpur Business School and the Founder/CEO of Kamorole Consulting Sdn Bhd.

Kamisan Bin Gadar is a Professor of Islamic Banking and the Deputy Dean, University of Kuala Lumpur Business School

Murray Hunter is a Professor at the University of Malaysia Perlis, spending a lot of time consulting to Asian governments on community development and village biotechnology. Professor Hunter has been involved in Asia-Pacific business for the last 30 years.