

NIGERIA POLICE FORCE PERFORMANCE IN CRIME PREVENTION AND CONTROL: AN ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Government instrumentalities need to be assessed periodically with regards to their function and performance as a means of ensuring effective delivery of services. The current study used political economy model to assessed Nigeria Police performance in crime prevention and control from the perspectives of civilian population. The study utilized in- depth interview supplemented with focus group discussion to obtain data from the respondents. The study findings indicate that the socio political order prevalent in Nigeria inhibits effective police performance in addition to the fact that high level unemployment has made the crime situation overwhelming for the police to control effectively. The study recommends that for the police to effectively prevent and control crime, there is the need to improve police-public relationship, recognize the importance of different private security organizations to work side-by-side and hand –in –hand with the police and other government agencies of law enforcement like we have in other societies such as the United State of America.

INTRODUCTION

Government instrumentalities should be assessed periodically with regards to their function – performance (Igbinovia, 1982). First, the huge sums of public money expended on them capially and recurrently, require some adequate accounting in terms of delivery services. Second, the important nature of the functions assigned them means that ineffectiveness in performance will have adverse or debilitating consequences on the system. Third, assessment has the significant value of measuring the efficiency with which functions are performed, the degree of fit between means employed and ends sought, and the lost benefits involves in identification of obstacles to effectiveness and efficiency and the suggestion of adequate and appropriate remedies(Igbinovia, 1982; Karimu, 1999).

The need for assessment is particularly crucial in a developing country like Nigeria where we have new but simultaneously burgeoning social problems whose nature, patterns, and management demand new strategies; where instrumentalities and personnel concerned with these problems are relatively new and inexperienced; where a myriad of needs competes for very scarce resources with myriad of problems and where there is no long standing concern for research and professional competence to guide policy(Igbinovia, 1982; Karimu, 1999). The Nigeria Police Force as it is known is the major organ that is saddled with responsibility of crime prevention and control in the country, but the burgeoning crime and the sophistication with which it is executed makes the functions of the Nigeria Police Force very cumbersome and arduous. This situation is aggravating considering the low morale of members of the police force and the numerous external and internal problems confronting the agency which include

manpower shortages, lack of essential police equipment and quality of police personnel (Igbinovia, 1982; Karimu, 1999).

According to Igbinovia (1982) the external factors are those about which the police as an organization have little influence; for example, the overall budgetary allocations which are made in competition with other government organs, by politicians and bureaucrats. Such things as manpower shortages, lack of equipment, funds, etc. are problems that come to the police and limit their capacity to perform the task of crime prevention and control effectively (Igbinovia, 1982; Karimu, 1999). Yet other problems are much more amenable to police control. For example, police behavior and conduct during their work, the content and extent of the training they receive, the control superiors exercise over patrol men, and the degree of corruption within the agency, all constitute internal factors. Many of the internal factors are actually exacerbated or are brought about by the external factors (Igbinovia, 1982).

The crime problem in Nigeria has assumed a serious dimension despite the fact that official statistics down play the problem to a minimal level. This situation may explain why affluent people have resorted to hiring private security system which was hitherto foreign to the country to protect them, their family and property. Additionally, as a result of the crime situation the confidence people used to have in the police especially in the prevention and control of crime has waned considerably. No governmental agency in Nigeria except the defunct National Electric Power Authority has been so severely criticized as the Nigeria Police for not living to its responsibilities and expectations (Igbinovia, 1982; Karimu, 1999).

Police criticisms in Nigeria generally center on the quality of the police personnel, their ineffectiveness and inefficiency in carrying out their tasks especially in preventing and controlling crime, manpower shortages, poor police attitudes and response to citizens' lack of essential police equipment and facilities and constant conflict and tension between the police and the citizenry. Another area which has also resulted in inefficiency in the police ability to effectively carry out its primary assigned duties of crime prevention and control and which has further alienated the agency from the citizenry is the amount of corruption that exists in the agency.

The purpose of the current study is to enhance an understanding of policing in Nigeria. The current study may therefore have implications for criminologists, criminal justice practitioners, researchers, policy makers and administrators seeking viable research strategies to improve police efficiency towards service delivery in the country and other African countries. Therefore, this study contributes to existing literature by seeking to provide a better understanding of police as an important agent of law and order maintenance in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political economy model of social control as propounded by Chambliss (1975) seems to be the major theoretical framework usually employed by most police scholars to explain the effect of an existing political economy order on the means employed by the authorized agents of the state such as the police to secure conformity to rules and regulations. This model provides a general framework to understand the crime problem of a society and the effectiveness of the crime

control and prevention agency. In this respect, the model focus on how political and economy forces shape the contexts within which men of a crime prevention and control organization operate.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out among residents of three communities in three local governments of Osun State-namely: Ife Central, Ilesha West and Osogbo. The three local governments were purposely chosen because they have the headquarters of the three police Area Commands in the state. Besides, they have the three largest concentration of police men and officers in the state to make the study viable and representative.

This study utilized qualitative design. It combined in-depth interview and focus group discussion to obtained relevant information from the respondents. The respondents were requested to answer questions relating to police performance in crime prevention and control and as well as the problem facing them in performing their functions. As suggested by Leady and Ormord (2005), questions asked relate to facts about participants' perspectives and experiences about the phenomenon under study (police performance in crime prevention and control). The participants were given an opportunity to review their interview transcripts and confirm their accuracy. Multiple respondents were interviewed due to the fact that it has the advantage of ensuring that the validity of information provided by one respondent can be checked against that provided by other respondent (Meyer, 2001).

Twelve interviews with members of the communities were utilized for this research. For the Focus Group Discussion, six (6) were conducted with members of the communities, two in each communities utilized for the current study. In analyzing the data obtained, the contents from both the in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussion were analyzed and reference made where necessary (Creswell, 2009).

Interview I

The first respondent who is a community leader in the community believed that the major function of the police is to see to the welfare of the society. According to this respondent, the police is to monitor human affairs, take cognizance of human ideas, the ways people relate and in a situation where there are problems, it is the duty of the police to investigate. This respondent further stated that the police have not performed their duties effectively. Furthermore, the first respondent claimed that the social system has not allowed the police to do a good job although the police have their own lapses. To some extent these variables have created some problems for the police. The respondent went further to state that the police would not be able to fight the war against crime without the support of the public.

The respondent believed that the depressed economy in the Nigeria is one of the factors that has exacerbated the crime problem and further argued that those who are gainfully employed are earning incomes that cannot sustain them. The respondent indicated that the unemployment situation in the country has also deepened the crisis. With all these, the respondent posited that there is no way the police can perform effectively in preventing and controlling crime. The

respondent does not believe that the various anti-crime operations being established by various state government in the country could be effective in preventing and controlling crime because the idea of military performing police duties will not augur well for the society since internal security is purely police affair. This respondent affirmed that the military will use the weapons and structure available to them to intimidate, repress and oppress the people.

It is the argument of this respondent that the police as an organization is not as well equipped as the military and other para-military agencies in the country. This respondent argued further that the police themselves are not patriotic enough to perform effectively with the equipment at their disposal. Some other problems facing the police according to this respondent include poor remuneration which could prevent them from performing their duty diligently and as well as the fact that the system generally does not allow the police to be patriotic. The Nigeria society structure according to the respondent is very defective and as a result one should not expect optimum efficiency from the police organization.

Some of the measures to make the police effective according to the respondent include improved salaries or wages, better equipment and facilities and as well as the decentralization of the police organization in Nigeria. The respondent however, disagreed with the establishment of private security agencies to assist the police because it will not help the society but will only compound the problem since a struggle for power between the police and the private security agencies may ensue. This respondent further noted that the relationship between the police and the public is not cordial. It was further noted by this respondent that the society does not see the police as good human beings because of corruption, harassment and intimidation. The respondent concluded that the police is very hostile to members of the public unlike in the developed countries. This the respondent concluded has adversely affected the performance of the police in Nigeria.

Interview II

The second respondent who is a farmer noted that the major functions of the police are to protect law and order, prevent and control crime in the society. This respondent was however, of the opinion that the police have not performed their functions effectively. The second respondent added that the police alone can perform the function of crime prevention and control effectively in the society if the condition is conducive for them to operate. This respondent believed that due to the economic problem of the country which has led to unprecedented increase in unemployment, able bodied men are not gainfully employed nor employ at all with the result being the temptation to get involved in criminal activities. This situation has made the police work to be very difficult.

The second respondent added that the socio-political order has adversely influenced police performance because as an agency it is also underfunded. The respondent stated that the paramilitary agencies established to help in crime prevention and control all over the country are corrupt and in as much as the socio-political and economic condition remain as they are the crime rate will be high. The respondent suggested that there is the need for necessary facilities and equipment to be provided for the police to enable them to perform their functions effectively.

According to this respondent, private security is a welcome development because many people now lack confidence in the Nigeria police as a result of the pervasive corruption in the organization. Having private security, will go a long way in protecting the citizens' life and property since it will lower the crime rate because the private security organization will be able to remunerate their men very well to get the optimum performance from them. The respondent however cautioned that private security should be subjected to police control to guard against abuse of power. This respondent concluded by pointing out that police/public relationship should be strengthened to improve the performance of the police.

Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussion was conducted to supplement data collected from the in-depth interview and for effective discussions which would further tap civil public opinion on performance of police in crime prevention and control. Participants were asked some questions aimed at further tapping from respondents' views on the level of police performance. According to Kitzinger (1995) focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalizes on communication between research participants in order to generate data. Although group interviews are often used simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously, focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method. This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view (Kitzinger, 1995). The questions and corresponding answers were shown below:

Question 1

The respondents were asked to state extent the police have performed the role of crime prevention and control. Majority of the respondents believed that the police have performed below average in crime prevention and control.

Question II

Respondents were asked if police alone can effectively prevent and control crime. Majority of the responses expressed the view that police alone could not effectively prevent and control crime as they need the full support and cooperation of the general public.

Question III

Respondents were asked the factors responsible for the level of crime in the country. The respondents said that the socio-political and economic situation which have created high level unemployment have also exacerbated the level of crime. Other factors mentioned include society's lust for wealth, and the ineffectiveness on the part of the police and other criminal justice agents

Question IV

Respondents were asked the major problems confronting the police in crime prevention and control. Respondents unanimously named welfare problem, inadequate facilities and equipment, inadequate training, corruption and lack of public support.

Question V

Respondents were asked to suggest ways of making police more efficient in crime prevention and control. The respondents believed that provision of modern equipment, improved welfare and conditions of service, improvement in standard of education and training, and improvement in police/public relationship and introductions of private security will help to improve the ability of the police to effectively prevent and control crime.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has examined police performance in crime prevention and control from the perspectives of the citizenry that the police are expected to protect. It also assess some factors, which tends to work against efficient policing. The overall picture which has emerged is quite unsatisfactory, it calls for quite substantial improvement in the police methods, budgetary allocation, facilities and equipment, and police/public relationship. The various views on police, and crime prevention and control were highlighted in the literature review. In collecting data from the field, the major instrument used were in-depth interview supplemented with focus groups discussion to enrich the data for the current study (Kitzinger, 1995).

The findings of this study confirmed the reality of the problem of the Nigeria police which has resulted in its inability to effectively perform its primary role of crime prevention and control. The findings were also discussed in line with the objective of assessing police performance in crime prevention and control in Nigeria. The current study findings include the fact that the socio political order inhibits effective police performance according majority of the respondents. It was the argument of the respondents that the situation has resulted in high level unemployment which has driven many able bodied men into crime which is difficult or overwhelming for the police to deal with. The findings from the in-depth interview further indicated that the crime problem in the country has gone beyond what the police alone could control. Additionally, it is evident from the study that the creation of various para military agencies to assist the police in crime prevention and control will not likely solve the crime problem in the country.

One notable finding of this research is with regards to the fact that the nature of relationship between the police and the public which is negative has had adverse effect on police performance in relation to crime prevention and control in Nigeria. It is important to note that Odinkalu (2004) has also noted that an honest analysis of the working of the Nigeria police indicate that police is never a friend of the average Nigerian. Hence it is always difficult for the police to receive cooperation from the civil populace in their primary function of crime prevention and control.

Similarly, the responses from the in-depth interviews conducted showed that private security is a welcome development in the country since it is glaring that the police has not lived up to expectations of the general public in controlling the crime problem. However, most respondents pointed out that the private security needs to be properly supervised by the police or the government to guard against abuse of power. Nwizu (2004) has noted that police alone cannot effectively prevent and control crime in Nigeria. It is the conclusion of Nwizu (2004) that the organization require inter-agency cooperation for effective crime control in Nigeria.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

One important recommendation that has emerged from the current study is the need to improve the conditions of service of the Nigeria police to motivate them for the responsibilities attached to policing in a young democratic system such as Nigeria. A police/public relations committee has been established since 1964 and they are in place in most police commands. However, there is a necessity to foster and strengthen it as already indicated by Odinkalu (2004). Public talks, workshops, public enlightenment programs and seminars by the police and members of the civil society will help foster this relationship. The police/public relations unit also need to be overhauled to actually make information on police activities or general public affairs available to members of the public. They should adequately exploit publicity as a means of increasing cooperation between police and the public.

Corruption seems to have become institutionalized by policemen at check points where they collect money unashamedly in the full glare of passengers and other road users. Every checkpoint becomes by itself a toll gate, especially for commercial vehicles, but with the difference that the proceeds went into the private pockets of the policemen. As noted by previous studies on policing in Nigeria, a significant reduction in police corruption in Nigeria can be achieved if the momentum for reform is maintained and by eliminating as many situations as possible which currently exposed policemen to corruption, and by controlling exposure where corruption hazards are unavoidable (Igbinovia, 1982; Karimu & Osunyikanmi, 2012). Other measures should include elimination of certain fiscal functions, good leadership and that recruitment personnel investigations must be instituted (Igbinovia, 1985).

For the police to effectively prevent and control crime, there is the need to recognize the importance of different private security organizations to work side-by-side and hand-in-hand with the police and other government agencies of crime prevention and control as obtained in other societies like the United States and Canada. As such, if our society is to be crime free, the government is advised to give some legal backings to the existing private security institutions. In addition, relationship between police and other agencies with whom they are expected to come into contact and to cooperate should be improved for effective performance in crime prevention and control.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It was difficult obtaining much information from the civil population utilized for this study because of the fear that whatever information provided could be used against them in the nearest future. This attitude could have been said to be due to the lack of adequate knowledge of the workings of the police organization. Coupled with this is the fact that most people dread the police and as a result will do anything to avoid even talking about them. To ensure that the participants fully participated in this study, they were informed of their rights and that their anonymity and confidentiality will be protected by ensuring that any information provided will be used only for the current study (Creswell, 2009). The respondents were also informed that no information obtained will have reference to their names.

This study was carried in one state of Nigeria, therefore information obtained only relies on information with citizens of this state supplemented with information from journals and internet-based documented source materials. The participants' selection was based on convenience samples and therefore suffers from lack of representation, sampling and selection bias (Lanier & Briggs, 2014). Also, due to the fact that the study was confined to citizens of a state in Nigeria, caution should be exercised in generalizing results to citizens of other states in the country (Creswell, 2009; Lanier & Briggs, 2014). It is therefore suggested that future research should involve population of other states in Nigeria. Also, future research might considered quantitative design which was not used in this study.

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