

Crime as a Threat to National Security: A Case Study of Benin City from 1999- 2014

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Abstract

This research was designed to examine crime as a source of threat to national security since the inception of the Fourth Republic, using Benin City as a case study. Four research questions were raised to enable the researcher to obtain information from respondents. One hundred and sixty copies of a questionnaire were used in the analysis. The paper sought to identify the most prevalent crime in the state, what measures to ameliorate the situation, and the effectiveness of such measure.

To answer the research questions, personal interviews with respondents were conducted and questionnaires were also administered. Also textbooks, journals and publications from the Nigerian Police Force were sourced for the paper. The analysis was based on an adaptation of Robert Agnew's 1992 general strain theory. The data collected was then analyzed to ascertain how crime constituted a security threat in the study area.

Findings show that crime was on the increase despite the presence of security agencies and neighborhood watch. And the main factors responsible for this increase in crime are the high rate of unemployment, increase in population and the “get rich quick” syndrome. It was recommended therefore that crime prevention should be integrated into social and educational policies, and policies should be introduced to promote moral values, monitor adherence to laws, and strengthen responses to crime.

Keywords: Security, Crime, Get rich quick syndrome, Criminality Street violence

Introduction

Crime is a highly complex phenomenon that changes across cultures and time. Crime in Nigeria is a salient fact, an integral part of the risks we face in everyday life. In both scholarly and public opinion, crime is associated with harm and violence; harm to individuals, destruction of property, and the denial of respect to people and institutions (Morrison, 2010). Crime operates as a core concept in

modern society. It seems like a common sense category but this is only a superficial appearance. Its widespread use, moreover, makes it necessary to ask what boundaries can be placed around the use of the term 'crime'. What does its use mean for us, individually, as speakers of the word, and collectively, as social groups that use the concept? Who has the power to make their claims as to what is a crime, and by what processes do these claims stick? These questions raise issues of social power and of popular acceptance, of objectivity and relativism the question now remains: is there a settled or 'objective' way of calling things crime that is accepted across social groups and different territorial institutions or must any use of the term crime be subjective, perhaps accepted within a particular locality or group, but leading to relativism when other perspectives are taken into account? What are the role, function, and consequences of our reliance upon 'crime' (and its related concepts, such as 'punishment') as an organizing concept in social life?

Crime simply defined is the breach of rules or laws for which some governing authority (via mechanisms such as legal system) can ultimately prescribe a conviction. Different societies may each define crime and crimes differently, in different localities (states, local and international), at different stages of their development.

Nigeria has had an elected Federal Government only 17 of its 51 years since independence in 1960; experiencing a civil war in 1967-70 (Nafziger, 1983); persistent military repression; and a series of irregular regime transfers through overthrows, assassinations, and coups. This has led to the submission that the consequences of frequent military intervention in Nigerian politics have been devastating. They include human rights repression, militarization of society and the political landscape, abuse of the rule of law, gross indiscipline, arbitrary proliferation of sub national States and local government areas, aggravation of ethnic politics, destruction of the productive sectors of the economy and monumental corruption, and poor quality of economic policy advice (Omeje, 2006).

Yet the period of the fourth republic, since the return to civilian rule in May 1999, has seen only limited improvement in crime and security. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (2007) estimated "that at least 50,000 people have been killed in various incidents of ethnic, religious and communal violence since May 1999. This gives Nigeria a casualty rate from internal conflict that is one of the highest in the world – and yet the country is not fighting a civil war." Federal security forces have clashed with militias, criminal gangs, and civilians from the

Niger Delta over the benefits of petroleum, while deaths from sectarian conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria have killed tens of thousands since 2001 (Federal Office of Statistics, 2003). In Benin City, the story is not any different as crime such as kidnapping, human trafficking, armed robbery and rape has become replete in the state especially with the inception of the Fourth Republic (Ibid, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Crime and street violence cross borders, ideologies, classes, ages and gender in every known society. In many societies, ordinary crime and victimization have come to be perceived not merely as a high priority problem requiring technical resources (International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP), (2003). A new discourse has developed, emphasizing crime as a threat to individual personal security and a potential source of state instability. Rising crime leads to enhanced fear of criminal violence in particular, the fear that one may suffer from attack of robbery or sexual violence or kidnapping and surges in criminality can be expected to lead some segments of society to support extreme measures that may violate rights, while many others may remain silent in the face of abuses committed against criminal suspects. In the context of rising crime and insecurity, other actors such as the media often play a critical role.

This research therefore, using Benin City as a case study, from the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, seeks to probe into this sense of insecurity. It equally seeks to examine how it is produced, fostered and, hopefully how it can be ameliorated. In particular the research seeks to discover what strategies have been most and least effective in defending rights in climates dominated by fear and insecurity.

Conceptual Discourse

The Dynamics of Rising Crime in Transitional Societies: The problems that crime creates for human rights organizations in different societies vary considerable, (Alienigenasin Rio de Jannerio and Amnesty International, 2013).

Any relatively stable political situation (democratic or authoritarian) will develop some set of arrangements for governing security, in which the state provides policing and justice services and carries a responsibility for upholding the rule of law. These arrangements will deliver some level of security. Typically, the distribution of security services is correlated with wealth — the wealthy tend to receive greater security than the poor. While levels of order/disorder vary, both from place to place and from time to time within and across countries, in any

particular context, some level of disorder is likely to be recognized as normal. This level will come to be accepted as a benchmark for assessing the degree to which any new regime effectively provides security.

Police forces in authoritarian states tend to suppress not only dissent but also criminality, or at a minimum, they are widely perceived as being effective at crime control. Of course, this control — to the extent that it is not simply a misperception — is usually achieved at a high cost to individual rights and the rule of law. As the case studies demonstrate, crime control in the states examined focused on repressive and frequently brutal methods, including systematic torture and summary execution of suspects. When governance regimes change, this has consequences for the institutional arrangements that have been in place — that is, for the way in which resources network are mobilized. One common consequence is that existing institutional arrangements either breakdown or are dismantled more quickly than it is possible to institutionalize new arrangements (Call & Stanley, 2001).

In the case of Nigeria, one of the first items on the Obasanjo government, which marked the inception of the first republic, agenda on assumption of office was to disband the various military-led, anti-crime taskforces and tribunals and transfer their roles to the regular police. Some of these anti-crime taskforces went by such militaristic names as: Operation Sweep (Lagos State), Operation Wedge (Ogun State), Operation(chase) (Oyo State), Operation Wipe (Edo State), Operation Storm (Imo State), Operation Watch (Kwara State), Operation Flush (Rivers State), Operation Keep Away Criminals (Kebbi State), Operation Scorpion (Adamawa State) and so forth .

In Nigeria, as in other transitional states, the military left the scene with their superior guns, bullet-proof vests, high-performance vehicles, life insurance and higher motivation. The police that succeeded them lacked resources and the government was not in a haste to equip them fully. It did not take long for the consequence to be noticed on the streets in terms of increased crime.

Economic liberalization and privatization programmes intensify the surge in crime in transitional societies. Economic liberalization unleashes a multiplicity of factors and creates new wealth opportunities that are not readily accessible or open to all. It also creates in its wake a mass of dismissed employees from privatized state monopolies, causing an increase in social crime. According to (Shaw 2001),

“Post-authoritarian and post-conflict societies are increasingly subject to structural changes in their economies. While a number of approaches are followed in this regard, transitional societies tend to share the experience of the changes in the ownership structure (privatization), the multiplication of economic actors and influences of globalization. Many transitional societies also seek to redefine the role of the state by reducing or altering its role in economic activity. In such states, the access to newly created opportunities is not equal for all. This factor creates contradictory pressures”

Robert Agnew General Strain Theory (GST)

This theory posits that as people experience strain or stress, they become upset and engage in crime as a result. They may engage in crime to reduce or escape from the strain they are experiencing. For example, they may engage in violence to end harassment from others, they may steal in order to reduce financial problems or they may run away from home in order to avoid abusive parents. They may also engage in crime to seek revenge against those who have wronged them and may engage in crime to obtain illicit drugs, which they use to make themselves feel better.

Robert Agnew, in his adaptation points to certain types of strains not considered, which may likely lead to crime. He describes two major categories of strain that contribute to crime: others prevent you from achieving your goal; others take things that you value or present you with negative or noxious stimuli. He states further that though strain may result from a variety of goals, failure to achieve these three related goals, money, status/respect and for adolescent-autonomy from adults. He notes that money is perhaps the central goal in all societies as people, both rich and poor are encouraged to work hard so that they might make a lot of money. Further, money is necessary to buy many things we want including the necessities of life. People however can legally get the money they need by working for it. Where it is not possible to get money through the legal means, people often resort to illegal ways of getting it. The desire for status and respect is closely related to the desire for money. People want to be positively regarded by others and treated respectfully by others. In order to achieve this status a certain level of affluence which can be procured by money is needed. People tend to engage in crime in order to achieve this status of affluence.

Merton's Anomie/Strain Theory

This is a concept developed by the founding father of Sociology, Emile Durkheim, to explain the breakdown of social norms that often accompanies rapid social change. American sociologist, Robert Merton (1938) drew on this idea to explain

the criminality and deviance in the United State of America. His theory argues that where there is a gap between the cultural goals of a society (e.g., material wealth, status) and the structural means to achieve these (education and employment), this strain between means and goals results in frustration.

Richard, 1995, considering increased crime in the former Soviet Union, asserts that the incentives to act illegally increase because of the confused situation during transition which reduces probabilities of detection and conviction. Equally, social disapproval of crime and unsettled conditions may also lead entrepreneurs to engage in illegal activities because the cost of conducting business through official channels may become prohibitively expensive. It is also difficult to ascertain whether a more democratic environment increases the visibility of certain crimes or creates conditions in which new forms of crime appear.

In many societies which transit from one form of government to another or from one economic system to another, the question that often arise are: Has armed robbery or assassination always been frequent but is only now reported? Or have such crimes become more frequent? Added to the above is the issue of displacement of criminal activity. Has it moved from poor to rich neighborhoods or from one part of the country to another? And what role do the media play?

It is likely that the perception of increased criminality in post-transition societies is due, at least in part, to the removal of restrictions on the media that are thus freer to report on criminality than during the authoritarian period. An additional element of criminal underreporting in authoritarian and totalitarian societies concerns the abuses of authorities themselves (which constitute crimes) and are rarely registered in official data. Indeed, authoritarian regimes frequently sanitise and inflate the effectiveness of the police. This phenomenon is particularly acute in the former Soviet Union, where research has demonstrated that the state-controlled media followed specific directives requiring that stories about criminality be censored, or, alternatively, that they present cases as solved by efficient police work (Los, 2002).

In Nigeria, a series of high profile killings and robberies of influential people's homes followed the inauguration of the Obasanjo government in 1999. The local media provided extensive coverage of these incidents, fuelling the belief that crime rates were rising dramatically. Rights activists in Brazil report a similar phenomenon when high profile incidents of crime victimize upper-middle class or upper class residents in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. These crimes are followed by a barrage of reports about 'crime waves' triggered by single incidents. The

disproportionate media attention to crime in these instances often reflects the status of the victims rather than an actual rise in crime. Official data are frequently biased in favour of registering crimes committed against middle and upper class victims who often report incidents (where the less affluent might not) for a variety of reasons, including insurance purposes.

The sudden change from military rule to civilian rule in Nigeria was unanticipated and political forces had not prepared for it adequately. Criminal groups were thus able to take advantage of that situation. Major General David Jemibewon, former Minister of Police Affairs, corroborated this view when he stated in an opening address he presented at a conference on transitions and policing:

The sudden change that the transition from the long years of military rule to a democratic dispensation brought on the country (Nigeria) was so monumental and managing it was daunting....The Nigeria Police Force that we inherited could be said to have suffered gravely from lack of such regulatory institutions and lack of focus.... Our new found democracy became to some extent a source of insecurity and lawlessness, as rights were misconstrued and exercised without restraint. Views which were considered anti-government and hitherto suppressed out of fear, under, the military, were now freely expressed and often times violently too. Militant groups that were agitating for one thing or the other, often times armed, sprang up in some parts of the country. The police, who were not adequately prepared for the violent and criminal eruptions that heralded our democratic birth, were therefore stretched to the maximum of their capability” (2001).

Crime can also be promoted, particularly in periods of transition, when security apparatus (used by previous repressive governments to control political dissent and crime) are dissolved and replaced by formal agencies that lack the capacity to cope due to neglect by the ousted government. The gap that is created between the legitimate effort to reform and the capacity to cope in the new situation is often exploited by criminal elements. Other factors come into play as well. For example, armed groups may easily transform themselves into criminal gangs.

One of the first acts of new governments is often to dismantle the old security structures (Call & Stanley, 2001). Sometimes, this creates a security vacuum. This gap leads to widespread demands for more effective order maintenance. It can and often does trigger considerable anger among those who have been victimized and who attribute their suffering to this vacuum. This attribution may or may not be accurate; the point is that it is felt. Such collective anger shapes the nature of the demand for more effective order maintenance. One common way in which it does

this is through a demand for retribution (Arie, 2001). Given the development of this vacuum, state policy-makers in transitional societies are charged with the difficult task of assuring citizen security while not allowing police and other security forces to revert to abusive practices characteristic of the pre-transitional society. This challenge is rarely met. In many circumstances, authorities turn a blind eye towards continued abusive practices. In other instances, they may actually encourage the police to continue to crack down on crime, knowing that in practice this will entail serious rights abuses. This is in line with the work of John Dollard (1939) on "Frustration- Aggression Displacement which states that frustration causes aggression but when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target. Frustration being a condition that exists when a goal-response suffers interference while aggression is an act whose goal-response is injury to an organism or organism-surrogate.

Methodology

The Study Area

Benin City is the capital of Edo State. It is made up of three local government areas namely, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo and Egor. The basic commercial and economic activity for the rural part of Benin is farming, with the main food crops being yam, cassava, plantain and cocoyam as well as beans, rice, okra, peppers and gourds. Oil palms are cultivated for wine production and palm oil, and kola trees for their nuts which are used for hospitality. Cash crops include rubber and timber trees. The Urban community of Benin City is dominated by government in the formal sector and trade in the informal sector, with half of the urban work force engaged in clerical, and especially sales and service production. Benin is also well known for its craft guild, such as carpenters, carvers, brass casters, leather workers and blacksmiths.

Methodology

Data for the study was collected through a questionnaire. Both the random and the stratified sampling methods were used in the distribution of copies of the questionnaire. In all, 160 copies were administered, 158 were recovered and 150 were found fit for use. They were used to obtain information concerning the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and information regarding the state of security and the perception of the respondents to security issues.

Presentation of Data

The data obtained from both the questionnaire and police records were tabulated and their percentages calculated. Of the 160 copies of the questionnaire, 158 were retrieved and 150 were found fit for the analysis, representing 93.75% of the

original sample size of the three local government areas that making up the Benin metropolis.

Table 1: Factors that Foster Crime

Factors	Oredo	%	Ikpoba-Okha	%	Egor	%	Grand Total	%
Unemployment	20	40	30	60	18	36	68	45
Urbanization	5	10	2	4	6	12	13	9
Civilization	3	6	-----	---	2	4	5	3
Media/ICT	16	32	8	16	12	24	36	24
Increase in arms	4	8	10	20	10	20	24	16
Hunger	2	4	-----	---	2	4	4	3
Total	50	100	50	100	50	100	150	100

Source: Field work, 2011

From **Table 1** it can be seen that 45% of the respondents agreed that unemployment is the major factor that causes crime. 24% blamed media and computer technology for the increase in crime in the study area.

Table 2: Crime Occurrences in Community since 1999

Occurrences	Oredo	%	Ikpoba-Okha	%	Egor	%	Grand Total	%
Very high	15	30	20	40	30	60	65	43
High	25	50	20	40	15	30	60	40
Low	5	10	5	10	5	10	15	10
Very low	5	10	5	10	---	---	10	7
Non-Existence	--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Total	50	100	50	100	50	100	150	100

Source: Field work, 2011.

Table 2 shows that majority agree that since 1999 which marked the inception of the fourth republic there has been an increase in the occurrence of crime in their respective communities.

Table3: Distribution of the most Prevalent Crime in the Community

Crime	Oredo	Ikpoba-Okha	Egor	Grand Total	%
Armed Robbery	10	12	8	30	20
Theft and Stealing	7	3	5	15	10
Burglary	5	3	4	12	8
House Breaking	5	4	5	14	9
Store Breaking	2	2	3	7	4
Rape	3	5	6	14	9
Kidnapping	6	8	3	17	11
Arson	---	---	---	---	---

OBT.by false presence	2	2	4	8	5
Affray(2 fighting)	4	3	---	7	4
Defilement	---	2	2	4	4
Breach of Peace	---	---	2	2	3
Murder/Assassinations	2	4	3	9	6
Assault	4	2	5	11	7
Total	50	50	50	150	100

Source: Field Work, 2011.

Table 3 indicates that armed robbery with 20% and kidnapping with 11% are the most prevalent crimes in the communities.

Table 4: Knowledge of Community Policing in Communities

Knowledge	Oredo	Ikpoba-Okha	Egor	Grand Total	%
Yes	40	15	30	85	57
No	10	35	20	65	43
Total	50	50	50	150	100

Source: Field Work 2011

Table 4 indicates that majority of the respondents are aware that there is the existence of community policing. Some of the respondents even stated that they often participated in neighborhood watch.

Table 5: Distribution of Perceived Effectiveness of Community Policing

Level of Effectiveness	Oredo	Ikpoba-Okha	Egor	Grand Total	%
Very Effective	16	8	4	28	19
Effective	20	10	16	46	30
Not Effective	8	18	22	48	32
Does not Exist	6	14	8	28	19
Total	50	50	50	150	100

Source: Field Work 2011

Table 5 shows that majority of the respondents 32% believe that community policing is not effective, 19% have no knowledge of their existence. The implication of this is that most residents do not feel safe in their community.

Table 6: Presence of Police and Crime Occurrence

Responses	Oredo	Ikpoba-Okha	Egor	Grand Total	%
Yes	10	14	12	36	24
No	40	36	38	114	76
Total	50	50	50	150	100

Source: Field Work 2011

A majority of the respondents do not believe that the presence of the police has any effect on the occurrence of crime in the communities. This shows the high rate of insecurity felt by the residents of the various communities. The reason that could be attributed to this feeling of insecurity is that the armed robbers come with weapons or arms that are more sophisticated than what the police men are equipped with.

Police Records

The various zonal police stations and other police commands in the study area were visited in order to obtain a comprehensive report. It was noted however that the cases that were documented were those that were reported to the police. The Police Public Relations officer (PPRO) maintained that the records were only of those reported and that many crimes are not reported.

Table 7: Combined Police Report for Edo State from 1999-2010

A	Offence against Persons	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1	Murder	8	10	20	40	54	73	86	85	68	57	62	50
2	Suicide	5	6	10	8	15	13	6	15	14	8	13	13
3	Assault occ. harm	105	220	350	290	420	704	676	720	452	380	291	500
4	Assault	2500	1200	888	760	3800	1817	1931	1630	881	574	422	900
5	Child stealing	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
6	Rape and indecent assault	30	30	34	25	40	94	90	134	114	81	87	15
7	Kidnapping	20	28	25	20	40	23	14	22	15	3	105	280
B Offence against Property													
1	Armed robbery	150	89	173	169	200	147	159	163	79	72	100	240
2	Theft and stealing	1500	1644	1520	10870	1000	1337	1543	1513	1061	760	430	1090
3	Burglary	156	146	192	140	135	146	182	188	112	102	97	80
4	House breaking	120	80	62	100	90	136	116	136	85	59	71	50
5	Store breaking	20	32	46	26	15	91	74	58	69	432	68	30
6	Obt. by false pretence	250	150	268	273	295	350	255	425	287	240	195	200
7	Forgery	2	4	4	8	9	3	16	212	9	4	8	8
8	Unlawful possession of arms	140	112	100	72	81	106	47	84	58	19	20	38
9	Arson	50	22	18	12	18	14	11	6	15	6	9	8
C Other Offences													
1	Breach of peace	415	---	4	---	125	312	327	379	---	155	156	160
2	Perjury												---
3	Bribery and corruption												---
4	Escaping from lawful custody												---
5	Human trafficking				4	2							10
6	Affray (two fighting)												4
7	Defilement (minor girl)												6

Source: Police Archives, National Police Headquarters, Abuja. (2010).

Police records indicate that there is indeed a rise in crime. However they have made and are still making efforts to tackle the security issue in Edo State as is occasioned by a drop in cases reported

Recommendations

The rising tide in crime, which threatens the very core of our security, raises a lot of debate on not only the effectiveness of the state to provide security for its citizens, a situation which undermines the sovereignty of the state, but also the ability of the state to protect its citizens. In line with the World Health Organization the following recommendations are made:

1. Create, implement and monitor a national action plan for crime prevention.
2. Enhance capacity for collecting data on crime by defining priorities for, and support research on, the causes, consequences, costs and prevention of crime, promote primary prevention responses and strengthen responses for victims of crime.
3. Integrate crime prevention into social and educational policies, and thereby promote gender and social equality
4. Increase collaboration and exchange of information on crime prevention by promoting and monitoring adherence to laws and other mechanisms to protect human rights.
5. Seek practical, internationally agreed responses to the global drugs and global arms trade.

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