

JUNGLE JUSTICE: AN INDICATOR OF INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESS

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Abstract

Jungle justice is a disturbing phenomenon. Its form of mob justice where people take the law into their own hands, often resulting in violent and deadly consequences as one of the reasons the country is tagged as one of the unsafe nations in the continent. The data shows some critical indicators of jungle justice in Nigerian society, including institutional weakness, the decline in institutional trust, and the failure of the state to provide effective governance, justice, and security to its citizens. This study is anchored on the theory of social disorganization. The study recommends implementing anti-jungle justice policies to revalidate the values of the rule of law and foster a stable society, and the study concludes with the revitalization of Nigeria's dying economy as an inevitable tool to the peaceful society, socio-economic, and development.

Introduction

The accelerating rate of jungle justice in most of Nigerian cities is alarming, while the practices continue to attract attention globally despite the presence of institutions such as police, judiciary, human rights, and others. Jungle justice is a phenomenon where individuals or groups take the law into their own hands, which has become a recurring decimal in Nigerian society. This trend, characterized by violent and deadly consequences, has raised concerns about the effectiveness of institutions in maintaining law and order. The prevalence of jungle justice in Nigeria is a stark indicator of institutional weakness, highlighting urgent attention and reform. Although the reoccurring lynching of suspect(s) in a crime scene has become a routine in the Nigerian system as a result of denying swift response by the security operatives to save people from the crime scene like threats, loss of life and properties, maim, kidnaping, insurgency, arson, and lots more (Ilori, 2020).

However, the reoccurrence of mob actions or jungle justice has shown that the police institution and the Nigerian legal systems do not enjoy legitimacy from the masses. Therefore, in the wake of any security threats, people prefer to harm or lynch the suspected person or persons without due recourse for state security operatives to take charge. Although this is a direct violation of human rights by taking illegal actions against even on a suspected

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criminal without following the due process, the disappointment in the swift response of Nigeria security services, especially the Nigeria Police when called upon to rescue from a crime scene and lack of trust in the Nigeria legal system has put into the public hands the legitimacy of community informal policing of their environs, which oftentimes leads to jungle justice. This has become a major security problem in most of developing countries like Nigeria as one of the contributors to the present state of Nigeria being categorized, as under-developed nation despite its abundance of resources in both materials and human.

In almost all Nigerian communities, there where ethnic vigilantes, and rarely a day goes by without news of gruesome scenes of mob justice. However, most notable ethnic vigilante in Nigeria include O'odua People's Congress, (OPC) as a Yoruba vigilante/social group in South West Nigeria, the Bakassi Boys in the South East of Nigeria and the Hisbah Vigilante Group in the Northern part of the country, and there are other types of ethnic and neighborhood vigilante groups in various Nigerian societies. Indeed, the acceleration rate of the events of mob action or jungle justice has demonstrated that the police institution and the legal systems do not enjoy legitimacy from the masses. Although, there are strong indicators of relative socio-economic inequality while assessing justice and public trust in Nigeria's police indeed, is a relatively problematic (Martire, K. 2010).

Nigeria's institutional framework, including the justice system, law enforcement agencies, and governance structures, has been plagued by corruption, ineptitude, and inefficiency. The country's justice system, in particular, has been criticized for its slow pace, lack of transparency, and susceptibility to manipulation. These weaknesses have created an environment in which citizens feel compelled to take the law into their own hands, resulting to jungle justice syndrome.

Conceptual Clarification

Jungle justice: refers to the extra-judicial punishment given to the perceived offenders by a mob or group of individuals. This phenomenon is often triggered by a sense of frustration and mistrust in the formal justice system. In Nigeria, jungle justice has manifested in various forms, including lynching, burning, punishment and other forms of violent.

Police: The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is a law enforcement agency responsible for maintaining law and orders, including the protection of citizens and the prevention of crimes. Indeed, Nigeria's police have been accused of perpetrating human rights abuses, including extra-judicial killings (Amnesty International, (2020). The lack of accountability and transparency (Omotola, 2015). While, the Police personnel's also lamenting their poor remunerations and poor conditions of the services from the government, to the extent that they use their poor personal income to equip and provide their needs (Omotola, 2015).

Institutions: According to the Penguin Dictionary of sociology, the social institution is a social practice that is regularly and continuously repeated, sanctioned, and maintained by social norms and plays a significant role in the social structure. However, social institutions can also be seen as organized patterns of beliefs and behaviors that are centered on the basis of social needs or established patterns of life. The major segments of social institutions include family, education, economy, religion, media, military, police, judiciary, and government.

The institution is like an engine that sustains society, while the effectiveness of these institutions reflects on the general structure of the whole society. However, the weakness or ineffectiveness of one segment of these institutions always have effects on the others, while the instability in the Nigerian economic sector has been indicted as responsible for the ineffectiveness and weakness of most institutions.

Judiciary: The Judiciary is one of the three branches of government responsible for the interpretation of laws, dispute resolution, administration of justice, and protection of human rights. All these functions are tantamount to security and justices in society and the nation, but in the present state of Nigeria's system, all these functions

of judiciary have been undermined and eroded due to the masses' lack of confidence in the Nigerian legal system. However, the Nigerian judiciary system has also been criticized for its complicit handling of human rights abuses (Amnesty International 2020). The Nigerian judicial system also accuses of being an instrument to extra-judicial killings (Omotola, 2015).

Vigilantism: Vigilantism has sparked intense debate among scholars, yielding diverse perspectives. According to the Longman dictionary, vigilantism refers to individuals who punish criminals and prevent crime, often due to perceived police ineffectiveness. Fourchard (2008) defined vigilantism as community-driven organizations that enforce norms, maintain law and order and prevent crimes in the absence of effective state action. There are three primary types of vigilantism:

1. **Vigilante Groups:** These groups operate with specific goals and targets and are often driven by ethnic or religious motivations.
2. **Individual Vigilantism:** This type of vigilantism involves individuals working alone to prevent crime and maintain justice and equity in society.
3. **Community-Based Vigilantism:** This form of vigilantism is employed by communities to protect their neighborhoods from crime and threats.

Vigilantism is not unique to Nigeria alone, it has been existed for decades in various forms and is popular in many countries, including China, Russia, Japan, and others. In Nigeria, vigilantism has a long history that dates back to pre-colonial times. Various ethnic groups in Nigeria have vigilante organizations, such as the Agbekoyas, Oodua People Congress (OPC), Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, Arewa People Congress (APC), and Hisbah. In recent years, vigilantism has gained popularity in many Nigerian cities because of perceived police ineffectiveness. Although, most vigilante staff members in Nigeria society join the service due to the inability to secure their desired job because of high rate of unemployment in the society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Disorganization Theory developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay. The theory suggests that crime is more likely to occur in areas where social institutions are disorganized or ineffective. Social disorganization theory argues that when institutions such as the economy, families, schools, justice, police, and community organizations are weak or absent, it can lead to a lack of social control and increase the tendency of crimes. In Nigerian context, Social Disorganization Theory employed in the context of the institutions ineffectiveness in committing crimes. Therefore, the ineffectiveness of Nigeria's economy as an (institution) has been indicted for responsible for a high rate of unemployment while unemployment causes poverty, as poverty reflects and renders other institutions weak and ineffective, the institutions such as family, education, religious, police, judiciary, and government were unable to perform their role effectively, as observed by Adebayo (2013), that economic hardship often pushes individuals into crime due to deprivation and a desperate need to survive. Nigeria's high unemployment rate has fueled numerous social vices. The financial weakness of the government has hindered its ability to provide reliable and effective security to its citizens, while the ineffectiveness of Nigeria's judicial system and lack of trust in the Nigerian police and legal system, prompting the public to seek alternative means of securing their environments.

The economic roots of institutional effectiveness

The weakness of Nigeria's economic sector has far-reaching implications for other institutions in the country as a foundation on which all other societal structures depend on in other to be function. The economy plays a pivotal role in shaping the performance of key institutions such as family, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, the education system, religious organizations, and the government. The impact of economic instability on institutional

effectiveness. A struggling economy, characterized by financial instability and widespread poverty directly affects the ability of these institutions to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. The consequences of economic instability are multifaceted, including weak financial capacity of the family that leads to increase the economic hardship and social instability. It also undermines the effectiveness of law enforcement and the judiciary, while the inadequate funding for law enforcement agencies and the judiciary limits their effectiveness in maintaining security and enforcing justices. The weakness of economic sector compromising the education system. The inadequate funding for the education sector causing the declining in education standard and quality, infrastructure, poorly compensated teachers and a widening gap in access to quality education. Furthermore, the economic downturn has cause some religious institutions to shift their focus toward prosperity messages rather than addressing societal issues. Indeed, the weakness of Nigeria's economic sector had had a profound impact on the country's institutional framework.

Unemployment and Poverty in Nigeria

Unemployment and poverty remain global issues, while Africa, particularly, Nigeria faces significant challenges. Despite efforts by many countries to address unemployment, Nigeria's government has been criticized for not doing enough to tackle the problem. The country's economic crisis has severely impacted the manufacturing sector, a key driver of employment, leading to high unemployment rates and poverty. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines unemployment as the number of economically active individuals without work who are available and seeking employment. In Nigeria, the unemployment rate stood at 33.3% in Q4 2020, with a significant jump of 4.1% in 2023, according to the Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics and the Nigeria Labor Force Survey (NLSF). This trend has been attributed to various factors, including poor government policies, the neglect of the agricultural sector, and poor enabling environment.

Unemployment has severe consequences for Nigeria's development and well-being. It contributes significantly to poverty, which in turn drives deviant behaviors among Nigerians. Addressing unemployment is crucial to promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, and improving overall well-being in Nigeria.

Poverty, insecurity and crimes in Nigeria

The increasing crime rate worldwide is a pressing concern. Crime is a pervasive issue that transcends beyond the geographical boundaries, economic systems, and political ideologies. Every country grapples with one form of crime or the others, while the severity and variation of these crimes largely dependent on the effectiveness of internal security management mechanisms (Institutions).

In developing countries, particularly, Nigeria, poverty has been identified as a primary driver of social vices. Adejumola and Tayo-Olajubulu (2009) subjected that poverty is a significant contributor to various forms of crimes, including armed robbery, prostitution, political thuggery, corruption, kidnaping, and extra-judicial killing. The prevalence of poverty has become a major obstacle to development of Africa, including Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the high rate of insecurity has become a recurring theme in the media, with various forms of social vices and crimes being reported daily. The country's youths are disproportionately affected by poverty and unemployment, which has led to a surge in crimes and other social vices. Addressing the root causes of poverty and insecurity is crucial to promoting development and ensuring the well-being of Nigeria citizens.

The institutional weakness and jungle justices in Nigeria

The Nigerian government's inability to provide a conducive environment for development is attributed to the weakness and ineffectiveness of institutions across various sectors. The prevalence of poverty and corruption within police and legal systems has contributed significantly to the rise of jungle justice. The persistent occurrence of mob actions and jungle justice has eroded public trust in the institutions. Research has shown that

socioeconomic inequality is a significant factor in assessing justice and public trust in law enforcement (Martire, K. 2010).

In Nigeria, the poor state of Nigeria's economy has severely impacted the government's ability to perform its roles and functions. The high rate of unemployment and poverty have contributed to increased crime rates, including extra-judicial killings. Studies have established a clear link between unemployment, poverty, and crime as submitted by Oni, (2007). The lack of job opportunities and lack of legitimate means to earn an income has driven many individuals to engage in illegal activities. The pervasive poverty and corruption in Nigeria have affected every aspect of institutions, including police and legal systems. The delayed response of the legal system and the inability of security operatives to provide swift protection have led to a loss of confidence in the effectiveness of the Nigerian police service. As a result, many Nigerians have sought alternative means of protection outside the state security apparatus that contributes to the rise of vigilante groups.

Challenges facing the Vigilante Groups

Despite their growing popularity, the vigilante groups face significant challenges, such as inadequate training, poor remuneration, and the lack of basic requirements for the job. These factors have led some vigilantes to engage in corrupt practices, further intensifying the crisis of trust in Nigerian institutions. The crisis of institutional weakness and ineffectiveness in Nigeria has far-reaching consequences, including the rise of jungle justice, extra-judicial killings, and the erosion of public trust. Addressing the root causes of poverty, unemployment, and corruption is crucial to strengthening Nigerian institutions and promoting a safer, and conducive society.

Conclusion

This study has extensively examined the far-reaching consequences of ineffective and weak social institutions in Nigeria, particularly in relation to extra-judicial killings and other crimes. The findings of this research underscore the significant impact of Nigeria's economic instability on the effectiveness of other institutions, hindering their ability to fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

This study reveals that unemployment and poverty serve as catalysts for criminal activities in developing countries like Nigeria. Furthermore, the lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the Nigerian police and legal system has been identified as a primary factor contributing to the prevalence of extrajudicial killings and mob justice. As a result, many Nigerian citizens have resorted to taking the law into their own hands and administering their own brand of justice to perceived criminals and suspects.

Recommendations

Indeed, the task of every administration is to achieve development, while unsafe environment remains an obstacle to this objective. However, for the Nigeria's government to reposition the nation back to its track, the government and stakeholders must work together to revitalize the Nigeria dying economy including the following?

Establishment of vocational training programs at all states of the country by the Nigeria's government to equip citizens with employable skills, thus bridging the gap between unemployment and poverty. The ITF-NECA Technical Skills Development Project is a great example of this. It provides training in over 30 trade areas and empowers over 8,000 youths annually.

All institutions also need to be strengthened, particularly the police and legal system, to ensure effective delivery of justice and security. Foster public trust and confidence in institutions through transparency, accountability, and community engagement

Soft loan opportunities should also be available and affordable to citizens to support entrepreneurship and job creation.

Restructuring the Nigerian legal system to make it more independent, transparent, and accountable. This includes promulgating anti-jungle justice laws to ensure that citizens' human rights are protected.

The total reform and re-orientation of the Nigeria Police System is highly necessary to make it more effective, efficient, and responsive to citizens' needs. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can create an enabling environment for social and economic development, ensuring citizens enjoy a sense of belonging, freedom, and human right

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