

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF ARMED ROBBERY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

Armed robbery is one of the most popular crimes in contemporary Nigerian society. It has to do with the unlawful utilization of any form of arms to forcefully deprive innocent people of their legitimate possessions; it is therefore a crime against the Nigerian criminal laws. Armed robbery has continued to permeate the society despite every concerted effort made by both the people and the state to combat it. Thus, this social milieu poses serious security and development challenges to the state and the society at large. This article utilized secondary data to explain the socioeconomic causes and consequences of armed robbery to both the victims and the society in general. The main objective of the paper is to identify the socioeconomic causes of persistent occurrence of armed robbery in Nigeria with the view of suggesting effective ways of stemming its negative impact on the society and possibly preventing its future occurrence. The article argues that armed robbery in Nigeria is the product of some socioeconomic and political imbalances in the existing social system of the society. That, until certain drastic measures were taken, armed robbery and perhaps other social vices will continue to permeate the society. The paper recommended that there is the need to take some urgent steps towards the prevention and control of persistent occurrences of armed robbery in the country. Such steps include provision of adequate social infrastructures, equitable distribution of resources among the citizens, supporting good governance, creation of more jobs and poverty eradication among many others.

Keywords: Robbery, Crime, Economic, Prevention, Control, Social, Effects, Imbalance

INTRODUCTION

Armed robbery, in this paper, simply refers to a process that involves forcefully deprivation of some innocent individuals of their lawful belongings by an armed individual or group of individuals without recourse to the law. This act in itself is an infringement on the fundamental human rights of the victim and the Nigerian criminal law which attracts serious sanctions. It is one of the rising features of crime in the country today. The perpetual occurrence of it despite official proscription is mindboggling. This calls for serious concern of the authorities and other stakeholders in peace and security management. Victims of armed robbery usually suffer certain tremendous negative social and economic consequences Arinze (2011).

Armed robbery is now common in every part of the country although it is more prevalent in the south east and the south - south than any other part of the country. Every class of people is a potential target even though the highly placed in the society are more vulnerable. The problem has successfully imposed a culture and atmosphere of fear, mistrust, and violence in the country. However, in northern Nigeria, it occurs more in the rural areas now than in the urban centers especially in the areas where high breed market centers were located in which cash transaction is very common.

Like many other crimes in Nigeria, armed robbery has not been given the desired attention by successive governments (Nwokedi, 2011). For decades now, law abiding Nigerians have continuously suffered in the hands of armed bandits. However, the malicious impact of persistent occurrences of armed robbery on national security and development constitute serious challenges.

This article utilized secondary data to analyze the problem of persistent occurrences of armed robbery in Nigeria with the sole aim of understanding the causes and effects of the problem and recommending some viable solutions towards curbing or possibly eradicating it in the country. It was argued that armed robbery and indeed other crimes can be linked to some significant imbalances in the existing social system of the society and until certain measures were drastically taken, the problem will not only continue to permeate the society but its dire consequences may seriously be catastrophic to national peace, unity and development. This provided the background for which this article explains some of the burning issues concerning the causes and effects of armed robbery and insecurity in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is domiciled in the materialist philosophy on society and social phenomena. The school is located within the Conflict/Marxist perspective. The major argument of the school is that, the causes of social phenomena, events and human behaviors can be explained and understood

contextually focusing on the existing material arrangement of the society. That the material arrangement of the every society determines the behaviors of its members and the kind of actions that they would produced at a given point in time and situation (Wayper, 1970). In other words, social actions and problems are a direct reflection or products of the existing material arrangement of the society.

Concerning capitalist society like Nigeria, the material arrangement of the system is characterized by structural imbalance with manifestations of some features of inequality, unemployment, poverty, injustice, and inhumanity thereby could be responsible for the occurrences of social problems such as armed robbery in the country. For example, the political arrangement in a society like Nigeria is such that there is an unequal access to power among the citizens to the extent that only the tiny group of elites can have it (Umar, 2010).

And it is acquired not for the development of the society and for the improvement of the quality of life of majority of the people but for the self aggrandizement of the tiny group of those in positions of authority and their cronies or collaborators (Ake, 2003). The political class struggle for power in order to further their personal socio-economic interest irrespective of the larger interest of the people. In this regard, public resources, at all levels of government, meant to cater for the basic needs of the people such as building infrastructures, conquering poverty, hunger, unemployment, diseases, etc., end up in the private pocket of those in authority and their collaborators (Giddens, 2004). The political culture is that politics is seen as business and business is politics. This scenario, according to this school of thought, in the end not only creates a perpetual wide gap between the rich and the poor in the society, but also creates unending ravaging poverty, unemployment, hunger, death, etc. in this system; politics is a zero-sum game, a situation whereby the winner takes all. But then the oppressed and exploited members of the society respond to their unfortunate conditions in an unprecedented ways and manner that may be unlawful like armed robbery thereby endangering national security and development.

Further, the process of acquiring wealth, power, status and prestige is highly rooted in the individual's economic strength so that only those who have the money can afford it, whether they are credible or not. This scenario has not only alienated the masses of the people who constitute the majority but also seriously undermines traditional moral norms and values (Lagi, 2010). The consequence of this is that incredible and morally bankrupt individuals end up in high positions of authority.

According to Ake (2003), when politics becomes the affairs of businessmen and women, corruption will be the order of the day because those who invest in the business of politics expect maximum profits in return which is only possible through the siphoning of public

resources. As politicians and their collaborators siphons public funds meant to capture poverty, unemployment, etc, into their private accounts through phony contracts and imaginative means, the society is left undeveloped leaving the people on their own to struggle for survival. And it is in this regard that some deprived and poverty stricken Nigerian individuals are left with no other options than to engage in criminal activities such as armed robbery.

Garba (2006) noted that the focal concern of the capitalist system is private accumulation of wealth. Here, personal worth in terms of self esteem is not measured by the individual's adherence to societal moral and religious values but by their individual money worth irrespective of whether the sources of their wealth were good or evil. This situation encourages political office holders to dump their people in their bid to acquire more wealth so as to garner respect from the people. When and if this wealth were successfully acquired, the political class and their collaborators turn round to oppress the people with their very flamboyant life style. This scenario creates deep depression and anger among the oppressed seeing that those who were nobody yesterday and those that used and dumped them are the people oppressing them today. As a response, some of the oppressed will be forced to seek for means of acquiring wealth so as to be recognized by the society too. According to Onoge (2003), it was in this context that most Nigerian youth have slide into various forms of crime.

The law and justice system only fortifies the system by entrenching injustice and inequality (Onwuka, 2007). The situation is that the law is there to protect and favor the rich and powerful and not the people. It means that the law is at the whims and caprices of politicians and public office holders. Which is why in Nigeria, billions of dollars were been criminally stolen by leaders over the years without been call to account or be punished. Thus, everybody then will engage in their struggles with total disregard to law and order and the effect of this is total breakdown of law and order looming in the system. Thus, young people having loss hope to succeed through legitimate means but left with only illegitimate options would no doubt slide into criminal acts such as armed robbery.

The school is also of the views that although it is not possible to eradicate crime from the society due to the nature of the political-economic system that exist, it can however be curbed through some measures of adjustments directed at addressing the causes of the problem rather than the effects. Onu (2010), suggested that the welfare of the majority of the people must be put in the front burner and this concerns massive eradication of poverty, unemployment, hunger, diseases, etc, and building massive quality infrastructures, as well as, removing social inequality and injustice from the system. This will no doubt go a long way in putting armed robbery at serious check.

THE CAUSES OF ARMED ROBBERY IN NIGERIA

Nigeria operates a dependent capitalist system with foreign appendage to the Western Europe and the United states of American (Onwuka, 2007). According to Alubo (1993), at independence in 1960 the colonial masters had already supper - imposed on Nigeria a dependent system that was characterized by private ownership of wealth by individuals. The main aim of the colonial masters was to enthrone a system that will continue to serve them despite independence. This they achieved in collaboration with the emergent Nigerian ruling elites because 50 years after the attainment of political independence the country has not achieved any meaningful development. This was compounded by the callous activities of a political class that is self-centered, parasitic and intellectually bankrupt. The 15 years of military intervention could not but worsen the situation as the officers in the long run became more of the problem rather than a solution (Umar, 2010). The looting and political brigandage continued without any serious measures of control to the extent that some people resorted to using other illegal means to arrive at their own selfish goal. Hence, these were the remote reasons why social vices such as armed robbery permeate the Nigerian society today.

In Nigeria today, the economy is in shambles, the nation is infested with perpetual corruption. Nigeria is one country in the world which government agencies and parastatals constitute a conduit pipe through which public funds, a means for the provisions of social infrastructures, are grossly siphoned into the private pocket of top bourgeois politicians (Otu, 2012). The reason for this is not farfetched. According to Onoge (2003), unlike the colonial masters who have been extracting so much wealth from the former colonized territories, the Nigeria politicians today have no colonies to exploit but depend so much on the state as their only source for primitive accumulation by siphoning of public funds meant for national development. Most of this illegally amassed wealth have been taken out of the country and invested abroad. According to Ribadu (2006), resources supposedly meant for the provision of meaningful education, employment opportunities, and infrastructure that will better the living standards of Nigerians have been diverted, siphoned, corruptly embezzled or mismanaged by the politicians occupying powerful positions of influence in the society. Due to this callous ineptitude, most industries and factories have closed down thereby escalating the problem of unemployment and poverty in the country. To compound the problem, inflation rate has since reached double digit and is on the increase impacting negatively on business as small traders are closing shops daily (Arinze, 2011). The resultant effect is the manifestation of ravaging poverty and unemployment in the country.

In a research by UNDP (2012), it was reported that 65% of Nigerians live below the poverty line without any access to basic goods, services and commodities. Most households in

Nigeria are more concerned with the provision of daily bread needed for the survival of family members (Umar, 2009). Further, the current Nigeria unemployment status even in the official quarters is embarrassing, (Arinze, 2011). This might have worsened over the years by the large population of young people graduating out of the many educational institutions. Umar (2012) argued that the wave of crime in Nigeria can be blamed on high unemployment among the nation's youth. Many are graduates from the country's more than fifty universities who cannot find jobs. Thus, there is no doubt that armed robbery in Nigeria today is an outcome of the interplay between the two factors of ravaging poverty and unemployment. Faced by the twin problem of unemployment and poverty which are threatening to their need for survival some of the citizens have therefore turn to armed robbery as a means. For example, with failed business and no other means of livelihood, some Nigerians might have turn to armed robbery. This explains the rising wave of the problem in the country.

Further, the criminal neglect of the people in terms of development by various Nigerian governments resulted in the problem of persistent rise in the rate and wave of crime such as armed robbery. Apart from series of communal clashes, many groups emerged in their struggle for social justice and emancipation and varied methods were adopted and used (Umar, 2012). Some groups resorted to the use of armed robbery especially for the purpose of money generation for arms purchase to protect their community from incessant attacks. This has been more prevalent in some parts of northern Nigeria where an ethno- religious conflict is rampant in recent years, as well as, some few communities in the south east and south west. According to Onoge (2003), the criminal neglect of the Niger Delta by various Nigerian governments led to series of communal clashes and high rate of crime in the area. As a result of this, dangerous arms that were proliferated during such conflicts may have gone to wrong hands who in turn utilize it for the perpetration of armed robbery. In fact, some young unemployed members of the communities used as foot soldiers for the war will now turn to hit back at the communities and their innocent victims by using the arms at their disposal to commit armed robbery. This may also the case with some political thugs who were consequently abandoned by their masters after elections.

Education is one of the most powerful weapons against crime. With good education the individual acquire the needed skills and capacity for legitimate employment to earn a living and conquer poverty. Poor early childhood education on the other hand multiplies the risk of criminal behavior at adulthood. Thus, there is a great relationship education and criminality in the society (Brown 2002). The Nigeria situation of today is that a chunk of Nigerians are grossly uneducated, the number of youth dropping out of school is proportionally high and the graduates turn out annually from various higher institutions of learning are poor in terms of

desired quality to be engaged for either white-collar or self employment. This is worsened by perpetual decline in Nigeria's educational standards (UNESCO, 2012). Worse still, the system has over the years been grossly under funded by government (Garba, 2006). However, given these circumstances, some young Nigerians have become an army reserve of recruits for criminal activities (Onoge, 2003). This also provides the background on which some these criminals opted for armed robbery. In fact, a look at the socioeconomic profile of most arrested or convicted armed robbers from the newspapers, police cells and prisons reveals nothing further than the truth (Umar, 2010).

Some families in Nigeria are agents of destruction rather than preservation of traditional moral values due to the various unholy activities going on there. Some family members act as accomplice thereby do encourage their wards to perpetrate criminal activities such as armed robbery due to the material benefits they may enjoy as a result. Gone were the days when parents questioned their wards on their sources of spending if it is above their anticipated income. Today, parents share the booty and the young man or woman will be celebrated and hail for hard work (Umar, 2010). For example, young men and women who come home from the city around Christmas and New Year with material things, not minding the source of those things, and share it among family members and friends are usually celebrated at their homes and the community in most Nigerian towns and villages. By this singular act, other young men and women are therefore encouraged to also struggle to succeed using whatever means and no matter what. Thus, some have resorted to armed robbery by means of abduction and extortion.

The role of some global mass media in the emergence and perpetuation of the problem is alarming. (Barret, 2004) argued that very powerful media conglomerates like the BBC, CNN, MTV and SKY through their powerful cable satellites transmit Euro - American popular culture that impact negatively on other societies in the world. Through local and foreign films and other communication materials Nigerians get to know about drug peddling, armed robbery, rape, money laundering and indeed kidnapping. In fact, most young armed robbers may likely have acquired the methods and skills from the foreign media. No wonder, armed robbery keep occurring in the country despite existing control mechanisms.

The life style of the elites contributes a lot to the perpetuation of the problem. Wealth is always been thrown around lavishly unmindful of the socioeconomic plight of the poor masses who are wallowing in poverty. This breeds more frustrations amongst the poor who constitute the majority in the society. In Nigeria, senior public officials especially politicians not only live above their means but wealth is fragrantly displayed with flamboyant recklessness. For example, politicians who were known to be living from hand to mouth before their election into office turn out to be displaying wealth recklessly around the society. This is more so that in

recent years there has not been any significant practical sanction against questionable life style and flagrant display of wealth in the society (Umar, 2012). And this is taking place amidst ravaging poverty, wide spread unemployment and collapsed infrastructures. This factor provokes not just anger among the poor people but some of them may have resorted to other criminal ways in their response to the situation. It was in that context that Onoge (2003) argued that a sizeable percentage of Nigerian youth have slide into violent delinquencies and crime. This explains why some suspected armed robbers arrested by the police justify their actions with their situation of poverty or unemployment. In some circumstances, politicians recruit, trained and finance young people for campaign activities with the promise to carry them along when elected only to dump them in the end. By the time the patronage is no longer forthcoming, these young people now hit back at the society by resorting to criminal activities such as armed robbery for the extortion of money.

The premature disengagement of security officers also plays great role in the emergence and persistence of the problem of armed robbery in Nigeria. Each time there is a change of guard or government, officers who are serving in those strategic areas were dropped and new ones posted for what is always said to be security reasons. Sometimes as a matter of discipline and deterrence security officers are summarily dismissed from service for committing serious offences. These two categories of security officers have enjoyed good patronage from their former stations with which they lived a very flamboyant, luxurious and ostentatious life style. Some of the officers affected by these situations had obtained highly sophisticated and specialized military training in areas that may include assassination, abduction, torture, intelligence, interrogation and actual armed robbery (Umar, 2010). Faced with the reality of life without the patronage in their new circumstances which some of them cannot cope, they are likely to hit back at the society in a bid to maintain their usual ostentatious life style. Thus, in that scenario some of these officers might have opted for armed robbery more so that the precision in the execution of a successful armed robbery requires some knowledge of good military training. Further, with an army reserve of millions of unemployed and poverty stricken youths who are already disillusioned and the military officers willing to offer their know – how, crime such as armed robbery may have been a fast get away. For example, it was discovered with the capture of one Habib Bama, retired military personnel, that this group of security personnel were involved in the training of the Boko Haram operatives that are disturbing the peace and security situation in the northern part of the country (sahara reporters, 2012).

The poor socioeconomic condition of security agents especially police officers in the country today could also contribute a lot to the persistent armed robbery occurrences. Apart from very poor condition of living which most of the rank and file live owing to poor condition of

service, the force has no any meaningful life insurance package for officers who die in active service. Nigeria's security personnel remain one of the most poorly paid they were expected to take care of other basic needs of themselves, wards and their dependents from it. This is at a time when the cost of things such as education, food, medicine etc, is astronomically high. Given this battered situation, some security officers may no doubt be tempted to join force with armed robbers in order to salvage their condition. In fact, this will explain why arms belonging to the force found their ways to armed robbers. Besides, in most cases the arms that are used by officers in charge of combating armed robbery are far less, in terms of supply and sophistication, than that of armed robbers. Most times the fund meant for the welfare of officers and purchase of good weapons disappears due to corruption at the top of the structure. Thus, these were among many other factors that is seriously killing morale in the force and as a result making it nearly impossible for armed robbery prevention and control in the country.

THE EFFECTS OF ARMED ROBBERY IN NIGERIA

Armed robbery attracts certain negative socio - psychological, economic, and political effects. A armed robbers stand very serious risks. They may be jailed if arrested and serving long term prison sentence may lead to loss of future career and self development. Some of them end up been killed in the process especially in their bid to escape from been apprehended by the law enforcement agents. Involvement in any infamous activity like armed robbery destroys family name and integrity. The socio – psychological effects on the victims and that of their families are deeply rooted. Sometimes the financial loss that ensure in the process of armed robbery may not bother the victims and their families but the fear that victims may be killed causes serious trauma. Thus, throughout the period, victims and their family members suffer serious torture and this may last for a very long period of time. Armed robbery undermines peace, order and stability in the society. As people live in the atmosphere of mutual suspicion and fear as a result of persistent occurrences of armed robbery in the area, social and economic activities is slowed down and eventually crippled. The negative impact of this on the domestic economy cannot be over emphasized. Further, foreign investment is a profound condition for rapid economic growth and development of society but no foreign investor would want to invest where there is insecurity. Hence, armed robbery discourages foreign investment and as a form of crime it erodes traditional moral norms and values of the society. As armed robbers perpetrate their dastard and infamous act with impunity, other societal members' especially young men may be encouraged to join so that with time normal ways are gradually substituted. Further, as a result of the rampant cases of armed robbery, colossal amount of human and material resources are usually expended by the government in the prevention and control of the problem. This amount

would have greatly transformed the society if it was pumped into the economy. Armed robbery sometimes involves very sophisticated weapons and equipments which can only be imported into the country from abroad. The amount of money involved in this importation mostly through smuggling constitutes capital flight, which further undermines economic growth and development.

CONCLUSION

It was argued that armed robbery has not only become a very popular crime in Nigeria today but that the persistent occurrence of it and the dimension it is taking is very worrisome. The study also explains that armed robbery continue to exist due to many causal factors which include unwavering unemployment rate, ravaging poverty, corruption, illiteracy and ignorance, premature disengagement of security officers from lucrative postings, etc. That armed robbery attracts wanton socio – psychological, economic and political consequences to the victims, the armed robbers and the society. However, below are some suggested solutions for the control and prevention of the problem in Nigeria:

1. Government at all levels should as matter of urgency embark on a character reformation and reorientation programme towards the acquisition nationalistic and traditional values of hard work, discipline, self - respect, perseverance, etc.
2. Functional education that will enable young graduates to acquire practical skills so as to be self - employed and self - reliant should be the hall mark of our school curricular.
3. Government should urgently initiate a truly dynamic and all - encompassing youth empowerment scheme to cater for the unemployed and poverty oriented youths.
4. Nigerian law enforcement agencies especially the police special armed robbery unit should be empowered with the necessary materials, personnel, skills for the detection, control and prevention of armed robbery.
5. Just and equitable distribution of resources must be the hallmark of government affairs.
6. Government should, as a matter of priority, embark on serious provision and rehabilitation of infrastructures and ensure that institutions work efficiently so as to create an enabling environment for both foreign and domestic investment.
7. Corruption should be seriously tackled by ensuring that culprits are not only apprehended but decisively punished irrespective of their social, economic and political status.

8. The agency for the control of mass media and the internet should work very hard in ensuring that materials that are antithetical to national and traditional interest were not circulated in the country.
9. Premature disengagement and retrenchment of security personnel should be fine – tuned with a programme of adjustment to ensure that the affected officers have a strong fall back in order to prevent them from any unnecessary temptation.
10. The task of crime prevention and control is not that of the security agents alone as all hands must be on desk so as to achieve effective peace and order. Thus, a comprehensive security strategy that greatly involves the community must be urgently put in place so as to effectively tackle armed robbery and other sundry crimes militating national security and development.

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