

## **CORRUPTION AND PEOPLE'S OPINION ON THE REMOVAL OF POLICE CHECK-POINTS IN YOBE STATE**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Police checkpoint is one of the most dreaded sights by motorists in Nigeria due to the dominance of extortion over all other activities at checkpoints instead of the normal stop-and-frisk expected of a security agent thereby affecting the efficiency of the force in preventing, detecting and containing crime. Yobe state with its high number of Boko-Haram induced checkpoints is one of the states where strong reactions follow the removal of police blockades in other parts of the country. This paper attempts, using survey research technique to assess the perception of the people of Yobe state on the removal of police frisk-barricades from the roads as a means of reducing police corruption in the country. The research found out among other things; that people of Yobe state believe that the removal will tremendous effect in reducing police extortion that has direct bearing on the common man. The study recommends inter alia the review of police salary and welfare packages, introduction of technology driven frisking system and policing the police technique of fishing out corrupt personnel.*

**KEYWORDS:** Police, Extortion, Perception, Corruption

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Police corruption was fast becoming an enigma in Nigerian social and political discourse; a bedrock upon which all other forms of corruption were built and a stumbling block on the country's path to modernization, progress and development. Although there are thousand and one ways through which Nigerian police engross in corrupt activities ranging from embezzlement of police fund at Louis Edet House to extortion at local police stations, the most prevalent one with direct bearing on ordinary citizens is the extortion perpetrated at police-checkpoints where the payment of fifty Nigerian Naira (₦50) by motorist to stationed policemen is receiving quasi-official recognition.

Motorist are made to pay without expecting any favor in return but to escape further harassment, intimidation or injury from state agents on the road or escape unnecessary frisking which the payment will certainly prevent. Such extortion is glaringly executed to inject feeling of legality into the act. Though, the police rank and file are the executioners of the notoriously dastard act, it is widely believed that the teams pay-back money to their officers in form of 'returns' and where they fail, the team may be changed and termed ineffective. In February 2012, the police IGP ordered the removal of police checkpoints across the country but after the President Jonathan's announcement of state of emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2012, the checkpoints were reinstated. (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

Yobe state being of one the states where due to prevalence of insurgents' attacks, police checkpoints are widespread, the people of the state suffer unnecessary humiliation and extortion from the law enforcement agents in the name of stop-and-frisk. "Police take bribe openly at any place they mount check point. The collection of N20.00 from motorists at road

blocks is well known across the nation” (Ibrahim, 2015). Thus, there is need to commence an opinion survey on people’s perception on the removal of police checkpoints with the aim of ascertaining its acceptability as a right step towards curtailing corruption in the country.

### **Conceptualizing the Nigerian Police**

Human society cannot sustain its existence without set of laws that differentiate between right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Laws put a ceiling in the life of men by apportioning powers, responsibilities and obligations for political office holders, bureaucrats and citizens. Although rules and regulations are meant to ensure peace and tranquility, they are useless without enforcement agents that ensure compliance, arrest violators and prosecute suspects in a court of law to serve as deterrence to others especially intending criminals. The Police is one of the most important institutions in the country institutionalized to ensure the maintenance of law and order and the Nigerian society places high prominence and expectations on the institution as enunciated by sections 214, 215 and 216 of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended. Thus, the significance of police as an institution of achieving and sustaining peace, tranquility and orderliness cannot be overemphasized. Merriam-Webster dictionary define police as a department of government charged with prevention, detection and prosecution of public nuisances and crimes. It is a legal institution or state agency charged primarily with the enforcement of criminal law and the maintenance of order through monitoring, discharging and destroying challenges to the existing order of things (Bowden, 1978; Ibrahim 2015).

Based on the aforementioned definitions, police possess the right of coercion as legitimate users of state force to ensure compliance with rules and prevent nuisance and distortion of the existing order of things. The police serve as a link between crime and the law by ensuring obedience and prosecution of offenders in a court of law. According to Part IV sections 23-30 of the Nigeria police act, the institution and its men are empowered by law to:

**Conduct prosecutions:** Subject to provisions of sections 174 and 211 of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended, a police officer may prosecute any case against an accused in a court of law.

**Arrest without warrant:** It is lawful for a police officer to arrest any person that commits, suspected to have committed, or is about to commit any act of felony, misdemeanor or simple offence. This includes people suspected or seen by others to have committed such offences.

**Arrest without having warrant in possession:** When a court of law issue a warrant to arrest any person, a police officer is entitled to execute the warrant even if he is not in possession of such warrant. But the law says the accused is entitled to be shown the warrant on demand after his arrest.

**Serve summonses:** A police officer is empowered by the law to serve summons issued by a court of law during the hours of daylight.

**Grant bail of person(s) arrested without warrant:** A police officer may enter into recognizance with an arrested person and release him/her on bail to reappear before a magistrate or report to the police station at the agreed day and time.

**Search:** A police officer is authorized to enter into any house, warehouse, shop or any building or its premises to search for a stolen property or any incriminating material and arrest any person found in possession of search property or material.

**Detain and search suspected persons:** A police officer is empowered by law to detain and search any person he reasonably suspect of being in possession of or conveying a stolen property or suspected to be in possession of something that can be used to disturb public peace.

**Take finger prints:** A police officer is having the power to take records of people's fingerprints, photographs, physical specifications and measurements for easy identification. But if such persons are eventually not convicted, discharged and acquitted, such records should be destroyed or handed over to the persons.

According to the police act, the police are equipped with these powers because they are employed for "the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged, and shall perform such military duties within or outside Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of this or any other Act."

However, despite the presence of constitutionally empowered police force, the institution failed to prevent and contain series of insurgent attacks, kidnappings, violence against vulnerable groups, assassinations, electoral disturbances and armed robbery that have been bedeviling the Nigerian nation in recent decades. Many reasons are adduced to such wanton failure including inadequacy of trained staff () poor funding and lack of police welfare (Karimu, 2015) corruption (Cheri, 2014; Ibrahim 2015) and poor planning.

### **The Concept of Corruption and the Nigerian Police**

Corruption is perhaps the most serious challenge facing African Nations, threatening all aspects of life – socio-cultural, political, economic, religious and educational. Nye (1967) defines corruption as "behavior which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence". This definition involves four simple assertions: That officials deviate from their formal public role; secondly, they deviate because of pecuniary or status inducement by private individuals or groups; thirdly, this deviation violates the rules and regulations of the land; fourthly, all these are done to achieve private benefit. In a similar vein, it is defined as "a form of secret social exchange through which those in power (political or administrative) take personal advantage, of one type or another, of the influence they exercise by virtue of their mandate or their function" (Méry cited in Amundsen, 1999:7) In addition to the four features of Nye's definition, Méry adds that corruption is often done in secret, far away from the public eye. This feature makes research on the issue a very difficult and dangerous engagement as both corrupt and the corrupters can derogate, injure, or even kill. Nonetheless, in all definitions of the term, the state appears as the key player which explains why the working definition of World Bank and Transparency International remains that corruption is the abuse of public power for private benefit (or profit).

Despite being more prevalent and severe in the less developed nations, corruption is not an exclusive reserve of the poor nations as the advanced nations cannot be totally exonerated of the scourge. However, due to the maturity and effectiveness of the control mechanisms and the

strength of political will, the advanced nations are capable of minimizing the prevalence and effects of corruption in their societies. This shows that corruption is not an inevitable live-partner as it seems to appear in most African, Asian and Latin American countries. However, it remains at the center of international discourse among international actors. It is required that the developed nations help the less developed once in the fight against corruption. Aid being the fulcrum around which the relationship between the two groups of nations revolves cannot be realized in the midst of unending corruption and distrust.

Corruption is variously categorized using different standpoints. It is called nepotism when officers engage in act of favoring someone against the established rules of the land or exonerating him from complicity due to family, tribal, village or any other personal affiliation. Corruption is termed embezzlement when officials take public resources (money or property) which they are legally entitled to administer on behalf of the public for their personal use without permission and in violation of laid down rules and regulations. This usually happen at the top echelon of the police force such as the case of Tafa Balogun (Ibrahim 2015). Fraud is a type of corruption that involves deliberate action or reaction that is intended to deceive, misinform, mislead or dupe others in order to obtain financial benefit. This can be termed a form of corruption only if it involves the use of official positions. Else, it is pure crime. The commonest form of corruption is bribery where money is given to a public official to facilitate something for the benefit of the corrupter. It can be given after the facilitation but usually given before it. Bribe can be given in cash or kind to quicken approval of promotion of a police officer, issuance of in-service letter to enable police man attend school or release of an offender from police net. Extortion is a form of corruption where money is extracted under duress from hapless people through the use of force, threat and intimidation. It is usually paid to policemen out of fear of possible injury, imprisonment, blackmail or even death. Corruption at police checkpoints centers on the last two forms of corruption – bribery and extortion. Money is being extorted from innocent civilians while criminals bribe their way out.

Police Corruption makes citizens apathetic to the state, leads the good ones to treat security personnel with distrust and disrespect, and threatens the very reason for loyalty and obedience. When corruption happens in a democracy, it pose a question whether democracy is really the best system of governing public affairs especially when bribery receives quasi-official recognition as an accepted form of state-society relations. It portrays government as a mechanism that ensures the perfidy of public trust to satisfy individual greed and group covetousness. When societal security, peace, and orderliness are sacrificed for private gain of the few to the detriment of the rest, all other aspects of life become affected. Police corruption results in decadence in society, infrastructural defect, political violence, religious bigotry and economic failure.

### **Extortion at police Checkpoints and the Nigerian state**

Seeing the behavior of policemen at checkpoints create a feeling that extortion is having a quasi-official status in Nigeria or rather a fully institutionalized tax collected at toll-gates. Extortion is usually perpetrated in open glare of the public using both threats and flattery depending on who happens to be the victim of the moment. Sometimes driver and passengers are charged differently and individually to maximize “profit” without recourse of morals, sobriety or ethics. According to Karimu (2015) “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.”The issuance and collection of N20.00 from road users to policemen is widespread throughout the country. Motorists are forced to pay money or face detention through prolonged parking, provocative questioning, injury, or even death. Instant payment on the other hand is rewarded with smile, prayers or even assurance that there will be no subsequent checks even if the vehicle documents are fake or loaded with illegal goods.

Extortion, embezzlement, and other corrupt practices by Nigeria’s police undermine the fundamental human rights of Nigerians in two key ways. First, the most direct effect of police corruption on ordinary citizens stems from the myriad human rights abuses committed by police officers in the process of extorting money. These abuses range from arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention to threats and acts of violence, including physical and sexual assault, torture, and even extrajudicial killings. The police frequently extort money from the public at taxi stands, in marketplaces, or while going about their daily lives. However, the most common venue for extortion occurs at police roadblocks, ostensibly put in place to combat crime. In practice, these checkpoints have become a lucrative criminal venture for the police who routinely demand bribes from drivers and passengers alike, in some places enforcing a *de facto* standardized toll. Motorists are frequently detained and endure harassment and threats until they or their family members negotiate payment for their release. Extortion-related confrontations between the police and motorists often escalate into more serious abuses. The police have on numerous occasions severely beaten, sexually assaulted, or shot to death ordinary citizens who failed to pay the bribes demanded (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

Thus, the illegal activities of policemen at checkpoints seriously damage the reputation and glory of Nigeria in the international community and affect the sensibility of Nigerians at home. It retards economic development and creates distrust and hatred between the agents of state and the citizens.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Yobe state is one of the areas bedeviled by insurgency in the last half-decade, it becomes place where security personnel especially police are using barricades to control speed of motorist, stop and frisk them in search of weapons and/or materials that can be used to improvise explosive devises. Noble as this objective sounds; it also makes it a fertile ground for undisciplined officers and men of the police force to use their weapons to instill fear in the mind of innocent civilians they are meant to protect with the aim of extorting money. It is a common sight at such checkpoints to see policemen collecting not only cash but bread, sachet water, firewood, groundnut oil and other valuables from those who are either *koboless* or not ready to give out cash. Such indecent acts no doubt disturbs the moral sanctity of the society, economic zeal of travellers, transport fares, and throw the country’s good name to the dogs. At the time of pronouncing that all police checkpoints be removed, many people in the state were thrown into abrupt jubilation while others express the fear that, weapons may pass unnoticed. This contentious issue calls for an empirical investigation on the exact view of the populace on the corruption associated with police checkpoints *vis a vis* their efficiency in crime detection and prevention.

### **Research Objective**

The main objective of this research work is to assess the opinion of people in Yobe state on corruption at police checkpoints and their efficiency in preventing crime and insurgency. While the specific objectives are:

- i. Assess the opinion of people on whether police checkpoints should remain in the state or removed.
- ii. Assess whether there is significant difference between the people living in areas most affected by insurgency and those living in relatively peaceful areas on the removal of police checkpoints.

### **Research Question**

- i. Are police checkpoints efficient in detecting and preventing crime and insurgency?
- ii. Do you attest to the prevalence of extortion at police checkpoints?
- iii. Do you support the removal of police checkpoints across the state?

### **Research Hypotheses**

- H<sub>01</sub>** There is no significant difference between in the opinion of people living in areas most affected by insurgency and those living in relatively peaceful areas on the removal of police checkpoints.
- H<sub>02</sub>** There is no significant difference between the perceptions of people across senatorial zones on the removal of police checkpoints in the state.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research work being an opinion survey employs survey research design and utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data. Literatures on the related topics were reviewed in line with the research objective to identify areas of convergence and divergence with the opinion of scholars and writers on the topic. Primary data was sourced through the use of both close ended and open ended questionnaires with the aid of observation in some instances. According to the 2006 headcount, the population of Yobe state stands at 2,321,591. Considering the demands of this research, a sample of 300 respondents is drawn using multistage sampling technique where the state is clustered into three clusters using the three senatorial districts of Yobe East (Zone A), Yobe South (Zone B) and Yobe North (Zone C) whereby two local governments are picked from each zone using purposive sampling. Fifty respondents are sampled from each of the six local governments using simple random sampling technique. Damaturu, Geidam and Potiskum are chosen as areas most affected by the insurgency while Nguru, Yusufari and Nangere represent areas least affected.

### **Data Analysis**

Data obtained from primary sources were codified and tabulated using frequency distribution tables and presented in percentages to ease understanding. Hypotheses were tested using chi-square statistical technique after which inferences were drawn.

**DATA PRESENTATION****Table 1.1 Efficiency of police checkpoints in detecting and preventing crime and insurgency in Yobe state**

Options	Most Affected		Less Affected		C.F	C.P	Zonal Distribution			
	F	%	F	%			Zones	Options	F	%
Agree	24	24.5	19	15.6	43	19.5	A	Agree	13	17.8
								Undecided	02	2.7
								Disagree	58	79.5
								<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>
Undecided	00	00.00	05	4.1	05	2.3	B	Agree	14	20.6
								Undecided	00	0.0
								Disagree	54	79.4
								<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>
Disagree	74	75.5	98	80.3	172	78.2	C	Agree	16	20.3
								Undecided	03	3.8
								Disagree	60	75.9
								<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>C.T</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Work, 2015***Table 1.2 Prevalence of extortion at police checkpoints**

Options	Most Affected		Less Affected		C.F	C.P	Zonal Distribution			
	F	%	F	%			Zones	Options	F	%
Agree	81	82.7	97	79.5	178	80.9	A	Agree	59	80.8
								Undecided	00	0.0
								Disagree	14	19.2
								<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>
Undecided	00	0.0	02	1.6	02	0.9	B	Agree	60	88.2
								Undecided	01	1.5
								Disagree	07	10.3
								<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>
Disagree	17	17.3	23	18.9	40	18.2	C	Agree	59	74.7
								Undecided	01	1.3
								Disagree	19	24.1
								<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>C.T</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Work, 2015*

**Table 1.3 Removal of police checkpoints across the state**

Options	Most Affected		Less Affected		C.F	C.P	Zonal Distribution			
	F	%	F	%			Zones	Options	F	%
Agree	66	67.3	86	70.5	152	69.1	A	Agree	50	68.5
								Undecided	07	9.6
								Disagree	16	21.9
								<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>
Undecided	05	5.1	12	9.8	17	7.7	B	Agree	51	75.0
								Undecided	04	5.9
								Disagree	13	19.1
								<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>
Disagree	27	27.6	24	19.7	51	23.2	C	Agree	51	64.6
								Undecided	06	7.6
								Disagree	22	27.8
								<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>C.T</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Work, 2015

### Hypothesis Testing

**HO<sub>1</sub>** There is no significant difference in the opinion of people living in areas most affected by insurgency and those living in relatively peaceful areas on the removal of police checkpoints.

**Table 1.4 X<sup>2</sup> computation table for HO<sub>1</sub>**

O	E	(O - E)	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>	(O - E) <sup>2</sup> /E
66	69.6	- 3.6	12.96	0.2
27	23.4	3.6	12.96	0.6
86	82.4	3.6	12.96	0.2
24	27.6	- 3.6	12.96	0.5
				<b>X<sup>2</sup> = 1.5</b>

$Df = 1$   $\alpha$  0.05 level of significance

### Decision

The  $X^2_{cal}$  is 1.5 which is less than the  $X^2_{tab}$   $\alpha$  0.05 level of significance is 3.84. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the opinion of people living in areas most affected by insurgency and those living in relatively peaceful areas on the removal of police checkpoints is hereby accepted because the calculated  $X^2$  is less than the critical table value.

**HO<sub>2</sub>** There is no significant difference between the perceptions of people across senatorial zones on the removal of police checkpoints in the state.

**Table 1.4**  $\chi^2$  computation table for HO<sub>2</sub>

O	E	(O – E)	(O – E) <sup>2</sup>	(O – E) <sup>2</sup> /E
50	49.4	0.6	0.36	0.0
16	16.6	- 0.6	0.36	0.0
51	47.9	3.1	9.61	0.2
13	16.1	- 3.1	9.61	0.6
51	54.7	- 3.7	13.69	0.3
22	18.3	3.7	13.69	0.7
				$\chi^2 = 1.8$

$Df = 2$   $\alpha 0.05$  level of significance

### Decision

The  $\chi^2_{cal}$  is 1.8 while the  $\chi^2_{tab}$   $\alpha 2df$   $\alpha 0.05$  level of significance is 5.99. Since the  $\chi^2_{cal}$  is less than the critical table value, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of people across senatorial zones on the removal of police checkpoints in the state is hereby accepted.

### Summary of Research Findings

The research work found out that most people of Yobe state are dissatisfied with the performance of police at checkpoints and consider them inefficient in the fight against crime and insurgency as indicated by 78.2% of the people in the state. On the contrary, 80.9% of the people of Yobe state believe that extortion is prevalent at police checkpoints across the state which is another indicator of the institution's failure to help in, rather than thwart the national goal of stemming the tide of corruption. The people of Yobe state regardless of the level at which they are affected by the insurgency believe in the prevalence of police corruption at checkpoints and call for their removal. This view is shared by the people across the three senatorial zones as indicated by the test of the two research hypothesis.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the data obtained and analyzed, the research work concludes that the people of Yobe state perceives that the police checkpoints in the state are inefficient in the detection, prevention and tacking insurgency and crime in the state. At the same vein, the people of the state opined that the police checkpoints are better removed that maintained.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The government should review its security arrangements with a view to replace checkpoints as means of preventing and detecting crime.
- ii. If the government decides to maintain the checkpoints, there should be an anti-graft squad within the police force that will be checking excesses of the police especially those at checkpoints. For instance, there should be a law that no policeman should have more than a certain amount on him at checkpoint so that when the squad finds more than that amount on a policeman at checkpoint he/she should be prosecuted.

- iii. The government should embark on awareness creation on whistle-blowing to encourage citizens to cooperate with government in giving timely information that will help to curtail extortion and other police excesses.
- iv. Police welfare and salary package should be upwardly reviewed to make them capable of abhorring and refusing pecuniary and other enticements. This becomes necessary in order to make the institution and its men put in their best for the country.
- v. The police should be trained on the art of detecting crime without causing unnecessarily suffering to the innocent citizens.
- vi. The government should supply modern crime detection equipment that can help security personnel in the detection of weapons.

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