



Do Armed Robbers Really Fear The Law In Metropolitan Benin, Southern Nigeria?

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Abstract. Ostensibly, the #Endsars protest of 2020 which rocked the entire Nigeria as nation had consequences and an upsurge in robbery/activities as several police stations were sacked while arms and ammunitions veered off into the wrong hands. The study therefore sought to examine the causes and motivating factors in armed robbery even in the face of stringent laws against it. The relative deprivation theory was used as the theoretical bases of the study. The research design used was the survey design which employed the questionnaire in collecting data from 585 participants. The study found that poverty, ostentatious lifestyle of the elite, poor condition of security agents, lack of family values and unemployment were some of the causes and motivating factors in armed robbery. The study revealed that the existing extant laws against armed robbery do not in any way deter potential armed robbers from engaging in the nefarious social vice. Against this background, the study recommends that good family values and morals, as well as government's creation of employment opportunities for the teeming unemployed youth, improving on the economy of the nation and strengthening the judiciary will help to reduce the incidence of armed robbery in metropolitan Benin, southern Nigeria.

Key words: Armed Robbery, Law, Police, Judiciary

1. Introduction

Mankind has always had the problem of armed robbery; in fact, all societies whether advanced or not, are presently faced with an upsurge in armed robbery. Nations like the United States of America, United Kingdom still battle with escalated rates of armed robbery (Siegel, 2008). The Nigerian nation is equally having its share of the upsurge of this social malaise. Scholars like Ugwuoke (2005) while tracing the origin of armed robbery observed that it came to

the fore due to the proliferation of weapons immediately after the civil war that was fought in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970. In addition to this, it would appear that the oil boom in the 1970s led to an increase in cash liquidity. The resultant effect was an expanded economy which saw armed robbery soaring. This expanded economy somehow led to widespread corruption which has remained a hindrance to the development of the country, and unfortunately, an excuse by hoodlums to continually wreak havoc on people in their homes, offices and highways. In other words, the lifestyle of corrupt politicians and the socio-economic order has tended to a large extent shaped the prevalence of this menace. This is likely to continue where corrupt politicians like Dariye, Nyame who were convicted of embezzlement by a court of competent jurisdiction after a fierce legal battle between them and the state; were freed by a wave of the hand in the name of state presidential pardon. The message this sends is that, there is no law in Nigeria. Little wonder then that crime is on the increase.

At the end of the Nigeria civil war, quite a number of the soldiers were disengaged (Ekpeyong, 1989) and due to hunger and the fact that suffering was on the increase in the country, many of the disengaged soldiers and deserters took to robbery which on the surface was a viable means of livelihood (Elechi, 2003). Government's response to the escalated incidence of robbery was to repeal the section in the Criminal Code of 1958 that bothers on armed robbery and replaced it with the Armed Robbery and Firearms (Special provisions) Decree 1970, No. 4 as a way of deterring potential armed robbers. Did this deterrence work? The answer is in the negative as annual report of the Nigeria Police Force (2006, 2007 & 2008) shows a rise in armed robbery cases while the National Bureau of Statistics (2008) on its part

collaborated the rise in the number of armed robbery cases in Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Although, kidnapping, banditry, terrorism, “yahoo plus”, ritual killings, herders and farmers’ clashes have constantly occupied the media space. Lately, it has however not erased the ever-growing concern of Nigerians over the dastardly acts of armed robbers. The trend and pattern of this social phenomenon has somehow deterred the law and advancement in technology (cashless economy). Unfortunately, too, armed robbery like other violent criminal activities has become prevalent, a huge security challenge that involves mostly young adults aged.

In October 2020, young adults under the auspices of the endsars trooped out in their thousands to protest the incessant harassment, intimidation and extortion of men of the Nigeria police force; a demonstration was massive and engulfed the entire nation. Good as the intention was, it soon was hijacked by hoodlums and criminally minded persons who burnt down police stations and carted away various arms and ammunitions. At the end of the protest, the guns that went into wrong hands were never recovered but instead used to terrorize people in metropolitan Benin. The spate of burglary, stealing and armed robbery went up with lightening speed which warranted the setting up of the Edo State vigilante group to combat the incidence and prevalence of the crime.

Regrettably, studies reveal that most of the robberies are carried out by these young adults who are unemployed or underemployed, while institutional failures; their inefficiency and ineffectiveness, economic conditions etc also plays its part in sustaining this crime. However, little or nothing is recorded about the effect of the law such as the capital punishment encoded in Nigeria’s statute books. Government’s response to the alarming increase in armed robbery has been to put the police force on its toes with the police responding by instituting programmes such as operation “fire for fire”, “operation flush”, “operation mesa” and “operation thunderstorm”- joint military and police venture. In spite of these efforts, myriads of robbery incidence are daily being recorded across the country.

There must therefore be an interesting variable responsible for the thriving nature of armed robbery in southern Nigeria. Could this be attributed to the corrupt and corrupting nature of some of the judicial officers who sell justice even to armed robbers? Do we put the blame squarely at the door step of the ill-

equipped security agents? Or should we have a rethink on the laws as it relates to punishment of offenders. The study was embarked on, to unravel some of these issues.

1.2 Research Questions

This study was guided by two research questions viz:

- What are the causes and motivating factors in the commission of armed robbery in Metropolitan Benin, Southern Nigeria?
- Do laws deter armed robbers in Metropolitan Benin, Southern Nigeria?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to thoroughly examine the impact of the law on armed robbery. The specific objectives however include:

- to identify causes and motivating factors in the commission of armed robbery in Metropolitan Benin, Southern Nigeria.
- to examine the effect of the law on armed robbery in Metropolitan Benin, Southern Nigeria

2. Brief Review of Related Literature

This section examines existing literature on the rapidly increasing spate of gun use in robbery in southern Nigeria with emphasis on the causes as well as the role of the law in acting as a deterrence to its commission. It is needful to state from the onset that no literature presently lays claim to a single cause of crime, rather there appears to be a concentration of causes which as Brantingham & Brantingham (1984) puts it often overlap and interlock.

2.1 Causes and Motivating Factors in Armed Robbery

Today, Nigeria’s economy is in shambles, riddled with corruption, nepotism and these have left behind an army of unemployed youth, with parents barely able to feed their children. Most industries and factories have either closed down due in part to the insecurity challenges which the country has continued to face unabatedly. Worst still is that, small traders are also daily closing their shops due to inflation rate which has reached double digit (Arinze, 2011). A look at Nigerians in the streets of Lagos, Benin, Ibadan and others would show a people without any access to social amenities, a people who live below the poverty line and this goes for 65% of Nigerians (UNDP, 2012). Poverty has remained a major issue in Nigeria but it became worse since the current leadership at the federal level took over.

Truth be told, poverty-stricken Nigerians have become easy prey for criminals who recruit them into armed robbery and its allied activities.

Closely linked to the poor economy and poverty rate as causes of armed robbery is the issue of unemployment. Yearly, higher institutions of learning churn out copious numbers of graduates to team up with the already existing ones. In Nigeria today, the jobs are non-existent and the few that are available are given to or reserved for top-notch politicians and first-class traditional rulers. Little wonder that, you find university graduates who left school over eight years ago still roaming the streets. These sets of people become disillusioned, frustrated, especially in the face of fruitless search for employment coupled with hunger, neglect, serious want and deprivation. The not principled or strong ones tend to resort to crime as means of venting their animosity on the society. Worst still is the fact that some of the youth who have posh jobs as in NNPC, Shell and other federal parastatals might not be as academically qualified as those on the streets. Without doubt, such circumstances tend to lead to dissatisfaction and with the growing need to amass wealth and draw level with their peers and armed robbery becomes a choice that is often resorted to. Unfortunately, it would appear that the present government has no solution to this social menace.

Compounding the problem further is the lifestyle of the ruling class. The politicians and even the trending 'yahoo boys' spend lavishly with no reservation, not caring that the vast majority of people are wallowing in abject poverty. This flagrant display of wealth which is often ill-gotten tends to breed more frustration amongst the young unemployed graduates. As Umar (2012) and Onoge (2003) have argued, this open display of opulence which has not elicited sanction more often than not, provokes the poor youth into taking to crime such as armed robbery.

Another cause of armed robbery is the soaring cultism and gang activities in most of the public universities in Nigeria. Some criminologists have attributed the rise in cult related activities to the influence of peer groups and quest for power and protection (Obarisiagbon, 2017). More often than not, the language mostly understood by cultists appears to be violence which in a way is what obtains in robbery activities. A number of armed robbery victims attested to the fact that those who robbed them spoke impeccable English, were well dressed and comported. These are but tales and signs of educated persons who were probably cultists that operated on their various campuses undeterred and have matured into armed robbery.

Umar (2015) has attributed the poor socio-economic condition of security personnel particularly the men and officers of the Nigeria police force as contributory factor to the incessant armed robbery attacks in most parts of the country. The take home pay of policemen is to put it mildly, grossly inadequate. There are no incentives such as life insurance packages, training leave with pay and so on. These men are thus, not even in a position to take care of themselves, let alone their wards and dependants. Little wonder that with this gory state of affairs, some policemen have resorted to armed robbery while others give out their arms or join forces with armed robbers in a bid to salvage their miserable economic conditions. This was the case with one Iyamu, a police officer convicted by a court of competent jurisdiction along with the notorious Anini in the 1980s. As it stands today in Nigeria, the morale of the police is quite low and this is particularly so when one discovers that funds meant for their welfare and purchase of sophisticated weapons do disappear or are embezzled or siphoned by politicians and very senior officers. With this graphic scenario, it is near impossibility for armed robbery not to continue to grow in leaps and abound in Nigeria.

It has been rightly observed that education is a vital tool against crime. In an ideal situation, the possession of good education is supposed to be an avenue and a means of earning a living and the quenching of the fire of poverty. Brown (2002) was correct when he stated that there is an association between education and criminality in human societies. Over 2.1 million undergraduates in Nigeria public universities (Nigeria Universities Commission, 2021) have been forcefully placed on "house arrest" due to the federal government's insensitivity to the plight of the lecturers and decay in infrastructure in the education sector. An idle mind they say, is the devil's workshop and one would not in the least be surprised if criminal activities (armed robbery) increase during this period, and as Onoge (2003) puts it, these young Nigerians have become an army reserve of recruits for criminal activities. Garba (2000) puts it succinctly when he noted that over the years, the education system in Nigeria has been grossly underfunded by the government. Closely linked to the poor economy and poverty rate as causes of armed robbery is the issue of unemployment. Yearly, higher institutions of learning chunk out copious numbers of graduates into the labour market.

Umar (2010) is of the strong view that the very fabric of family morality has been sacrificed at the altar of survival. The family unit in most African societies

was responsible for inculcating good moral values into its members and unholy activities by any member of the family was seriously and openly frowned at. Gone were the days, when fathers and even mothers subjected their children to endless questioning whenever they brought in any property that was not bought by them for the child. Today, and most ironically, some family members act as accomplices share from the booties and celebrate their children who do not work but bring in material things for the family, and sometimes the community. The bottom line is that, the young ones see this as tacit approval of their activities, which in most cases are nefarious and criminally related.

Obarisiagbon & Obarisiagbon (2016) in their study found that the mass media, particularly the social media is a powerful tool in the inculcation of values, negative or positive and this view is further strengthened by Barret (2004) when he opined that powerful media conglomerates transmit culture that could impart in a negative sense on the society. The world is now a global village which implies that with the click of a button, methods of doing things in Australia, America and the far East can be downloaded or accessed with ease. This perhaps explains how the youths in Nigeria tend to know the trend, patterns and innovative techniques of armed robbery and violent crimes. Thus, it will not be a surprise that most methods and skills used by young armed robbers are learnt from foreign media and if things remain the way they are, armed robbery will keep increasing despite the efforts of security operatives.

2.2 The Law as a Deterrent to Armed Robbery

In all known human societies, there are laws that regulate the behavioural patterns of their citizens. The law in other words, prescribes the right way of doing things and also makes provision for sanction against those who deviate from the right pattern. These laws are either codified or transmitted through cultural means. The Nigeria Criminal Code (2004) is a body of laws which deals with criminal offences as well as prescription of sanctions. In addition to this, successive governments have at one time or the other in response to the increasing rate of armed robbery, put tough punitive intervention. The Decree No. 47 of 1970 which prescribes death penalty by firing squad for a convicted armed robber is one such intervention by the government. The Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Act (1990) is another one of such statutory intervention by government. These laws ordinarily were meant to deter potential armed robbers but unfortunately, as Onwuka and Eguavoen (2007) observed, the law and justice

system in Nigeria have only assisted in entrenching injustice and inequality by protecting and favouring only the rich and powerful while the downtrodden are left in the cold. The implication of this is that, the law, even against armed robbery has been and is still being circumvented by suspected armed robbers. To Obarisiagbon & Obarisiagbon (2018), and Obarisiagbon & Aderinto (2019) corruption by men and officers of the Nigeria Police force and judicial officers has made light the impact of law on crime. Nigeria has reached a situation where, with the right amount of money, armed robbers can be charged with lesser offences or even, a no case advice from the director of public prosecution obtained. In the face of this, the law regrettably appears not to be a deterrent to armed robbery in Nigeria.

2.3 Theoretical Orientation

The study adopts the relative deprivation theory in its explanation of the incidence of armed robbery in metropolitan Benin, southern Nigeria. This theory according to Crosby (1976) seeks to explain a person's frustration as due to the perceived injustice and this tends to put pressure on him to use crime as an escape route. This theory seeks to explain the subjective dissatisfaction which is due to an individual's relative position to a given condition. Put succinctly, the theory states that an individual may consider himself deprived of something which he honestly feels he needs relative to his own past, other persons or groups or even some other social category.

The implication of this is that when an individual feels worse off compared to some standards, this usually leads him to responding or reacting in ways that could be termed criminal (Gurr, 1970 & Runciman, 1966). In Nigeria, relative deprivation takes place when there is a negative mismatch between reality and life. This author argues that when an unemployed individual who is a university graduate sees a secondary school dropout displaying opulence and living an ostentatious lifestyle, he is likely to consider himself deprived and depending on his level of maturity and moral inclinations, vent his frustration, anger, animosity by taking to armed robbery in a bid to forcefully take back what he believes the society has deprived him of. This theory in a way, makes one to understand the process and emotion involved in armed robbery. This author further argues that armed robbery is a process that involves the emotions of the actors whose sense of judgment as being poor, deprived of basic infrastructure and employment tends to lead into the crime.

3. Research Methodology

The descriptive survey design was employed as the research design for this study. Its choice stemmed from the fact that it is well suited for the collection of data to accurately and objectively describe existing social phenomena and in this instant case, armed robbery. The population of study includes all policemen, lawyers, magistrates and men and officers of the Edo State vigilante. The census technique was used in selecting the entire population of 105 state counsel, and prosecutors, and 85 magistrates, policemen in the Anti-robbery Unit and defence counsel. The simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 130 members of the public from the three local government areas that make up Benin metropolis thus resulting in a sample of 390

respondents in the study area. This brought the total number of participants studied to 585.

The research instrument used to collect data from respondents was a questionnaire titled “Armed Robbery and the Law Questionnaire (ARLQ)”. The instrument was self-designed and had two sections, A and B. Section A focused on the socio-economic features of participants while Section B dealt with the issues of causes and motivating factors of armed robbery and the effects of the law. Two well-trained research assistants helped to administer the questionnaire on the respective participants. After the filling process, the completed research instruments were collected from the participants for analysis. The data were coded and responses obtained were converted to assigned numeric value. The descriptive statistics was adopted in the analysis of the data.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Sex		
Male	385	66
Female	200	34
Total	585	100
Age		
19-24	100	17
25-34	150	26
35-44	200	34
45 and above	135	23
Total	585	100
Religion		
Christianity	500	85
Islam	50	9
A.T.R.	35	6
Total	585	100
Educational status		
Primary	85	14
Secondary	150	26
Tertiary	350	60
Total	585	100
Marital status		
Married	475	81
Single	100	17
Divorced	10	2
Separated	-	-
Total	585	100

Source: Field Survey, February- April, 2022

Table 1 indicates that there were 385 (66%) male respondents while the number of female respondents was 200 (34%). This implies that there were more male respondents than female in the area of study. The table also shows that respondents within the ages of 19-24 years were 100 (17%), those between 25-34 years were 150 (26%), while those within the ages of 35-44 years were 200 (34%) and those who were 45 years and above were 135 (23%). This shows that majority of the respondents were between the ages of 35-44 years. On religion, 500 (85%) of the respondents were Christians, 50 (9%) were Muslims and 35 (6%) practiced African traditional religion. On educational status, 85 (14%) of the respondents had primary education, 150 (26%) had secondary education and 350 (60%) had tertiary education. This shows that majority of the respondents had tertiary education. For marital status, 475 (81%) of the respondents were married, 100 (17%) were single, 10 (2%) were divorced and none of them were separated. This means that majority of the respondents were married.

Research Question One: What are the causes and motivating factors in the commission of armed robbery in Metropolitan Benin, Southern Nigeria.?

Table 2: Percentage Score of Causes and Motivating Factors in the commission of Armed Robbery

Causes and motivation for armed robbery	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Poverty	100	17
Lifestyle of the elites	105	17
Poor condition of security agents	50	9
Unemployment	50	9
Lack of values and morals	85	14
All of the above	200	34
None of the above	-	-
Total	585	100

Source: Field survey, February- April, 2022

Table 2 shows that 17% of the surveyed population affirmed that poverty is a cause and motivation for armed robbery, another 17% mentioned lifestyle of the elites as a cause, while poor condition of security agents and unemployment accounted for 9% and 9% respectively, 14% of the respondents stated lack of values and morals while 34% highlighted all the above causes. The findings of this study further lend credence to Umar (2012) and Onoge (2003) when they argued that, the open display of opulence which has not elicited sanction more often than not, provokes the poor youth into taking to crime such as armed robbery. The finding also supports the previous work of Umar (2015) who attributed the poor socio-economic condition of security personnel particularly the men and officers of the Nigeria police force as contributory factor to the incessant armed robbery attacks in most parts of the country. The take home pay of policemen is to put it mildly, grossly inadequate. There are no incentives such as life insurance packages, training leave with pay and so on. Little wonder that with this gory state of affairs, some policemen have resorted to armed robbery while others give out their arms or join force with armed robbers in a bid to salvage their miserable economic conditions. It equally gives credence to (UNDP, 2012) position that poverty has remained a major issue in Nigeria and could be a major reason for armed robbery and its allied activities.

Research Question 2: Do laws deter armed robbers in Metropolitan Benin, Southern Nigeria.?

Table 3: Percentage Score of Law and Armed Robbery

Does the law deter armed robbers?	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	185	32
No	400	68
Total	585	100

Source: Field Survey, February- April, 2022

Table 3 shows that 32% of the surveyed population affirmed that the law deters armed robbers while 68% held that the law does not deter armed robbers. This study's findings have, to a large extent, further validated studies which found that the law no longer acts as deterrence to potential armed robbers and criminally minded persons. Obarisiagbon & Omege (2018), and Obarisiagbon & Aderinto (2018) in their respective studies found that as a result of corruption by men and officers of the Nigeria Police force and judicial officers, criminals no longer respect the law, let alone fear it. Nigeria has reached a situation where, with the right amount of money, armed robbers can be charged with lesser offences or even, a no case advice obtained from the director of public prosecution. In the face of this, the law regrettably appears not to be a deterrent to armed robbery in Nigeria.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Of all the violent crimes committed in Nigeria, none is as horrifying as armed robbery. It remains a major source of concern to both highly and lowly placed persons in society as no one is spared the agony whenever they strike be it in residential places or the highway. The study reveals that there is no one cause of the crime as its causes are multifaceted. More worrisome is the fact that the law does not appear anymore to be a deterrent to potential armed robbers within metropolitan Benin, southern Nigeria. This finding should be of concern to individuals and the society in general. This implies that any action plan for curbing this social malaise must be holistic and one that addresses the causes and motivation for the offence. It is therefore against this background that the following suggestions have been put forward:

- Government should look into the installation of closed-circuit television (CCTV) in major streets within metropolitan Benin. This will act as a powerful anti-robbery strategy.
- There is the need for government to recruit and train more police officers who should be provided with modern gadgets (helicopters, vehicles, dogs, surveillance cameras and sophisticated arms and ammunition).
- The welfare (enhanced living wage and insurance policies) of the police should be given top priority by those at the corridor of policy making. This will help boost their morale in fighting armed robbery.
- Government needs to be dispatch men and officers of the police force to patrol the country's borders. This patrol should involve aerial surveillance so as to frustrate the efforts of armed smugglers.
- Government at the state and federal levels should create more youth empowerment and poverty eradication schemes.
- There should be just and equitable distribution of the nation's wealth while at the same time, a discouragement of flagrant display of opulence by politicians and moneybags.
- There is the need for a general reform of the judiciary with emphasis on the creation of a zero tolerant judiciary. Judicial officers found corrupt, enriching themselves or demanding and receiving bribe with the aim of perverting the cause of justice should not only be shown the way out of the system but be prosecuted. This too should go for the police force.

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