Normalization of Corruption: A Case Study of Policemen on East-West Road in Rivers State.

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Abstract
This study investigates the normalization of police extortion along the East-West Road in Rivers State, Nigeria. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research explores the socio-economic factors that contribute to the prevalence of extortion, the impact on local communities, and the public perception of law enforcement. The findings indicate that police extortion has become a routine aspect of daily life for many residents, significantly undermining trust in law enforcement and exacerbating socio-economic challenges. The study concludes with recommendations for policy reforms aimed at enhancing accountability and restoring public trust.

Keywords: Corruption, Police Extortion, East-West Road, Rivers State, Nigeria, Community Impact, Public Perception, Policy Reform.

Introduction
Corruption is a significant challenge in Nigeria, particularly within law enforcement agencies (Hobbes, 1651). The East-West Road, a vital transportation route in Rivers State, has become notorious for police extortion practices (Human Rights Watch. 2022). This study aims to explore how these practices have become normalized, the factors contributing to this normalization, and the implications for local communities and governance.

Aim
The primary aim of this study is to assess the normalization of police extortion along the East-West Road in Rivers State and its impact on local communities.

Objectives of the Study
1. To identify the socio-economic and institutional factors contributing to the normalization of police extortion.
2. To evaluate the impact of police extortion on the socio-economic conditions of communities along East-West Road.
3. To analyze public perception of police legitimacy in the context of extortion.
4. To propose actionable recommendations for addressing police corruption.

Methodology
This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data collection involved:

Surveys: A structured questionnaire was distributed to 300 residents and business owners along the East-West Road to gather quantitative data on experiences with police extortion.
Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 participants, including community leaders, police officers, and victims of extortion, to gain qualitative insights into the normalization of extortion practices.
Focus Groups: Three focus group discussions were held to explore community perceptions and coping mechanisms regarding police extortion.

Data analysis involved statistical analysis of survey results and thematic coding of qualitative data to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Theoretical Framework
This study is grounded in the social contract theory (Hobbes, T, 1651) and institutional corruption theory (Rose-Ackerman, S. 1999). The social contract theory posits that citizens consent to surrender certain freedoms in exchange for protection and order from the state. When law enforcement agencies engage in extortion, they violate this contract, leading to a breakdown of trust and legitimacy. Institutional corruption theory highlights how corrupt practices become embedded within organizations, often leading to a culture of impunity and normalization of unethical behavior (Mauro, 1995).

Statement of the Problem
The normalization of police extortion along the East-West Road poses significant challenges to governance, public safety, and community trust in law enforcement. This study seeks to understand the extent of this issue, the factors contributing to its normalization, and its implications for society.

Review of Related Literature
Numerous studies have documented the prevalence of police corruption in Nigeria, emphasizing the socio-economic and political contexts that facilitate such practices (Adebayo 2019, Ojo 2020 and Smith 2017). Research indicates that systemic corruption erodes public trust and hampers effective governance (Eze 2021 and Transparency International 2023). However, limited studies specifically address the normalization of extortion practices along major transportation routes like the East-West Road. The literature suggests that economic hardship plays a significant role in fostering corrupt practices among law enforcement (Andvig, & Moene, 1990), while political patronage can also influence police behavior (Méon,, & Weill, 2010). Furthermore, the lack of accountability mechanisms within police forces exacerbates the problem (Klitgaard, 1988). Effective community policing strategies have been proposed as a way to build trust and improve police-community relations (Trojanowicz., & Bucqueroux, 1990 and Skogan, 2006). Finally, addressing the underlying socio-economic conditions, such as poverty and unemployment, is crucial for tackling the root causes of corruption (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

Results
The study finds that:
Prevalence of Extortion: 75% of respondents reported experiencing or witnessing police extortion.
Economic Hardship: 65% of respondents indicated that economic challenges influenced their interactions with police.

Public Trust: Only 20% of respondents expressed confidence in law enforcement, citing widespread corruption as a primary reason.

Findings
The normalization of police extortion is deeply rooted in socio-economic challenges, a lack of accountability, and a culture of impunity. Many community members have adapted to this reality, often resorting to silence or informal negotiations with law enforcement. The findings suggest that the extortion practices have become a routine aspect of life for many, leading to a cycle of distrust and corruption.

Discussion of Findings
The results indicate that police extortion is not merely an isolated issue but a symptom of broader systemic corruption within Nigerian institutions. The erosion of trust in law enforcement has significant implications for community safety and governance. The normalization of extortion reflects a failure of the social contract between citizens and the state, where citizens feel compelled to pay bribes for basic services and protection.

Moreover, the findings highlight the socio-economic factors that contribute to this normalization. Economic hardship and unemployment create a fertile ground for corrupt practices, as individuals may feel they have no choice but to comply with extortion demands. The lack of accountability mechanisms within the police force further exacerbates the issue, allowing corrupt practices to flourish without fear of repercussions.

Conclusion
The normalization of police extortion along the East-West Road in Rivers State represents a critical challenge to governance and public trust. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive reforms and community engagement to restore accountability and integrity within law enforcement. The study underscores the need for a multi-faceted approach that includes economic development, legal reforms, and community policing initiatives.

Recommendations
1. Community Policing Initiatives: Implement community policing strategies to foster trust between police and residents, encouraging collaboration and open communication.
2. Independent Oversight Bodies: Establish independent oversight mechanisms to investigate and address police misconduct, ensuring accountability for corrupt practices.
3. Public Awareness Campaigns: Increase public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about their rights and available reporting mechanisms for police extortion.
4. Economic Development Programs: Advocate for economic development initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty and reducing vulnerability to extortion, thereby addressing the root causes of corruption.

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