Original Research Article

Security Check Points and Police Extortion: A Study of Road Transport Corridors in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Police checkpoints have come to be associated with extortion in Imo State, and motorists frequently become victims of a well-established pattern of unethical behavior. This work, 'Security Check Points and Police Extortion: A Study of Transport Corridors in Imo State, Nigeria', sought to investigate and understand the nature and pattern of such extortion, its significant effects on drivers, and society at large. The objective of the study is to comprehend the dynamics of this widespread problem and shed light on its deep-seated roots and wide-ranging effects. Data was primarily gathered, methodically coded, and analysed using an interpretivist philosophy and qualitative methods to help the study delve deeply into the various tactics used by the police to extort money from motorists, such as arbitrary searches, illegal fines, and intimidation tactics. Adopting Strain Anomie Theory, the study analysed the methods used at these checkpoints. The effects of this extortion scheme go beyond just the financial losses for drivers. But there is a deterioration of public confidence among the police organisation and personnel. Considering a multifaceted approach to dealing with this issue The study recommends that the police force urgently needs fundamental reforms, covering greater training, stricter supervision procedures, and increased accountability standards. Imo State can aim to eliminate this harmful behaviour and restore faith in the police institution through a concerted effort involving other law enforcement agencies, civic society, and the general public, ultimately building a safer and more just society for all.
Keywords: Security challenges, Police extortion, Transport corridor, security check point, Nigeria.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Society either developed or not, has rules and laws that regulate how members conduct themselves. To guard against citizen misconduct, specific institutions must be put in place to safeguard these various rules and regulations. The Nigerian police, one of the law enforcement agencies, are the main subject of the researcher's attention. Nigerian police, which had existed for a century, underwent reform and modernization to be ready for any issues that might arise due to the 1930s instability (Oluwaniyi, 2011). After 1930, there were intermittent changes to its composition, organisational structure, tools, and methods. The primary objective of the Nigerian police is the upkeep of law and order, for which the law has granted them certain leeway in dealing with citizens (Ene & Abejirinde, 2020).

In reaction to abuses of discretion, such as physical assaults on bystanders and unequal application of the law when making arrests, it was decided to limit police officers' freedom of action. Others argue that rather than seeking to restrict police discretion, we should respect it (Idowu, 2013). Some people believe police officers should have less discretion. The police have corrupted themselves and exploited their discretionary powers as a cover, corrupting this power out of self-interest, which is one of the main reasons why some people oppose discretion (Nwolise, 2012). Social science researchers have observed that corruption has permeated Nigerian culture to the degree that it is ironic that individuals who choose not to partake in it are usually referred to as "deviants" in the neighbourhood (Anyadubalu, 2010).

This situation is played out on a daily basis; drivers plying the Nigerian roads are terrified of police officers' actions and unlikely to report their experiences to other relevant authorities (courts), where they can

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assuredly secure speedy justice. As a result, they are unable to stand in the way of any police officer who demands a bribe. The saying "justice delayed is justice denied" gives rise to the misconception that road users can simply purchase their passage with some naira notes without being stopped or checked by police, saving them the time and inconvenience of having to wait on the road. Giving some Naira notes to the authorities at the checkpoints has become standard practice as a result of this roadside norm-evasion. Due to this shift in conventions, cops now view checkpoints as commercial hubs, while motorists no longer perceive them as law enforcement personnel. As a result, the official connection that should exist between the police and drivers has evolved into a give-and-take arrangement, and any motorist who refuses to cooperate may experience nasty responses from the authorities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The widespread and deeply ingrained corruption of the Nigerian police is no longer a secret (Ene & Abejirinde, 2020). This is due to the institutionalised agency, which is constitutionally responsible for protecting lives and property, combating crimes of all kinds, and combating bribery, intimidation, and extortion, currently swimming in such rivers of oddities with impunity. Petty corruption, acts of bribery and extortion, criminal infiltration, and political corruption are all types of police corruption (Ene & Abejirinde, 2020). The daily media in Nigeria frequently reports on extrajudicial death cases. For instance, on November 14, 2002, police officers manning checkpoints killed four Christians who were returning from Enugu, a night vigil service, and injured eight others. The event happened at the toll gate in Ogbunike, where the driver opted to provide N20.00 instead of N60.00 as a bribe. As the remaining passengers escaped the van, the officers became agitated and opened fire from close range, instantly killing the driver and three other passengers (Oyewale, 2005).

Fidelis Okoji, a father of five, was also killed on July 8, 2005, by Blessing Ighinovia, a police officer with service number 397213, in Ogba, Lagos, for disrupting an argument between the policeman and a bus driver and for declining to pay the N20.00 bribe (Oyewale, 2005; Inyang & Ubong, 2013). Commercial and private vehicle owners in Nigeria routinely struggle with police extortion. Few research studies have examined the effects of such extortion on police public relations as well as internal security, despite the fact that many studies on this topic have focused on the proliferation of police checkpoints and the police practice of extorting motorists. However, very little research has examined the potential origins of this phenomenon. The fact that there is no empirical research on the potential sociopolitical and economic connection between checkpoints and driver extortion on Nigerian highways is particularly important. Therefore, it is in this study's interest to close these gaps, thus an imperative to carry out this study on

Security Check Points and Police Extortion: A Study of Road Transport Corridors in Imo State, Nigeria'.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine security checkpoints and police extortion: a study of road transport corridors in Imo State, Nigeria. The study's specific objectives are as follows:

1. To describe the nature of the extortion of motorists by the police at checkpoints in Imo State.
2. To investigate the patterns of extortion at police checkpoints in Imo State.
3. To identify the causes and motivations behind extortions at police checkpoints in Imo State
4. To assess the impact of extortion by police on motorists and society.

1.4 Research Questions

Relaying on the identified problem and objectives of the study, this study shall seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the extortion of motorists by the police at checkpoints in Imo State?
2. What are the likely patterns of extortion at police checkpoints in Imo State?
3. What are the causes and motivations behind extortions at checkpoints in Imo State?
4. What are the impacts of extortion by police at checkpoints in Imo State on motorists and society?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 The Nigerian Police

Laws and rules are meant to regulate people's behaviours but are useless without enforcement professionals who watch over compliance, hold violators, and file charges against suspects in court to serve as a warning to others, especially potential criminals. The police are one of the most important agencies in the country, created to uphold law and order. The Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, as amended, outlines the institution's significant role and expectations in Nigerian society under Sections 214, 215, and 216. The value of the police as an institution for establishing and preserving peace, tranquilly, and order cannot be overstated. The identification, investigation, and punishment of crimes and public nuisances are the responsibility of the police as a government body, according to Merriam-Webster. It is a judicial body or governmental organisation entrusted with maintaining order and defending the rule of law by keeping an eye out for dangers to the status quo and eradicating them (Ibrahim 2015).

Statutory Duties of the Nigerian Police

Protection of people's lives and property, crime prevention and detection, apprehending offenders, maintaining law and order, properly enforcing all laws and regulations, and security are among the statutory

obligations of the Nigerian police (Adegoke, 2014; Ibrahim, 2015; Cheri, 2015; Philip, 2016). Unfortunately, from the researcher's observations on highways, it is obvious that police are not on highways purely to preserve the safety of the public but rather to extort money from both private and commercial drivers. The fundamental duty of the state continues to be the protection of people's lives and property, whether at homes, workplaces, roadways, waterways, or airports. As needed, the police and other law enforcement professionals carry out this duty.

2.2 Security Checkpoints and Police Extortions

When a roadside barrier or barricade is erected, a checkpoint is created (Legaladmin, 2020). Law enforcement personnel stop vehicles for inspection. Drug checkpoints, border checks, and DUI checkpoints are a few examples of these examinations. Cars are halted at these obstacles so that authorities can search the inside for weapons, narcotics, and paperwork. The driver, fugitives, and missing persons can all be checked by police to see if they are under the influence. Such checkpoints may be used for border security, public safety, or the advancement of an investigation into a crime. For instance, to locate a missing child, police can set up a roadblock on the motorways leading out of a city (UN, 2015; Legaladmin, 2020).

However, as extortion has consistently been referred to as corruption by multiple definitions of corruption, there is no other way to conceptualise the character of extortion by the Nigerian police as corrupt. Akubo (2015) defines corruption as a broad category of illegal behaviour that includes graft, bribery, nepotism, and other unfair strategies employed by members of the public and government employees to get socially and legally prohibited privileges. Similar to that, it's referred to as a form of covert social trade when people in positions of authority use their influence to advance their personal interests in one way or another (Doig, 2009). The police extorting money from motorists at checkpoints while brandishing a gun and acting in the service of the government is described in this definition as corruption.

Based on the behaviour of police personnel at checkpoints, it appears that extortion is an organised levy collected at toll gates in Nigeria. Depending on the victim at the time, extortion frequently takes place in public view and involves both threats and flattery. It is occasionally possible to charge drivers and passengers individually in an effort to boost "profit" without concern for morality, sobriety, or ethics. Karimu (2015) asserts that police personnel who openly collect cash from motorists and other road users at checkpoints look to have institutionalised corruption. For commercial trucks in particular, every roadblock automatically converts into a toll gate; the difference is that the police personnel keep the money in their own pockets. In some regions of the country, police personnel offer road users money ranging

from N50 to N500. Drivers are required to pay a fine or run the risk of being pulled over repeatedly, subjected to rude questions, suffering injuries, or even losing their lives. The response to rapid payment, on the other hand, is often a smile, a prayer, or even a promise that there won't be any more checks (Inyang and Ubong, 2013; Mohammed, 2014). This is true even when the vehicle's paperwork is forged or the cargo is loaded with illegal goods.

What is constant in every definition of the term is that the state is considered the main actor, which explains why the World Bank and Transparency International continue to use the phrase "abuse of public power for personal gain or profit" as their working definition of corruption (World Bank, 2011). Ibrahim (2015) defined extortion as a form of corruption in which coercive methods such as force, threats, and intimidation are used to extract money from defenceless people. It is frequently given to police personnel as a result of the many accidents, arrests, threats of blackmail, and even fatalities on Nigerian roads.

2.3 Nigerian Police Force and the Challenges of Law Enforcement

Nigeria's failed security system and current insecurity situation are factors in the ongoing debate regarding the creation of a state police, which is in line with the practice of Federalism. Katsina (2012) asserted that the issue of states having their own police force or department has continued to spark controversy and vehement debate. The country's courts' shortcomings, which limit its ability to protect residents' lives, property, and liberties, also contribute to a general lack of confidence in Nigeria's legal system, law enforcement agencies, and judiciary. Many efforts have been made to prevent crime in most Nigerian cities, according to a study on "crime control and prevention in Nigeria" by Ngwube (2013). 65% of the participants in the research agreed that many efforts have been made in recent years to decrease crime in Nigerian cities. Despite the government's progress to date, the police have had little effect on combating crime through such slogans as "fire for fire," "operation sweep," and so on. There is much more to preventing crime than hiring more police officers and security guards and installing more advanced alarm systems (Ngwube, 2013).

Onifade, Imhonopi, and Urim (2013) maintained that political figures, government minority groups, local communities, the general public, and the media are all exerting undeniable pressure on the police. The Nigerian police have long been the subject of complaints and criticism. All of them call for changes to the police, including making them more efficient, strong, responsive, and, in some cases, nonexistent. For instance, in Nigeria, it was found that social and political unrest, economic unrest, a lack of accountability on the part of those in positions of authority, inconsistencies, and a lack of continuity in government initiatives are the main

barriers and failures to social justice in the country. This was discovered during a workshop on "police and social justice" held in 1994–1997. Others include the insufficient benefits provided to police officers and bad working circumstances (Ngwube, 2013).

2.4 Conceptual Framework
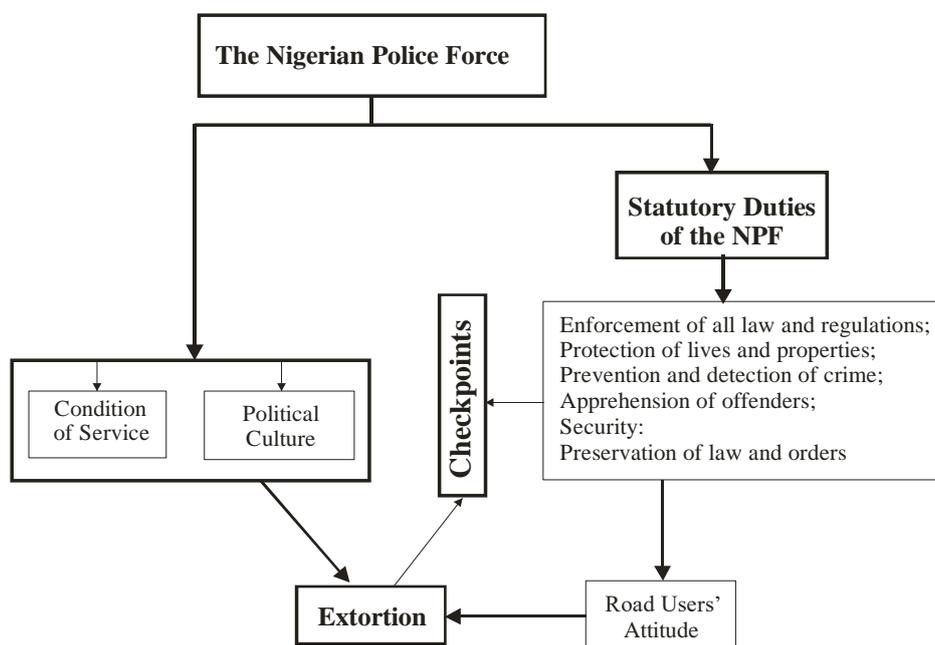
Fig 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Authors compilation (2023)

As illustrated in the chart above, there are numerous interrelated elements that are at play in the intricate interaction between police checkpoints and extortion. The study expects a relationship between the political climate, road user attitudes, and the police condition of service as causal elements of extortion based on the study's objectives in Chapter 1 above. This is further explained in the graph above, which demonstrates that increasing checking points is primarily done to allow the police to carry out their legal obligations. However, it is also clear that these statutory obligations affect how they interact with other road users, who may respond by offering bribes to prevent the police from carrying out their duties. This payoff is thought to have inspired the cops to operate in an extortionate manner. On the other hand, it is also thought that the political climate and police conditions of duty encourage extortion. Consequently, it is thought that the police now view the checkpoints as their business centres because of the extortion, even though the primary goal of establishing checkpoints is to enable the police to carry out their legal obligations. In conclusion, it is thought that extortion is a function of the police's state of service, political climate, and road users' attitudes. Road users' attitudes are influenced by how well the police carry out their legal obligations, and the proliferation of checkpoints is a result of how well the police carry out their legal obligations and extortion.

2.5 Theoretical Framework
Strain Anomie Theory

A disjunction or lack of connection, between goals and means is what leads to crime, according to the structural strain theory. An American sociologist, Robert King Merton, postulated strain theory, a concept borrowed from Emile Durkheim's theory of 'anomie'. Merton asserted that societies are composed of two core aspects: culture and social structure. Our values, beliefs, goals, and identities are developed in the cultural realm (Agnew, 2005). They form the way one responds to existing social structures that ideally provide the means for the public to achieve their goals and live out positive identities. Often, though, people lack the means to achieve culturally valued goals, leading them to feel strain (frustration) and possibly engage in deviant behaviour (Ashley, 2021). Merton believed that societies do not provide adequate means of achieving cultural goals. Taking the case of the United States, to achieve the American Dream, American society would need to provide access to education and employment. When society does not do well enough, individuals are faced with a gap between 'what ought to be' and 'what is.'

Theory argues that deviance and crime occur when there aren't enough legitimate means for people to achieve the normal success goals of a life, especially in a secular society where wealth is a social means of acceptance and evaluation (Nightingale, 1993). In such a situation, there is a 'strain' between the individual's goals of making wealth and becoming successful and the

societal stricture that means to achieve those goals. Thus, some people deviate by turning to crime in order to achieve success.

Response to Strain

Merton noted that the deviant response to strain is one of five ways or responses, which are: Conformity: When the person or group accepts societal cultural goals and the means of achieving them. Innovation: This involves accepting societal cultural goals but rejecting the traditional, legitimate means of attaining those goals. Ritualism: the person or group rejects societal cultural goals but accepts the traditionally stated legitimate means to obtain cultural goals. Retreatism: When a person or group rejects both the cultural goals and the traditional means of achieving those goals, Rebellion: applies to people who reject and replace societal culturally registered valued goals and the socially sanctioned means of achieving them.

The theory is very cogent in explaining the problem of juvenile gambling because of its employment of the axiom 'innovators'. Innovates, aptly captures, and explains the act of police extortion at checkpoints. The innovative extortionist officer accepts the societal cultural goals of success (wealth and riches) but rejects the traditionally stated legitimate means of achieving those goals. Thus, they chose to apply deviant means (extortions) to achieving success and riches while rejecting the legitimate societal and culturally registered means, which are hard work and career progression through education.

The use of Strain Anomie Theory will therefore improve our understanding of security checkpoints and rising extortion in Nigeria. Those in Nigeria who had the good fortune to get a high education are now getting caught doing crimes. Due to the tremendous and intolerable level of poverty in the country, many individuals have no alternative but to use what Merton called creativity through innovations, which causes them to turn to crime. Road users bribe the police personnel to expedite their business in an effort to make ends meet and avoid the expected social behaviour, similar to how drivers use the creative method. Ngwube (2013) made the following observation with regard to the aforementioned: "A school of thought has argued that there can be no crime prevention efforts that will thrive in this place until something feasible is done regarding poverty, ignorance, and diseases that gaze on the faces of ordinary individuals in most families in less developed countries.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

Research methodology, according to Jansen (2023b), is a technique to describe how a researcher wants to conduct their study, including the approach, procedures, data collection, and analysis methodologies the researcher will employ to ensure valid and reliable results. In order to investigate the thoughts and opinions of drivers, particularly those plying the roads in Imo State, this study used interpretivist philosophy and an inductive approach. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill's (2007) "research onion" model, the study method is connected to the second layer of decision-making. Because there is a dearth of empirical information on the factors that drive police to commit extortion, this study believes that an inductive method will be appropriate for a qualitative inquiry of this kind (Jansen, 2023a). The population of the study includes all male and female drivers, 18 years of age and older, who are loading passengers in any of the parks in Owerri, Imo State, that are supervised by the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). Since these parks are located near the state's administrative centre and are accessible via major highways, only drivers in them were tested. The study uses the snowball sampling technique and the saturation guiding concept to locate the participant motorists and the parks in a homogenous community with an unknown population size (Jansen, 2023a).

Semi-structured interviews were utilised in the study because they are effective at eliciting rich, qualitative information about people's experiences, ideas, or perspectives and because they enable the researcher to immediately contact participants for clarification or further information (Specht, 2020). In order to compare the written and audio-recorded reports, data was obtained, transcribed, sorted, and coded. The processes mentioned in Braun and Clarke (2012), which include data transcription and organisation, familiarisation, coding, theme production, review, theme refinement, and data interpretation and reporting, are applied in this study to apply the thematic technique of data analysis.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined steps for conducting reflexive thematic analysis, which were repeated and further explained by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2016, and 2019). These steps include data transcription and organisation, familiarisation, coding, theme generation, review and refining of themes, and data interpretation and reporting.

4.1 Transcription and Data Organisation

The study double-checked to transcribe, confirm, and make sure that all pertinent information was obtained utilising a comparison of the written and audio-recorded responses. Using the snowball sampling saturation approach, the study was able to recruit sixty (63) drivers from eight parks who were willing to take part in the study. Each item is given a special identification to preserve anonymity, and it is then placed into a spreadsheet system of data organisation for the sole purpose of correct organisation and comprehension of the data flow. A few discrepancies were found while

comparing the written and audio records, as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Written vs Audio Data Reconciliation

Participant	Written record	Audio record	Reconciled Data
Participant 2	Come throw	Control	…control their temperament…
Participant 10	Park	Pat	…pat on the back…
Participant 30	Hanger	Anger	Anger

Source: Field Work, 2023

When the written record was compared with the audio record, the aforementioned inconsistencies were found, and they were fixed as indicated. The majority of the mistakes that were found were misinterpretations of pronunciation.

4.2 Familiarisation

The researchers familiarised themselves with the information by reading the transcripts twice, making notes as they went along, and underlining key passages from which they would later pull out sample extracts to answer the study questions. Table 2 displays the initial codes that were recorded as they emerged throughout this procedure.

Table 2: Initial codes

Study Themes	Initial codes	Sample Excerpts
Nature of Extortion	Bribe, Money, Illegal, Stop and search, Fabricated offences, Accusations, Extortion, Legitimate, Unauthorised, Documents, Safety, Violations, Threat, Fines, Impound, Arrests, Victim, Comply, Demands, Registration, Driver's license, Harassment, Intimidation, Violence, Fear, Coercion, Accountability,	"the officers just stand for checkpoints to take bribe", "…and them no de collect bribe from us alone o, everybody wey de use this road follow de suffer", "every road users are victims", "this bribe matter is increasing every day because nobody is holding the security personnel accountable"
Patterns of extortion	Selective, Targeting, Perception, Time, Claims, Violations, Exaggerated, Seatbelt, Insistent, Cash, Receipt, Location, Reluctance, Inconspicuous Locations, Isolated areas, Confusion, Manipulative, Nighttime, Less traffic, Darkness, High Traffic, Delays, Tourist, Strangers, Target, Unfamiliar, Complications,	"they select motorists they believe they will get money from", "…sometime them go say provide your papers, provide your license, all that nah to intimidate you", "nah for morning and evening we de see police more for road"
Causes and motivations behind extortions	Poverty, Working Conditions, Benefits, Income, Corruption, Training, Economic Inequality,	"the police always complain of low salaries", "the corruption within the Force is the main reason for extortion", "they are not well trained",
Extortion on motorists and the society	Financial burden, Economic Activities, Distrust, Diversion of routes, Negative Perception, No cooperation,	"motorists have become reluctant to report crimes…", "the bribes lead to much expenses", "it has increased transport cost which affect trade and economic growth", "them don become dog wey de shop bone them hang for him neck…, how them go fit secure us when nah them de cause de trouble",

Source: Field Work, 2023

Major codes, such as words, phrases, and sentences (Braun and Clarke, 2016), as they relate to the research questions, are anticipated to emerge from the initial codes. During the classification process, some additional codes from the initial codes listed in Table 4.2 evolved to form the primary codes listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Emergent Codes

Study Themes	Categories	Major Codes
Nature of Extortion	Nature of interaction with the police	Giving money as bribe, Illegal checkpoints, Stop and search, Fabricated offences, False accusation of motorists, Unauthorised arrests, Threat on motorists, Harassment and Intimidation,
	Frequency of police checkpoints encounter	Security personnel, Daily, Often, Motorists, Citizens, Safety checks,

Study Themes	Categories	Major Codes
	Motorists coping strategies.	Violations, Registration and documentation, Driver's license, diversion of routes, Bribe,
Patterns of extortion	Actions of police at checkpoints	False accusations, Exaggerating offences, Lack of Transparency, Intimidation of motorists, Manipulative stop and search,
	Period and locations of prevalence	Isolated areas, Less Visible, Remote areas, Slow-high traffic routes, Holidays,
	Factors influencing the selection of targets	Perception of wealth, Luxurious cars, Traffic offenses, Incomplete documents, Avoidance of delay,
Causes and motivations behind extortions	Police officers welfare	Poor salaries, Poor working conditions, Economic Inequality,
	Expectations from higher authorities	Corruption, Power relationship and returns, loss of accountability,
	Roles of motorists	Non-compliance with traffic laws, Traffic offences, Being in haste all the time, Lack of reporting corruption,
Extortion on motorists and the society	Emotional and financial impact on motorist	Financial burden, Distrust, Confidence, Negative Perception, Poverty,
	Impact on community-police relations	Low confidence, No cooperation,

Source: Field Work, 2023

4.3 Theme generation

The codes were systematically applied to the entire dataset to aid in locating patterns, connections, and recurring themes for consequent theme formation through the grouping of similar codes. In the process of examining these codes for themes, it was discovered that some categories were already covered by others and consequently collapsed. As Richards & Morse (2007) argued, categorising is how we 'up' from the range of data to the forms of data, and the kinds of items portrayed by so doing, the major codes evolved into themes as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Emergent Themes

Study Themes	Categories	Emergent themes
Nature of Extortion	Nature of interaction with the police	Transactional communication between road users and the police, Illegal checkpoints for collecting bribes, Stop and search checkpoints, Fabricating offences as tools of extortion, Harassment and Intimidation,
	Frequency of police checkpoints encounter	Daily encounter with security personnel, Motorists' route determines the frequency,
	Motorists coping strategies.	Violation of police order to pack, Registration and documentation of vehicles, Acquiring Driver's license, Diversion of routes heavy with checkpoints, Giving bribes and favours to the officers,
Patterns of extortion	Actions of police at checkpoints	False accusations on motorists, Exaggerating offences to extort, Intimidation of motorists, Document inspection,
	Period and locations of prevalence	Inconspicuous and Isolated locations, prevalent at evening and early morning, Slow-high traffic routes,
	Factors influencing the selection of targets	Perception of wealth indicated by luxurious cars, Incomplete documents, Avoidance of delay by the motorists,
Causes and motivations behind extortions	Police officers welfare	Poor salaries and poverty mentality, Poor working conditions, Economic Inequality,
	Expectations from higher authorities	Corruption, Power relationship and returns, loss of accountability
	Roles of motorists in encouraging extortion	Non-compliance with traffic laws, Traffic offences, Being in haste all the time,
Extortion on motorists and the society	Emotional and financial impact on motorist	Financial burden, Uncertainty of expenses, Distrust on the officers and lack of confidence in the system,
	Impact on community-police relations	Low confidence, No cooperation,

Source: Field Work, 2023

4.4 Review and refine themes

The initial themes were reviewed and refined by comparing them with the coded data to ensure that the major themes that will emerge capture the essence of the data and represent different perspectives and experiences as they relate to the research questions. Some of the themes were retained as they captured the data they represent, while others were refined, restructured, or merged. Therefore, in line with the research questions, the categories and themes used to measure them as refined are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Refined Themes

Study Themes	Categories	Refined themes
Nature of Extortion	Nature of interaction with the police	Transactional relationship at the checkpoints, Fabricating offences as tools of extortion, Unauthorised arrests and impounding of cars, Threat on life and properties of motorists,
	Frequency of police checkpoints encounter	Daily encounter with security personnel, Frequency of road usage and choice of routes,
	Motorists coping strategies.	Violation of police order to pack, Documentation of vehicles, Diversion of routes heavy with checkpoints, Giving bribes to the officers,
Patterns of extortion	Actions of police at checkpoints	False accusations and exaggeration of offences to extort, Intimidation of motorists, Manipulative stop and search,
	Period and locations of prevalence	Inconspicuous and Isolated locations, prevalent at evening and early morning, Slow-heavy traffic routes,
	Factors influencing the selection of targets	Perception of wealth indicated by luxurious cars, Incomplete documents, Desire to avoid delay by the motorists and passengers,
Causes and motivations behind extortions	Police officers welfare	Poor salaries and poverty mentality, Poor working conditions, Economic Inequality,
	Roles of motorists in encouraging extortion	Non-compliance with traffic laws, Being in haste all the time, Inability to report corruption,
Extortion on motorists and the society	Emotional and financial impact on motorist	Financial burden, Uncertainty of expenses, Distrust on the officers and lack of confidence in the system, Negative Perception of the police officers,
	Impact on community-police relations	Low confidence, No cooperation,

Source: Field Work, 2023

4.5 Data Interpretation and Reporting

With an experiential attitude towards understanding data, the investigation of how a person would interpret a certain phenomenon is frequently prioritized. This requires examining the significance of the phenomenon to the respondent as well as the interpretation that the respondent ascribes to it (Byrne, 2021). The researcher would accept the participant's interpretation of these thoughts, feelings, and experiences, even though it is subjective and inter-subjective (Braun and Clarke, 2014). Since the study's objective was to assess police perceptions, encounters, and attitudes towards motorists at checkpoints in Imo State, Nigeria, an experiential approach seemed most appropriate for using the information gathered from the field to respond to the following research questions:

What is the nature of the extortion of motorists by the police at checkpoints?

Akubo (2015) deduced from the literature that police extortion of motorists is a form of corruption. He defines corruption as a broad category of illegal behaviour that includes graft, bribery, nepotism, and other unfair strategies employed by members of the public and government employees to get socially and legally prohibited privileges. In other cases, the police have been portrayed as oppressors rather than as the people's protectors because of checkpoint activities (Akinlabi, 2013; Smith, 2007).

Regarding the aforementioned claims, this study looked into the nature of extortion at police checkpoints and discovered that their primary goal in setting up these roadblocks was extortion. In order to ostensibly police traffic laws, fight crime, or assure security, they set up checkpoints along roads, highways, and inside cities. However, as this sample illustrates, some officers take advantage of these checkpoints to take advantage of people for their own gain.

(Respondent 5, Male, 48years)
> …me I can't say they are doing their work o, because all they do is to collect money from the drivers. They no even want to know what is in your car as far as you give them roger (they don't even care what is in your car, if you bribe them)

When automobiles are stopped, the police may fabricate or exaggerate minor infractions or violations, such as expired vehicle documentation, a driver's licence, or other issues. Then, even if the crimes are trivial or

even made up, they threaten the people with fines, impoundment, or even arrest. Additionally, it was discovered that the officers will threaten and coerce the drivers if they don't participate by offering bribes.

What are the patterns of extortion at police checkpoints?

The placement of checkpoints was used to evaluate the patterns of extortion, and it was discovered that checkpoints are strategically placed along main thoroughfares, highways, and in urban areas. Additionally, authorities selectively target automobiles, frequently concentrating on commercial vehicles more than private cars. Private cars only get their attention when the driver—in the case of young men—appears vulnerable, is unfamiliar with the neighbourhood, or drives a luxury vehicle. Young people who drive premium cars are often referred to as "yahoo boys" and forced to hand over their phones to be searched in an effort to frighten them and extort money from them.

Additionally, drivers are accused of bogus offences, which can vary from minor infractions to more serious charges. When this is done, the cops are justified in asking for bribes. In order to overlook the claimed infraction or guarantee a quick resolution without legal repercussions, officers expressly or tacitly seek a bribe. The sum demanded is frequently arbitrary and subject to change depending on the officer's attitude, the victim's naivety in negotiations, and the perceived ability to pay. The following passages serve as examples of these conclusions.

(Respondent 7, Male, 34years)
> they put checkpoints where they know vehicles pass steady, so that they will make more money

It was discovered, in an interesting way, that even though checkpoints are frequently staffed by various officers over time, the same extortion patterns tend to endure as new police learn the habits of their forebears. Here, it was discovered that the motorists, not the police officials, were responsible for the amount collected. Drivers can pay as little as N100, as much as N200, or as much as N500 or N1000. The respondents concurred that a lot of variables, such as the type of car, the driver's look, and even how the drivers approached the officers, affected how much a driver had to pay. The following passages provide more information.

(Respondent 8, Male, 27years)
> …if you carry big motto, them go say you be yahoo boy, those ones go fit pay from ₦1000 and above (if you drive luxury car, they will tag you a fraudster, and such people pay from ₦1000 and above)

What are the causes and motivations behind extortions at checkpoints?

Insufficient or no empirical research findings on the reasons behind and driving forces behind the extortion of motorists at checkpoints in Imo State were found in the literature review. However, research has indicated that there are difficulties with law enforcement when it comes to the police, such as political interference and corruption (Agbiboa, 2015; Lere and Luqman, 2018), poor service conditions (Idowu, 2013), and a lack of manpower, inadequate training, and illiteracy (Adegoke, 2014). Therefore, this study focused on these elements as the root causes and driving forces behind police extortion of motorists at checkpoints in Imo State.

Low pay and unfavourable working conditions were revealed to be major contributing factors in the checkpoint extortion by the cops. In Nigeria, many police personnel receive little pay and endure difficult working circumstances. Some policemen turn to extortion and bribery as a way to supplement their income and support themselves and their families as a result of this financial stress. This is due to cops turning to unethical tactics like extortion because of a lack of proper training in professionalism, ethics, and appropriate law enforcement procedures, as shown in some representative excerpts below.:

(Respondent 30, Female, 51years)
> I believe that what we see on the roads is a manifestation of what is going on in the office, as corruption have eaten deeply into every part of the system, and that of police is only significant because they are on the roads

What are the impacts of extortion by police at checkpoints, on motorists and the society?

This study explores the effects of police extortion at checkpoints on society at large and on motorists in particular, concluding that extortion places a financial burden on motorists. Motorists who are subjected to extortion at police checkpoints must pay bribes or unlawful fees, placing a direct financial hardship on them. This is especially harmful to low-income people because they cannot afford such payments, and it may cause money to be taken away from necessities. Relatedly, it has been discovered that extortion hinders economic activity by adding uncertainty and extra costs for enterprises. Trade and economic development in the affected area are impacted by the increased cost and decreased efficiency of the transportation of products and services.

Another effect of extortion on motorists is fear and intimidation, because they can be targeted by it if they interact with police enforcement. This anxiety is said to cause people to postpone travelling when it is required, change their routes, and even hesitate to report crimes or work with the police. The majority of respondents concurred that they would only use a police

checkpoint-equipped route if they had no other option to avoid it. In a similar vein, it was discovered that extortion undermines public confidence in police enforcement. Effective policing depends on public trust, and people may be less willing to collaborate, report crimes, or supply information when they lack that trust (Tankebe, 2009a; Philip, 2016). Finally, it has been noted that confidence in the capacity of government institutions to handle citizens' problems and safeguard their rights has weakened as a result of the failure to address police extortion. Because of bribes and corruption, the police, as a government agent, can no longer act with trust to stop crime, as seen in the following excerpts.:

(Respondent 26, Male, 40years)
> "all the police want to do on the road is collect money, so they don't even want to know who is a criminal" (Respondent 12, Female, 41years). "…but the first thing the police ask drivers is money, so they don't have the moral power to check the vehicle for anything criminal"

These findings from this work support earlier research by Alemika (2010) and Orole *et al*., (2014), affirming that police protection is not a luxury that should be provided to the public and that police may even cooperate with criminal suspects in the prosecution of crime victims or complainants.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to research reports (Akinlabi, 2011; Alemika, 2013; and Agbiboa, 2015), one cannot receive protection from the Nigerian police unless they are a member of the influential community or political elite. This contradicts the mission of the Nigerian police, which is expressed in their motto, "to protect and serve with integrity." Through their everyday interactions with drivers at checkpoints, police corruption is made extremely clear. Police collecting bribes on the road has been viewed in a variety of ways and has piqued the interest of many study lenses. The primary areas of extortion at checkpoints in Imo State, as well as the effects of extortion on drivers and society in general, have gotten little to no study attention. As a result, this study was interested in learning more about the nature and patterns of extortion before examining the motivating elements to ascertain the impact of these extortion operations on Imo State roadways.

Extortion patterns at police checkpoints in Nigeria frequently entail a predictable series of events, with variations depending on the setting, the vehicles involved, and the drivers' interactions with the officials. Since extortion has been identified as a systemic behaviour, it persists even when cops are occasionally transferred. The amount collected and the connection are perceived as transactional to the extent that police may award drivers balances when the amount of money they provide is greater than what was requested. One wonders what might have caused a law enforcement agency to descend to such a level of decadence.

Extortion at police checkpoints in Nigeria has a variety of root causes and driving forces that are as varied as the problem's complexity. These elements interact frequently and add to the pervasiveness of this corrupt behavior. The welfare of the officers, work environment, lack of adequate training in ethics, professionalism, and societal acceptance are factors that were found to motivate police officers to extort people at checkpoints in Imo State, having varying degrees of impact on both drivers and society as a whole.

Finally, it has been seen that extortion by police at checkpoints in Imo State, Nigeria, has major effects on both drivers and society at large. These effects may be extensive and harmful, affecting different facets of daily life as well as the general wellbeing of people and the community. Financial Burden on Motorists, Economic Activity Inhibition, Fear and Intimidation, Negative Perception of Law Enforcement, Trust Eroding, and Reduced Confidence in Government are some of the main consequences.

After examining the complexity of police corruption through extortion at checkpoints and the severity of the problem, it is important to provide remedies for the root causes and driving forces of extortion. This is done in an effort to lessen how debauchery affects both society as a whole and motorists. The report concludes that there is a need for a thorough and comprehensive examination of the issues facing the Nigerian Police Force that contribute to extortion and the following recommendations were identified based on the above:

Training and sensitization
It is necessary to work towards correcting such inadequacies by giving police officers frequent training on ethical conduct, human rights, and professionalism after it was discovered that a lack of professional ethics training was one of the causes of police extortion at checkpoints in Imo State. The cops need to be made more aware of the damaging effects that extortion has on the public and the perception of law enforcement. To improve relations with drivers, there should also be specialised training in effective communication and dispute resolution.

Monitoring, performance evaluation, and incentives
The community, non-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations must be involved in the observation and assessment of police performance. This is due to the fact that the police are there to protect people and property, so contacting the public is usually their first port of call. Because the typical Nigerian, of which the motorist is a part, experiences and comes into contact with the police's operations on a regular basis, they are in a better position

to assess their effectiveness. Therefore, this study advises linking officers' performance reviews and promotions to their observance of professional and ethical norms, which can be checked through community-police cooperation (community policing).

Digital Solutions

In order to eliminate the necessity for physical documentation checks, the government should establish digital platforms for car registration and document verification in cooperation with stakeholders. To reduce cash transactions at checkpoints and the potential for extortion, this should involve the adoption of electronic payment methods. The use of body cameras by police officers at checkpoints to capture interactions with motorists would also help to promote accountability. Body camera footage might be used as evidence in cases of misbehaviour or extortion. The development of a mobile app or hotline that enables drivers to report extortion situations in real-time will help establish a direct channel for reporting and ensure rapid action and settlement.

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