

Socio-Political Environment and Policing in Rivers State, Nigeria**Amakiri, Chizike, PhD**Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Rivers State University,
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Annotation: The paper theoretically analysed the influence of socio-political environment on policing. It presented a detailed explanation of key variables such as; Police, Policing and Socio-Political Environment. It went further to analyse major issues of interrelation like; The Influence of Socio-Political Environment on Policing, Police and Politics in Rivers State, and Possible Factors responsible for inadequate policing in Nigeria. This work adopted Political Economy Theory which explained that The Police Force was politically organised to perpetually suppress the marginalized strata instead of acting as a vanguard of a just and equitable society and protecting the country's democracy, human rights and socio-economic justice. The paper recommends that government at all levels should allow police officers to carry out their lawful functions and responsibilities adequately without fear or favour. Police officers should be free from unnecessary political engagements or appointments, else such engagements influence their activities or operations. The Police Service Commission should persevere and remain active in discharging its duty of supervision, by so doing, ensuring adequate policing in the country especially in Rivers State.

Keywords: Police, Policing, Socio-political and Environment.

Introduction

The primary duty of The Police Force is policing, that is, securing the people in compliance with existing laws and in total conformity with the rules and regulations guiding the particular society. The Police Force, amongst other arms-wielding agencies, is solely responsible for safeguarding people's lives and property and ensuring strict maintenance of law and order within the state. In a broader sense, policing has always been necessary in every society for adequate maintenance of law, safety and peaceful social relations. Such necessity of policing becomes indispensable in modern societies where crime is on the increase because of the characteristic divergence and contradictions arising from population heterogeneity with its resultant conflicting ideologies, urbanization, industrialization, and socio-political organizations. However, the emergence of The Police Force as a body of men recruited and paid by the state to enforce law and maintain order, is a relatively recent development (Reiner, 2000).

Policing from traditional society (pre-colonial Nigeria) was affected by socio-political factors. From time immemorial, The Police was an agency of the state created for the maintenance and enforcement of law and order. The features, roles and primary assignment of The Police Force would be based on and determined by the socio-political structure of the nation in which they operate. Similarly, police activities, as a state's agency, are dependent and influenced by the character and the composition of the political economy of the society (Weber, 1968).

Notably, modern police bodies are assigned the primary role of law enforcement and maintenance of order. The content of law and what constitutes order differ greatly across time and space and are determined by the environment and political structure of societies. However, the main functions performed by The Police Force are explained by law, and the conception of order is determined by varying interest groups in accordance with socio-political realities inherent in the particular society. The interest of the dominant political class in society usually serves as a key determinant of what constitutes orderliness or disorderliness in the state (Okafor, 2007).

This paper is specifically concerned with Nigeria Police and its activities in the country's socio-political environments, the political activities in Rivers State being the case study.

Literature Review

Police and Policing

The simple term 'police' could have a very complex meaning, because it involves all security agencies whose fundamental duty is to enforce law and order (Caldwell 1965). Police, in a general idea -- persons who are interested in controlling crimes -- enforce law and order, and tackle some other socio-political issues. For Smith (1980), the imposition of responsibilities or functions and having no association with "crime control" shape and explain the idea and efficiency of the police. The police force fundamentally is an organization of men and women established by the state to maintain stability by enforcing law and order, controlling crime, defending values -- ideologies viewed as normal and legal -- and protecting wealth circulation as well as state powers. On the other hand, the police force could be a group set aside to deny civil individuals the opportunity of genuine advocacy for positive social order (Alemika 1993).

Subsequently, the police force can also be a legitimately established group endowed with state powers to control civil combat and prevent crime in any given state. The police, obviously, are cumbered with a lot of duties and functions as determined by the law, but sometimes the reflection of political and economic interests/concerns of the ruling class of the society.

Policing as a concept covers the range and levels of operation engaged by various formally and informally recognized bodies in a given society geared towards controlling unlawful activities and ensuring the safety of citizens within villages, communities, districts and the state at large, but not without respect to the rules and regulations of the state. Hills (2011) views policing as a complex phenomenon which denotes activities of a group geared towards solving the problems of a wrecking people or society which could be local or national, commercial or non-commercial, and to help in all styles of security and equity. Odekunle (2010) delineate policing as an act with the primary aim of ensuring security, and social order and making the citizens have psychological and social sense of protection.

In pre-colonial society, every adult in the community was mandated to work towards the maintenance of law, and order, prevention of crime and social control; this was the substrate of the emergence of the formal state police force as one of the state's social systems (Chukwuma 2003). It is evident that traditional policing has made policing the duty of everybody. However, the creation of the state as a complete formal entity with the assumption of the duty of having complete control over legal violence in the society engendered the establishment of professional security agencies like the police and other armed forces (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2003).

At this point, it is clear that policing involves manifold responsibilities like; apprehension and prosecution of culprits, maintenance of public order, and provision of security services to the society.

Socio-Political Environment

The socio-political environment, in this context, has to do with political dominance or control with dynamic abilities to function actively and influence the society and be influenced by the same society (Ake, 1981). In a socio-political environment, political institutions like political parties, the federal, state and local governments, security agents, etc. become the vehicle through which the powers to make laws, distribute goods and services, extract oil/mineral and other resources within the environment with a capacity to decision-making (Almond and Powell, 1966). Again, it is believed among Nigerians that practical democracy is abused; the rigging of elections, prosecutions of political opponents and marginalization of oppositions' ethnic localities especially in terms of socio-economic resources distribution are the mainstay of the Nigerian socio-political environment.

In the same vein, politics has become a system through which political actors gain control over societal resources for personal ends. This is like the case of the prebendal political system which is associated with some positions in a state obtained via services offered to a lord by complete purchase to generate money for their owners. Prebendalism in the Nigerian context will involve some political behaviours that have to do with tenets indicative that such a position should be contested and usurped for the private ends of officeholders alongside their supporters (Ekoko and Vogt 1990).

The Influence of Socio-Political Environment on Policing

From independence in 1960, police activities have been influenced by various socio-political issues such as the political ideology of the citizens, the eccentricity of the socio-economic environment and the body language of those in government. The Nigerian economy since independence has been explained by various scholars and groups. Some view it as a "mixed economy", some as a "peripheral economy", while others as a "capitalist/neo-capitalist economy", "neo-colonial economy", and so on. Subsequently, Nigeria has also been categorised as a "neo-colonial state", "bourgeois state", "authoritarian state", "dependent state", and "renter state" and her economic ability and sovereignty are categorised either as strong or weak (Nwoye, 2010).

It is notable that at Nigeria's independence in 1960, the indigenous government had assumed governance and regulated the police force under the control of the Inspector General, K. Bevel and the British police were also there to ensure peace and order as well as regulate the new body. Moving on from that time, the police had operated and functioned in reaction to and influence of the socio-political and economic environment. Its functions nevertheless were guided by a policy, thus being in total agreement with people's expectations (Onoge, 1993). Prior to the condition of contemporary Nigeria police, the condition of being a tool for oppression and exploitation being used by politicians and those in government even to torment political antagonists, the body was simply the indigenous authority or local government police (Ake, 1981).

The police force is one of the essential parts of the criminal justice system in Nigeria. The criminal justice system is designed in such a way that the police will be the first to communicate the criminal before any other agency like the courts or prisons. More so, the victims of crimes equally communicate the police force as they (the police force) remain the prime agency to make decisions, and their decisions serve as the bedrock of the criminal process. They are, many times, confronted with issues of political dictatorship, the police officers will have the obligations of their activities reflecting the concerns of the politicians who determined the offices they occupied (Chambliss 1975). In accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1999, sections 215 and 216, the Inspector General of Police shall be appointed by the president on the advice of the Nigeria Police Council. It is evident that the Inspector General cannot, after this time, work

independently; he must be answerable to the presidency. Thus, it becomes apparent that the police force is influenced or run under the influence of the political leaders of the day. Police, as a component of the political system, become an institution run and regulated by the federal government. They, as salary earners, receive their pay from the federal government which buttresses the enormous influence the state has over the police as a unit of the social system. The functions of the police revolve around; the maintenance of law and order, apprehension of culprits, protection of lives and property and enforcement of rules and regulations (Iwarimie-Jaja, 1988).

Nigeria Police and Protection of Ruling-Political Class against the Masses

In a capitalist state (society) like Nigeria, the police force would always protect and serve the interest of the ruling class even to the detriment of the working class and the mass majority. Contemporary police forces across the globe are primarily assigned the duty of law implementation and order. However, the law and what comprises order differ based on eras (times) and nations. The substantial functions of the police are determined by law and order in reflection of the interest of the ruling political class of the society. Reiner (2000) posits that: “The Nigeria police are the conveyors of the country’s base or power bedrock; the complete control of legal use of coercion or force, how and for what this force is applied to communicate the heart of the situation of political order. Through the foregoing reality, the jeopardy of unprofessional acts perpetrated by police on behalf of a specific prejudiced interest depicts the Nigeria police force as a clear intimidation tool”.

The police force is conditioned to protect and defend the interests of the political/dominant class or groups in society, but they allow the working class and the general masses to live in a timeless oppression and injustice despite the 1990 Police Act in conjunction with the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The constitution espouses that Nigerian police must maintain, at all levels and times, fairness, objectivity, justice, impartiality, neutrality and respect in its dealings with the citizenry (Softer, 2009).

Policing and Politics in Rivers State

The Nigerian police force is the legitimate government agency entrusted with state powers to enforce laws, maintain peace and order, and ensure tranquillity during state electoral processes. Its primary responsibilities include safeguarding the electorate, the political parties, and competitors generally impartially to ensure free and fair elections. The police are expected to remain neutral in state politics, but today, they are often politically motivated and oriented and deeply involved in the state electoral process through actions such as election rigging, the seizure of electoral materials, and the systematic hindrance of opposition parties.

Against this backdrop, security personnel have undermined the legitimacy of opposition parties, especially in a context marked by social divisions and a lack of effective conflict mediation. Citizens, in such circumstances, have been forced to resort to self-help for protection. This is an anomaly, as democracy should guarantee the right to protection from dire situations, accountability, and full adherence to the rule of law. These are all essential components of democracy needed to address insecurity within all marginalized groups (Ake, 1997).

It is important to note that the 2015 general election, the rerun on March 16, 2016, the rerun on December 10.....year,, and the 2019 general election in Rivers State have deeply scarred the political landscape of Rivers State. During these events, security agents went to great lengths to support the interests of federal authorities, working diligently to re-elect or elect their political proxies, even against the wishes of the Rivers populace (Joab-Peterside, 2019).

Consequently, it was alleged that the police, in an attempt to favour the People's Democratic Party (PDP) at the expense of the opposition party -- the All Progressives Congress (APC) -- provided clear evidence of the power struggle between Joseph Mbu, the Commissioner of Police in Rivers State, and supporters of Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi during a political rally organized by the Save Rivers Movement (SRM). This incident marked a significant democratic event in Rivers politics. During this rally, it was also alleged by an APC leader that Senator Magnus was shot by a police officer. This allegation prompted a protest by Ogoni youths. In response, security agents apprehended ten of the protesters, who were subsequently charged with conspiracy, unlawful assembly, and possession of dangerous weapons (*The Guardian*, January 18, 2014).

Also, it was alleged that the security agents, led by Commissioner Mbu in the month of Nov. 2013, invaded Omuma Local Government Area Council in their attempt to pave the way for formal Minister of State for Education -- Nyesom Wike's -- political supporters (Grassroots Democratic Initiative -- GDI) to inaugurate the political group in the LGA. Meanwhile, a month after the police's invasion of Omuma Local Government Area on December 2013, other places like Ikwerre Local Government headquarters located at Isiokpo was also taken over by police; they released teargas to drive away APC supporters who were at a political rally there. The police officers dispersed teachers who were newly recruited with teargas who had gathered to collect their posting letters. The police posited that they were mobilized by the APC party against the Presidency; that convergence had a political undertone (*The Guardian*, January 19, 2014).

Police activities, as directed by Mr Mbu, became a general concern, hence it wrecked the socio-political activities of the state. The Civil Society Group (CSG) requested the National Council of Society (NCS) to intervene and challenge the abnormality of Mbu's involvement in state politics. They tagged Mr Mbu as "playing power politics" and having completely undermined his functions and duties as a police officer. Under Mbu's watch, according to them, Rivers State had experienced perpetual escalation of crime and disorder (citation needed).....

Rotimi Amaechi, as alleged, was bedevilled with the issue of the security personnel under his control withdrawing their allegiance to him, which was a shock to him. As the governor of the state at the time, Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi lamented that the state was under a siege, and that he could no longer account for the security agents, even as the Chief Security Officer of the state. Governor Amaechi accused Mr Mbu of being rooted in Rivers' politics. He (the governor) described the commissioner of police (Mr Mbu) as "a political entity in a security attire" sent to disrupt the socio-political and economic structure of the state while he worked for the opposition: the People's Democratic Party -- PDP (*Vanguard*, 2013).

Ironically, the reverse became the case: the victory of Muhammadu Buhari in the presidential election upturned the police's political involvement in Rivers State. Nyesom Wike, who won the governorship election in the state during the 2015 general elections is today in opposition. He alleges to have been experiencing the same level of social and political intimidation and oppression from the security agents. Nyesom Wike slams security agencies for their unholy alliance with the All Progressive Congress (APC) in Rivers State. The governor alleged that the avoidable violence from cancellation and suspension of polls during elections has unfortunately led to the death of many people in Rivers State (*The Vanguard*, 13th Dec. 2016).

The Governor, Nyesom Wike, alleged that his security details had been withdrawn by the then Commissioner of Police, Mr. Frances. During the rerun elections, security agencies were implicated in the hijacking of electoral materials and other electoral fraud, which posed a significant threat to the country's democracy. In response to the security agents' perceived excesses, Governor Nyesom

Wike and other PDP leaders in the state organized a protest. They called for the redeployment of the then Assistant Commissioner of Police, Steven Hasso, who also served as the head of operations, and Mr Akin Fakorede due to their alleged involvement in compromising the state's security and supporting attacks against the state (*Vanguard*, December 16, 2016). The central argument of this account is that police officers have become deeply entrenched in Rivers politics, and their actions unmistakably align with the interests of federal authorities.

The 2016 Rivers State Re-run Election was marred by widespread violence, with some voters facing intimidation and oppression from security agents. The rerun election was heavily fortified with security personnel, but it became evident that their presence was primarily to safeguard and defend the political elite rather than the general populace. During the rerun on March 16th....year.it was observed that all major political figures in Rivers State were accompanied by convoys comprising a significant number of security agents. This clear display of police force reflected the interests of these political heavyweights, irrespective of their party affiliations, leading to accusations that security agencies were taking sides in the election process.

For instance, on March 20th....year.leaders from both the APC and PDP stormed the Mile one...Police Station in search of the Collation Officer for Ward 10 in Port Harcourt LGA. It was alleged that the then Minister of Transport, Rt. Hon. Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi, led the charge from the APC, accompanied by over 400 soldiers and other APC dignitaries, including the gubernatorial candidate Dr. Dakuku Peterside and the APC state chairman, Dr. Davies Ibiama, among others, each arriving in separate convoys (*Vanguard Newspaper*, 2016). On the other hand, Governor Nyesom Wike of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was also accused of invading the police station with his security squad, joined by other party leaders such as Senator George Sekibo and Chief Augustin Okpara, all with their respective convoys. The entire scene was inundated with various security agents who were primarily focused on safeguarding the political elite in this highly charged political atmosphere....citation needed

This social reality inevitably resulted in a significant reduction in the number of security agents available to protect the lives of Rivers State residents before, during and after the electoral exercise.

The role of Nigeria Police in the electoral Process

A brief examination of Nigeria's electoral history reveals that the pursuit of credible elections in the country has been thwarted by a multitude of security-related challenges. These challenges encompass a wide spectrum, including political assassinations, thuggery, the ballot box and paper snatching, intimidation, arson, looting, and more. The persistence of these vices is largely due to the fact that the police are sometimes complicit and even directly involved. For instance, the 30,000 Justice, Development, and Peace Committee (JDPC) local team monitored and scrutinized the general election of 2003. In their final report, the JDPC (2003) noted that the presence of security agents, especially the police, had a dampening effect on the confidence and morale of voters in many parts of the country. In their own words:

The team particularly observed that: the security agents, especially the police, came out to liaise with and brood the interest of the ruling party. They, in most of the polling units where hijacking of ballot papers and boxes by thugs were going on, did nothing to stop it: Rigging was coolly going on, as if it was mere ballot box stuffing by, mainly, PDP agents colluding with the police as well as the INEC officials in the polling unit (2003).

The JDPC reports on the involvement of security agencies in electoral processes reached a critical point when they observed that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the South-South and South-East geopolitical zones, in collusion with certain INEC officials and some members of the Police Force, aggressively intimidated their opponents and successfully executed extensive election rigging at the time of the report (JDPC, 2003). Similarly, the report from the Citizen Forum (CF) revealed massive manipulation and rigging facilitated by the police and electoral officials. This led to calls for the resignation of the president, President Olusegun Obasanjo, and state governors (Oladipo, 2004).

The 118-member EU observer team also noted serious fraud and inconsistencies from a security perspective, which cast doubt on the fairness and integrity of the elections and their processes (Ali, 2004). Likewise, the 22-member Commonwealth observer team, having initially given the election a passing grade, later confirmed in a statement signed by the mission head, Salim Ahmed Salim, that their final assessment echoed the concerns about the election (Ali, 2004). In so many states, the election was marred. In part of Enugu State and part of Rivers, there was a complete breakdown in the electoral processes; some political opponents of the PDP's were given a ruffled time in way of intimidation by thugs and unlawful arrests made by the police (p.3).

In all, opposition parties and many international election observers expressed strong condemnation of the detrimental roles played by security agents during the election. It was widely believed that the victories achieved by the ruling party (PDP) were orchestrated and made possible by the actions of these security agents (Oladipo, 2004). This belief gained further credibility when the opposition parties while voicing their dissatisfaction with the electoral process, alleged that the Nigeria Police Force had issued specific memoranda to all its state commands entitled "Instructions for Strict Compliance" (Ayoola, 2004). These memos implied orders to police officers to ensure victory for the ruling party, even if it required extreme measures, such as assassinating tough opponents, as tragically occurred in some cases.

Notable instances of such politically motivated violence include the assassination of Mr. Jesse Aniku, a Plateau State gubernatorial aspirant in June 2006, Dr. Daramola, a gubernatorial aspirant in Ekiti State on August 14, 2006, Dr. Harry Marshal, an ANPP national Vice Chairman, on March 5, 2003, Chief Aminasoaru Dikibo on February 6, 2004, and Chief Bola Ige, an AD Chieftain, on December 23, 2001 (Chubah, 2009; Ayinla, 2005). Shockingly, in all of these politically motivated killings, no culprits have been apprehended or convicted, possibly because the police either failed to identify them or were directed not to do so.

This grim reality underscores the deep-seated problems within Nigeria's electoral process, specifically the involvement of security agents and the resulting electoral malpractice and violence. In the subsequent discussion, we will explore the adverse effects of electoral malpractice on the electorate and the efforts to strengthen democracy in Nigeria.

Possible Factors responsible for inadequate policing in Nigeria

Depressed Economy

The challenging economic situation in Nigeria casts an unfavourable light on the performance of the police force. According to Sanni (2010), the global economy has been experiencing stagnation, with many individual countries facing recession, thereby posing a significant threat to African economies. Consequently, the economic stagnation in Nigeria has had a detrimental impact on various aspects of law enforcement in the country. As a result, in an economically depressed

environment, a nation encounters the following key issues: poverty, education, and crime control, which are discussed below.

Poverty

A depressed economy invariably leads to widespread poverty in any country. In the case of Nigeria, the impact of a struggling economy is glaring, with over 70% of the population living below the poverty line. Poverty itself is not uniform; the World Bank classifies it as core and moderate, but in Nigeria and other similar countries, core poverty can be further subdivided. Some individuals can only afford one or two meals daily, while others struggle to have a meal every day. Some people reside in slum areas, particularly in urban centres. There is also a segment of society that faces extreme poverty, characterized by the absence of regular meals and proper accommodation. These individuals are often referred to as having "no fixed address," which has negative implications as they cannot be easily located or tracked, even if they are involved in any wrongdoing (Ali, 2014).

It is important to highlight that poverty is a breeding ground for crime. As noted by Otto (2012), impoverished individuals are more susceptible to engaging in criminal activities and violence. Consequently, as the crime rate rises, law enforcement agencies become increasingly vigilant in dealing with criminal elements. However, it's worth noting that in a depressed economy, essential tools and resources for effective law enforcement often fall short, hindering the full operational capacity of security agents.

Education and Crime Control

A country grappling with a weakened economy often suffers from a less robust education system. Education serves as the foundation of any country and is regarded as the most effective means of socialization. In the fight against crime, education plays a pivotal role, as it is the educated individuals who can effectively operate sophisticated technological tools to enhance the capabilities of security agents. Put simply, those who are educated and literate possess a deeper understanding of societal norms and can read and write. When someone receives a quality education, their potential to make a positive contribution to society's development is significantly heightened (Oluchi, 2007).

However, in an economically harsh environment, security agencies are more likely to be staffed with individuals who lack formal education, leading to a society with a substantial portion of undereducated citizens—individuals who are only partially equipped with academic knowledge. In such circumstances, even those who manage to graduate may find themselves without job opportunities, and some may become frustrated and resort to any available means of livelihood, including engaging in illicit activities. This, in turn, places additional burdens on security agents, who may lack certain essential skills and resources to combat crime effectively (Nwoye, 2010).

A depressed economy can also result in security agents relying on outdated techniques, even when criminal elements are well-versed in more advanced methods. This inability to adapt hampers progress, as many countries are continually advancing in contemporary technology and forensic techniques to ensure more effective policing (Osayanda, 2008).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political Economy Theory

The term "political economy" traditionally refers to a branch or segment of government concerned with the systematic examination of a country's wealth and its underlying causes (Ake, 1981).

Significantly, scholars have frequently employed the term "political economy" in their efforts to elucidate and describe the intricate relationship between rulers, the populace, and the economy.

In the past, political economy was employed by historians to elucidate how individuals and groups with shared economic interests utilized politics to effect changes beneficial to them. Historically, political economy encompasses the theoretical understanding of the economy within bourgeois society, whether in a historical or developmental context.

While there are various approaches to "political economy," they all share common interests and mutual foundations, including:

- The interrelation of a society's political and economic structures.
- The idea is that the principles, norms, cultural values, and governance practices of a society are shaped or influenced by its economic and political structure.
- The belief that a comprehensive analysis or understanding of society can be achieved through a profound comprehension of the interplay among its social institutions and structures.

However, the most widely accepted strand of political economy is the Marxian approach. Marx (1970) contends that:

"In social production, individuals inevitably enter into a social relationship independent of their will, forming social relations of production corresponding to a given epoch in the development of their productive forces. The totality of these social relations of production constitutes the substructure (economy) of society, the real foundation from which legal and political superstructures emerge to correspond to certain forms of social consciousness."

According to Marx, the economic structure of society shapes the functions of the superstructure, which encompasses various aspects such as law, education, culture, family, and religion. When applying the political economy model to the theme of the socio-political environment and policing in Rivers State, Nigeria, it becomes evident that the challenges facing the police force today are rooted in the structure of the society to which it belongs. This insight leads to an examination of the role of capital resources in the political organization of Nigeria, spanning from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era. It reveals the intricate interplay among the political system, infrastructure, and the police force.

In society, we find different social classes and groups with varying levels of power and influence over policies and the economy. Dominant economic classes wield control over the political system, including the security agents responsible for enforcing laws and maintaining order. As argued by Reiner (2005), "police activities may result from mutual and collective operations of social control, and professional police forces evolve alongside hierarchy and inequality."

Furthermore, Scaglione and Robinson (1987) noted that the establishment of specialized state police forces is linked to economic specialization and the unequal access to resources that occur during the transition from one dominant social class to another in society.

Political economy theorists contend that society is divided into social classes and groups with both shared and conflicting interests. They assert that the police force was not created to serve the entire society but rather to protect specific individuals within society at the expense of the majority. The Institute for the Study of Labor and Economic Crisis (1982) asserts that "police forces around the world vary in accordance with economic and political organizations, and in every capitalist society, the primary duty and function of the police force have been to protect those who profit significantly

from the economy due to the accumulation of private profit." Initially, the police force was established to suppress riots and disorder resulting from oppressive working and living conditions.

Bowden, as cited in Asenine (2014), suggests that one of the functions of the police force is to subdue the less privileged and the powerless in a punitive and beneficial manner on behalf of the state. Instead of acting as champions for a just and equitable society by safeguarding social democracy, human rights, and socio-economic justice, the police forces are often organized to exert control over marginalized segments of society. It is based on these principles that the researcher has adopted the political economy model to justify the theme of the socio-political environment and policing in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The police force functions as an arm of the state, tasked with upholding and enforcing the law and order within a society. Much like the state itself, the character, roles, and priorities of the police force are shaped and determined by the socio-political structure of the nation. Police activities, as carried out by state agencies, are contingent upon and influenced by the nature and composition of the political economy of the society. Unfortunately, modern-day Nigeria has experienced instances of crises arising from police abuse of power, driven by the prevailing political structure.

In times of economic hardship, the security forces often consist of individuals with limited education, and the general populace may not be academically well-prepared—resulting in a populace that is not fully equipped to combat crime effectively. Graduates may find themselves unemployed, leading to frustration and, in some cases, a turn to illicit means of livelihood. This, in turn, places greater demands on the security forces, even when they lack certain capabilities in addressing crime.

The structure of the police forces is often geared towards protecting and serving the interests of the political and dominant class in society. As mentioned earlier, in authoritarian states, the police play a role in preserving the status quo of the political elite, allowing economic injustice and oppression of the working class and the general population. However, it's important to note that the 1990 Police Act, in conjunction with the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, emphasizes the importance of fairness, objectivity, justice, impartiality, neutrality, and respect in the dealings of the Nigeria Police Force with the citizenry.

In light of these observations, the paper proposes the following recommendations:

1. Government at all levels should grant police officers the autonomy to carry out their lawful functions and responsibilities without any external influence, political or otherwise, that may impact their activities or operations.
2. The Police Service Commission should maintain an active role in supervising and ensuring adequate policing in Rivers State.
3. Nigeria's police force should receive proper orientation to foster professionalism and ethical conduct in the discharge of their responsibilities in Rivers State.
4. The Inspector General of Police should actively work to reduce political interference in police affairs and ensure the prosecution of criminals.
5. The welfare of police officers should be a priority, and adequate funding for the police force should be ensured.

6. Police involvement in politics in Rivers State, especially during the 2015-2019 general elections, should be addressed. The paper highlights that many police officers deployed to protect voters ended up safeguarding the interests of the political elite and engaging in electoral malpractice, contributing to crises during and after elections in Rivers State.

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