

Perception of Police Parade of Suspects among Residents of Eti-Osa during Lockdown in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was carried out to determine how the residents of Eti-Osa Local Government Area of Lagos State perceive police action in parading suspects arrested in the course of enforcing the law on the state-wide lockdown imposed by the state government. The study adopted survey research method using structured questionnaire to ask questions germane to the study. The population consists of residents of Eti-Osa local government area out of which 300 respondents were selected for the study. Perception theory was used to explain the nature and extent of perception of the residents regarding the parade of suspects by the police. The findings revealed that a cross section of the respondents recognised the efforts of the Nigeria Police in fighting crime even when others were of the view that the parade of suspects was just a strategy used by the police to make the public believe they are effective in the performance of their policing function. It was recommended that since the parade of suspects has positive effect on the public, the police should use it as a deterrence strategy but within the limits allowable by the law.

Keywords: Perception, Police Parade, Suspects, Lockdown, Lagos State

Introduction

The views that citizens have about the police are important. These views can influence the degree and type of interaction people have with the police and the degree of support provided to the police (Cao & Dai, 2006). Without public support, modern policing is difficult, if not impossible (Islam & Ali, 2008). Positive views of the police by citizens can lead to a positive relationship with the police, which can improve the effectiveness of the police (Brown & Benedict, 2002). Negative views can lead to resentment, which can impede the ability of the police to be effective formal agents of law and order (Goldsmith, 2005). The emergence of the state as an entity with claim to the monopoly over the means of legitimate violence in society resulted into the creation of specialised agencies such as the police and the armed forces for controlling the use of violence by another groups.

Broadly speaking, modern police forces are assigned the primary duty of law enforcement and order maintenance. But the content of law and what constitutes order vary widely across time and nations, and are determined by the political economy of societies. The concrete roles played by the police are defined by law and conception of order in accordance with the political and economic interests of the dominant or ruling groups in society. The danger of abuse, on behalf of particular partisan interests or the police themselves are clear and daunting. Police are organised to defend and preserve the interests of the dominant groups and classes in society. Consequently, the significance of police as either facilitators or inhibitors of pro-poor change initiatives will depend on the character of their society. In a totalitarian and economically inequitable society, police role will be more to defend the *status quo* of political oppression and

economic injustice. In contrast, in a democratic society the police are more likely to provide services that will enhance development and democracy.

By maintaining order and enforcing law in consonance with the principles and practice of a democratic society, police will foster public safety, which are critical to development and human cooperation in general. It is in these respects that the police can make positive contributions towards the society. Thus, this study was motivated by the need to explore the perception of police parade of suspects among residents of Eti-Osa local government area during COVID-19 lockdown in Lagos state.

Statement of the Problem

Presently, Nigeria is suffering from a growing crime-problem, which is progressively threatening its sovereignty, security and development. Despite the constitutional powers granted the police to maintain general security, public safety and peace, the public sees their roles in many cases to denigrate the law, endanger the citizens and blotting the institutional reputation of the police and also the parading of the suspect arrested is seen has been deceptive and hypocritically inclined because they believe most of the parades are manipulated and just a normal show up by the police force. Hence this study therefore aims to examine the perception of the police parade of suspects among residents of Eti-Osa Local Government Area of Lagos State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the perception of Eti-Osa Local Government Area residents towards the police parade of suspects during COVID-19 lockdown in Lagos state.
2. Find out if the police parade of suspects has an influence on the Eti-Osa Local Government Area residents' perception of the image of the Nigerian police force.
3. Investigate if the police parade of suspects has influence on the control and reduction of crime among Eti-Osa Local Government Area residents.
4. Determine Eti-Osa Local Government Area residents' attitude towards police parade of suspects during COVID-19 lockdown in Lagos state.

Conceptual and Literature Review

Perception (or what has been referred to some other scholars as social perception) has been defined in variety of ways. According to Wiley Online Library perception is "an individual's or group's unique way of viewing a phenomenon; involving the processing of stimuli and incorporating memories and experiences in the process of understanding. Put it in context, perception can be described as the end result of a number of observations based on available information by the customer. Reitz (2019) states that Perception includes all those process by which an individual receives information about his environment-seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting and smelling. So, perception is a complex process which is outside of consciousness". In this instance one can conclude that perception is the single most important determinant of human behaviour. This could be interpreted to mean that perception takes place before behaviour. Put in another way, people act or behave based on their perception. Furthermore, what could have informed Eti-Osa residents' opinion on police parade of suspects is based on their interpretation of information at their disposal.

From another perspective, social perception refers to constructing an understanding of the social world from the data we get through the senses (Michener, DeLamater & Myers, 2004, p. 106). They added further that perception “refers to the process we form impressions about people’s traits and personalities”. This aligns with the view of Reitz that perception guides the perceiver in harnessing, processing and channeling relevant information towards fulfilling the perceiver’s requirements. In the opinion of Verma (2013, p. 64) perception is the process by which the customers make sense out of the world. He says, “Customers translate the external physical world into internal subjective world.”

Section 36 subsections 5 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended presumed every person who is charged with criminal offence as innocent until such person is convicted by a court of competent jurisdiction. This provisions of clearly bares the fact that any person accused of committing any offence of whatever nature cannot be tainted with the tar of a criminal unless the court has made such pronouncement. This section of the constitution somewhat put to question the practice parading criminal suspects before the media by the Nigeria Police Force.

Adewale (2020) posits that law enforcement agencies in Nigeria are constitutionally bound by law to protect citizens’ lives and property are violating the provisions of the above mention section of the constitution in the way they parade suspects arrested by them before the media even before they are found guilty by the court. In common law as practiced in Nigeria, precedents have equal potency as the statutory law statutes created by legislative bodies. Furthermore, Sahara reporters independently searched through the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Police Act and found no law permitting the Nigeria Police Force to parade suspects before the press, neither is there precedent ruling of the Supreme Court or unchallenged ruling of lower courts that permits the parading of suspects. Ojo (2018) says the practice has no legal basis except “identification parade” the only instance the police are authorised to parade suspects or where the law allows the Police to parade a suspect but not before the media only when the identity of the suspect is in question. In identification parade, the suspect is lined with eight other innocent people who have the same height, body build and complexion; the victim would then identify the accused among the nine men. This is done in the police station in the presence of the suspect’s lawyer who merely stand as an observer the investigative officer and the victim. Edgal (2018), former Lagos State Commissioner of Police also restated that suspects’ parade is meant for the Police to “always inform members of the public of what they are doing so as to win the trust and confidence of the people”. This, many legal practitioners including Femi Falana (SAN) have described as a breach of the suspects rights as provided for in Section 36 (4) and (5) of the Constitution and Article 7 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights Act.

Micah (2017) conducted a study titled “public perception of police activities in Okada, Edo State Nigeria.” The study was aimed at investigating public perception of police activities in a semi urban area, Okada in Edo State. The researcher adopted descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The findings showed that police officers lacked integrity and members of the public were also collaborators that aided illegal practice. It further showed that police activities, especially in Okada town, were fraught with illegal act and this really affected public rating of the organisation. Mannie (2018) carried out a research on public perception of the role of the Nigeria police force in curbing the menace of kidnapping in Benin Metropolis, Southern Nigeria. The

researcher adopted the problem-oriented policing theory in its explanation of the topic under investigation. The findings showed that the police were not effective in curbing kidnapping.

Theoretical Framework

Perception Theory

Fundamentally, perception theory is applied in relation to when people interpret media messages to agree with their already held beliefs and judgements. Such interpretation is determined by knowledge, attitudes, needs, values and other world-views (Momoh, 2015, p. 123). It is applied in this context to explain the different ways residents of Eti-Osa Local Government Area perceive the police parade of suspects. Research has identified structural and functional influences on perception. Structural influences on perception come from physical aspect of the stimuli to which we are exposed while functional influences are the psychological factors that influence perception and therefore introduce subjectivity into the process (Onabajo, 2005, p. 31). This could be implied that the subjective opinion of the residents matters in interpreting the police parade of suspects. It is therefore imperative for any organisation to be mindful of the kind of perception held by relevant stakeholders. Baran & Davis (2012, p. 183) alluded to this that selective perception is the mental or psychological recasting of a message so that its meaning is in line with a person's beliefs and attitudes. This theory clearly explains the role perception play in the understanding of a particular phenomenon. In this instance, it describes the way the public with specific reference to Eti-Osa local government area understand or interpret the parading of suspects arrested by the police during COVID-19 lockdown in Lagos state.

Methodology

Survey research method was adopted for this study. It is a commonly used communication research strategy that involves selecting individual respondents, asking them questions, analysing their responses, and then inferring how the findings apply to the entire population of interest to a researcher. This method is often regarded as one of the most appropriate and effective means of conducting opinion research which deals with the feelings, perceptions, beliefs, opinions, behaviours and attitudinal dispositions of people on a given subject-matter or issue in their natural settings. For this study, the population is residents of Eti-Osa Local Government Area which consist of 283,791 residents. The researcher adopted the simple random sampling technique for this study. According to Osuala (1982, p. 104), random sampling procedure refers to the method of drawing a portion of the population so that each member has equal chance of being selected. The sample size for this study is 400 respondents residing in EtiOsa Local Government Area. This figure was arrived using the Taro Yamane Formula. The Taro Yamane formula is a very efficient statistical method used in calculating the sample size for a research work, especially when the study population is high. The formula gives a precise and accurate sample size from a large study population, hence the need to adopt the formula in determining the sample size for this study. Since the population of residents in Eti-Osa Local Government Area is 283,791(which is a large number), it, however, became imperative to use Taro Yamane Formula to determine the sample size for this study.

Sample formula $n = N/(1 + N(e)^2)$

n = The sample size you want to get

N = whole Population under study

e = precision or sampling error (0.05)

l= Constant unit

Therefore;

$$n = \frac{283,791}{1 + 283,791 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{283,791}{1 + 283,791 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{283,791}{1 + 709}$$

$$n = \frac{283,791}{710}$$

$$n = 400$$

Hence, the sample size for this study is approximately 400 respondents

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Witness of Suspects Paraded by The Nigerian Police

No/S.	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	YES	324	81%
	NO	76	19%
	Total	400	100%

Table 1 reveals that out of 400 respondents sampled, 324 respondents (representing 81%) had witnessed police parade of suspects. The table above implies that majority of the respondents (81%) had witnessed police parade of suspects.

Table 2: Medium of Experiencing Parade of Suspects

No/S.	Medium of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
	Newspaper	174	43.5%
	Radio	34	8.5%
	Television	168	42.0%
	Others	24	6%
	Total	400	100%

The information in the table above shows that majority of the respondents (81%) had witnessed police parade of suspects through various mass media platforms.

Table 3: The Right of Police to Parade Suspects before the Media

No/S.	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	YES	344	86%
	NO	56	14%
	Total	400	100%

The table above shows that out of 400 respondents sampled, 344 representing (86%) of the respondents believes it is right for the Nigerian Police Force. This implies that majority of the respondent (86%) believes it is right for the Police to parade suspects before the media.

Table 4: Encouraging Police Parade of Suspects

No/S.	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	Yes	344	86%
	No	56	14%
	Total	400	100%

Table 4 above reveals that out of 400 respondents sampled, 344 respondents (representing 86%). The table above implies that majority of the respondents (86%) supports police parade of suspects.

Table 5: Perception of Police Parade of Suspects in Lagos State

No/S.	Perception	Frequency	Percentage
	Good	198	49.5%
	Bad	99	24.75%
	Neutral	103	25.75%
	Total	400	100%

The table above reveals that majority of the respondents 198 (49.5%) have a good perception towards the Police parade of suspects in Lagos State.

Table 6: Influence on Public Parade of Suspects by the Nigerian Police

No/S.	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly agree	62	15.5%
	Agree	198	49.5%
	Undecided	19	4.75%
	disagree	97	24.25%
	Strongly disagree	24	6%
	Total	400	100%

The data presented above indicate that majority of the respondents selected for this study **agrees** that parading of suspects by the Nigerian Police can influence the public perception of The Nigeria Police.

Table 7: Parading of Suspects as a Means of Fighting Crimes

No/S.	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly agree	61	15.25%
	Agree	204	51%
	Undecided	11	2.75%
	Disagree	100	25%
	Strongly disagree	24	6%
	Total	400	100%

The table above shows that majority of the respondents selected for this study agrees that parading of suspects by the Nigerian Police is a viable means of fighting crimes.

Table 8: Parading of Suspects as a Means of Fighting Crimes in Lagos State

No/S.	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly agree	92	23%
	Agree	222	55.5%
	Undecided	8	2%
	Disagree	59	14.75%
	Strongly disagree	19	4.75%
	Total	400	100%

The table above implies that majority of the respondents selected for this study agreed that parading of suspects by the Nigerian Police could help in the reduction of criminal activities in Lagos State.

Table 9: Personal Attitude towards Police Parade of Suspects

No/S.	Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
	Positive	208	52%
	Negative	99	24.75%
	Neutral	93	23.25%
	Total	400	100%

Data from the above table show that majority of the respondents sampled for this study holds a positive attitude towards The Nigerian Police parade of suspects.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that the media play a prominent role in the dissemination of information about the Nigerian Police parading of suspects. Based on the data obtained, it was discovered that newspaper and television were the major sources of information about the parading of suspects by the Nigerian Police amongst the respondents sampled for this study.

The findings corroborate the idea of agenda setting theory which dwells on the ground that the media have the ability to influence and project issues to heights of importance in the minds of the public and in the process, peoples' opinion are shaped. Through consistent reportage on the parade of suspects by the Nigerian Police, the media helped in disseminating information to Eti-Osa residents, thus making it easy for them to contribute to the phenomena under investigation. Based on the data gathered from the respondents sampled for this study, it was discovered that majority of the respondents believed that the parading of suspects by The Nigerian Police is the right thing to do. These findings corroborate Cao & Dai (2006) who noted that the views that citizens have about the police is important as their views can influence the degree and type of interaction people have with the police and the degree of support provided with the police. The public support for the parading of suspects increases the effectiveness of the police as Negative views can lead to resentment, which can impede the ability of the police to be an effective agent of law and order.

Findings from this study further revealed that majority of the respondents encouraged the parading of suspects by The Nigerian Police. In this way the opinion one forms about another person or issue is premised on the amount of information at one's disposal and the extent to which one can correctly interpret the information one has acquired. Through consistent reportage of The Nigerian Police parade of suspects by the media, residents of Eti-Osa Local Government

Area were able to form their opinions and disclose their perceptions towards The Nigerian Police public parading of suspects. The findings align with the provisions of the media dependency theory which dwells on the ground that media, audience and social systems are linked together and the characteristics of individuals and the social environment are factors that influence their cognitive behaviour and their media use. Hence, the media could influence how people think and what beliefs, views and opinions they hold in the society. This is as a result of the fact that the audience depend on the media for information among other things. It was revealed that majority of the respondents believed that the parading of suspects could help in the reduction of crime in Lagos State. This finding aligns with the principles of the perception theory which says that people interpret media messages to agree with their already held beliefs and judgements. Applying the perception theory to the variable under investigation, it can be said that what informed majority of the respondents' decision to hold the view "that parading of suspects could lead to a reduction of crime rates in Lagos" was as a result of their already held beliefs that public parade of suspect can play a pivotal role in the reduction of crime rates in the society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusively, parade of suspects in the media makes a tremendous contribution as it has impacted positively on publics in Lagos State. Therefore, it is noted that a large number of residents of Lagos state have a positive attitude towards the police parade of suspects in the media. The following recommendations are hereby given:

1. Since the finding shows that the parade of suspects has positive impact in influencing the public, it is hereby recommended that the parade of suspects should continue on mass media among the Lagos state residents since it has positive impact on its public.
2. Research result reveals that the parade of suspects creates some level of awareness towards the consequence of committing crime; therefore, it is recommended that any suspect caught should be paraded by the police.

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