MOTORCYCLE THEFT AND JUNGLE JUSTICE IN MAKURDI METROPOLIS OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA.

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Keywords

Crime, Cultural beliefs, Group solidarity, Jungle justice, Motorcycle theft, Retributive justice

Abstract

Research problem: *Motorcycle theft has become a pervasive issue in the North-Central Region of Nigeria, often leading to incidents of jungle justice where citizens take the law into their own hands. This study examines motorcycle theft and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria, by specifically interrogating mistrust in the Nigerian police and judicial system, group solidarity, exposure to crime and insecurity, and cultural beliefs in retributive justice and jungle justice.*
Methods/theory: *Anchored on Routine Activity Theory, this study adopts a descriptive survey research design. 501 respondents were sampled, and twenty-six (26) key informants were interviewed in Makurdi Metropolis.The instruments for data collection were both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, while the qualitative data from the interviews were analysed thematically.*
Results: *Results from the findings revealed that there is a positive relationship between mistrust in the Nigerian police and judicial system, group solidarity, exposure to crime and insecurity, and cultural beliefs in retributive justice and jungle justice.*
Conclusion: *Addressing motorcycle theft and jungle justice in Makurdi demands stronger law enforcement, transparent and efficient judicial*

processes, and improved community police relations.
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *This study extends theoretical implications to vigilante responses in Nigeria, thereby enriching local criminological literature on motorcycle theft and informal justice systems.*
Recommendations: *The study recommends strengthening law enforcement, expediting judicial processes, and community dialogue to challenge cultural beliefs that justify retributive justice and strengthen victim support systems.*

Introduction

Motorcycle theft, locally called "Okada" theft, has become rampant in Makurdi, the capital city of Benue State in North-Central Nigeria. Motorcycles are a primary means of transportation for many residents, serving both as personal vehicles and as commercial motorcycles (Okadas), which provide a source of income for many. The demand for motorcycles, coupled with their high resale value, makes them attractive targets for thieves. Reports have shown that perpetrators often operate in organized gangs, using force or weapons to dispossess individuals of their motorcycles, sometimes leading to physical harm or even fatalities (Abah& Ede, 2023). Several factors contribute to the rise in motorcycle theft. The economic downturn in Nigeria has left many youths unemployed and desperate, making them vulnerable to engaging in criminal activities as a means of survival. Additionally, the porous nature of law enforcement in some regions of Makurdi has emboldened criminals, as they perceive a low risk of apprehension or prosecution (Odeyemi, 2022). The increase in crime has not only instilled fear among the residents but also disrupted the economic activities in the metropolis, as many Okada riders are forced to operate under constant threat.

In response to the increasing incidents of motorcycle theft, there has been a marked rise in cases of jungle justice across Makurdi. Jungle justice, or mob justice, occurs when a group of people takes the law into their own hands, often subjecting suspected criminals to immediate and violent punishment, which can include beatings, lynching, or burning. The participants usually justify this form of vigilante justice as a necessary response to the inefficacy of formal legal channels. In many cases, the perpetrators of jungle justice are community members who have lost faith in the police and judiciary, believing that these institutions are either too slow or too corrupt to deliver justice (Igwe&Agaba, 2021). The practice of jungle justice has deep roots in Nigeria, where traditional forms of communal punishment were once used to maintain order in pre-colonial societies. However, in contemporary settings, this practice is often fuelled by frustration with the modern legal system, which is perceived as being out of touch with the realities of everyday life for many Nigerians. The lack of timely and fair justice has led to a situation where communities feel compelled to take drastic measures to protect themselves and their property (Adebayo, 2020). Unfortunately, this often results in the wrongful punishment of individuals, as mobs act on suspicion and emotion rather than evidence and due process.

The intersection of motorcycle theft and jungle justice in Makurdi has profound socio-economic implications. On the other hand, the threat of motorcycle theft discourages investment in

commercial motorcycle operations, a vital livelihood source for many in the metropolis. The fear of losing one's motorcycle or facing violent criminals has led to a decline in the number of Okada riders, reducing affordable transportation availability and increasing unemployment (Odu, 2023). On the other hand, the prevalence of jungle justice undermines the rule of law and perpetuates a cycle of violence and insecurity. It creates an environment where people are more likely to resort to self-help measures, further eroding the authority of formal institutions and perpetuating the breakdown of social order. The socio-economic challenges in Makurdi, including high unemployment rates, poverty, and inadequate law enforcement, contribute to both motorcycle theft and jungle justice. As poverty levels rise, more individuals are driven to crime, while the failure of law enforcement to provide adequate protection and justice leads to the community resorting to extrajudicial measures. This vicious cycle threatens residents' safety and security and hampers economic development and social cohesion in the metropolis (Ebikeme&Aloko, 2022).

The role of law enforcement in addressing the twin issues of motorcycle theft and jungle justice is critical. However, the police force in Makurdi, like in many parts of Nigeria, is often affected by a lack of resources, inadequate training, and corruption. These challenges have led to a situation where the police are seen as ineffective or complicit in crime, further eroding public trust (Chukwuemeka, 2021). Efforts to improve police-community relations, enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies, and ensure accountability within the police force are essential steps in curbing motorcycle theft and jungle justice. Community-based initiatives have also emerged as a response to these challenges. Some communities in Makurdi have organized vigilante groups to patrol their neighbourhoods and protect residents from motorcycle thieves. While these groups can effectively deter crime, they also risk perpetuating jungle justice, as they operate outside the formal legal framework and are not always subject to oversight (Ibrahim, 2023). Therefore, a balanced approach is needed to strengthen community policing efforts while ensuring justice is administered fairly and by the law.

Statement of the problem

Motorcycle theft has become a serious security challenge in many urban centres in Nigeria, particularly in rapidly growing cities where motorcycles serve as an important means of transportation and livelihood. In Makurdi Metropolis, motorcycles are widely used for commercial transportation, popularly known as okada. For many residents, especially unemployed youths, commercial motorcycling provides a major source of income and mobility within the city. However, the increasing demand for motorcycles has also attracted criminal elements who engage in motorcycle snatching and theft. These incidents have created fear, economic loss, and insecurity among motorcycle operators and the general public.

In recent years, cases of motorcycle theft in Makurdi have been accompanied by the growing phenomenon of jungle justice, where suspected thieves are immediately punished by angry mobs without recourse to the formal criminal justice system. Jungle justice often involves brutal physical assaults, burning of suspects, and other violent punishments carried out in public spaces. This situation reflects widespread frustration with perceived inefficiencies in the police and judicial system, as many citizens believe that arrested criminals are either released shortly after arrest or escape punishment. Consequently, members of the public, particularly motorcycle

operators and youth groups, sometimes resort to self-help justice as a form of deterrence against theft.

Several studies, such as Abah and Ede (2023) and Ajayi (2020), have examined the issues of motorcycle theft and jungle justice in Nigeria. Previous research has largely focused on themes such as the rise in criminal activities associated with motorcycle snatching, the exposure of commercial motorcyclists to violent crime, public distrust in the police and judicial institutions, and cultural beliefs that support retributive justice. Some scholars have also examined the role of group solidarity among motorcycle operators in mobilizing collective retaliation against suspected criminals. While these studies have provided valuable insights into the causes and consequences of jungle justice, most of them tend to analyze the problem primarily from the perspectives of crime prevalence, institutional failure, or cultural acceptance of mob punishment.

Despite these contributions, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding how motorcycle theft specifically triggers collective violent reactions and how these reactions are shaped by the socio-economic realities and everyday experiences of motorcycle operators in Makurdi metropolis. Many earlier studies treat jungle justice as a general response to crime without sufficiently examining the immediate situational dynamics that link motorcycle theft incidents to mob violence in urban settings. In addition, little attention has been given to the interaction between motorcycle operators, community members, and law enforcement agencies in the escalation of such incidents.This study, therefore, intends to view the issue of motorcycle theft and jungle justice from a slightly different analytical angle. Rather than examining jungle justice only as a consequence of distrust in the criminal justice system, this paper explores the interrelationship between motorcycle theft, the economic vulnerability of commercial motorcyclists, and the collective response mechanisms within motorcycle operator networks in Makurdi metropolis. The study also pays attention to how repeated experiences of theft, fear of livelihood loss, and peer group mobilization among motorcycle riders contribute to the rapid formation of mobs and the execution of jungle justice.In doing so, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a deeper understanding of how specific forms of property crime can trigger violent informal justice practices in urban Nigeria.

Objective of the study

The specific objectives of the study validated the following:

1. To examine the impact of mistrust in the Nigerian police and judicial system on jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria.
2. To find out the influence of group solidarity on jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria.

Conceptual clarification

Motorcycle theft

Motorcycle theft refers to the unlawful taking, stealing, or unauthorized appropriation of a motorcycle belonging to another person with the intent to permanently deprive the owner of the property. It is a form of property crime and is generally categorized under theft, larceny, or motor vehicle theft in criminal law. Motorcycle theft has become a significant security challenge in many parts of the world, particularly in

developing countries where motorcycles are widely used for transportation and commercial purposes (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2018).Motorcycles are especially vulnerable to theft because they are relatively easy to move, dismantle, and resell compared to other vehicles. Criminals may steal motorcycles for various reasons, including resale in illegal markets, dismantling for spare parts, use in committing other crimes such as robbery, or personal use (Clarke & Harris, 2016). In many urban areas, stolen motorcycles are quickly transported to other locations where they are either sold at lower prices or stripped into parts to avoid identification by law enforcement agencies. According to Nwankwo (2020), motorcycle theft often occurs in public spaces such as markets, motor parks, residential areas, and roadside parking locations where security surveillance is limited.

In Nigeria and other African countries, motorcycle theft is sometimes associated with organized criminal activities. Some criminal groups specialize in stealing motorcycles and selling them across state or national borders. Others use stolen motorcycles to facilitate crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and drug trafficking because motorcycles allow quick movement and easy escape from crime scenes (Okolie & Igbuzor, 2019). Motorcycle theft has serious social and economic implications for victims and communities. Many individuals rely on motorcycles as a means of livelihood, particularly commercial riders who use them for daily income. When a motorcycle is stolen, the victim may lose their primary source of income, thereby worsening economic hardship and social instability (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2018). The frequent occurrence of motorcycle theft can also lead to frustration and distrust in formal law enforcement agencies, sometimes resulting in vigilante actions or jungle justice by community members who seek immediate punishment for suspected offenders. For this study, motorcycle theft is a criminal act involving the unlawful taking of motorcycles for personal gain or criminal purposes. It is influenced by factors such as economic hardship, high demand for motorcycles, weak security systems, and the presence of illegal markets for stolen vehicles and spare parts.

Jungle justice

Jungle justice refers to an extrajudicial form of punishment in which a group of people takes the law into their own hands by violently punishing a suspected offender without following the formal procedures of the criminal justice system. It usually involves mob action, such as beating, lynching, or burning of individuals who are accused of committing crimes such as theft, robbery, or witchcraft. Jungle justice typically occurs when members of a community lose confidence in law enforcement agencies and the judicial system to effectively investigate, prosecute, and punish offenders (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2017). In many developing countries, particularly in parts of Africa, jungle justice has become a recurring phenomenon due to factors such as slow judicial processes, corruption within law enforcement institutions, and inadequate policing. When people perceive that formal justice institutions are ineffective or inaccessible, they may resort to mob justice as an immediate way to punish offenders and deter others from committing similar crimes. However, jungle justice undermines the rule of law because it bypasses legal procedures such as investigation, fair trial, and the presumption of innocence (Okafor, 2018).

Jungle justice is closely associated with mob violence and vigilantism. It often occurs spontaneously when a crowd gathers around a

suspected criminal and collectively inflicts punishment. In some cases, the accused person may not even be properly identified or proven guilty before punishment is carried out. This makes jungle justice highly problematic because innocent individuals may become victims of mob attacks due to rumors, mistaken identity, or false accusations (Tankebe, 2019).In Nigeria, jungle justice has been widely reported in both urban and rural communities. Cases often involve the public beating or burning of suspected thieves, particularly motorcycle snatchers, armed robbers, or pickpockets. The persistence of jungle justice in Nigeria has been linked to the perceived inefficiency of the criminal justice system, delays in court proceedings, overcrowded prisons, and a lack of trust between the public and the police. As a result, many citizens believe that immediate mob punishment is a more effective deterrent than waiting for formal legal processes (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In this study, jungle justice is a form of mob punishment carried out outside the legal framework of the state. Although it often arises from frustration with ineffective justice systems, it poses serious dangers to human rights, social order, and democratic governance.

Theoretical framework

This study adopted the Routine Activity Theory (RAT). The theory was developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979 and is a framework that explains criminal events by focusing on the circumstances in which crimes occur rather than on the characteristics of offenders. The theory is based on the following key assumptions:

1. Crime as a routine activity: Crime is a part of everyday life and occurs during routine activities when an opportunity arises. Motivated offenders do not need to be inherently different from law-abiding citizens; anyone may commit a crime if the conditions are favourable.
2. Three elements of crime: For a crime to occur, three elements must converge in time and space:
   i. Motivated offender: An individual willing and capable of committing a crime.
   ii. Suitable target: An object or person that presents an opportunity for crime, often because it is perceived as vulnerable or valuable.
   iii. Absence of a Capable Guardian: The lack of a person or mechanism to prevent the crime, such as law enforcement, security systems, or community vigilance.
3. Environmental influence: The theory posits that the environment and situational factors play a significant role in crime. Crime is likely to occur in environments where the three elements mentioned above converge, making the opportunity for crime more accessible.
4. Routine activities: People's daily activities influence the likelihood of these three elements coming together. For instance, changes in work patterns, social activities, or technology can affect crime rates by altering the exposure of targets and the presence of guardians.

The theory applied to the study because the increase in motorcycle theft can be attributed to various socio-economic factors, such as unemployment, poverty, and the perception of motorcycles as high-value items. These factors can motivate individuals to engage in criminal

activities. The offenders are often young men who see motorcycle theft as an easy way to make money due to the high demand for motorcycles in the area.

Motorcycles, particularly in Makurdi Metropolis, serve as a vital mode of transportation. The proliferation of motorcycles increases the availability of potential targets. Motorcyclists, especially those operating late at night or in poorly lit areas, become easy targets for snatchers. The relative ease with which a motorcycle can be stolen and sold makes it a suitable target. The effectiveness of law enforcement in preventing motorcycle theft in Makurdi Metropolis may be limited due to inadequate resources, corruption, or a lack of presence in high-risk areas. Additionally, the absence of a strong community policing framework or technological measures like tracking systems contributes to the ease with which these crimes are committed.

Jungle justice, where communities take the law into their own hands to punish suspected criminals, can be seen as a reaction to the perceived failure of the formal justice system. When law enforcement is seen as ineffective, community members may assume the role of "capable guardians" in a misguided attempt to deter crime. This often leads to severe and unlawful punishment of suspected motorcycle snatchers, further escalating violence and undermining the rule of law.

Environmental and situational factors in Makurdi, such as the lack of street lighting, poor road infrastructure, and the design of urban spaces, contribute to the prevalence of motorcycle theft. These factors create opportunities for offenders and reduce the likelihood of being caught. Additionally, the social environment, characterized by distrust in the formal justice system and a culture of retribution, fosters the practice of jungle justice.

Routine Activity Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of motorcycle theft and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis. The convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians creates an environment conducive to these criminal activities. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes improving law enforcement capabilities, enhancing community policing, and fostering trust in the formal justice system to reduce the reliance on jungle justice.

Literature review

Mistrust in the Nigerian Police, judicial system, and jungle justice

Jungle justice, defined as the practice of mob violence and extrajudicial punishment, is a prevalent issue in many Nigerian urban centers, including Makurdi. This practice is often fueled by a profound mistrust of the formal justice system, which is widely perceived as corrupt, inefficient, and inaccessible (Igwe, 2018). In response to perceived injustices or slow legal processes, communities often take the law into their own hands, demanding immediate and frequently brutal punishments for suspected criminals. Mistrust in the Nigerian police and judicial system is a significant factor behind the jungle justice phenomenon. Many motorcycle riders have had negative experiences with law enforcement, leading to a widespread belief that the police are corrupt, inefficient, and unreliable. According to Alemika (2017), this lack of trust in the police is pervasive across Nigerian society, but it is particularly pronounced among those in the informal sector, such as Okada riders. This mistrust means that when a crime is committed, riders often feel that reporting it to

the police will be futile. Instead, they take matters into their own hands, believing that jungle justice is the only way to ensure justice is served. This sentiment is reinforced by the slow pace of the legal system, which often fails to deliver timely justice, further eroding public confidence in formal institutions (Oluwadare&Oyesanya, 2020).

The loss of trust in the NPF has led to a disturbing increase in jungle justice across Nigeria. Jungle justice is a form of mob justice where individuals accused of crimes are subjected to immediate and often brutal punishment by the community without any legal process. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in areas where the police are perceived as ineffective or corrupt (Agbiboa, 2015). Several factors contribute to the rise of jungle justice in Nigeria. One of the most significant is the perception that the police are unable or unwilling to provide justice. People often resort to jungle justice because they believe reporting crimes to the police will not lead to meaningful action (Akinlabi, 2017). Additionally, the slow pace of the judicial process in Nigeria, coupled with the widespread belief that the rich and powerful can easily manipulate the system, has further eroded confidence in formal justice mechanisms (Ajayi&Longe, 2015).

The prevalence of jungle justice also reflects deeper social and economic issues in Nigeria. High levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality contribute to a sense of hopelessness and frustration, which can manifest in violent forms of retribution (Agbiboa, 2015). Moreover, in communities where the state is perceived as absent or ineffective, people often feel they have no choice but to take matters into their own hands (Smith, 2004). The consequences of jungle justice are severe and far-reaching. Firstly, it undermines the rule of law and the principle of due process, which are fundamental to any democratic society. When individuals are subjected to extrajudicial punishment, it violates their fundamental human rights and perpetuates a cycle of violence and lawlessness (Akinlabi, 2017).

Secondly, jungle justice often results in the punishment of innocent people. In many cases, accusations are based on rumors or mistaken identity, leading to the wrongful execution or maiming of individuals who have committed no crime (Amnesty International, 2017). This not only results in tragic loss of life but also deepens the divide between the community and the state, further eroding trust in the police and the justice system. Finally, the prevalence of jungle justice can lead to a breakdown in social cohesion. When communities resort to mob violence, it creates an environment of fear and suspicion, where people are less likely to cooperate with authorities (Ajayi&Longe, 2015). This can have long-term adverse effects on community relations and social stability.

The loss of trust in the Nigerian Police Force is a significant factor contributing to the rise of jungle justice in the country. As public confidence in the police continues to erode due to issues of corruption, brutality, and inefficiency, more and more Nigerians are turning to extrajudicial means of seeking justice. This phenomenon undermines the rule of law and severely affects social cohesion and human rights. Addressing the problem of jungle justice in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that includes police reform, community engagement, and public education. Restoring trust in the police is essential, but it will require sustained efforts to tackle the root causes of public disillusionment. Only then can Nigeria hope to reduce the incidence of jungle justice and strengthen the foundations of its democratic society.

Group solidarity and jungle justice

Globally, studies have demonstrated that jungle justice is often rooted in strong group cohesion and collective emotional reactions to perceived injustice. When individuals identify strongly with a group, they are more likely to participate in collective punishment against perceived offenders, especially when formal institutions are perceived as ineffective. For instance, Tolossa et al. (2023) conducted a systematic literature review on mob justice across different countries. Their findings revealed that mob justice is frequently driven by groupthink and de-individuation, where individuals in a crowd lose their personal sense of responsibility and conform to the actions of the group. The study concluded that strong group cohesion often encourages individuals to participate in violence because they feel protected by the anonymity of the crowd and the collective support of others. The researchers employed a systematic review methodology, analyzing previously published studies on mob justice, collective violence, and human rights violations. Similarly, Mbiada and Sithuga (2023) examined mob justice in South Africa and other societies and found that group solidarity plays a central role in the emergence of vigilante actions. Communities experiencing high crime rates often develop informal mechanisms of social control where residents collectively punish suspected criminals. The study relied on qualitative literature analysis and conceptual examination of vigilantism, revealing that collective solidarity is often fueled by shared frustration with the formal criminal justice system.

Another empirical investigation by Gross (2016) explored vigilante violence in South African townships. Using mixed methods involving fieldwork, interviews, and statistical analysis, the study discovered that vigilante attacks frequently emerge in communities with strong internal cohesion but weak trust in state institutions. Residents often believe that collective punishment will deter crime and protect community members. The study concluded that strong group solidarity enables communities to mobilize quickly against suspected criminals, thereby facilitating mob violence. Another empirical study conducted in Ghana by Tankebe (2005) analyzed vigilante homicides between 1990 and 2000. Using newspaper reports and crime data analysis, the research revealed that most victims of mob justice were young men accused of robbery or theft. The findings indicated that group solidarity among residents often leads to spontaneous attacks using readily available weapons such as stones, sticks, and clubs. The study further revealed that mob justice was strongly associated with public distrust of police institutions and fear of rising crime. Similarly, Maruma (2024) examined vigilante justice in South Africa through qualitative case studies and interviews with community members. The findings indicated that community solidarity and shared experiences of insecurity often motivate residents to collectively punish suspected criminals. Participants in the study argued that mob justice represents a form of community protection in environments where law enforcement is perceived as ineffective.

Obasanjo et al. (2023) conducted an empirical study on the patterns and causes of mob justice in Nigeria. The study relied on secondary data analysis of published literature, textbooks, and newspaper reports. The findings revealed that mob justice is usually carried out by groups of community members who collectively punish suspected criminals without allowing them to defend themselves. The study identified several forms of mob punishment, including beating, stoning, burning, and lynching. It also found that mob justice frequently occurs in cases of theft,

robbery, rape, and kidnapping. Another relevant study by Shodunke (2022) examined the relationship between mob justice and the Nigerian criminal justice system. Using qualitative analysis and review of documented mob incidents, the research found that community members often justify jungle justice as a collective response to insecurity. The study concluded that the failure of the state to ensure justice has strengthened group-based punishment systems in many Nigerian communities.

Research Methodology

Design, study description, and scope

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to investigate motorcycle theft and jungle justice phenomena in Makurdi Metropolis, Nigeria. The descriptive survey design is chosen due to its effectiveness in collecting data that describes the current situation, behaviours, attitudes, and opinions of the population under study. It allows for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between motorcycle theft incidents and the occurrence of jungle justice in the area. The study area was the North-Central region of Nigeria, specifically Makurdi Metropolis, the capital city of Benue State, Nigeria. Makurdi is a significant urban centre with a diverse population and high economic activity, making it prone to various forms of criminality, including motorcycle theft. The choice of Makurdi as the study area is informed by the increasing reports of motorcycle theft and residents' corresponding jungle justice actions. The target population for this study was motorcycle riders known as "Okada" because they have either witnessed or been involved in incidents of motorcycle theft and jungle justice. The population also includes law enforcement officers, community leaders, and victims of motorcycle theft. This diverse population is crucial for understanding the different perspectives on the issue. The motorcycle riders (Okada) have a population of 5,012 registered members, according to the Chairman of the Benue State Motorcycle Association Office, Makurdi Branch (2024).

This study used a sample size of 501. The 501 sample size was determined based on the recommendation of Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003), which advised that if the population is between 2 and 1000, use 20% as the minimum sample size, and if it is up to 5,000, use 10% as the minimum sample size. The sample size for this research study was five hundred and one (501); that is, 10% of the total population (5,012) of motorcycle members in Makurdi Metropolis.

The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique**.** First, twenty-two (22) motorcycle stations (Okada) were divided into clusters based on their wards or Makurdi Metropolis. This ensures that different parts of the metropolis are represented in the study. Secondly, stratified random sampling was used to select ten (10) of the twenty-two (22) motorcycle stations from different parts of the Makurdi metropolis, namely BSU Main Gate, Tipper Park, Wukuru Market, Yaman Park, Benue Links Gate, Abu King Shingula Road, SARS Junction, North Market, Wadata Market, and Modern Market Main Gate. This ensures that all relevant subgroups are represented. Finally, within each stratum, systematic sampling was used to select five hundred and one (501) respondents. Every nth person on a list of potential respondents was chosen until the desired sample size for that stratum was achieved.

The data collected was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods**.** The quantitative data were analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to test each

hypothesis at a 0.05 significance level. The qualitative data from the interviews were analysed thematically. This involves identifying and coding key themes, patterns, and narratives from respondents' experiences and perspectives.

This study adhered to ethical standards in research, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality of the information provided, and ensuring anonymity of respondents. The research also sought approval from relevant authorities, such as the Benue State Motorcycle Association and the Nigerian policein Makurdi Metropolis, before data collection began.

Potential limitations include response bias**,** where respondents may provide socially desirable answers, and limited access to certain key informants. Efforts were made to mitigate these limitations by ensuring the anonymity of responses and employing multiple data collection methods. This methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to motorcycle theft and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis, Nigeria, and to inform potential policy and community-based interventions.

Results

Socio-Demographics of respondents

The respondents' demographic information showed that the majority, 62% (N = 312), were male, while 38% (N = 189) were female. More males participated because they were more willing to participate than females. The age category showed that 39% (N = 197) were between 20 and 30 years of age, 33% (N = 166) were between 31 and 40 years, 19% (N = 97) were between 41 and 50 years of age, while 8% (N= 41) were between 51 and above years of age. The educational level of participants revealed that 37% (N = 183) had completed primary education, the majority, 40% (N = 201), had completed post-primary education, and 23% (N = 117) had completed tertiary education or more. Data on occupation shows that the majority, 50% (N= 251), were motorcycle riders, 22% (N =111) were farmers, 13% (N = 64) were traders or business owners, and 7% (N= 33) were either civil or public servants. In comparison, 8% (N= 42) belonged to neither of the categories listed (others).

Analysis of research objectives

Research objective 1: What is the relationship between mistrust in the Nigerian police, judicial system, and jungle justice in Makudi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Correlation Coefficient on the influence of mistrust in the Nigerian police, judicial system, and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria.

		Mistrust in the Nigerian police and judicial system	Jungle justice
Mistrust in the Nigerian police and judicial system	Pearson correlation	1	.907**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	501	501
Jungle justice	Pearson correlation	.907**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	501	501

**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows a strong positive relationship between mistrust in the Nigerian police, judicial system, and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria, r=.907, p=0.000<0.05, n=501. This result means that mistrust in the Nigerian police and judicial system is a significant factor behind the jungle justice phenomenon.

Research objective 2: Group solidarity influence on jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficient on the influence of group solidarity and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria.

		Group solidarity	Jungle justice
Group solidarity	Pearson correlation	1	.904**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	501	501
Jungle justice	Pearson correlation	.904**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	501	501

**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows a strong positive relationship between group solidarity and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria, r=.904, p=0.000<0.05, n=501. This result means that when one rider is attacked or robbed, other riders may feel a sense of duty to defend their colleague.

Discussion of findings

Mistrust in the Nigerian police, judicial system, and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis

The study looks into motorcycle theft and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis. The finding of hypothesis one revealed a significant positive relationship between mistrust in the Nigerian police, judicial system, and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with the

finding of Ibrahim (2018) that Victims often believe that reporting incidents to the police will not lead to any meaningful resolution and, in some cases, may even exacerbate their problems. This has fostered an environment where citizens must resort to alternative means of justice, including jungle justice. In contrast to the above finding of Ibrahim (2018), Ogunode (2019) added in their findings that many residents express concerns about the ability of the courts to adjudicate cases, particularly those involving influential individuals, fairly. This perception of bias and delay in the judicial process has led to people preferring to take matters into their own hands rather than relying on the courts to deliver justice.

When asking the key informant interviewee about the issue of motorcycle theft in Makurdi. A male, 35 years old, motorcycle (Okada) rider said:

Motorcycle theft has become a big problem in Makurdi. Every day, you hear stories of riders being attacked and their bikes stolen. We feel unsafe on the roads, especially at night. I have had friends who lost their motorcycles and almost lost their lives in the process. The thieves are becoming increasingly daring, and it appears that nobody is taking action to stop them.

Probing further on their trust in the police to handle motorcycle theft cases effectively,a member of the Motorcycle Hire Association, Makurdi Branch, revealed that:

I do not trust the police at all. They rarely respond on time; when they do, they are more interested in collecting money than finding criminals. Even if they catch someone, they will likely be released after a few days. There is no justice. It feels like the system is rigged against us, the ordinary people.He further alleged that police frequently released suspected offenders caught without prosecuting them for their crimes, urging them not to wait for justice to take its course (Male, 30 years, KII/Wukuru Area).

When asked about their feelings on jungle justice practices in the community and why they do not allow the criminal justice system to handle such matters, another Rider lamented that:

It is not right, but sometimes people feel they have no choice. When the police and courts fail to deliver justice, people take matters into their own hands. I have seen cases where people caught a thief and decided to deal with him themselves. It is dangerous because innocent people can get caught up in it, but it happens because people are frustrated with the system(Male, 23 years old, KII).

Further inquiry on their experience with motorcycle theft in Makurdi, a key informant interviewee said:

It was a terrifying experience. My brother was attacked by some boys who wanted to steal his motorcycle. They beat him badly and left him on the road. Luckily, someone found him and took him to the hospital. We reported it to the police, but nothing came of it. We never got the motorcycle back; the attackers are still out there(Male, 29 years old, KII).

When asked whether they believe the police are doing enough to prevent and solve crimes like motorcycle theft. Unit Chairman of the Motorcycle Association, Benue State University, Main Gate, has this to say:

No, I do not think so. The police here do not care much about ordinary people. They are slow to respond; even when they do, they do not follow up on cases. We do not feel protected. Instead, we feel abandoned by those who are supposed to keep us safe.Probing about his thoughts on jungle justice in the community.He

said:It is a desperate act, but sometimes it is the only way to get justice. People are tired of waiting for the police and the courts to do their jobs. When someone is caught in the act, people want to punish them immediately. It is risky and can lead to more violence, but the lack of trust in the legal system makes people resort to jungle justice(Male, 42 years old, KII)

Probing how prevalent motorcycle theft is in their community and their experience. A Rider said:

Motorcycle theft is common now, creating a sense of fear in the community. Many people rely on their motorcycles for their livelihood, so losing one can be devastating. The community is always on edge because you never know who might be the next victim. When asked about hisopinion of the Nigerian Police Force's response to motorcycle theft and other crimes. He said the police force needs to be more effective. They are underpaid, poorly trained, and often corrupt. Many people do not report crimes anymore because they know it will not lead anywhere. The police are more interested in making money than in protecting the people. This has led to a complete breakdown of trust.When asked about hisview of jungle justice in Makurdi, he said:Jungle justice is a symptom of the more significant problem of mistrust in the police and the judicial system. People feel that nothing will happen if they do not take action themselves. It is a dangerous trend because it leads to lawlessness and can result in innocent people being hurt or killed. However, until there is real reform in the police and judiciary, I do not see it stopping.

A female Benue State University student narrated her ordeal:

My uncle's motorcycle was stolen last year. He was attacked by some guys on his way home at night. He reported it to the police, but nothing was done. He had to borrow money to buy another motorcycle because that is how he makes a living. It was a terrible experience for our family.Asking about *her* confidence in the police and judicial system to handle such cases. She said:The police need to take these cases seriously, and the courts need to be faster. The system has much corruption, making people feel like there is no justice for low-income people. You are alone if you do not have money or connections(Female, Student, 21 years old, KII).

When asking about their perspective on jungle justice in the community. A male civil servant with the Ministry of Transport, Makurdi, Benue State, said:

I understand why people resort to jungle justice, but I do not support it. It is dangerous and can lead to more violence. However, when people lose faith in the police and the courts, they feel like they have no other option. It is a sad situation, but it reflects the deep mistrust in our legal system(Male, Civil Servant, 45 years old, KII).

Group solidarity influences jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis.

The second finding revealed a significant positive relationship between group solidarity and jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria. This finding is similar to the finding of Onoja (2018) that motorcycle riders, when confronted with threats or attacks against their members, sometimes resort to mob action to exact retribution. This behaviour is often rationalized as self-defence or community protection, especially when law enforcement is ineffective or biased. Research indicates that motorcycle riders are frequently the first responders to incidents involving their members, and their involvement can quickly escalate into violent acts of jungle justice (Ajayi, 2020).

When questioned about their thoughts on motorcycle theft in Makurdi Metropolis. A 35-year-old male motorcycle rider said that:

Motorcycle theft is a severe problem here. Every rider is worried about it because it happens too often. We work hard to buy our motorcycles, and it is like losing everything when they get snatched. The worst part is that the police sometimes do little to help. That is why we riders stick together to protect ourselves.

Asking about how solidarity among motorcycle riders helps in situations of motorcycle theft. A member lamented that:

We have a strong bond. If someone's motorcycle is snatched, we immediately spread the word through our network. We help each other search for the motorcycle and sometimes even catch the thieves ourselves. We trust each other more than we trust the police, so we rely on our group to solve these problems*(*Motorcycle Association Member, Akpehe Unit, Makurdi Branch, Male, 40 years old).

Probing about the role motorcycle riders'associations play in addressing motorcycle theft, another rider said:

The Okada riders are very united. When something happens to one of them, they all come together. They communicate quickly and mobilize to find the snatched motorcycle. I have seen them recover motorcycles that the police could not find. Their solidarity is strong and more effective(Rider, male, 40 years old).

When asked if they think jungle justice is a justified response in motorcycle theft cases, a ticket booker said:

It is hard to say. On one hand, no one should be killed or beaten to death without a trial. However, on the other hand, people are desperate for justice. They see the thieves as threatening their livelihood and safety, and believe the criminals will get away if they do not act. It is sad because it shows that people have lost faith in the legal system(Female, 38 years old, Motorcycle Association Office, MakurdiBranch)**.**

Probing to know how motorcycle groups contribute to addressing the prevalent theft, one of the riders' chairpersons said:

Motorcycle groups are very organized and have become an informal security force in the community. When a motorcycle is snatched, they quickly respond and work together to recover the stolen property. Their unity is their strength; they often succeed where the police fail.How do you view the solidarity among motorcycle groups in responding to motorcycle theft (Male, 43 years old, Chairman, Motorcycle Association Office, MakurdiBranch).

The solidarity among motorcycle riders is both a strength and a challenge. On the one hand, their organisation helps quickly spread information and recover stolen motorcycles. On the other hand, when they take matters into their own hands, it can escalate into violence, making their job even more difficult.

Conclusion

Motorcycle theft has emerged as a significant social and security concern in the North-Central Region of Nigeria, often culminating in incidents of jungle justice. This disturbing trend reflects deep-seated societal issues, including a pervasive mistrust in formal law enforcement and the judiciary, inadequate police presence, and the perceived inefficacy of legal processes in delivering timely and fair justice. The reliance on jungle justice, wherein individuals or groups take the law into their own hands, not only

undermines the rule of law but also perpetuates cycles of violence and insecurity. This phenomenon is further exacerbated by economic challenges and a cultural inclination towards retributive justice, where communities feel compelled to exact immediate punishment on suspected criminals. The fear and anger induced by frequent motorcycle theft incidents drive these acts of vigilantism, as people believe it is the only way to protect themselves and their property without reliable state intervention.

Addressing motorcycle theft and jungle justice in Makurdi requires a multifaceted approach. Critical steps include strengthening the capacity and presence of law enforcement, fostering community-police relations, ensuring swift and transparent legal processes, and implementing public awareness campaigns to discourage jungle justice. Furthermore, socio-economic development initiatives to reduce poverty and unemployment could mitigate the factors driving crime and vigilante responses. Ultimately, restoring public trust in the justice system and re-establishing the authority of lawful institutions are essential to curbing the rise of jungle justice in Makurdi Metropolis. Without such measures, the cycle of violence and insecurity associated with motorcycle theft is likely to persist, posing ongoing challenges to peace and social order in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it has been recommended that:

The government should establish transparent mechanisms for addressing complaints against police misconduct. The judicial system should also expedite the handling of cases, particularly those involving motorcycle theft, to reduce perceptions of inefficiency and corruption.

There should be peer education and advocacy programs that mobilize influential community members and motorcycle rider associations to advocate against jungle justice. By fostering a sense of collective responsibility, these groups can discourage retaliatory violence and promote lawful responses to crime.

The government should enhance the security infrastructure in Makurdi Metropolis by increasing police patrols, particularly in high-crime areas, and installing surveillance systems. This will reduce the frequency of motorcycle theft and the resulting fear and frustration that often leads to jungle justice.

Human Research Ethics Issues: Ethical approval for this study was sought and obtained. Respondents' informed consent was also sought before the interview, and they were urged to respond to all questions honestly, but also reserved the right to decline to answer any question if they felt uncomfortable.

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Declarations

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