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UBIQUITY OF JUNGLE JUSTICE IN NIGERIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

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Abstract

This paper examined the ubiquity of jungle justice in Nigeria and its implications for law enforcement. Through a critical review of relevant literature, the dynamics and precipitating factors of jungle justice in Nigeria were unveiled to include cultural erosion, weakened institutions, and ineffective law enforcement agencies, among other factors. The study, which was hinged on the Institutional Anomie Theory (Messner & Rosenfield, 1994), posited that jungle justice stems from anomie resulting from the inability of the people to trust in the capacity of the public institutions to perform their duties effectively and ensure justice, fairness and equity in dealing with the populace. The role of law enforcement agents in preventing and curtailing the challenges of jungle justice was enshrined in the paper. Lastly, the paper highlighted the consequences of jungle justice and provided plausible remedies to the menace of jungle justice in Nigeria.

Keywords: Jungle Justice, Law Enforcement, Ubiquity

Introduction

The persistent escalation of Jungle Justice in Nigeria is worrying and requires concerted efforts to curtail or mitigate the menace for the preservation of human dignity, safety and security. Nigeria is currently experiencing the worse form of insecurity with different regions experiencing different forms of insecurity ranging from banditry and kidnapping which is prominent in the north-central, ritual killings in the south-west, terrorism in the north-east and north-west, struggles for secession by the proscribed members of the IPOB in the South-east and pipeline vandalism and kidnapping of expatriates in the south-south geopolitical region of Nigeria (Ibrahim & Lasisi, 2023).

Globally, jungle justice is a legally and morally condemnable behaviour that must be eradicated, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, which may not have attained the technological advancement required to curtail such wanton behaviour at an advanced level (Rawat & Chaudhary, 2021). Malik et al. (2024) posited that jungle justice has remained prevalent in Pakistan, with negative consequences for the country's judicial system.

In the African context, cases of jungle justice have intensified in countries such as South Africa, Libya, and Nigeria, among others (Addadzi-Koom, 2024). This condemnable behaviour of bypassing legal process has taken diverse forms, including religiously related lynching, xenophobic-triggered attacks, ethnic and other types of primordial sentiment-based attacks that have continued to undermine human existence, dignity and safety.

In Nigeria, the prevalence of jungle justice is a worrisome and challenging situation that has continued to threaten the powers of the legal system and endanger the lives of citizens. It is alarming

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that this heinous act has been perpetuated without maximum reprimands by the law enforcement agencies in most instances (Umoh et al., 2023). In the submission of Ruwan et al. (2020), factors such as police inefficiency, lack of fairness and lawlessness demonstrated by law enforcement agencies as perceived by citizens are the major enablers of citizens' indulgence in jungle justice in Nigeria. according Amnesty International, as reported in Sanusi (2024), at least five hundred and fifty-five persons were victims of killings associated with jungle justice in Nigeria between January 2012 and August 2023. These killings consisted of mob-related killings, such as victims that were burnt alive, some that were buried alive and others that were tortured to death.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is premised on the Institutional Anomie Theory (Messner & Messner, 1994), which posits that when there is a disconnect between citizens' expectations and the capacity of public institutions to address their grievances, individuals may resort to alternative, often extralegal, means of dispute resolution. In Nigeria, institutional anomie reflected the prevalence of jungle justice, where people dissatisfied with perceived inefficiencies and or biases on the part of public institutions, such as law enforcement and legal systems, resort to vigilantism, suggesting the intricacies between declining public trust and recourse to informal justice mechanisms.

Concept of Jungle Justice

Jungle justice may be defined as extralegal punishment carried out by mobs or vigilante groups against individuals accused of a crime. This form of attack may include physical assaults, humiliation or summary execution of the accused without any form of judicial trial or other legal process. In the view of Adewale (2017), jungle justice, also known as mob justice, refers to the act whereby a group of persons that bypasses established legal procedures to administer judgment to someone or people suspected of a crime. Similarly, Alemika (2018) corroborated the views of Adewale (2017) when he asserted that jungle justice is commonly seen as a form of vigilantism, where a person or group of persons "takes the law into their hands," usually resulting from poor emotional acumen, anger, and desire for vengeance without recourse to the rule of law. In Nigeria, jungle justice contravenes section 33(1) and 34(1)(a), respectively, of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended, which states inter alia, that;

"Every person has a right to life, and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life, save in execution of the sentence of a court of competent jurisdiction upon conviction of a criminal offence for which the penalty is death under the law in force in a part of Nigeria." And

"No person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment." Also, articles 3(2), 4, 5, and 12 respectively of the African Charter on human and peoples' rights state inter alia "Every human-being shall be entitled to equal protection of the law",

"Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right"

"Every individual shall have the right to the respect of the dignity inherent in a human being and to the recognition of his legal status. All forms of exploitation and degradation of man, particularly slavery, slave trade, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment shall be prohibited"

Also, the United Nations Security Council (2023) expressed its strong condemnation of rising cases of human rights abuses in Africa, urging member countries to rise to the challenge and bring all

forms of human rights violations to an end. It emphasised the role of relevant public agencies in ensuring adequate protection of all forms of human rights and upholding human dignity.

Cases of Jungle Justice in Nigeria (2017-2025).

It was documented by Mac-leve et al. (2024) in a Daily Trust newspaper report of 24th February, 2024, that a total of seventy-three persons were brutally murdered through jungle justice in different parts of Nigeria, with another thirty-one persons sustaining varying degrees of injuries from attacks relating to mob actions between January and December, 2019. These figures may not include incidents that occurred in rural communities or victims from low social status who may not have the resources to escalate such issues to the limelight. Data obtained from the Jungle Justice archive of Premium Times Newspaper (2025) showed the regional compilations of cases of jungle Justice in Nigeria.

In the south-west of Nigeria, the Lagos state police command on 31st August, 2017, confirmed the arrest of five persons in connection with the lynching of two suspected ritualists in Mushin Area of Lagos State. also, on 10th July, 2019, a 22-year-old man named Olamide, a tricycle rider who was accused of phone theft, was gruesomely murdered, and his corpse, which was thrown into the lagoon in Lagos State, was later discovered to be innocent of the accusation that stemmed from a false alarm. Furthermore, three suspected motorcycle thieves were set ablaze in the Iyana-Ipaja area of Lagos state, South-west Nigeria, on 19th July, 2021. Similarly, the police reported the killing of two suspected robbers of point of sale (P.O.S) operators, where the suspects were set ablaze on November 2nd 2022. More so, a middle-aged woman was set ablaze to death by mobs in the Abule-Ado area of Lagos state, on the suspicion that the woman was a kidnapper and had a stolen baby and an A. K. 47 rifle. The police later confirmed that the woman was actually mentally unstable and was neither in possession of a baby nor a gun.

In the North-west and North-east of Nigeria, it was reported that a female student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto State, North-west, Nigeria was burnt to death for making comments that were perceived to be blasphemous to Islam and Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) on the 12th of May, 2022. Also, on the 14th June, 2022, some irate youth set ablaze a suspected motorcycle thief in Chinada Community, Katagum Local Government Area of Bauchi State.

In North-central, Nigeria, angry youth set ablaze a suspected motorcycle thief without subjecting the suspect to a fair hearing and judicial process in Plateau State, North-central, Nigeria, on the 2nd November, 2022. Also, in Nasarawa state, north-central, Nigeria, it was recorded that, on October 11th, 2023, a man accused of genital theft was gruesomely burnt to death alongside his car without subjecting the suspect to any form of legal process. In a similar event reported by Business Day Newspaper (August 21st 2025), a woman suspected of being destitute was wrongly accused of child kidnapping without any evidence. The woman was instantly attacked by irate youths, resulting in her death at the popular Ipata Market, Ilorin, Kwara State.

In South-south, Nigeria, it was reported that on 18th February, 2021, six suspected criminals were reportedly lynched and set ablaze by mobs within 48 hours in Akwa-ibom state, South-south, Nigeria. Also, on July 19th, 2023, it took the proactive effort of the Nigerian police force personnel to rescue two people from lynching. These two suspects included a man accused of stealing a Campari drink in Akwa-Ibom state. Furthermore, on 27th March, 2025, as reported by Amnesty International, sixteen hunters travelling through Uromi, Edo State, Nigeria were ambushed and lynched on the suspicion that the travellers were kidnappers without empirical evidence, nor were they allowed to undergo judicial processes before being condemned to death.

Forms of Jungle Justice in Nigeria

Jungle justice can take the form of lynching, mob beating, public shaming, stoning, and burning alive, among others (Kolawolw-Amao, 2020).

Lynching of Suspects: Lynching of suspected criminals without judicial trials is fast becoming a norm in our contemporary society. Mobs are often lynched among other forms of inhuman treatments, such as burning alive, and or beating of suspects, resulting in severe bodily harm and death (Uroko & Ukeachusim, 2025).

Mob Beating: In most mob actions against suspected criminals or perceived enemies, the victims are usually overpowered by the crowd and beaten to the point of sustaining severe injuries, bodily harm, which eventually results in the death of the victims (Esara et al., 2023).

Public Shaming: In this instance, suspects accused of committing crimes are subjected to public ridicule, escalating to the physical harm of the suspects. In some cases, violators of norms and cultural values are stripped naked and paraded in public places without allowing the legal process to take charge of the suspect and the suspected crime (Omenugha, 2025).

Stoning: Mobs stone suspected criminals to death, especially in cases of alleged blasphemy against Islam and Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W.). This practice of stoning perceived blasphemers and burning the same to death is commonly exhibited among mobs who are usually referred to as religious extremists in the northern region of the country (Obasanjo et al., 2023).

Burning Alive: Victims of jungle justice are most times set ablaze and allowed to burn to death, especially in instances where there was no quick response or proactiveness on the part of the law enforcement agencies (Mshella & Yusuf, 2022).

Factors Influencing Jungle Justice in Nigeria

Jungle justice in Nigeria is influenced by political, ethno-religious, institutional, and socio-educational factors, including negative public perceptions of the law enforcement agencies, the legal system, and the inefficiency of the security networks (Obarisiagbon, 2018). Furthermore, Essoh and Asangausung (2025) linked jungle justice to systemic and socio-legal factors. In addition, he identified ignorance of the law, limited awareness of legal rights, and distrust in law enforcement and legal institutions as key drivers. However, Akan (2023) argued that the inefficiency of law enforcement agencies is a major contributing factor to the escalation of jungle justice in Nigeria. More so, Ibrahim (2025) suggested that the attitude of the political class towards deliberate attempt to sacrifice the lives and well-being of their constituents for selfish benefits is grossly responsible for the rising cases of jungle justice in Plateau State, North-central Nigeria. premised on the established empirical submissions on the factors influencing jungle justice in Nigeria, it is evident that, jungle justice is largely an outcome of political and institutional failures in Nigeria, with severe consequences on the collective existence of the people that fall within the low social class.

Consequences of Jungle Justice

Jungle justice could have devastating consequences on citizens and the socio-economic components of society if left untamed. Ugba (2024) stated that the consequences of jungle justice include loss of lives, breakdown of the rule of laws and order, erosion of trust in institutions, increased violence, human rights violations, and socio-economic consequences, among others. Moreso, Chukwudi et al. (2025) argued that anxiety, societal instability, and limitations against the smooth achievement of SDG-16 are the major negative effects resulting from the activities of jungle justice in Nigeria. This position was supported by Taiwo (2024), who argued that jungle justice has

led to the complete repudiation of the rule of law and modern civility, thereby fostering moral decay and the devaluation of human dignity in the contemporary Nigerian society.

Implications of Jungle Justice for Law Enforcement

Nigerian Police Force saddled with the responsibility of internal security in section 214 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended, and part C of the Police act 2020 as amended, must improve on their level of responsiveness to distress calls, adopting a more effective proactive measures, protecting victims from jungle justice, and ensuring accountability through the arrest and effective prosecution of the suspects (Essoh & Asangausung, 2025). Additionally, law enforcement agencies should strengthen community-based engagement and collaboration to promote effective security, build public trust, and discourage jungle justice through sustained awareness and reorientation programmes that reinforce respect for the rule of law (Kolawole-Amao, 2020).

Challenges of Curbing Jungle Justice by Law Enforcement Agencies in Nigeria

Some of the major challenges faced by law enforcement agencies in curbing or mitigating the menace of jungle justice include;

- 1) Lack of public trust in the Nigerian Police Force
- 2) Sluggish process of the courts and other legal systems
- 3) Poor public awareness and education on legal rights and procedures
- 4) Inadequate manpower deployment by the Nigerian police force and other law enforcement agencies (Essoh & Asangausung, 2025).

Suggestions

Based on the highlighted challenges, the paper suggested the following;

- 1) The federal Government of Nigeria and the Police authority should inculcate measures to promote transparency, community-based engagements, and ensure prompt and adequate investigation of reported cases of jungle justice.
- 2) The Federal Government of Nigeria should put measures in place to fast-track court processes and improve coordination between the police and judiciary.
- 3) Public education and enlightenment efforts against jungle justice need to be intensified by the governments at all levels across communities.
- 4) There should be increased funding of the Nigerian police force to accommodate the recruitment of more personnel and procurement of contemporary security gadgets for effective policing.

Conclusion

The prevalence of jungle justice in Nigeria reflects a glaring failure of the formal justice system and the associated erosion of trust in our institutions. This trend portrays deeper societal challenges, including poverty, inequality, and limited access to justice.

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