Police Behavior at Checkpoints and Extortion Rates: Study of Major Traffic Corridors in Umuahia, Abia State

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Abstract

This study examines Police behavior at checkpoints and extortion rates at major traffic corridors in Umuahia, Abia State. With an experiential approach to data interpretation, the study investigates variations in police conduct, the frequency of extortion incidents, motorists' perceptions of extortion, and potential solutions to address this pressing issue. Police extortion at checkpoints is a pervasive problem in Nigeria, posing significant challenges to motorists and undermining public trust in law enforcement. Despite efforts to address this issue, extortion practices persist, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of its causes and impacts. Therefore, the study sought to address the issues what is the impact of variations in police conduct at checkpoints on the likelihood of extortion experienced by motorists in Umuahia? What is the relationship between the frequency of extortion incidents and the levels of police presence at checkpoints in Umuahia? How do motorists perceive extortion and observable police behavior at checkpoints in Umuahia? And what are the potential solutions and recommendations for addressing extortion at police checkpoints in Umuahia? The study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews with motorists to gather insights into their experiences and perceptions of police extortion at checkpoints. Data analysis involves thematic coding to identify patterns, connections, and emergent themes relevant to the research questions. The population includes all motorists involved in transportation in Umuahia. Purposive sampling is used to select participants with diverse experiences and perspectives related to police extortion at checkpoints. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with motorists. Interviews are audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed to identify key themes and patterns. The findings reveal pervasive instances of police extortion at checkpoints, influenced by variations in police conduct, the frequency of checkpoint stops, and motorists' perceptions of fairness and accountability. Participants highlight the need for strengthened oversight mechanisms, anti-corruption measures, and community engagement to address extortion practices effectively. Based on the findings, recommendations are proposed to address police extortion at checkpoints, including strengthening oversight mechanisms, implementing anti-corruption measures, enhancing community engagement, and others. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of police extortion at checkpoints and offers practical recommendations for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations to combat corrupt practices and uphold the rule of law in Umuahia and beyond.

Background to the Study

Police checkpoints are a common sight on roads around the world, often intended to ensure public safety and enforce traffic laws. However, in some regions, checkpoints can become hotspots for corruption and extortion, where motorists are subjected to harassment and demands for bribes by law enforcement officials. Abia State, located in southeastern Nigeria, has experienced its fair share of issues related to police checkpoints and allegations of extortion. Despite efforts to address corruption within the police force, anecdotal evidence suggests that motorists continue to face challenges and feel vulnerable to exploitation at these checkpoints. Understanding the factors that contribute to extortion rates at police checkpoints is essential for developing effective strategies to combat corruption and ensure the fair and lawful treatment of motorists. One significant factor that has received limited attention in previous research is the behavior of police officers themselves. This study aims to investigate the influence of police checkpoint behavior on extortion rates in Abia State. By examining variations in police conduct, such as demeanor, verbal interactions, and adherence to protocols, researchers seek to determine how these factors affect the likelihood and frequency of extortion experienced by motorists.

Previous research in the field of corruption and law enforcement has highlighted the importance of institutional factors, societal norms, and individual motivations in shaping police behavior. For example, a study by Khan et al. (2016) found that organizational culture and leadership styles within police departments can influence officers' propensity to engage in corrupt practices. Similarly, research by Mungiu-Pippidi and Dada (2017) emphasized the role of societal norms and expectations in shaping attitudes towards corruption within law enforcement agencies. These studies suggest that addressing corruption within the police force requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors driving misconduct. By focusing specifically on police behavior at checkpoints, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between officer conduct and extortion rates. Findings from this research may inform policy interventions aimed at improving accountability, transparency, and integrity within the Nigerian police force, ultimately leading to a safer and more equitable environment for motorists in Abia State.

Statement of the Research Problem

Despite efforts to address corruption within law enforcement agencies, police checkpoints in Abia State, Nigeria, continue to be associated with allegations of extortion and harassment towards motorists. There is a need to understand the influence of police behavior at checkpoints on extortion rates to develop effective strategies for combating corruption and ensuring the fair treatment of motorists. Recent literature suggests that organizational culture and leadership styles within police departments can influence officers' propensity to engage in corrupt practices (Khan et al., 2016). Additionally, societal norms and expectations play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards corruption within law enforcement agencies (Mungiu-Pippidi & Dada, 2017). However, there is a gap in understanding how variations in police behavior at checkpoints

specifically impact extortion rates experienced by motorists in Abia State. By investigating this relationship, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature and inform policy interventions aimed at promoting accountability, transparency, and integrity within the Nigerian police force.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the influence of police behavior at checkpoints on extortion rates experienced by motorists in major traffic corridors of Umuahia, Abia State. Specifically, the study shall pursue the following objectives:
1. To examine variations in police, conduct at checkpoints and its impact on the likelihood of extortion experienced by motorists in Umuahia.
2. To assess the frequency of extortion incidents in relation to levels of police presence at checkpoints in Umuahia.
3. To explore the relationship between motorists' perceptions of extortion and observable police behavior at checkpoints in Umuahia.
4. To identify potential solutions and recommendations for addressing extortion at police checkpoints in Umuahia.

Research Questions
1. What is the impact of the variations in police conduct at checkpoints on the likelihood of extortion experienced by motorists in Umuahia?
2. What is the relationship between the frequency of extortion incidents and the levels of police presence at checkpoints in Umuahia?
3. What is the relationship between motorists' perceptions of extortion and observable police behavior at checkpoints in Umuahia?
4. What are the potential solutions and recommendations for addressing extortion at police checkpoints in Umuahia?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study extends across academic, policy, empirical, and theoretical domains, offering multifaceted contributions to the understanding and mitigation of corruption and extortion at police checkpoints in Abia State, Nigeria. This study addresses a significant gap in the academic literature by empirically investigating the relationship between police behavior at checkpoints and extortion rates experienced by motorists. By delving into this underexplored area, the study contributes to advancing knowledge on the dynamics of corruption within law enforcement agencies, particularly in the context of traffic management and policing in Nigeria.

The findings of this study hold substantial policy implications for enhancing accountability, transparency, and integrity within the Nigerian police force. Policymakers can utilize the empirical evidence generated to develop targeted interventions aimed at combating corruption and extortion at checkpoints. These may include reforms in recruitment, training, and oversight mechanisms to foster a culture of professionalism and ethical conduct among police officers. Through rigorous data

collection and analysis, this study provides empirical evidence on the prevalence and determinants of extortion incidents at police checkpoints in Abia State. By quantifying the relationship between police behavior and extortion rates, the study offers insights into the factors driving corrupt practices and their impact on motorists' experiences. Such empirical evidence is essential for informing evidence-based policy interventions and evaluating their effectiveness over time.

The study contributes to theoretical debates on corruption and law enforcement by examining the role of police behavior as a determinant of extortion rates. By integrating insights from organizational behavior, criminology, and public administration, the study enriches theoretical frameworks for understanding the mechanisms through which corruption manifests within law enforcement agencies. Additionally, the study sheds light on the complex interplay between institutional factors, societal norms, and individual motivations in shaping corrupt practices. In sum, the significance of this study transcends disciplinary boundaries, offering valuable contributions to academia, policymaking, and theoretical understanding. By addressing the pressing issue of corruption and extortion at police checkpoints, the study endeavors to promote integrity, accountability, and fairness within law enforcement institutions, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of good governance and rule of law in Nigeria.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
Overview of Extortion at Police Checkpoints in Nigeria

Police extortion at checkpoints is a prevalent issue in Nigeria, significantly affecting motorists and overall public trust in law enforcement agencies. Extortion often occurs when officers misuse their authority to demand bribes or engage in corrupt practices during routine vehicle stops. Research within the past decade has shed light on various aspects of this problem, including its causes, impacts, and potential solutions. Studies by Okorie and Ezeani (2018) and Okafor et al. (2019) have explored the factors contributing to police extortion at checkpoints. They found that issues such as low salaries, inadequate training, and systemic corruption within law enforcement agencies create an environment conducive to corrupt behavior. Additionally, Ajaero and Ajayi (2017) highlighted the role of institutional factors, such as poor oversight and accountability mechanisms, in perpetuating extortion practices.

The impact of police extortion on motorists has been extensively documented in recent research. Anyanwu and Nwosu (2019) found that extortion at checkpoints not only imposes financial burdens on motorists but also erodes trust in law enforcement and undermines the rule of law. Moreover, Eze and Onuoha (2018) emphasized the psychological toll of extortion, with motorists experiencing heightened anxiety and stress during encounters with corrupt officers. Efforts to address police extortion at checkpoints have focused on a range of interventions. Obinna and Okoye (2021) proposed leveraging technology, such as body cameras and electronic payment systems, to enhance transparency and accountability. Meanwhile, Oguamanam and Uzoegwu (2018) stressed the importance of training programs to promote ethical conduct among police officers.

Community-based initiatives, including citizen monitoring groups and advocacy campaigns, have also been suggested as effective strategies for combating extortion (Okafor & Nnamani, 2020). Recent research underscores the pervasive nature of police extortion at checkpoints in Nigeria and the need for comprehensive reforms to address this issue. By understanding its causes and impacts, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards implementing effective solutions to restore public trust in law enforcement and promote integrity within the police force.

Police Conduct at Checkpoints and Extortion
Extortion at police checkpoints is a pervasive issue in many regions, including Nigeria. Scholars have extensively examined the behavior of law enforcement officers at checkpoints and its implications for motorists. Okorie and Ezeani (2018) found that police conduct at checkpoints significantly influences the likelihood of extortion experienced by motorists. They noted that aggressive behavior, arbitrary searches, and lack of accountability contribute to an environment conducive to extortion. Similarly, Okafor et al. (2019) highlighted the role of perceived corruption in shaping motorists' experiences at checkpoints, emphasizing the need for systematic reforms in police conduct. Building on the findings of Okorie and Ezeani (2018), Ajaero and Ajayi (2017) delve deeper into institutional factors contributing to police misconduct at checkpoints. They argue that systemic issues within law enforcement agencies, such as inadequate oversight mechanisms and limited accountability, create opportunities for corruption and extortion. Furthermore, they suggest that addressing these institutional deficiencies is essential for curbing extortion practices effectively.

Research by Okeke and Nwokorie (2020) highlights the intersection between socioeconomic factors and police behavior at checkpoints. They found that officers stationed at checkpoints in economically disadvantaged areas may be more inclined to engage in extortion due to lower salaries and limited resources. This underscores the need for targeted interventions that address both institutional and socioeconomic factors to combat extortion effectively. On the other hand, extending the work of Okafor et al. (2019), Anyanwu and Nwosu (2019) explore the psychological effects of police extortion on motorists. Through qualitative interviews and surveys, they found that extortion encounters often lead to feelings of powerlessness, anger, and mistrust among motorists. These emotional responses not only impact individual well-being but also contribute to broader societal perceptions of law enforcement legitimacy.

Eze and Onuoha (2018), conducted a study focusing on community perspectives on police extortion at checkpoints. They found that motorists often develop coping strategies to navigate encounters with corrupt officers, including paying bribes or avoiding certain routes altogether. This research underscores the resilience of communities in the face of extortion but also highlights the need for structural reforms to address the root causes of the problem. Gender dynamics in extortion encounters are explored by Oguamanam and Uzoegwu (2018). Their study reveals that female motorists may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation at checkpoints, facing additional risks such as sexual

harassment or coercion. This highlights the intersectionality of extortion experiences and underscores the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in addressing police misconduct.

Frequency of Extortion Incidents and Police Presence
The relationship between the frequency of extortion incidents and the level of police presence at checkpoints has been a subject of interest in academic literature. While Okeke and Nwokorie (2020) found a positive correlation between the two variables, suggesting that a higher density of police presence may exacerbate opportunities for corrupt practices, other researchers have provided additional insights into this complex relationship. For instance, Nnamani and Ude (2018) conducted a study examining the impact of community policing initiatives on extortion incidents at checkpoints. They found that areas with active community policing programs experienced lower rates of extortion, indicating that increased community engagement and collaboration with law enforcement can mitigate corrupt behavior.

Furthermore, research by Onyekwelu and Igboezue (2019) explored the role of urbanization and population density in shaping the frequency of extortion incidents at checkpoints. They observed that in densely populated urban areas, where law enforcement resources may be stretched thin, extortion incidents tend to be more prevalent due to reduced police visibility and oversight. Additionally, Ogunnaike and Okonkwo (2019) investigated the influence of political factors on police conduct at checkpoints and its implications for extortion. They found that during election periods, when there is heightened political pressure and interference in law enforcement activities, the frequency of extortion incidents tends to increase as officers prioritize fulfilling political mandates over upholding ethical standards.

Moreover, studies by Ofoegbu and Ezeani (2018) and Eze et al. (2021) have highlighted the importance of training and capacity-building programs for police officers in mitigating extortion at checkpoints. They argue that well-trained and professional law enforcement personnel are less likely to engage in corrupt practices, regardless of the level of police presence. In all, the relationship between the frequency of extortion incidents and the level of police presence at checkpoints is influenced by various factors, including community engagement, urbanization, political dynamics, and officer training. Addressing this issue requires a holistic approach that considers these multifaceted dimensions and implements targeted interventions to promote integrity and accountability within law enforcement agencies.

Motorists' Perceptions of Extortion and Police Behavior
Research on motorists' perceptions of extortion and police behavior at checkpoints provides valuable insights into the dynamics of corruption and its impact on public trust in law enforcement. While studies by Anyanwu and Nwosu (2019) and Eze and Onuoha (2018) have shed light on this issue, additional research offers further perspectives on the subject. For instance, Okafor and Okeke (2020) conducted a study examining the role of

demographic factors, such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, in shaping motorists' perceptions of extortion. They found that younger drivers and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to perceive police extortion as a normal or acceptable practice, reflecting broader disparities in access to justice and trust in public institutions.

Furthermore, research by Ogunleye and Adeyemi (2017) explored the influence of past experiences with law enforcement on motorists' attitudes towards extortion. They observed that individuals who had previously encountered corrupt practices at checkpoints were more likely to perceive police behavior as unfair and distrustful, highlighting the long-lasting impact of negative interactions on public perceptions. Moreover, studies by Nwankwo and Uzochukwu (2018) and Ibrahim et al. (2021) investigated the role of media and social networks in shaping motorists' perceptions of extortion. They found that sensationalized media coverage of corruption scandals and widespread dissemination of anecdotal accounts of police misconduct contributed to the erosion of public trust in law enforcement, amplifying negative perceptions of extortion among motorists. So, understanding motorists' perceptions of extortion and police behavior requires considering a range of factors, including demographic characteristics, past experiences, media influence, and social networks. Addressing this issue necessitates targeted interventions aimed at fostering transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct within law enforcement agencies, while also addressing broader societal attitudes towards corruption and authority.

Potential Solutions and Recommendations
Addressing extortion at police checkpoints requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses policy reforms, institutional changes, and community engagement. Several scholars have proposed various strategies to combat this issue. Obinna and Okoye (2021) advocated for the implementation of technology-based solutions such as body cameras and electronic payment systems to enhance transparency and accountability. Additionally, Oguamanam and Uzoegwu (2018) emphasized the importance of training and capacity-building programs for law enforcement officers to promote ethical conduct and professionalism. Community-based initiatives, including citizen monitoring groups and advocacy campaigns, have also been suggested as viable means of holding authorities accountable and fostering public trust (Okafor & Nnamani, 2020). In summary, the literature highlights the intricate relationship between police behavior at checkpoints, extortion incidents, and motorists' perceptions. To effectively address this issue in Umuahia, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses systemic issues while promoting transparency, accountability, and community participation.

Theoretical Framework
This study shall anchor the discourse on the social learning theory and routine activity theory. The social learning theory was proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977 (Bandura, 1977), while the routine activity theory was proposed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus

Felson in 1979 (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Both theories are criminology theories, explaining criminal behavior from different perspectives. For social learning theory, individuals learn behavior by observing others. This learning occurs through modeling, imitation, and vicarious reinforcement. Bandura emphasized the importance of role models and the social context in shaping behavior. Also, behavior is reinforced or inhibited based on the consequences it produces. Individuals are more likely to adopt behaviors that are rewarded or positively reinforced, while behaviors that lead to negative outcomes are less likely to be repeated. They also argue that the role of cognitive processes, such as attention, retention, and motivation, in mediating learning and behavior change. Individuals must pay attention to and remember observed behaviors, as well as be motivated to imitate them.

Okorie and Ezeani (2018) applied social learning theory to examine the influence of peer interactions and organizational culture on police behavior at checkpoints in Nigeria. Ajaero and Ajayi (2017) explored how exposure to corrupt environments within law enforcement agencies affects individual behavior, drawing on social learning theory principles. In this present study, social learning theory provides a framework for understanding how police behavior at checkpoints is influenced by peer interactions, organizational norms, and past experiences. In the context of this study, social learning theory can help elucidate how observing corrupt practices among colleagues or within the organizational culture may shape individual officer behavior. By examining the role of modeling, reinforcement, and cognitive processes, the study can assess how social learning mechanisms contribute to the likelihood and frequency of extortion incidents at police checkpoints in Umuahia, Abia State. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing targeted interventions to address corruption and promote ethical conduct within law enforcement agencies.

Nevertheless, the social learning theory did not say anything about the relationship between the police and the motorists. This goes to say that the social learning theory ignored the possibility of some external influence on the officers' behavior. Therefore, the routine activity theory is considered to fill this gap. According to the routine activity's theory, crime occurs when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship. Routine activity theory emphasizes the role of everyday activities and interactions in creating opportunities for criminal behavior. Furthermore, they argue that crime is more likely to occur when suitable targets are readily accessible to motivated offenders. Factors such as the presence of valuable assets, lack of security measures, and patterns of human activity influence target suitability. Also, that the presence of capable guardians, such as law enforcement, security personnel, or vigilant community members, can deter criminal activity by increasing the risk of detection and apprehension for offenders.

Therefore, Okeke and Nwokorie (2020) applied routine activity theory to examine the relationship between police presence and the frequency of extortion incidents at checkpoints in Nigeria; while Onyekwelu and Igboezue (2019) used it to explore how

urbanization and population density influence the likelihood of extortion incidents. So, this present study sees the significant of the routine activity theory in offering insights into the situational factors that contribute to extortion incidents at police checkpoints. By examining how the convergence of motivated offenders (corrupt officers), suitable targets (motorists), and the absence of capable guardianship (ineffective oversight or accountability mechanisms) creates opportunities for extortion, the study can identify specific risk factors and vulnerabilities within the checkpoint environment. Understanding these dynamics can inform strategies to enhance guardianship through improved police training, increased community engagement, and the implementation of technology-based surveillance systems. Additionally, routine activity theory can help assess how variations in checkpoint design, environmental conditions, and patterns of human activity influence the likelihood and frequency of extortion incidents, providing valuable insights for policymakers and law enforcement agencies seeking to mitigate corrupt practices and promote public trust and safety.

Methodology
This study adopts an interpretivist approach with an inductive research design. Interpretivism is chosen for its suitability in exploring subjective experiences and social phenomena, allowing for a nuanced understanding of human behavior (Burleson, 2011). The inductive approach is justified by the lack of existing knowledge on the correlations between police checkpoints and extortion in the study area, aiming to generate insights based on specific observations (John, 2023a). The population of the study comprises registered drivers from the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) registry in Umuahia, totaling 7,203 individuals. These drivers operate in 21 motor parks across the city, making them a relevant group to investigate police behavior at checkpoints.

The sample selection process involves purposive sampling techniques, focusing on drivers who frequent major routes with permanent police checkpoints, including Umuahia - Aba Road, Umuahia - Owerri Road, Umuahia - Okigwe Road, and Umuahia - Ikwuano Road. Only drivers present at the parks during the researcher's visits and willing to participate are included, ensuring they have direct experiences with police checkpoints and extortion. The snowball sampling technique is employed to identify participants from various parks, starting with a seed contact from the Okigwe Park and expanding to other locations until data saturation is reached. Data saturation, where new information becomes repetitive, serves as a criterion for sample size adequacy in qualitative research.

Data collection relies on semi-structured interviews conducted with the selected drivers, allowing for in-depth exploration of their experiences and perspectives. Research assistants assist in administering and recording the interviews, ensuring accuracy and consistency (Specht, 2020). Thematic analysis is employed as the method of data analysis, involving transcription, organization, familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, and refinement of themes, and data interpretation and reporting. This iterative process

helps identify patterns, connections, and recurring themes related to police behavior at checkpoints and extortion rates (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Overall, the research methodology prioritizes understanding the subjective experiences of drivers and aims to provide insights into the dynamics of police behavior at checkpoints and its impact on motorists in Umuahia, Abia State.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings
Socio-demographics of Respondents
The sociodemographic characteristics of respondents indicate a predominant age bracket of 30-39 years (57.4%), followed by 40-49 years (23.5%), with a minor representation of younger (20-29 years, 10.3%) and older (50 years and above, 8.8%) age groups. All participants were male, highlighting a male-dominated profession. The majority were married (75%), while fewer were single (17.6%) or divorced (7.4%). Regarding vehicle ownership, 55.9% drove for others, 23.5% owned their vehicles, and 20.6% operated on hire-purchase. Most respondents (70.6%) were on the road for 2-6 days, with 25% driving daily. The distribution across major routes was relatively even: Okigwe-Enugu (26.5%), Mbaise-Owerri (27.9%), Ikwuano-Uyo (19.1%), and Aba-Portharcourt (26.5%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-29	7	10.3
	30-39	39	57.4
	40-49	16	23.5
	50+	6	8.8
Gender	Male	68	100
	Female	0	0
Marital status	Single	12	17.6
	Married	51	75
	Divorced	5	7.4
	Others	0	0
Ownership of vehicle	Own my vehicle	16	23.5
	Driving for somebody	38	55.9
	On hire-purchase	14	20.6
Frequency on the road	Everyday	17	25
	2-6days a week	48	70.6
	Once a week	3	4.4
Route	Okigwe-Enugu	18	26.5
	Mbaise-Owerri	19	27.9
	Ikwuano-Uyo	13	19.1
	Aba-Portharcourt	18	26.5

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Familiarization
The researcher familiarized themselves with the data by reading transcripts twice, noting initial significant codes and sample excerpts aligned with research questions. These

excerpts, presented verbatim, include both English and Pidgin English, aiding in identifying and analyzing codes in detail during data interpretation and reporting.

Table 2: Initial codes

Study Themes	Initial codes	Sample Excerpts
Variations in police conduct	Conduct demeanor, Communication style, Motorist interactions, Perception of fairness, Presence of bribery cues, Consistency in procedures, Utilization of intimidation tactics, Transparency of transactions, Display of authority	"The officers always approach the vehicle with stern demeanor,… "Their authoritative way of demanding to see vehicle documents is frightening." "…their method is to intimidate motorists with aggressive communication style… "… and the way they scrutinized vehicles, make you question the fairness of the inspection process."
Frequency of extortion	Incidence of extortion, Frequency of checkpoint stops, Visibility of law enforcement, Reported extortion attempts, Proximity of checkpoints to populated areas, Police deployment patterns, Correlation with time of day, Patterns of monetary demands	"there is a significant increase in the incidence of extortion at checkpoints lately" "The officers stop motorists more during rush hours and near major intersections." "… in fact, there is extortion in almost every checkpoint"
Motorists' perceptions of extortion	Perception of police demeanor, distrust in law enforcement, Influence of prior experiences, Interpretation of checkpoint interactions, Level of fear or anxiety, Perception of authority abuse, Impact of social norms,	"…I can just say they are generally disrespectful and unprofessional" "…how can I expect them to be fair, with all I have seen them do on the road?" "Their level of abuse of authority is what brings fear and anxiety on motorist"
Potential solutions and recommendations	Strengthening oversight mechanisms, implementing anti-corruption measures, Enhancing community engagement, Introducing technology-based solutions, Instituting transparent reporting systems, Enhancing inter-agency cooperation	"…make other agency de monitor wetin police de do for road" "…also, it will be good to implement anti-corruption measures" "If the government involve the community to work with the police, it will help."

Source: Field Work, 2023

From the initial codes, significant units of information are expected to form major codes, comprising words, phrases, and sentences (Braun and Clarke, 2016), relevant to the research questions. Through the process of categorization, new codes emerged from the initial codes, contributing to the formation of major codes as detailed in table 3.

Table 3: Emergent Codes

Study Themes	Categories	Major Codes
Variations in police conduct	Behavioral demeanor	Authoritative demeanor, Friendly demeanor, Intimidating demeanor, Professional demeanor
	Transparency and consistency	Clarity of instructions provided, Consistency in enforcement of regulations, Transparency in transactions, Adherence to standard operating procedures
Frequency of extortion	Incidence of bribery attempts	Frequency of solicitation of bribes, Extent of monetary demands, Variation in types of bribes requested, Reported instances of extortion
	Patterns of monetary demands	Amounts requested during extortion attempts, Methods of payment preferred by officers, Frequency of refusal to pay bribes, Trends in extortion rates over time
Motorists' perceptions of extortion	Trust in law enforcement integrity	Confidence in fairness of transactions, Perception of officers' honesty, Reliability of law enforcement actions, Trustworthiness of law enforcement officials,
	Perception of fairness and accountability	Fairness of treatment during encounters, Perception of accountability for officers' actions, Trust in the judicial system to address grievances, Confidence in mechanisms to report misconduct
Potential solutions and recommendations	Strengthening oversight mechanisms	Implementation of independent oversight bodies, Regular audits of checkpoint operations, Establishment of whistleblower protection programs, Enhanced disciplinary measures for misconduct
	Implementing anti-corruption measures	Training programs on ethics and integrity for law enforcement personnel, Introduction of technology-based monitoring systems, Implementation of strict penalties for corrupt practices, Collaboration with anti-corruption agencies for enforcement

Source: Field Work, 2023

Theme Generation
The codes were systematically applied to the entire dataset to identify patterns, connections, and recurring themes. During this process, it became evident that some categories overlapped with others, leading to their consolidation, as Richards & Morse (2012) suggest that categorization helps in moving from the breadth of data to the forms and types of items represented. Consequently, the major codes evolved into themes, as depicted in table 4 below.

Table 4: Emergent Themes

Study Themes	Categories	Emergent themes
Variations in police conduct	Behavioral demeanor	Professionalism and Respect, Friendliness and Approachability, Intimidation and Aggression
	Transparency and consistency	Clarity of Instructions, Consistency in Enforcement, Transparency in Transactions, Adherence to Standard Operating Procedures
Frequency of extortion	Incidence of bribery attempts	Frequency of Solicitation, Extent of Monetary Demands, Variation in Bribe Requests
	Patterns of monetary demands	Amounts Requested, Preferred Payment Methods, Frequency of Refusal to Pay
Motorists' perceptions of extortion	Trust in law enforcement integrity	Confidence in Fairness, Perception of Honesty, Reliability of Actions, Trustworthiness of Officials
	Perception of fairness and accountability	Fair Treatment, Accountability for Actions, Trust in Judicial System, Confidence in Reporting Mechanisms
Potential solutions and recommendations	Strengthening oversight mechanisms	Independent Oversight, Auditing Procedures, Whistleblower Protection, Enhanced Disciplinary Measures
	Implementing anti-corruption measures	Ethics and Integrity Training, Technology -based Monitoring, Strict Penalties for Corruption, Collaboration with Anti -corruption Agencies

Source: Field Work, 2023

Review and Refine Themes
The initial themes underwent a meticulous review and refinement process, where they were compared with the coded data to ensure that the emerging major themes accurately captured the essence of the data. This process aimed to represent various perspectives and experiences relevant to the research questions effectively. While some themes were retained as they effectively encapsulated the data they represented, others were refined, restructured, or merged to enhance clarity and coherence. Therefore, in alignment with the research questions, the categories and the refined themes used to measure them are presented in table 5 below.

Table 5: Refined Themes

Study Themes	Categories	Refined themes
Variations in police conduct	Behavioral demeanor	Professionalism and Respect, Intimidation and Aggression
	Transparency and consistency	Clarity of Instructions, Consistency in Enforcement
Frequency of extortion	Incidence of bribery attempts	Frequency of Solicitation, Extent of Monetary Demands
	Patterns of monetary demands	Amounts Requested, Frequency of Refusal to Pay
Motorists' perceptions of extortion	Trust in law enforcement integrity	Confidence in Fairness, Perception of Honesty
	Perception of fairness and accountability	Fair Treatment, Accountability for Actions
Potential solutions and recommendations	Strengthening oversight mechanisms	Independent Oversight, Whistleblower Protection
	Implementing anti-corruption measures	Ethics and Integrity Training, Collaboration with Anti-corruption Agencies

Source: Field Work, 2023

Data Interpretation and Reporting
This study adopts an experiential approach to data interpretation, centering on participants' attributions of meaning and significance to their experiences (Byrne, 2021). Consistent with Braun and Clarke (2014), the researcher acknowledges participants' interpretations of their experiences. By highlighting participants' subjective "personal states," the study seeks to comprehend their viewpoints, lived experiences, and perceptions concerning police extortion at checkpoints in Abia State, Nigeria. This methodological orientation is congruent with the study's objectives and facilitates addressing the research questions using data collected from the field.

Impact of Variations in Police Conduct on Extortion Likelihood
The findings underscore the critical role of police conduct at checkpoints in influencing the likelihood of extortion experienced by motorists. This aligns with previous research by Okorie and Ezeani (2018), who emphasized the significance of officer demeanor and behavior in shaping extortion encounters. The present study reveals that motorists perceive professionalism, respect, and transparency in police conduct as crucial factors in fostering positive interactions and reducing opportunities for corrupt practices. However, there are instances where officers adopt intimidating and aggressive behavior, contributing to feelings of fear and apprehension among motorists. The following excerpts captures the view of the respondents:

> *"…de thing be say them no even respect themselves because them de look for money" (Respondent 30). "if what they want is for me to give them money, so I just prepare the money give them and go my way, what is my business with respect?" (Respondent 18) "…when a police officer checking vehicle license without any explanation, what is the work of Road Safety Officers (FRSC) and Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIO)?" (Respondent 21)*

This resonates with the findings of Okafor et al. (2019), who highlighted the impact of perceived corruption on motorists' experiences at checkpoints. Therefore, addressing variations in police conduct, particularly through training and accountability mechanisms, is essential for mitigating extortion incidents and fostering public trust in law enforcement.

Relationship between Extortion Frequency and Police Presence
The relationship between extortion frequency and police presence at checkpoints is complex and context dependent. While increased police visibility is intended to enhance security and deter criminal activities, the findings suggest that it may inadvertently create opportunities for corrupt practices as is seen in the following excerpts:

> *"I've noticed that whenever there are more police officers present at the checkpoints, there seems to be a higher frequency of extortion incidents…*
> *…it's almost like they feel emboldened when there are more of them around." (Respondent 8) "…before, the presence of more police officers will make us feel safer, but now it amounts to more expenses for us" …because a police officer know that there is army checkpoint close to them and you no fit run, it makes them strong" (Respondent 29)*

This finding is consistent with the literature on police visibility and crime deterrence (Nnamani & Ude, 2018). However, the effectiveness of police presence in deterring extortion may vary based on factors such as community policing initiatives and urbanization (Onyekwelu & Igboezue, 2019). Therefore, addressing extortion incidents requires a nuanced understanding of the interaction between police presence, community dynamics, and environmental factors to implement targeted interventions effectively.

Relationship between Motorists' Perceptions and Police Behavior
Motorists' perceptions of extortion are shaped by their interactions with police officers at checkpoints. Negative perceptions of police behavior, particularly regarding fairness and honesty, contribute to feelings of anxiety and mistrust among motorists. This finding is represented by the following excerpts:

> *"…they are rude and unfair, so I can't do anything with them except give them money and go my business." (Respondent 2) "the thing is, with how they treat drivers just because you didn't give them money, it's hard to believe they're acting in our best interests." (Respondent 5) "When I see*

the police at checkpoints, I immediately feel uneasy. It's like I know I'm going to be treated unfairly or asked for money. It's just become the norm, and it's really frustrating because we're supposed to trust them to keep us safe." (Respondent 15)

This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the impact of police demeanor on public trust and confidence (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2017). Furthermore, the role of prior experiences and social norms in shaping perceptions underscores the complexity of addressing public trust in law enforcement. Therefore, efforts to improve public perceptions of police conduct must address underlying systemic issues while promoting transparency and accountability within law enforcement agencies.

Potential Solutions and Recommendations
Participants proposed various solutions and recommendations to address police extortion at checkpoints, including strengthening oversight mechanisms, implementing anti-corruption measures, and enhancing community engagement, as seen in the excerpts below.

"There should be independent bodies that oversee their actions and ensure they're not abusing their power. That way, we can trust that they're doing their job properly." (Respondent 3) "…one thing they should improve on in their training is ethics training to reinforce ethical values." (Respondent 11) "for me, I think, when the government use citizens to monitor and report misconduct, no be person go tell them to stop collecting bribe." (Respondent 27)

These suggestions align with previous research emphasizing the importance of comprehensive approaches to combating corrupt practices within law enforcement agencies (Obinna & Okoye, 2021). By leveraging technology, enhancing training programs, and fostering collaboration with anti-corruption agencies, policymakers can address systemic deficiencies and promote integrity within the police force. Additionally, community-based initiatives, such as citizen monitoring groups and advocacy campaigns, play a crucial role in holding authorities accountable and fostering public trust in law enforcement.

In summary, addressing police extortion at checkpoints requires a multifaceted approach that considers the complex interplay between police conduct, community dynamics, and institutional factors. By integrating insights from the present findings with existing literature, policymakers and stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to mitigate corrupt practices, restore public trust in law enforcement, and promote the rule of law.

Summary
This study delves into the pervasive issue of police extortion at checkpoints in Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria, employing an experiential approach to data interpretation. Through qualitative analysis, the research aims to understand the impact of variations in police

conduct, the relationship between extortion frequency and police presence, motorists' perceptions of extortion, and potential solutions to address this problem.

Examining the socio-demographics of respondents revealed a predominant age bracket of 30-39 years, highlighting the working-age population's representation, predominantly male, reflecting the male-dominated nature of the profession. Most respondents were married, and the majority drove for others or owned their vehicles, indicating diverse roles within the transportation sector. Their frequency on the road varied, with a significant portion driving 2-6 days a week, covering major routes such as Okigwe-Enugu, Mbaise-Owerri, Ikwuano-Uyo, and Aba-Port Harcourt. The analysis identified emergent themes related to variations in police conduct, including behavioral demeanor and transparency and consistency. These themes encompassed aspects such as professionalism, respect, clarity of instructions, and adherence to procedures, shedding light on the factors influencing police behavior at checkpoints.

Findings regarding the frequency of extortion incidents underscored the complex relationship between police presence and extortion rates. While increased police visibility aims to enhance security, it may inadvertently create opportunities for corrupt practices. Moreover, motorists' perceptions of extortion were influenced by their interactions with police officers, highlighting the importance of addressing negative perceptions and promoting transparency within law enforcement agencies.

Participants proposed various solutions to combat police extortion, emphasizing the need for strengthening oversight mechanisms, implementing anti-corruption measures, and enhancing community engagement. These recommendations align with previous research emphasizing comprehensive approaches to addressing corrupt practices within law enforcement. Overall, the study contributes to understanding the multifaceted nature of police extortion at checkpoints and underscores the importance of holistic interventions to promote integrity, transparency, and accountability within law enforcement agencies. By addressing systemic issues and fostering collaboration between stakeholders, policymakers can work towards restoring public trust in law enforcement and ensuring the safety and security of motorists in Umuahia and beyond.

Conclusion and Recommendations
This study sheds light on the intricate dynamics surrounding police extortion at checkpoints in Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria. Through an experiential approach to data interpretation, we have gained valuable insights into the impact of variations in police conduct, the relationship between extortion frequency and police presence, motorists' perceptions of extortion, and potential solutions to address this pressing issue. The findings highlight the pervasive nature of police extortion and its detrimental effects on public trust, safety, and the rule of law.

The socio-demographic analysis revealed diverse profiles among respondents, reflecting the complexity of the transportation sector and the varied experiences of motorists on the

road. Emergent themes related to police conduct underscored the importance of professionalism, transparency, and consistency in shaping interactions at checkpoints. Additionally, the study elucidated the nuanced relationship between police presence and extortion rates, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to mitigate corrupt practices while ensuring public safety.

Motorists' perceptions of extortion highlighted the profound impact of negative interactions with law enforcement officers on trust and confidence in the police. Addressing these perceptions requires comprehensive reforms aimed at promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct within law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, the study identified potential solutions, including strengthening oversight mechanisms, implementing anti-corruption measures, and enhancing community engagement, as key strategies to combat police extortion effectively.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to address the issue of police extortion at checkpoints in Umuahia:
1. Strengthen Oversight Mechanisms: Implement independent oversight bodies tasked with monitoring police conduct at checkpoints and ensuring adherence to ethical standards and procedural guidelines.
2. Implement Anti-Corruption Measures: Enhance training programs on ethics and integrity for law enforcement personnel and leverage technology-based solutions, such as body cameras and electronic payment systems, to enhance transparency and accountability.
3. Enhance Community Engagement: Foster collaboration between law enforcement agencies and local communities through citizen monitoring groups, advocacy campaigns, and community policing initiatives to promote trust and cooperation.
4. Promote Institutional Reforms: Address systemic issues within law enforcement agencies, including low salaries, inadequate training, and limited accountability mechanisms, to create an environment conducive to ethical conduct and professionalism.
5. Conduct Further Research: Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at addressing police extortion and conduct further research to identify emerging trends and best practices in combating corrupt practices within law enforcement.

By implementing these recommendations in a coordinated manner, policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations can work towards restoring public trust in law enforcement, ensuring the safety and security of motorists, and upholding the rule of law in Umuahia and beyond.

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