Psychosocial Predictors of Support for Mob Justice among Residents in a Selected Community in Ibadan, South-West Nigeria

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Abstract
Mob justice remains a recurring social problem in Nigeria despite legal frameworks established to uphold due process. While previous studies have examined structural causes such as weak justice systems and poverty, fewer studies have examined psychosocial factors associated with support for mob justice. This study, therefore, examined the influence of experience of attack, police perception, gender, age, and socio-economic status on support for mob justice among university residents in South-West Nigeria. A quantitative cross-sectional design using vignette method was adopted. A total of 313 university residents were selected using simple random sampling. Data were analyzed using factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression analysis. Results showed significant main effects of experience of attack (F (1,305) =4.539; p<. 05) and gender (F (1,305) =99.294, p<. 001) on support for mob justice. Participants with prior experience of an attack reported higher support for mob justice than those without such experience. Male participants also reported higher support than female participants. Police perception, age, and socio-economic status did not significantly predict support for mob justice, and no interaction effects were found. The findings indicate that some psychosocial variables, particularly prior victimization and gender, may be associated with support for mob justice. It becomes necessary that cognitive restructuring be conducted for those who have experienced a criminal attack in the past. Similarly, concerted psychological inoculation should be geared towards the male gender so as to discourage mob justice.

Keywords: Mob Justice, Past Experience of Attack, Perception of Police

Introduction

The practice of mob justice continues to attract a lot of attention globally, particularly in developing countries, in the face of global efforts to promote human rights (Osabutey, 2023). As a working definition, mob justice refers to when people take the law into their own hands and aggressively carry out instant judgment and punishment on a suspected criminal (Chowdhury, 2025). The mob becomes the executor of the law as this act is a direct and undeniable violation of human rights, taking illegal actions without following due process and in so doing putting the rest of the public at risk alike. Attafuah (2008) and Akpan (2023) described instant justice as the instantaneous infliction of bodily and mental pain, suffering or death on a person arrested, or otherwise physically overpowered, as punishment for his alleged wrong, as he is so subdued.

According to Obasanjo et al., (2023), Mob justice takes numerous forms and shapes: beating suspected robbers to death; smashing suspected criminals to death with stones; stripping alleged criminals unclad and pounding them with blocks, firewood and iron rods till they die; subjecting alleged criminals to embarrassing and undignified treatments, and occasionally setting them ablaze. Some sufferers have escaped the various punishments connected to mob justice by a hair's breadth, particularly upon the timely arrivals of law enforcement agents.

It is incumbent upon this article to mention a few bizarre instances of mob actions in Nigeria. About the most painful incident that readily comes to mind is the **"ALUU FOUR"** killing that occurred in 2012! In the build-up to the killings of the boys in Aluu, Rivers State, the four boys who were, until their gruesome death, were students of the University of Port-Harcourt, were accused of theft. In a split second, they were stripped naked, after being beaten to a stupor and doused with fuel and subsequently set ablaze (Omonobi, 2012). Their gruesome killing was captured on camera and subsequently went viral. In Nigeria, all it takes is the mention of "Ole, Ole!" (Yoruba translation of thief! thief!). Before long, a large crowd gathers and often sets the suspected thief ablaze after thorough beatings (The Conversation, 2017).

International best practices and globally accepted modes of treating suspects condemns in strong terms, the brazen and open killings of suspects without recourse to the law. In a democratically governed country like Nigeria, founded and established on the rule of law that projects the course

of human dignity and the advancement of human rights and freedoms, there are still recorded cases of mob action pervading the land (Shodunke et al., 2023 & Ater, 2025). This assertion is further supported by the graphic killing of two thieves in Ekpo Eyo, Calabar, Cross River State, in May 2020 (Naijaloaded.com.ng, 2020).

The above scenarios then bring into question whether mob lynching would ever come to an end. In answering this question, one would first need to ask what factors predispose people to engage in mob action. According to Danladi (2025), a primary factor that could see mob lynching persist in Nigeria is unwarranted delay in justice delivery. His study bemoans regular adjournments and delays in the adjudication of justice and calls for concerted effort by the judiciary to stem the trend. The disturbing trend is not just a Nigerian thing, as it appears to be an African nemesis or syndrome. For example, in a study conducted by Adu-Gyamfi (2014), he opined that mob justice is a social menace amongst Ghanaian communities. He further posited that the root cause of the mob justice stems from people's distrust in the legal and security authorities to properly handle suspected criminals, coupled with the increased spate of crime and other factors.
Similar to (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014) findings, a similar study by Osabutey (2023) averred that, lack of trust in the judicial system, increased public fear of crime and the perception that public institutions would fail to address the menace of criminals have culminated in the ravaging menace of mob justice in Ghana.

Abimanyi (2009) postulates that mob justice or actions are clearly a vote of no confidence by the public in the police and judicial institutions. Several pointers are in the direction of the populace lacking trust in authorities vested with the onus of bringing culprits to justice, and as identified by Byabashaija et al. (2016), the populace finds refuge or respite in delivering justice on their own terms so that the culprit never returns to wreak havoc. Balogun et al., (2023) opined that, when crimes are not being investigated and handled properly by the law due to incompetence, mobs arise to combat the problem on their own.

The above submissions suggest that perpetrators of mob justice may have lost faith in the people vested with the responsibility of prosecuting a criminal suspect. Some other research findings suggest that, when poverty is rife among a populace, they are likely to engage in mob justice at

the slightest provocation. As reported by (Beegle et al., 2016), 72% of African youths survive on less than $2 a day, and this is clearly biting hardest in countries like Nigeria, Ethiopia, Uganda, Zambia and Burundi. It should come as no surprise if mob actions are rampant in the above-listed countries owing to poverty.

It behoves at this juncture to point out the fact that, the above submissions were mainly obtained from newspaper articles and sites, thus suggesting a dearth in scientific findings as regards factors that may trigger mob justice. Mob violence often colloquially referred to as **"jungle justice"** remains a persistent socioeconomic challenge in Nigeria. Existing literature is heavily dominated by media reportage, descriptive and subjective commentary. There remains a critical empirical gap regarding the underlying psychosocial mechanisms that drive collective violence, and an evidence gap concerning how institutional, experiential, and demographic factors interact to predispose specific communities to these acts. This study addresses these deficiencies by systematically investigating the predictive influence of three key psychosocial variables: public perception of law enforcement, direct or vicarious experience with crime, and gender dynamics. By transitioning the discourse from opinion-based assertions to empirical verification, this article substantially expands the currently infinitesimal literature on collective violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, the resulting evidence base is intended to equip the Nigerian government and security policymakers with data-driven frameworks necessary to design, implement, and evaluate targeted interventions to stem the tide of mob actions."

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Anomie Theory (Merton, 1957) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977). Anomie theory posits that when societal structures fail to provide legitimate means for achieving socially approved goals, individuals may resort to deviant behaviors as an alternative means of restoring perceived social order. Within the context of mob justice, perceived inefficiency of the criminal justice system may weaken confidence in formal justice mechanisms and potentially encourage support for extrajudicial actions. The Theory of Reasoned Action explains that, attitudes and social influences shape our intentions and consequently, our behavior. Support for mob justice may therefore be associated with personal experiences such as prior victimization, perceptions of law enforcement, and socially shared

beliefs about crime and punishment. These psychosocial factors may shape attitudes toward informal justice and influence approval of mob action. Together, these theories provide a framework for understanding how psychosocial variables such as experience of attack, police perception, and gender may be associated with support for mob justice. Experience of attack may influence attitudes through heightened fear of crime or perceived vulnerability, while police perception may reflect confidence in formal justice processes. Gender differences may also reflect variations in socialization regarding aggression and punishment.

Based on these perspectives, this study examines police perception, experience of attack, gender, age, and socio-economic status as psychosocial and socio-demographic predictors of support for mob justice.

Based on the theoretical and empirical literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. There will be significant main and interaction effects of police perception, experience of attack and gender on support for mob justice among university residents in South-West Nigeria.
2. Socio-demographic factors (age and socio-economic status) significantly predict support for mob justice among university residents in South-West Nigeria.

Methods

Research designs

A quantitative cross-sectional design employing vignette method was adopted to examine psychosocial variables associated with support for mob justice. The study involved 313 university residents selected through simple random sampling. The sample size was considered adequate based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination guidelines.

Participants

The participants consisted of 313 residents of the University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Participants were drawn from residents in Abadina Community, University of Ibadan. The sample comprised 177 males (56.5%) and 136 females (43.5%). Participants were between 18

and 56 years of age, with most falling within the 26–35 year age group. Participation was voluntary.

Sampling

Simple random sampling was employed. Participants were drawn from residents in Abadina Community, University of Ibadan. Notice was given through the office of the President, Abadina community. Interested persons converged at the community's multipurpose hall. Tags labelled **Yes** and **No** were deposited into a basket. There were three hundred and fifty tags labelled **"Yes"** and the others labelled **"No".** Participants with a **Yes** tag were recruited for the study. An initial sample of 350 participants was recruited to accommodate possible attrition and incomplete responses. After data screening and cleaning, 313 valid responses were retained for final analysis, resulting in an attrition rate of 10.57%, which is considered acceptable for cross-sectional survey research.

Instruments

Demographic Information: Demographics such as gender, age and socio-economic status were obtained, with some subsequently used as independent variables. Similarly, experience of attack (robbery, burglary, etc.) was measured as a one-item scale with a two-response format of either **Yes** or **No.**

Perception of Police: This is a 12-item scale developed by Nadal and Davidoff (2017). The scale was developed to measure the perception that the general public holds about the police. The scale has two (2) subscales: general attitude towards police and perception of bias. Response to the scale ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The scale developers reported an internal consistency of 0.92. In this study, an internal consistency of 0.88 was obtained for this scale among participants of this study.

Mob Justice: Support for mob justice was measured using a vignette-based behavioral assessment. The vignette presented a hypothetical but realistic scenario designed to examine participants' support for mob justice under controlled conditions. The vignette incorporated elements relating to prior victimization experience and perceptions of police effectiveness, while

gender was treated as a naturally occurring participant variable. Support for mob justice served as the dependent variable and was measured through participants' responses to structured questions following the scenario. The development of the vignette was overseen by three conference of experts who adopted experience-driven approach and rated unanimously the suitability of the final output. A brief excerpt of the vignette is presented below:

"On your way back from school/work, you find a crowd of people beating a man who is about to be set ablaze. Out of curiosity or sympathy, you advance closer to the scene to find out what he did. The story about him says he is a robber, a serial rapist and a kidnapper caught with a bag in his possession. Upon searching the bag, a dead child was found.

Bearing in mind that a few months back, there had been an increased spate of crime in your neighborhood in which you were a victim. More so, a vast majority of the inhabitants believe that the police are always letting suspects off the hook each time they are handed over to them. You would also believe that if an action is not taken, the same fate may befall this suspect and you or a family member might be the victim the next time there is a robbery or kidnapping."

From the above scenario,

(a) Do you support mob justice for this suspect? Yes / No?

(b) Do you think your experience informed your choice in (a) above, Yes / No?

The vignette method was used to simulate a realistic social situation and assess participants' behavioral support for mob justice under controlled hypothetical conditions.

Procedure

Residents within the University of Ibadan were randomly selected for the study. The questionnaires cum vignette were distributed with appropriate instructions to participants who indicated interest in participating in the study. The dependent variable was measured through a vignette. The said vignette projected an imaginative but realistic scenario with a two-response format to the ensuing questions that followed thereafter. Participants were required to respond to these questions as though they were involved in reality. Although the research acknowledges that

support for mob justice does not necessarily translate into action per se, it gives a far-reaching insight as to what may be obtainable should the scenario be real.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The study adhered to established ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 26). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of participants. Factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the main and interaction effects of police perception, experience of attack, and gender on support for mob justice. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the joint and independent effects of age and socio-economic status on support for mob justice. Statistical significance was set at the 0.05 level.

Results

Hypothesis 1: There will be significant main and interaction effects of police perception, experience of attack and gender on support for mob justice among university residents in South-West Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA). Results are presented below.

Table 1: Summary of 2x2x2 Factorial ANOVA showing the main and interaction effects of police perception, experience of attack and gender on support for mob justice

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Level of police perception (A)	.111	1	.111	.231	.631

Experience of attack (B)	2.176	1	2.176	4.539	.034
Gender (C)	47.597	1	47.597	99.294	.000
A * B	.347	1	.347	.723	.396
A * C	.006	1	.006	.012	.913
B * C	1.114	1	1.114	2.323	.128
A * B * C	.000	1	.000	.001	.979
Error	146.204	305	.479		
Total	673.000	313			
Corrected Total	199.438	312			

a. R Squared = .267 (Adjusted R Squared = .250)

Results from Table 1 show that experience of attack [$F_{(1, 305)} = 4.539$; $p < .05$] and gender [$F_{(1, 305)} = 99.294$; $p < .05$] had significant main effects on support for mob justice among university residents; while perception of police [$F_{(1, 305)} = .231$; $p > .05$] had no significant main effect on support for mob justice among university residents in South-West Nigeria. Further results show that two-way interactions and the three-way interaction of police perception, experience of attack and gender did not have a significant interaction effect on support for mob justice among the university residents in South-West Nigeria.

Further analysis was carried out to ascertain the direction of the significant main effect of experience of attack and gender on support for mob justice among the University of Ibadan residents. Results are presented in the tables below;

Table 2: Summary of t-test showing mean differences in support for mob justice across experience of attack

	Experience of an attack	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t	P

	Yes	115	1.36	.72946		
Support for Mob Justice					311	2.295	<.05
	No	198	1.15	.82921		

Results from Table 2 show that there is a significant difference in support for mob justice based on university residents' experience of attack t(311) =2.295; P < .05. The results suggest that participants who have had experience of an attack (M =1.36) reported higher support for mob justice than those who had never had any experience of an attack (M =1.15).

Table 3: Summary of t-test showing difference in support for mob justice between male and female students

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	P
Support for Mob Justice	Male	177	1.37	0.669	311	10.042	.001
	Female	136	0.78	0.669			

Results from Table 3 shows that, there is a significant difference in support for mob justice based on participants gender [t (311) =10.042; p<.001]. The results suggest that male participants with

a mean score of ($\bar{X}$ = 1.37) reported higher support for mob justice than their female counterparts ($\bar{X}$=0.78).

Hypothesis Two

Socio-demographic factors (age and socio-economic status) will jointly and independently predict support for mob justice among the university residents in South-West Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis. Results are presented in Table 5

Table 4: Multiple Regression Showing Age and Socio-Economic Status as Predictors of Support for Mob Justice

Predictor	R	R^2	F	P	β	T	P
Age	.077	.006	.865	>.05	-.064	-1.133	.258
SES					.036	.638	.524

Results from Table 4 showed that age and socio-economic status did not have a significant joint influence on support for mob justice among participants [R^2 = .006; F (2, 310) = .865; p> .05], indicating that the model explained a negligible proportion of the variance in support for mob justice.

Similarly, there was no significant independent influence of age (β= -.064; p > .05) and socio-economic status (β=.036; p > .05) on support for mob justice. The above finding suggests that involvement or support for mob justice cuts across all age categories and socio-economic levels, suggesting that support for mob justice is neither age specific nor contingent upon socioeconomic factors.

Discussions

The hypothesis that police perception, experience of attack, and gender would have significant main and interaction effects on support for mob justice was partially supported. Significant main effects were found for gender and experience of attack, while police perception and the interaction effects were not significant. These findings suggest that these psychosocial variables may operate independently rather than interactively in shaping support for mob justice within this population. The findings thereof alluded to the standpoint of Mazur (2021), who investigated the role of experience of attack in support of mob justice among college students in Slovakia. The study opined that the experience of an attack had a significant impact on support for mob justice. Similarly, Nalukenge (2001) & Innocent (2023) discovered that previous experience of bodily attack contributed significantly to support for mob justice among a community-based population in Kampala, Uganda. These findings are also consistent with the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977), which suggests that personal experiences may shape attitudes toward behavioral responses to crime.

However, Rivera (2025) and Yu (2025) on crime attitudes suggest that victimization does not always translate into support for punitive responses, indicating that individual coping styles and perceptions of justice may influence these relationships.

Interestingly, police perception did not predict support for mob justice. This finding appears inconsistent with common assumptions that distrust in police predicts support for mob justice. Kryston (2026), posits that people are more likely to be involved in mob actions as an expression of a lack of trust towards the police and the policing system. This is even more obvious as the citizens believe strongly that the policing system in Nigeria is fraught and bedeviled by corruption. Balogun (2023), averred that the rising cases of mob justice in Lagos state, Nigeria, are a result of dissatisfaction and seeming loss of confidence in the Police and Judiciary system. The study further opined that the citizens of Lagos perceived the judicial system as being partial. According to Adu-Gyamfi (2014), mob justice stems from the people's cynicism that the legal and security authorities do not properly handle suspected criminals, thus making the citizens vulnerable to an increased spate of crime, with the people left with no choice but to execute the law as they deem fit by way of mob action. However, the present finding suggests that distrust in

police may not always translate into support for mob justice, particularly where such distrust is already perceived as a normal societal condition. This may indicate that personal experiences may sometimes be more influential than institutional perceptions in shaping attitudes toward mob justice.

This finding differs from some previous studies. One possible explanation is that participants already living with the belief that the Nigerian police system is corrupt and may conclude it is a norm that cannot be remedied.

The study also found a significant gender difference in support for mob justice, with male participants reporting higher support than female participants. This finding is consistent with Mutabazi (2006) & Osabutey (2023), who reported gender differences in attitudes toward mob justice. This difference may reflect gender socialization patterns that influence attitudes toward aggression and punishment. However, some studies on punitive attitudes have reported minimal gender differences, suggesting that contextual and cultural factors may shape how gender relates to support for informal justice.

The hypothesis that socio-demographic factors (age and socio-economic status) will jointly and independently predict support for mob justice among university residents in South-West Nigeria didn't pan out as envisaged. Consequently, the finding thereof aligned with the works of Seleye-Fubara and Bob-Yellowe, (2005); Shodunke et al., (2023), who reported that demographic factors such as age, educational qualification and income level had neither joint nor independent influence on mob justice. Similarly, Nwosu and Odesanmi, (1998); & (Bezuidenhout & Kempen, 2022) found that there exists no significant age difference in support for mob justice among a community-based population. These findings are suggestive of the possibility that mob justice is a complex social problem that is associated with any category individuals may belong to. Age or socioeconomic status does not necessarily liberate you from participating in mob action. Nevertheless, some research suggests that socio-economic disadvantage may increase support for harsh or immediate justice responses, indicating that the relationship between demographic factors and support for mob justice may vary across contexts (Mpuru & Häefele, 2024).

Overall, the findings of the study indicate that the statistical evidence supporting mob justice may be more closely linked to personal psychosocial experiences than to either demographic

factors or institutional perceptions. The role of the experience of being attacked and gender is important to indicate the potential influence of personal exposure to crime and socialization patterns on the orientation towards informal justice. Meanwhile, the non-significant differences in police perception, age, and socio-economic status indicate that the desire to support mob justice cannot be explained by a single factor; it reflects a complex interplay of contextual and psychological factors. The findings add to the current debates on the psychosocial aspects of mob justice in the Nigerian context.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study have some theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the results suggest that personal experiences such as prior victimization may be associated with attitudes toward mob justice, which is consistent with assumptions of the Theory of Reasoned Action that attitudes may be shaped by individual experiences. The findings also suggest that individual-level psychosocial factors may be relevant in understanding support for mob justice within the studied context.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that efforts aimed at discouraging mob justice may benefit from considering the role of prior victimization experiences and individual differences. Public education on the risks associated with mob justice and the importance of lawful justice processes may also be relevant in reducing support for extrajudicial actions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, an intervention that focuses on addressing attitudes toward mob justice can be beneficial, especially for people with past victimization experience. Promoting community policing and enhancing the likelihood of people trusting formal justice processes might also apply to the decrease in patronage of extrajudicial justice. In addition, sensitization programmes on the implications of mob justice and the significance of due process should be conducted among the population to deter such behavior.

Limitations

There are certain limitations to this study. First, the cross-sectional design restricts the capacity to make causal inferences about the correlations between the variables of the study. Second, the scale of supporting mob justice was gauged on the basis of a hypothetical vignette situation, which might not always translate into practical behavior in real-life contexts. Third, a university-based sample might limit the applicability of the results to the general Nigerian population. To further confirm these results, future research can focus on the application of more varied community samples and behavioral indicators of mob justice participation.

Conclusion

This study examined psychosocial variables associated with support for mob justice among university residents in South-West Nigeria. The findings showed that experience of attack and gender were significantly associated with support for mob justice, while police perception, age, and socio-economic status were not significant predictors. These findings suggest that personal experiences and individual differences may play a role in shaping attitudes toward mob justice. The study contributes to understanding factors associated with support for mob justice within the Nigerian context and highlights the importance of addressing psychosocial influences when considering responses to mob justice.

Declaration

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