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# EFFECTS OF YOUTH GANSTERISM ON SECURITY IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF *YAN SHARA* GANG IN KADUNA METROPOLIS (2015-2023)

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**Abstract**
*Gangsterism has become a fractious phenomenon affecting individuals and social activity in Kaduna Metropolis. The Yan Shara gang moves mostly in groups victimizing, terrorizing, intimidating, and injuring innocent individuals at their homes, shops and on the streets which resulted in loss of lives and valuable property in the Metropolis and by extension challenge the Nation's national security. It is against this background; therefore, this article attempts to examine the effects of Yan Shara gangsterism on national security using Kaduna Metropolis as a case study from 2015 to 2023. The objective of this study was to find out the factors responsible for the occurrence of Yan Shara thuggery on social and political settings. Data was obtained through secondary sources. The study considered this assumption that, Yan Shara gangsterism recurs frequently in Kaduna Metropolis because it is sponsored by the elites. Frustration-aggression theory was adopted to serve as a theoretical base for this*

*study. The findings of the study depict that gangsterism in the Metropolis is as a result of unemployment, illiteracy, poor governance, group sentiment, poverty, injustice and weak security agencies to mention but a few. Therefore, the study recommends among other that government should initiate programmes including awareness campaigns that will transform and dissuade the Yan Shara and intended thugs from involving into such violent behaviours within the State.*
***Keywords:*** Gangsterism, violence, Yan Shara, Security.

## INTRODUCTION

Insecurity that involves the youth as important segment of the society in most countries around the world has been a thorny issue in academics and policy making entities with the most concern factor to be the case of unemployment. The correlation between insecurity and high level of unemployment in developing countries like Nigeria poses a serious concern to the national security of the country, its citizens and by implication the West African sub region in general.

Urban youth gangs have been in existence in Nigerian cities for a long time. In the immediate post-civil war period, i.e. from early 1970s, there was a noticeable increase in the incidence of violent crimes such as kidnappings, ballot stuffing, and killings and in the heinous nature of these crimes particularly in the use of dangerous weapons and killings. The national awareness and emergence of thuggery and increased violence can be traced back to the aftermath of the Nigerian civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. The roots of urban violence have been attributed to the loss of traditional structures that kept people together (Aderinto,1994).

It is an understatement to state that the Nigerian youths today have no future, as there is no serious social programmes or economic policy to cater for the interests and needs of the youths, despite the existence of some agencies in Nigeria such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Economic and Empowerment Development Scheme (NEEDS), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) among others, in other to alleviate the suffering of the youths (Freedom, 2008)

However, despite assurances from the Nigerian Police Force on security, opposition candidates are harassed or arrested; voters were turned away from polling stations by gang of young thugs (Bratton, 2008). It is commonly reported that long military rule in Nigeria is responsible for high level of political violence orchestrated by political thugs in the form of election rigging, falsification of electoral register, assassination of political rivals among other things. The inability of the government to conduct free and fair election has continued to undermine smooth transition and good governance, and in the words of Omotosho, (2008) '… has made the country the butt of bad jokes in the international community'.

More recently, Kaduna State, being the focus of this paper, has experienced this trend of violence, especially the 'the End bad Governance protest' in the State. Thus, since the creation of the State in 1967, the State has experienced several cases of violence. These include ethno-religious conflicts, land dispute, pastoralists-farmers conflicts, violent actions of thugs called *Yan shara* and election related violence, armed robbery, kidnapping and other related social vices. Of all these forms of violence, however, the most devastating one that keeps recurring in the State is thuggery by *Yan shara*. The use of political thugs, *Yan Shara* and its attendant consequence in the State has been a source of worry in recent years.

### Statement of Research Problem

The issue of youth gangsterism remained highly disturbing as the country faced serious security challenges. Youth gangsterism is among the major factors that affect the Nigerian

socio-economic status and also a serious problem that contributes to the country's multi-faceted problems. Thuggery also perpetually affects innocent individuals on daily basis in their homes, shops and on the streets. Thus, the activities of thugs called *Yan Shara* in Kaduna State have widely affected the relative peace enjoyed by the people. These gangsters move mostly in groups victimizing, terrorizing, intimidating, and injuring not only politicians but also innocent individuals in the state. The menace of this youth gangs called *Yan Shara* results to death or poses deadly threats by deterring individuals from actively partaking in the political, economic and cultural activities in their environments.

**Methods**

This article adopted the secondary type of data collection approach through which textbooks, journals, and other materials were consulted to review scholarly works on gangsterism while using same to explain the scenario in Kaduna Metropolis and how it affects security development in the area.

**Review of Related Literature**

This paper utilizes thematic styleof literature review whereby the author place the items base on the themes they occupied in the paper to enable the work provides adequate knowledge on the research topic.

**Violence and Conflicts in Nigeria**

Violence has attracted different definitions in a number of contexts and dimensions. According to Osaghae (1994:3) "Violence is any act that involves a threat to, or destruction of, lives and or property". This definition is significant because it brought two issues: threat and destructions, but violence on a wider outlook cannot be limited to only act of threat and destructions. Gurr (1970) and Hibbs( 1973) have defined violence based on political grounds as the use of force, that is, the intentional use of force by an individual or society on the opponent(s) in order to injure, kill or destroy lives and property. Though, the above definition expanded the dimension of violence to a political angle but that alone cannot fully explain violence as itexcludes other important aspects in human society.

It is necessary to explain the concept of violence from different aspects such as socio-cultural violence, economic violence, and ethno-religious violence. According to the 2011report by the Thinking Security for Africa, there are five forms of violence in Nigeria. These includeviolence caused by political differences; religious extremism; communal differences; the economic struggle and crime. Each of these overlaps with one another, in many important ways. This identification of the forms of violence helped us to understand the dimensions of violence in Nigeria and Kaduna state in particular. Consequent to any form that the violence may assume is the nature and disposition of the actors involved and whether the violence is incidental, ancillary or endemic. Therefore, violence, regardless of its form, is surrounded by the four compartmental circles: the organizers, the victims, the beneficiaries and above all, the environment.

Thuggery has become a matter of national insecurity, especially during campaigns and elections. Security is thus elemental in governance as it is the protection of the lives, rights, dignity and property of the citizens and the resources, territory, sovereignty and lawful institution of the country. It is also when these institutions utilize the resources of the nation for the provision of secure, just and equitable living conditions for the citizens of the country that they own their legitimacy (Usman, 1986:173). However, in most African states, including Nigeria, the rulers of the states constitute the major threat to the security of the lives and property of their own citizens. Meanwhile, the security agencies that exist to

checkmate the excesses of such leaders become the propagators of disunity because of their political ambitions.

Ethno-religious violence also formed an integral part of violence. Albert (1994) considers a few cases of violence in Kano. He argues that ethnicity, religion, and culture are the foundation of violence in Kano state. He further explains that the first major religious violence in Kano took place between December 18 and 29, 1980, and was triggered by the Maitatsine sect under Muhammad Marwa. The riot expanded to other places in Northern Nigeria such as Jimeta in 1984, Gombe in 1985 and Funtua in 1987. Between May 28 and June 5, 1985 over 61 people were killed and over 101 injured in some areas of the then Bauchi State, specifically Gombe, Azare, Kaltungo and Alkaleri.

Furthermore, religious violence also affects "unity in diversity" in the contemporary democratic process of Nigeria. A study of violence suggests that conflicts between Nigerian Christians and Muslims manifests in deadly inter-religious conflicts. On February, 2000, Kaduna state experienced religious violence within the metropolis. The crisis erupted as a result of the apprehension arising from the agitation for the implementation of Sharia in the State. Also, on March, 2002, another religious tension occurred in Kaduna State, owing to a revolting act against the holy prophet in a publication by Thisday Newspaper, it took the intervention of the security agents to forestall reprisals (Sampson, 2012).

Similarly, other major cases of violent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria include the Zangon-Kataf riots of 1992. Between May 28 and June 5, 1985 over 61 people were killed and over 101 injured in some areas of the then Bauchi State, specifically Gombe, Azare, Kaltungo and Alkaleri. Tafawa Balewa clashes in 1991, 1995 and the Jos ethno-religious riots of 2001. Although no exact figures of casualties are available, the Jos riots of 2001 have claimed several hundreds of lives and generated violent ripple effects beyond Jos (Osaghae, 2005).

**Nature and Pattern of Youth Thuggery in Nigeria**

As a political concept, thuggery has been defined differently by different scholars depending on their own perspective of the term. As observed by Howell (2004) and Asiegbu (2011), thuggery refers to the activities of thugs connected with stealing, killing, kidnapping, rudeness, victimization, intimidation and harassment. This manner affects peace, harmony and mutual co-existence among groups in their respective communities. If politics is criminalized through thuggery, right people who are the observers of good values tend to be scared and keep away from political processes. This suggests that thuggery is a violent behaviour affecting political processes in the Nigerian politics. Banwo (2003) maintains that the processes of the use of extra-judicial means in the course of the contest for or in exercising political power including intimidation, harassment, assassination, blackmail, and arson; physical and psychological attacks could not help to ensure sustainable peace and security within any democratic system like Nigeria. Hence, scholars believe that the attributes of sponsoring thugs is due to the fact that Nigerian politics is characterized by rigging, violence and ropes under the manipulation of the few elites.

Furthermore, in discussing the causes of thuggery, Mbaya (2013) argues that the majorities of youth are jobless, illiterates, with no means of livelihood, and are being paid to manipulate election results. The political elite capitalize on this weakness and recruit the youths. Secondly, politics for personal gain – this has become a common feature in Nigerian politics. This is a situation in which an individual tries to hold on to power for personal gains. In an attempt to hang on to power, leaders often create a regime of violence, repression and bloodshed. They organize political thugs, hooligans and scavengers to sing their praises,

intimidate opponents and kill them if they become intransigent. The unnecessary and uncoordinated urge to control, dominate and amass wealth for their family and friends informs the emergence of political thugs to be used to win election by all means. Thirdly, The politicians, having invested huge amount of money on campaigns and other political activities, coupled with the existing system of winner takes all, would want to win at all cost. In view of the above, the need to employ the use of thugs and touts to manipulate and rig elections becomes necessary, especially when such politicians are not popular candidates.

**Nexus between Youth Thuggery and Insecurity**

The word thug refers to a person inclined or hired to treat another person roughly, brutally or murderously (beaten or robbed) (The Merriam Webster Thesaurus 1995). In this sense a thug is a person or group of persons employed to perpetrate violence on another person or group of persons. Example of thug in this respect is the *Yan Shara* thugs in Kaduna State who strangle their victims. Howell, (2004) on the other hand observed that political thug can be seen as the tireless repetition of misleading 'facts' designed to depict an opponent as personally despicable and with regard to governance and it is dangerous to the physical and political life of the nation.

Political violence on the other hand refers to act of the processes of execution of the activities of political thugs enticed by politicians. In other word Banwo, (2003:100) posits that:

"It is the processes of the use of extra-judicial means in the course of the contest for or in exercising political power. These include intimidation, harassment, assassination, blackmail, arson, and looting, physical and psychological attack among others".

To Mehler, (2007:209) political violence has become a prominent part of the culture of Africa. Indeed he emphasized that governance and violence have become common mode of political competition in African societies more than consensus or co-operation. Political violence is usually part of the machinery employed by the political class in most underdeveloped economies to attain and sustain power or protest its deprivation. Bazenguissa-Ganga, (1999) further argued that, … 'faction leaders in collapsed or collapsing states are often politicians or officers who jockeyed for position in an elite hierarchy and benefited from 'official' political violence, the goals of violence turn toward battling local rivals and appropriating as much of the wealth of this political network for themselves' Therefore political thuggery and political violence are intertwined. This had in many ways truncated political process in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, national security is threatened when unemployed youths are involved in conflict situations such as religious and ethnic conflicts. For instance, the conflict situation in the Niger-Delta and so many parts of the Northern states is spearheaded by youths, most of whom were unemployed. At the very least, there is a correlation between economic hardship (occasioned by poverty and unemployment) and those accused of taking part in the orgy of violence or violent disorder taking place in this country are the youths. Therefore, it is discerning that unemployment pre-dispose people to poverty which co-jointly influence national security by creating chaos and other security situation. Rising crime waves are therefore the consequence of unemployment among the teeming youth population (Rotimi, 2011).

**The Menace of Youth Gang (*Yan Shara*) on Social and Electoral Processes in Kaduna State**

The popularity of political thugs in Kaduna State could be traced to the politics of 1999 when youth were mobilized to refute the claims of the leading party PDP by ANPP as it were in

Kano and other neighboring States (Usman, 2019). *Yan Shara*, or tout; resurfaced in the Politics of 2007, 2011 but became eminent and unhealthy for democratic process in the Politics of 2015 and 2019. There activities commences from the early stage of politicking and becomes intense at election periods. Most of these groups of unemployed youths are sponsored by desperate politicians who lure them with extravagant promises of employment and other government patronage. Since 1999 to date, some of these youthful thugs have been sponsored by desperate politicians to protect their political interest.

After elections, these boys trained to maim and kill political opponents are left helpless without any tangible means of sustenance (WeeklyTrust, 2018). Dashee, (2019) asserted that in other instances, even their sponsors are not spared from their acts of violence as they equally attack them in public functions like wedding, political rallies and so on, when they fail to meet their expectations or demand. Two major reasons why politicians employ violence could be attributed to their quest for power and drive toward primitive accumulation of wealth and competitive authoritarian nature of the Nigerian state. This gave rise to the high level and sophistication of political thuggery in Kaduna State.

For instance, Weekly Trust reported worrisome atrocities of *Yan Shara* titled "*How Yan Shara held Kaduna state hostage"* revealed that hooligans tagged *Yan Shara* from both opposing parties APC and PDP and others fought, left some dead and many casualties with injuries. Similar incidents abound in Borno state when Ali Modu Sheriff won the 2003 election. Many youths across Borno state found it enterprising to engage in political thuggery. As a result other groups emerged with seeming divisions amongst them and persistent clashes between the different camps mostly associated with sharing of largesse. On 12th June 2016, there were intra group clashes between political thugs loyal to the ruling APC and inter group with PDP an opposition party. These activities however do not occur without the input of the two players the politicians and the youths (thugs) themselves and the youths depend on the politicians to perpetrate their nefarious activities without impunity.

**Factors responsible for the incessant *Yan Shara* Gangsterism in Kaduna State**

Governance is the way rules, norms and actions are structured, sustained, regulated and held accountable. Democratic governance involves promoting the sustainability of democracy which includes an enduring capacity for the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and the transparency and accountability of a responsible civil service, functioning at both the national and local levels. Democratic governance is a machinery of government that allows the voice of the minority to be held while majority have their way in deciding and addressing various issues that confront them as a people or an entity for the good and fairness of all. Elections provide a theatre of power politics amongst elites in Nigeria. Such moments lay bare elites' desperation to hang on to power for incumbents, or achieve power for marginal elites. For incumbents, state resources and other privileges associated with State power are invested in retaining power. And for those wanting to gain power, personal wealth and those of "power brokers" are patronized to fight their way into power (Tar and Shettima, 2010).

Several factors abound to explain the cause of political thugs as well as political violence. Prominent amongst these are two principal factors these are - competitive authoritarian nature of the Nigerian state and economic factor. The rest can be tied to either two of the above. These include illiteracy and poverty, weaknesses in the institutions, checks and balance. *Nature of Nigerian state:* - The competitive authoritarian nature of the Nigerian state after long punctuations of military regimes accepted civilian government in 1999 that permits democratic competition but bedeviled by fraud and abuse of state apparatus which enables those with machinery of the state to suppress opposition group or party. This groupings result

more often than not into clashes of interest between different groups which end up in violence or skirmishes.

*Illiteracy*: - This is another cause of political violence. Some studies revealed that most of those that engage or used by politicians in their shoddy deal are either illiterate or received low level of education as such they become prey to overzealous politicians as they are vulnerable to resort to violence.

*Poverty*: - High level of unemployment have accounted for high level of poverty in the State. As most of youths come from humble families which cannot fulfill their obligation. It goes with the common saying "*a hungry man is an angry man"* hence need little effort to join any group of militia/thugs.

*Weaknesses in the political system*: - There are prevalent weaknesses in the institutions responsible for carrying out electoral processes in Nigeria. The inability of institutions of government such as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the police, judiciary and the executive resulting from abuse of office and fraud often emasculate electoral process. This includes undue favor to some group or individuals and power of incumbency.

*Checks and balances*: - Lack of checks and balances on part of the three arms of government to ensure smooth electoral process often leads to fraudulent acts and behaviors, rigging, cheating among others.

**Theoretical framework**

Frustration-aggression theory was adopted in this study. Frustration Aggression theory which Dollard (1962) and his associates initially developed and has been modified and expanded by scholars like Aubrey (1962) and Leonard (1962) appears to be the leading and common explanation for violent behaviour stemming from inability to satisfy needs. In an attempt to explain aggression, scholars' points to the difference between what people want or deserve and what they actually get. As Kirby (2011) noted, where expectation does not meet attainment, the tendency is for people to confront those they hold responsible to frustrating their ambition.

The basic argument of the theory is frustration is not undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct but that is the outcome of disappointment and that in a situation where the actual legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way the society is structured, the feelings of disappointment may lead such person to express anger through violence. The annual increase of the unemployed and without corresponding industries (space) to absorb the youths in Nigeria is largely responsible for the emergence of violent groups such as *Yan shara* thugs and other social vices. Because it is very uncommon, if not totally impossible, for someone that is gainfully employed to engage in irrational killing and willful destruction of Individual and National properties. (Bello, 2003).

Most of the youth gangs such as the *Yan shara* gang were formed as a result of frustration, the large percentage of the youth that participates in this act were either illiterates, or unemployed people in whatsoever ways who express their aggression because of marginalization, nepotism and injustice. The aggressive activities of *Yan shara* gangs in Kaduna state were largely as a result of frustration due to poverty and illiteracy.

This theory helps to explain how aggression is always caused by some form of frustration, at as argued that people are motivated to reach their goals, but if these goals are blocked then

frustration occurs, frustration always leads to aggression which later leads to crime and continues crime gives birth to crises and it is the continuous crises that in most cases affects National security.

Frustration aggression theory will be appropriated for this study considering the fact that the youths are frustrated about the poverty and unemployment situation in the country. Other reasons include high cost of living, deplorable state of infrastructure and social amenities in the country. This made the youths susceptible in the hands of the desperate leaders who use them to unleash violence especially during and after electioneering. The youths use the opportunity to express anger concerning the wide gap between the rich and the poor.

**Discussion**

From the gamut of the available data, selfish interest, unemployment, illiteracy, poor governance, group sentiment, political manipulation, poverty, injustice and inactive security agencies can be considered as the major factors that contributed to *Yan Shara* gangsterism in Kaduna State. All these contributes perpetually to the endless thuggery, as a socio-political phenomenon, affecting the people and democratic process negatively in Kaduna State in spite the policies and programmes initiated by the government to tackle the menace.

The ruling elites' fault is attributed to the lack of employment, ineffective policies on education to booster literacy level, poor governance, manipulation in political processes, injustice and inactive security agencies. Government of Kaduna State has been accused in many respect related to the above atrocity which felt reluctant to overcome the aforementioned issues that invariably influenced thugs to emulate violent behaviour leading to thuggery and more often than not resulted to social violence. The government is being proactive in its different decisions on tackling the menace of thuggery in the state.

On several occasions, public commentators and political analysts blamed political elites on supporting *Yan Shara* gangsterism for their selfish gain, in the State. Just as in 2019 that Human Right Watch was being secretly informed by Police that politics is making their life very difficult; PDP supporters were not arrested, and or if they were arrested, Police Officials, handed them over to the governor, and in turn released. Similarly, in some occasions, police officers posit that thugs had been detained on purely political ground as a result, they should be released, that they are human beings and they have human rights like any other human being.

Finally, It can be deduced that the reasons for thuggery is as a result of youth are joblessness, they are impoverished, and being paid easily to manipulate election results. Politics for personal gain, being a situation in elites organize thugs, hooligans and scavengers to sing their praises, intimidate opponents and kill them; and prebendal politics, as an investment by hungry politicians also created chances on which politicians have invested huge amount of money and resources on campaigns and other political activities.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the effects of the perpetual *Yan Shara* gangsterism in Kaduna State are basically included creating fear amongst citizens, hindering electorates from voting, killing innocent people, violating human rights, destruction of valuable properties, insecurity during and after elections and intimidating people. The paper observed that these effects have been politically and socially motivated which affected different people in different places in Kaduna State. As a result, both government and private properties including vehicles and offices were burnt, offices and valuable properties of different political parties were destroyed and burnt, innocent individuals lost their valuable properties on the streets, in their

shops and at homes. Besides, elites and innocent individuals of various positions in both public and private establishments have been affected by the *Yan Shara* gangsterism with different degrees of injuries ranging from wounds to loss of lives within the state.

Finally, the paper also observed that the activities of Gang called *Yan Shara* have fuelled insecurity in the state which is characterized by killing, kidnapping, street attacks, house break-ins, shoplifting, frightening and threatening innocent individuals losing their lives and valuable properties that invariably exacerbated social violence affecting economic and social activities especially during campaigns, rallies and election related activities for which electorates and candidates of different party affiliations are scared and frightened of in Kaduna State.

**Recommendations**

The study recommends the following:

1. The study recommended that government should ensure the physical punishment (detention) to *Yan Shara* gang members. This will deter them from involving into thuggery within Kaduna Metropolis.

2. Additionally, the study also recommended that security agencies should continue to cooperate and coordinate with vigilante groups to combat the nefarious activities of *Yan Shara* in Kaduna Metropolis.

3. Furthermore, the study recommended that Government and communities should prioritize the provision of quality education at the secondary and tertiary level for the youth to be educated against engaging in *Yan Shara* gangsterism that could endanger their lives.

4. Security operatives and vigilante groups should strengthen their patrol along routes that attracts the activities of *Yan Shara* to safe guard lives and properties of the people in the area.

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