

EFFECT OF DRUG ABUSE AND POLITICAL THUGGERY AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTH: A STUDY OF SOME SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF KANO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the nexus between drug abuse and political thuggery among youths in some selected LGAs in Kano State, Nigeria. Kano as one of the most populous states with a pronounced youth bulge, over 65% of the population is under 30 years and persistently high youth unemployment, demographic pressure and economic exclusion intersect with political violence. The study is anchored on strain theory. It examines how frustration arising from unmet expectations of education, unemployment and political inclusion predisposes Kano youths to substance abuse and subsequent recruitment as political thugs. The study utilizes survey data from 400 youths, age from 15-35 years from Nasarawa, Fagge, and Ungogo LGAs of Kano State. Findings reveal that tramadol, codeine-based cough syrups and cannabis are the most abused substances, often used to reduce fear, boost aggression and sustain energy during electoral conflicts. In conclusion the government should enact stronger laws against thuggery, and politicians to distance themselves from such groups. The study therefore recommends targeted interventions in the Local Government Areas, skills and entrepreneurship programs to close the capability expectation gap.

Keywords: Drug Abuse, Political Thuggery, Nigerian Youth, Kano State, Nigeria

Introduction

The Nigeria's Fourth Republic, was inaugurated in 1999, it was expected to institutionalize peaceful electoral competition. But yet 25 years later political violence remains a defining feature of Nigerian democracy (Albert, 2007). The independent National Electoral Commission reported 1, 149 incidents of election-related violence between 2015 and 2023, resulting in over 3,400 deaths in 2024 (INEC, Report, 2023). A recurring characteristic of this violence is its demographic and physiological profile which shows that 78% of perpetrators

arrested are males aged 18-35 years, and 73% of those arrested during the 2023 elections tested positive for psychoactive substances, primarily tramadol, codeine and cannabis Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2023).

This pattern cannot be divorced from Nigeria's demographic and economic realities. Nigeria has one of the world's most pronounced youth bulges, with over 70% of its over 200million population are under 30 years and a median age of 18.1 years, National Population Commission (2022). This demographic structure should constitute a demographic dividend for

growth instead. The National Bureau of Statistics Q3 2023 reports youth unemployment at 33.3% and youth underemployment at 22.8 %. The country has millions of educated but jobless young people experience what Gurr1970 termed “relative deprivation” a widening gap between their aspirations shaped by education and social media exposure and their economic capabilities. Drug abuse has emerged at the intersection of this demographic pressure and political violence. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2023 National Drug Use Survey indicates that 14.3 million Nigerians are drug abused in 2022 with pharmaceutical opioids like tramadol and codeine showing the fastest growth. The NDLEA data reveals that Kano, Lagos, Rivers and Kaduna States lead in both drug seizures and election violence. An interview with ex-thugs and security experts describe a consistent pattern by political actors by supplying cash, weapons and drugs to area boys and political boys before electoral operations. These drugs function as moral disengagement tools in reducing fear, increasing aggression and ensuring loyalty during ballot snatching, voter intimidation and attacks on opponents. Therefore, drug abuse in Kano State is not merely a public health crisis.it has become a political technology used to weaponize economic frustration.

Conceptual Literature Review

Drug Abuse

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency Act 2004 defines drug abuse as the non-medical use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. UNODC 2023 situates Nigeria’s drug problem within the

pharmaceutical opioid crisis where tramadol, codeine-based cough syrups and methamphetamine have overtaken traditional cannabis.The United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime typically uses drug use rather than drug abuse in recent reports to reduce stigma. (Buth, 2009) refer to the same concept. It defines drug use to the consumption of psychoactive substances for non-medical purposes. It includes the use of controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances listed under the international drug control conventions as well as the non-medical use of prescription drugs.

Psychoactive substances: Any chemical that affects the brain and changes mood, perception, consciousness, behavior, which includes tramadol, codeine, cannabis, meth, cocaine and heroin.

Non-Medical purposes: This is the act of using drugs without doctor’s prescription, or using more than prescribed or using to get high instead of to treat illness.Non-Medical use or prescription drugs: UNODC specifically ban pharmaceutical opioids like tramadol and codeine cough syrup as major problems in Nigeria, using them without prescription.

World Health Organization (WHO, 1969) defines drug abuse as persistent or sporadic excessive drug use inconsistent with or unrelated to acceptable medical practice.National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, Act, 1989) definition of drug abuse as the non-medical, illegal, or excessive self-administration of psychoactive substances such as tramadol, codeine, cannabis, and methamphetamine.

Thuggery

Thuggery is defined to mean a violent behavior in which people fight and attack others. The word is thus clothed with criminal flavor and is consequently associated with all negative synonyms such as violence, brutal acts, hooliganism, gangsterism, assassins, criminal, delinquent, troublemakers. Etc. United Nations Development Programs (UNDP, 2012), define political thuggery as political motivated violence perpetrated by organized groups of youths who are recruited, armed and financed by political elites,

Political Thuggery

This will obviously imply act of thuggery in relation to the political process. (INEC, 2010), defined political thuggery as any act of violence intimidation and disruption carried out by individuals or groups on behalf of a political party or candidate to influence electoral outcomes, (Anifowose, 1989) political thuggery is a threat or actual use of physical force intended to cause injury, death or property destruction with specific goal of modifying the behavior of political actors. (Rotimi, 1996), political thuggery is the use of violent youth's militias by political entrepreneurs to win elections in weak states where formal institutions fail. (Paul, 2009). Political thuggery is the deployment of coercive force by political elites through armed youth gangs to capture, retain or manipulate political power at state and level. Thus political thuggery can be defined as any act of intimidation, violence, hooliganism, brutality or gangsterism, whether leading to death or not, calculated to pose a threat or scale political opponent or perceived

political opponents before, during or after elections and aimed at achieving an undue political result or advantage. Political thuggery, especially at elections may range from such acts as inciting or causing others to act in a disorderly manner, being in illegal possession of or usage of offensive weapon/s with the aim to scare or intimidate voters, snatching or destruction of election materials, acts resulting into undue influence as by compelling any person to vote or refrain from voting against his/her will, ballot stuffing etc.

According to (Larry, 1998) political thuggery is an organized band of youths mobilized and armed by politicians to disrupt opponents, rig elections and terrorize voters. This illegal interference with the electoral process no doubt is electoral fraud, is criminal and has severe consequences on democratic stability in general and national security in particular. (Adigun, 2004), political thuggery is a clientelistic exchange where unemployed youth provide violence and intimidation services to political patrons in return for cash, drugs, contracts and protection. (Isaac, 2011) sees political thuggery as youth brigandage in electoral politics where politicians recruit, arm, and intoxicate young men to serve as "political foot soldiers" for violent mobilization. Political thuggery is the use of state and non-state armed groups by politicians to subvert democratic process through violence and fear (Isara, 2007). (Omotola, 2009), define political thuggery as the commodification of youth violence, where drugs and small cash turn unemployed youth into marketable weapons for political activities. (Steven, 2004), it is a strategic deployment of ethicized youth gangs by politicians to riot,

intimidate and deliver votes in competition democracies. In a broader sense however, what has been the political thuggery witnessed in the nation's democratic experience especially in 1999, 2003 and 2007 dispensation, what are the possible causes of this ugly phenomenon? In what ways does this affect the nation's democratic development and security? How does the law grapple with this? These and other issues form the basis of the focus of this chapter of which in the ensuing paragraphs we shall now look at the nature and patterns of political thuggery in Nigeria.

Nature and Patterns of Political Thuggery in Nigeria

There is no gainsaying, the fact that in the past series of elections held in Nigerian between 1999, 2003 and 2007, activities of thugs have taken a center stage thereby breeding a feeling of resentment among members of the public (Omotola, 2010) The activities of thugs are not noticeable in only one party; all political parties are guilty of this. Each political party in trying to wrestle power from the other or remain in power ahead of the other engages in this condemnable act. Thuggery is not known or experienced in only one part of the country, it is everywhere in the country. Indeed, hardly will one pick a national daily in a week without finding a headline

about thuggery. Within the nation, different groups exist, formed and maintained by politicians before, during and after elections with the aim to intimidate, harass, distort and to perpetrate whatever activities that would give political advantage to party candidate over their opponents. (Albert, 2007)

It is reported that in the Northern part of Nigeria, *Karare* is a brand of Hausa word referring to a group of people, mostly youth between the ages of 8 – 35 years, some of whom are in secondary schools or school drop-outs. These youths are used by politicians during campaigns and elections in some sections of Northern Nigeria to intimidate voters and political opponents into accepting the position of their sponsors. They are violent, unemployed and mostly drug addicts. Similar group exist in Kano known as “*yandaba*”. In Kaduna, they are called *Kawaye* or *yan mage* while in Borno, they are known as *ecomog*, in Bauchi, you call them *sarasuka*. In Lagos, you call them area boys. History has it that the *yanakusa* also known as *yandaba* or *bangain* Kano were used in the First Republic by the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) to check the winning streak of NEPU. The same phenomenon today repeats itself as most of these groups are formed as “soldiers” to fight in the struggle for political power. (Albert, 2007)

Typology of Political Thugs in some Selected LGAs in Kano State, Nigeria**Table 1.1**

S/N	Type	Definition	LGA Example	Payment
1.	Election mercenaries	Hired per-election cycle, dispersed after	Snatch-and-run teams, Fagge LGA. 2023, Election	Cash and Tramadol
2.	Resident Thugs	Swearing-in of new Deputy Governor	Yan-dabaHotoro LGA, 2026	Cash and Weapons
3.	Party Militia	Formal Party wing E.g APC, NNPP,ADC and PDP, youth vanguard	NNPP Volunteers Gyadi-Gyadi Quarters	Party Opposition and drugs.
4.	Community Brigands	Local boys used for intimidation unpaid	Ward-level boys in Abattoir Market and Koki, 2026	Protection and Occasional Cash

Source: Daily Trust Newspaper, 2026

Rise in Kano Thuggery Collective Societal Failure

The recent surge in thuggery in Kano State is long standing politization of the menace and collective failure of the society. The situation is unfortunate, the problem could have been addressed when it was still small. The politicians have continued to benefit from the activities of the thugs, hiring them for rallies and rewarding them instead of punishing them. Sometimes the Governor or even the president will be welcomed by these arms-wielding thugs, recently thugs killed seven persons in one week in Kano.

Causes of Political Thuggery in Nigeria

The causes of political thuggery in Nigeria according to (Adigun, 2007) and (Adeleke, 2016) are:

Financial Gains

The lucrative nature of political offices is alarming. It is so enormous that aspiring politicians to certain offices do whatever is possible to get there. Married with the get-richquick syndrome characteristically commonplace in Nigerian, politics has become such a lucrative business so much that it now a matter of do-or-die in the struggle to acquire political power. Remuneration for political offices being exceedingly attractive constitute the major reason most politicians present themselves, dressed in sheep's clothing as desiring to serve. Even if the mandate is denied them as expressed in the voting where there is any, they steal it through acts of thuggery.

Money Politics

There has become entrenched a misplaced political culture where politics has been

monetized. Sequel to the point above, politicians are ready to pay anything to get there. It has become business where you invest during the campaigns to reap profit when you get to the office. The investment here is that politicians buy up everybody believed to matter by distributing money or other food or valuable items. So called king makers fall prey to this. Some voters equally fall to these bates. Campaigns are thus no longer issue based. In essence, there is misplaced priority by the voting community. This may not be unconnected with the high level of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment prevalent in the society and deliberately orchestrated by the same politicians as a result of bad governance. The point sought to be made therefore is that when such huge monies are spent (invested) anything standing in the way of such an investor getting to where he will eventually recover his investment and much more will be done away with using whatever means including acts of thuggery. For many politicians now who buy up their votes, they have already settled the society. Thus, once they get to the office, they turn their back on their constituency. The consequences have been wide spread under development, poverty and unemployment to which we now turn.

Poverty and Unemployment

It is common knowledge that the youth who readily submit themselves to perpetrate these acts of thuggery are unemployed and wallowing in poverty. The moments of electioneering campaigns is a moment that many put in whatever they can in the expectation of what they hope to benefit when the person they are supporting wins. For many of the thugs, some good promises are made relating to job expectations or contracts awards. For

some, it is for some paltry sums of money paid to hire them. The dirty jobs these thugs do are not the kind of jobs gainfully employed people or literate people will be involved in. Not even the children of these politicians will go into the field to be directly involved in these acts of thuggery for the sake of ensuring victory for their parents. The point must be made that wide spread poverty and unemployment is a result in most societies deliberately unattended to by the governments of the day. This is consciously used as a device to keep people hungry so that when they see little money, they can jump at it and do the will of the giver.

Unpopular Candidates

It is believed and expected that candidates who are popular amongst the people will not even have to go through so much pains trying to convince the electorates. They will not have to bribe their way through. They will not have to entice the electorates with little sums of money to vote for them. That is to say not to talk of employing criminal ways such as the use of thuggery to intimidate, harass, kill or influence or steal mandate. The trend of forcing or imposing candidates on the electorates by their so called godfathers has led in several quarters to vehement opposition and rejection. When this is perceived or happens, given their unpopularity, knowing that they will not genuinely compete with the generally acceptable and popular opposition candidates, they resort to violence by the use of political thugs in order to actualize their must-win attitude. This is an attitudinal problem which will have to be dealt with decisively. This is if elections as an indispensable feature of democracy must be appreciated within the context of the functions it plays.

The Role of Security Agents

During, before and after elections, security agents of the State have duty at all material times to ensure that security of lives and property is guaranteed and that there is peace and order in the society. The dispatch and presence of security officers at political functions, conventions, primaries, general elections etc. would presuppose that this will scare off or defer the activities of political thugs. By the antecedents of the previous general elections in the country particularly the 2003 and 2007 general elections conducted by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, it is doubtful to say whether security agents (in some place, made up of the police military, civil defence etc) dispatched at election polling booths were to ensure peaceful conduct of the election or the help perpetuate “official thuggery” so as to rig the process.

Effects or Consequences of Political Thuggery

The consequences of political thuggery are numerable depending on the perspective one looks at it. Hence, they range from constituting a major threat to national security; instills fear and causes low turnout or participation by eligible voters, flowing from that, it thus casts doubt on the credibility of the purported elected leaders before the eyes of the local and international community; similarly, it could affect the respect from the governed and this could further affect the general acceptability of the popularity of the government, amounts to stealing of genuine mandate from the voters; diminishes good governance and makes the people's hopes and expectations dashed and finally, it hinders or does away

with public accountability by the so called elective officers. These consequences are certainly not exhaustive. They are straight forward and may need no further elaboration. However, emphasis must be placed on some.

National Security

Security is one of the greatest concerns of every nation of the world. Conceptually, national security appears ambiguous and bogus. It is a concept that emphasizes the overall and holistic security of a nation politically, economically, socially, environmentally and what have you. The United States Armed Forces defines national security (of the United States) as a collective term encompassing both national defense and foreign relations of the United States. This includes amongst others, a defense posture capable of successfully resisting hostile or destructive action from within or without, overt or covert. The Encarta Encyclopedia defines national security as the protection of a nation from attack or other dangers by maintaining adequate armed forces and guarding state secrets. It is therefore conduce to saying that national security is the requirement to maintain the survival of the nation-state through the use of economic, military and political power and the exercise of diplomacy. Possessing national security necessarily implies that a nation needs to possess amongst other things, economic security. Because of its inevitable relevance to a nation and its citizens, much money is put in other to provide and maintain security in the society. The brake down of security, law and order spells doom and does no one any good. Once there is brake down of security in a society, lives are lost, properties are destroyed, business

activities are crippled, investments of people are lost, the nation lost heavy revenue, tourism is destroyed, Foreign Direct Investment is lost. Depending on the magnitude of a particular brake down of security, law and order, sometimes, it has degenerated into civil war in some States, sometimes, a ground for military intervention into civil rule in the past in Nigeria for instance. These can potentially be the fall outs of political thuggery where it degenerates into brake down of law and order and insecurity ensues.

Furthermore, insecurity looms in the society as a result of the activities of resultant criminality arising from the wide circulation of arms and ammunition in the hands of criminals which were used for thuggery at election. It becomes difficult to retrieve these arms from the hands of the thugs. Whether eventually settled or not, the thugs find another lucrative use for the arms by indulgence in criminality – armed robbery and it is the society that pays for it.

Delivering a paper on Nigeria: Electoral Violence and National Security, the one-time Inspector General of Police, Tafa A. Balogun conceded to these facts when he said:

... Electoral violence, could, in conjunction with other prevailing factors lead to anarchy and ultimately to political instability. Our experience in the recently concluded elections indicate that there is unbridled flagrancy in the smuggling and use of arms and ammunition by political thugs and party supporters. The result has been that political opponents are either intimidated or outrightly killed or injured.

The implication of all these are that illegal arms get into the hands of unauthorized

persons who used them for criminal activities. Resources which ordinarily would have been spent on developmental projects are spent combating such crimes or repairing damages caused by these hoodlums. Worse still the economic community are (sic) put on the edge and many investors are scare (d) away by the apparent lack of security for their investment. The foregoing is tantamount to a threat to our national security. The recent episode in Kano State illustrates what damage unbridled political gangstarism could cause. It need be emphasized that politics cannot be played with national security. The dangers are unbearable and are better imagined than experienced. Nigeria cannot afford to be thrown into the political quagmire that gave rise to the civil war experience in the late 1960s.

There is therefore the dire need for all hands to be on deck to work assiduously towards averting the repetition of this ugly phenomenon in the country. The time is indeed ripe as the country matches toward 2011 polls. It is the concern of every well thinking Nigerian that the polls should be credible, the votes should count, it should be devoid of violence, rancor, thuggery and above all, free from the above mentioned attendant consequences of thuggery.

While the sure way to achieving this is a total reevaluation of our value systems and involves all Nigerians, the immediate measure which commonly comes to mind is the legal framework. The law is usually preemptive and seeks to prevent the occurrence of acts inimical to the society by prohibiting and providing for punitive measures in order to serve a deferent measure. In this context, what is the position of the Nigerian penal laws

regarding this criminal act of political thuggery at elections? This in the main is the focus of the next discussion.

The Concept of Youth

Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age group. However, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment. Therefore, youth is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This later age limit has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many youth people into a prolonged period of dependency. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) uses different definitions of youth depending on the context. For activities at international or at regional level, such as the African Youth Charter 2006, Article 1 define youth as people between the ages of 15-35 years, AU says Africa has more than 400 million young people aged between the ages of 15 to 35 years. The range reflects prolonged transition due to unemployment, schooling delays, etc. UNESCO uses the United Nations' universal definition. The United Nation, for statistical consistency across regions, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 – 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. All UN statistics on youth are based on this definition, as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics

published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health.

Theoretical Framework

Strain theory in sociology proposal that pressure derived from social factors, such as lack of income or lack of quality education drives individuals to commit crime. The ideas underlying strain theory were first advanced in the 1938 by American sociologist Robert .K. Merton whose work on the subject became especially influential in the 1950s, other researchers set forth similar ideas including Cohen and American sociologist Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin., Classic Strain theories focused primarily on disadvantaged groups, wherein common aspirations e.g realizing the American dream and inability to achieve those goals was considered a driving factor behind crime. Individuals whose incomes placed them below the poverty threshold for example, were unable to realize common socially accepted ambitions through legal means and thus they were forced down a path of criminal behavior to achieve their goals.

Methodology

The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative method for the study, the survey research design, was used. Descriptive statistical tools as methods of data analysis were employed. The study engaged both the primary and secondary sources of data. The required primary data were collected from a sample through the use of structured and unstructured interview and questionnaires. This research relied on three main instruments for data collection: interview,

questionnaire and focus group discussion. Consequently, the study adopted the random sampling technique and convenience sampling, because going by the relevance of the topic to national security a random selection of experts based on purpose in the field of study were selected and interviewed. This is because it is not every member of the population will be included in the sample size, the justification of choices of the technique is because of the nature of the research study. The use of percentage was used to employed. Taro Yamane's formula (1967) was used.

$$n = \frac{N}{n1 + N(e)^2} = 400$$

Where:

n = sample size
 N = population
 e = the level of precision
 95% = 0.05
 99% = 0.01

Interview ; NDLEA officials, Security expert, and pharmacist Also interviewed were two (2) community leaders and associations, two (2) district, village and ward heads, one (1) community association and general public.

Questionnaire; four hundred (400) questionnaire was administered to the thirteen political wards in the study area based on their population, such as traders in the Fagge, Hotoro and Gyadi-Gyadi Local Government markets (Abattoir market, KurnarAsabe market, Koki, Gyadi-Gyadi quarters and other petty traders in the communities). Selected civil servants, students and security experts from Fagge, Hotoro and Gyadi-Gyadi

Local Government officials were also sampled through questionnaire. Sampling procedure used was a stratified sampling. Out of the four hundred (400) questionnaires, three hundred and eighty one 381 (95%) of the questionnaires were returned and duly completed. Therefore, the analysis of data is based on three hundred and eighty one 381 (95%) respondents.

Personal Observation; the researcher visited some of the markets in the mentioned local government areas and wards.

Official Documents; The researcher consulted some file documents in the Police Zonal Office, Kano.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the article addressed the major concepts relevant to the discourse and in doing so, pointed out the causes and effect of political thuggery in Nigeria. The study has critically examined the effect of drug abuse and political thuggery among Nigeria youth in selected local government areas in Kano State, it reveals that tramadol, codeine-based cough syrups and cannabis are the most abused substances, often used to reduce fear, boost aggression and sustain energy during electoral conflicts. The study equally takes a look at national security in Nigeria, establishing that this is a phenomenon that features very strongly in our political process.

Recommendations

- i. The State government should introduce Local Government Areas skill and entrepreneurship programme to close the capability expectation.

- ii. Parents should review their children's upbringing.
- iii. The government should enact stronger laws against thuggery, and politicians to distance themselves from such groups.
- iv. Communities must also take responsibility as thugs are well known in their localities.

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