



NATURE AND IMPLICATIONS OF YOUTH STREET GANG ACTIVITIES ON COMMUNITY SECURITY IN KANO METROPOLIS



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Abstract

This article examines the nature and implications of youth street-gang activities on community security in Kano Metropolis. It is drawn analysis upon social disorganization theory. The study adopted desk-review using existing literature in textbooks, journal articles, conference proceedings, newspapers, magazines, internet materials, etc. It is the findings of the study that these gangs (called Yan Daba) have evolved from informal social fraternities into semi-organised formations engaging in activities like armed robbery, systematic extortion, political thuggery ('Yan jagaliya), drug trafficking and distribution through bush bar networks, during electoral cycles, inter-gang territorial violence (fada clashes), sexual harassment and gender-based violence, and infrastructure vandalism. It also found that gang activities is embedded in the State's political economy, because they are used by political elites who provide impunity and resources in exchange for electoral violence. The analysis demonstrates that gang formation is driven by structural conditions, such as chronic youth unemployment, poverty, rapid urbanisation, and institutional attenuation. The article reveals the high prevalence of gangs in Kano. Their implications for community security include: erosion of public safety and nocturnal curtailment of urban life; normalisation of violence and its intergenerational transmission; strain on law enforcement and erosion of institutional legitimacy; the contested monopoly of violence and fragmentation of governance, etc. The article concludes that the situation is destabilising Kano, the most populous city in northern Nigeria; and reproducing the conditions that render gang participation subjectively rational for successive youth cohorts. To mitigate violent youth gang activities, there should be economic inclusion strategies targeting gang-involved youth; urban governance reforms to rebuild collective efficacy and legitimate neighbourhood institutions; public

health responses to substance abuse; political reforms to sever the gang-politics nexus; educational and social welfare investments.

Keywords: Community security, implications, urban Kano, violence, youth street gangs.

Introduction

Urban Kano is a pre-colonial commercial emporium and enduring centre of Islamic scholarship in West Africa. But this city is witnessing a troubling metamorphosis in its youth subcultures over recent decades (Umar, 2010). These groups of youths provide rudimentary mutual aid and neighbourhood defence. They were historically localized, often ethnic-based social fraternities among young males but progressively assumed characteristics more commonly associated with organised criminal networks (Gore & Pratten, 2003). They are known through vernacular taxonomies including ‘Yan Daba (literally seen as ‘children of strength/men of violence’) and ‘Yan Banga (literally defined as children of the police/area boys, a cheap, often illicit locally distilled spirit) (Ahmed, Abba & Ibrahim, 2024). Today, they constitute a significant source of insecurity within Kano’s densely stratified urban morphology (Ibrahim, 2017). Kano State exhibits some of the country’s most acute developmental deficits among its youthful demographic. This is evident in youth unemployment rates persistently exceeding national averages, while literacy levels, particularly among males in informal settlements, remain markedly low (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). Simultaneously, Kano’s strategic position within trans-Saharan and regional trade networks has historically engendered a complex, densely contested urban space, wherein indigeneity and ‘settler’ status generate persistent inter-group tensions (Umar, 2010). This is particularly salient in Sabon Gari, established for Southern Nigerian migrants during colonial rule. It is within these interstitial zones of economic precarity and ethno-religious ambiguity that gang structures have demonstrated the greatest resilience and capacity for regeneration (Albert, 2007).

The political appropriation of ‘Yan Daba constitutes a recurring motif in Kano’s contemporary political history. From the Second Republic onwards, aspirants to state power have mobilised these groups as thugs (‘yan tauri) for disruption of opposition rallies, voter intimidation, and, on occasion, post-election violence (Rufai, 2015). This symbiotic yet asymmetric relationship furnishes gangs with both protective impunity and financial resources, whilst simultaneously embedding them within patronage networks that extend from ward-level politicians to

gubernatorial contenders (Fourchard, 2011). Consequently, state security apparatus frequently exhibit profound ambivalence toward gang suppression, oscillating between periodic crackdowns and tacit accommodation. This equivocation erodes public confidence in formal policing mechanisms and perpetuates cycles of extra-judicial reprisal and communal vigilantism (Hills, 2008).

Community security in urban Kano must therefore be understood not merely as the absence of physical violence but as encompassing perceived safety, freedom of movement, unfettered economic exchange, and the resilience of informal social controls (UN-Habitat, 2020). Evidence from Fagge and Dorayi communities within Kano city indicates that gang presence distorts local economies through systematic extortion (tsangaya or 'levies') imposed upon traders, transporters, and small-scale manufacturers (Dan-Asabe, 2019). Moreover, territorial contestation between rival factions engenders spatial fragmentation, effectively creating 'no-go' areas and compelling residents to negotiate daily movement under threat of harassment or physical assault (International Crisis Group: ICG, 2021). Such conditions corrode the quotidian trust essential for functional urban coexistence.

Scholarly attention to youth violence in Northern Nigeria has historically concentrated upon ethno-religious conflict and, more recently, upon insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin (Thurston, 2017; Mustapha, 2014). There are studies on the profound impact of youth gangs on social cohesion, economic activity, and perceptions of state legitimacy (Pratten, 2008; Umar, 2010; Momale, 2018). Yet, there is considerably less academic scrutiny directed toward neighbourhood-level criminality exercised by 'Yan Daba and cognate groups. Thus, the present study will find answers to two research questions: 1) What is the nature of youth street gang activities in Kano Metropolis? and What are the implications of youth street-gang activities on community security in the study area?

In view of this, the study will therefore fill the above research gap by examining the nature and implications of youth street-gang activities on community security in Kano Metropolis

Conceptual Clarifications

This section will conceptualise the key terms used in the study, including youth street gangs and community security.

Youth Street Gangs: The term 'gang' carries considerable semantic baggage. It frequently evokes imagery derived from North American and

European criminological traditions (Klein, 1995). In this study, youth street gangs are conceptualised as loosely semi-organised collectivities of predominantly male adolescents and young adults who assert varying degrees of territorial control or claims thereof over particular urban neighbourhoods, markets, or transport nodes (Ahmed et al., 2024). These gangs' collective identity is performatively enacted through distinctive vernacular registers, embodied dispositions, sartorial codes, and, increasingly, digital signifying practices (Ibrahim, 2017). The age parameters warrant explication. Whilst statutory definitions of youth in Nigerian policy documents frequently terminate at twenty-nine or thirty years (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019). Ethnographic evidence from Kano demonstrates that gang membership, particularly in leadership echelons, frequently extends into the mid-thirties (Momale, 2018). This temporal extension reflects both the protracted transition to socially recognised adulthood (predicated upon economic independence and marital establishment) and the path-dependent trajectories of individuals socialised into gang structures during adolescence who remain embedded within these networks due to truncated licit economic opportunities (Honwana, 2012).

Crucially, the designation 'street gang' does not imply fixed, bureaucratised organisational forms. Kano's gangs exhibit what Pratten (2008) terms 'rhizomatic' structures: decentralised, horizontally networked, and capable of rapid reconfiguration in response to shifting political opportunities or security force pressure. The vernacular nomenclature itself signals important distinctions. 'Yan Daba' etymologically connotes 'children of strength'. It is historically reference to young men embodying martial prowess and neighbourhood defence functions, a category possessing ambivalent moral valence (Last, 2005). 'Yan Banga' (literally 'children of the police/area') indexes the spatialised, territorial dimension of gang identity, whilst 'Yan Shara' denominates those groups more explicitly oriented around substance consumption and, consequently, frequently positioned lower in informal hierarchies of prestige (Dan-Asabe, 2019). These categories are neither mutually exclusive nor stable; individuals and factions migrate between identifications as contexts dictate.

Community Security: Within mainstream security studies and criminology, the term community security has historically been framed negatively. It is the absence of violent crime or the effective operation of formal criminal justice institutions (Baldwin, 1997). This state-centric, law-enforcement orientation proves inadequate for understanding security

dynamics in contexts where the state's monopoly on legitimate violence is partial and contested, and where formal policing institutions are frequently experienced as extractive, abusive, or indifferent (Kyed, 2019). This study conceptualises community security based on human security frameworks (UN-Habitat, 2020). Thus, community security encompasses not merely the objective absence of physical violence or property crime, but fundamentally the subjective experience of safety among diverse neighbourhood residents; the unimpeded functioning of informal economic exchanges that constitute the lifeblood of Kano's vast popular economy; and the resilience of neighbourhood-level social institutions in the face of coercive pressure or predation. These institutions include mosque committees, market associations, *zumunta* (kinship networks), and *tsangaya* (traditional Quranic school) systems (Moser & McIlwaine, 2014).

This conceptualisation foregrounds the relational and spatial dimensions of security. Security perceptions are stratified by gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. This is because who feels safe, where, when, and under what conditions are not neutral questions (Pain, 2009). In Kano's densely contested neighbourhoods, security is also profoundly territorialised: gang presence produces micro-geographies of fear, boundaries invisible to the cartographer yet viscerally legible to residents who must navigate them daily (Momale, 2018). The concept of community security thus entails attentiveness to these fine-grained spatial variations and their intersection with existing patterns of urban marginality. Furthermore, community security possesses an ineluctable institutional dimension. It requires that neighbourhood-level governance structures can operate without systematic coercion, capture, or intimidation by armed actors (Baker, 2005). In extensive areas of metropolitan Kano, evidence suggests gang leaders exercise substantial influence over dispute resolution, access to public space, and even the distribution of state welfare palliatives, effectively displacing or subordinating legitimate community leadership (Rufai, 2015). Such conditions constitute a profound deficit of community security, irrespective of officially recorded crime statistics.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Disorganization Theory. The theory was originally developed by Shaw and McKay (1942), which explains how structural characteristics of neighbourhoods influence patterns of crime and delinquency. The theory posits that crime is not randomly distributed but is concentrated in areas characterized by poverty, residential instability,

and social heterogeneity. These conditions weaken informal mechanisms of social control and reduce a community's ability to regulate behaviour, thereby creating an enabling environment for criminal activities. In this study, the theory is specifically applied to explain the spatial concentration and persistence of youth street gang activities across neighbourhoods in Kano metropolis. Rather than merely describing the existence or activities of youth gangs, the framework is used to understand why such activities are more prevalent and sustained in certain urban environments than others. This focus aligns with the study's research questions by providing a structural explanation for the observed patterns of gang activities and their implications for community security.

Central to Social Disorganization Theory is the concept of collective efficacy, defined as the combination of social cohesion among residents and their willingness to intervene for the common good (Sampson et al., 1997). Where collective efficacy is weak, communities are less capable of maintaining social order, which increases the likelihood of delinquent behaviours, including youth gang formation and violent activities. Recent empirical studies continue to validate the relevance of Social Disorganization Theory, while also refining its application. For instance, research demonstrates that neighbourhood-level structural conditions, such as socio-economic disadvantage and weak institutional presence, remain significant predictors of crime and gang-related activities (Sampson, 2019; Wo & Hipp, 2017). Similarly, Sharkey et al. (2017) show that the presence or absence of community-based institutions can significantly influence levels of violence, reinforcing the importance of local social organization. Other studies have emphasized the role of spatial and environmental factors in shaping crime patterns, further supporting the argument that neighbourhood context is critical in understanding urban insecurity (Steenbeek & Weisburd, 2018).

However, contemporary scholarship also highlights important limitations of the theory, particularly in non-Western contexts. Critics argue that what is often described as "disorganization" may instead reflect alternative forms of social organization that do not conform to formal or state-centric expectations (Pratten, 2008). This perspective is particularly relevant in African urban settings, where informal networks, kinship systems, and religious institutions continue to play significant roles in structuring social life. In the context of Kano metropolis, rapid urbanization, population growth, and socio-economic pressures have significantly transformed traditional systems of social control. While historically embedded institutions such as kinship networks and religious associations have

provided mechanisms of cohesion and regulation, these structures have increasingly been strained by demographic expansion, economic hardship, and urban fragmentation. As a result, certain neighbourhoods experience weakened collective efficacy, creating conditions conducive to the emergence and persistence of youth street gangs.

Thus, Social Disorganization Theory provides a useful analytical lens for linking neighbourhood structural conditions to the uneven distribution, organization, and intensity of youth gang activities, as well as their broader implications for community security. By situating youth gang activities within the context of urban social structure, the theory enables a deeper understanding of both the patterns of gang behaviour and the varying levels of insecurity experienced across communities in Kano metropolis.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative desk review design. In other words, it relies on secondary data to examine the nature of youth street gang activities and their implications for community security in Kano metropolis. The choice of this approach is informed by its suitability for synthesizing dispersed empirical, theoretical, and policy-oriented literature, particularly in contexts where primary data collection may be constrained by issues of access, safety, or sensitivity. By drawing on existing sources, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of youth gang dynamics and their broader security implications.

Study Area and Justification: The study focuses on Kano metropolis in Kano, one of the largest and most densely populated urban centers in Northern Nigeria. The selection of Kano is justified by its rapid urbanization, complex socio-economic structure, and the persistent prevalence of youth street gangs, locally referred to as Yan daba. Over time, the metropolis has witnessed recurring incidents of gang-related violence, street criminality, and drug abuse, making it a critical site for examining urban insecurity (. Furthermore, Kano's role as a major commercial and migration hub contributes to increased social pressures, including unemployment, urban poverty, and informal settlement expansion, all of which have been linked to youth involvement in gang activities. The city has also been frequently referenced in reports by security agencies and civil society organizations as an area experiencing significant challenges related to street-level violence. These characteristics make Kano metropolis a relevant and representative case for exploring the intersection between youth gang activities and community security.

Analytical Categories and Operationalization: In line with the research questions guiding this study, two key analytical categories structure the analysis: the nature of youth street gang activities and the implications of these activities for community security. Rather than treating these as rigid quantitative variables, the study conceptualizes them as qualitative constructs that can be examined through recurring patterns in the literature.

The *nature of youth street gang activities* is understood in terms of the forms, organization, and operational patterns of such groups. This includes documented evidence of street violence, theft, drug use and distribution, and extortion, as well as patterns of group formation, territorial control, recruitment dynamics, and the use of weapons in public spaces. These elements are derived from ethnographic studies, empirical research, and policy reports that describe how youth gangs operate within urban settings.

The *implications for community security* are conceptualized as the effects of these activities on the safety, stability, and social well-being of residents. This is reflected in patterns such as the incidence of crime and violence, the level of fear and perceived insecurity among community members, disruptions to economic and social life, and the erosion of trust and social cohesion. These dimensions are widely discussed in human security and urban criminology literature and provide a basis for interpreting the broader consequences of gang activities.

Data Sources and Search Strategy: A structured literature search was conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar and Research Gate. It is also complemented by institutional and organizational repositories. The search process involved the use of relevant keywords, including “youth gangs,” “street gangs,” “Yan daba,” “urban crime,” “community security,” “Kano,” and “Northern Nigeria,” applied in various combinations to identify relevant materials. The study draws on a wide range of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government publications, and reports from non-governmental organizations such as Human Rights Watch, as well as credible media reports. This multi-source approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the subject by incorporating both academic perspectives and real-world observations.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: The selection of materials was guided by clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The study primarily focuses on literature published between 2017 and 2025 in order to ensure that the analysis reflects current trends and realities. However, earlier

works were included where they provide important theoretical or conceptual insights relevant to the Study. Materials were included if they address youth gangs, street-level criminality, or community security and offer empirical, analytical, or policy-relevant insights, particularly within the Nigerian context or comparable settings. Conversely, sources were excluded where they lacked methodological rigor, were not directly related to the study focus, or were outdated without contributing meaningful theoretical perspectives.

Data Analysis: The study employs thematic analysis as its primary analytical technique. This involved an iterative process of reading and re-reading the selected materials in order to identify recurring patterns and themes. Data were coded in relation to the two central analytical categories, namely the nature of youth gang activities and their implications for community security. Through this process, related ideas and findings were grouped into broader themes, allowing for a coherent synthesis of evidence across diverse sources. This analytical approach ensures that the findings are directly aligned with the research questions, while also enabling the identification of relationships between different aspects of youth gang activities and their effects on community security.

Validity and Limitations: To enhance the credibility of the study, a strategy of triangulation was adopted, drawing on multiple sources including academic literature, policy reports, and media accounts. This helps to minimize bias and strengthens the reliability of the findings by allowing for cross-verification of information. However, the study is not without limitations. Its reliance on secondary data means that it may not fully capture rapidly evolving or highly localized dynamics of youth gang activities within Kano metropolis. Additionally, variations in the quality and depth of available sources may influence the scope of the analysis.

Ethical Considerations and Use of AI Tools: The study is based entirely on publicly available secondary data and does not involve direct interaction with human participants. As such, it does not pose ethical risks associated with primary data collection. Nevertheless, all sources have been carefully acknowledged to ensure academic integrity. Artificial intelligence tools were used in a limited capacity to support language refinement and clarity in parts of the manuscript. The identification of sources, conceptual development, analysis, and overall organization of the study remain the original work of the researcher.

The Nature of Youth Gang Activities in Urban Kano

The operational repertoire of youth street gangs in metropolitan Kano is characterised by considerable diversification, adaptive hybridisation, and contextual variation across neighbourhoods and temporal cycles. Drawing upon available ethnographic studies, human rights documentation, media reports, and the limited but cumulatively significant survey data, this section provides a systematic typological analysis of some interconnected gang activities as follows:

Armed Robbery and Extortion: Extraction of regular payments from economic actors constitutes the most pervasive and institutionally embedded of gang revenue streams. Termed variously *jagaliya*, *kudin kafa* (literally ‘foot money’), or *tsangaya* across different Kano neighbourhoods, this systematic extortion targets an expansive range of victims: market traders, shopkeepers, transport operators (particularly minibus danfo and motorcycle achaba drivers), small-scale manufacturers, and, on occasion, residential households (Momale, 2018). The modality varies from spontaneous, intimidatory demands to routinised weekly or monthly collections, with amounts calibrated to victims’ perceived capacity to pay and the coercive credibility of the gang. What distinguishes *jagaliya* from simple predation is its quasi-regulatory character. In extensive informal economies operating beyond effective state oversight, gangs construct parallel taxation systems, sometimes issuing informal receipts or tokens and, in return, providing limited protections or selectively, recovering stolen property (Fourchard, 2011). This functional ambivalence complicates straightforward criminalisation. Victims simultaneously resent extortionary demands and, in the absence of functional policing, may perceive gang-regulated environments as marginally more predictable and less violent than unregulated open-access predation (Umar, 2010). The persistence of *jagaliya* thus indexes not only gang coercive capacity but also the profound deficits of state protection in Kano’s popular economy.

Armed robbery is distinguished from extortion by its episodic, often opportunistic character. It constitutes a second, overlapping revenue stream. Targets include residential properties in affluent or mixed neighbourhoods, commercial premises, and individuals transiting through gang-controlled territories at night (Ibrahim, 2017). Weaponry has historically comprised machetes, knives, and clubs, though contemporary reports indicate increasing, if still relatively limited, access to locally manufactured pistols and, on rare occasions, military-style rifles (ICG, 2021). This armament dynamic is self-reinforcing. Its perceived threats

from rival gangs or security forces incentivise weapon acquisition, which in turn escalates the lethality of both inter-gang and gang-community violence.

Drug Trafficking and Consumption: The nexus between gang activity and psychoactive substance economies constitutes both an economic foundation and a symbolic-cultural matrix. Gangs exercise substantial control over retail-level distribution of an expanding pharmacopoeia: cannabis (weed, igbo), non-medical prescription opioids (notably tramadol, in both 100mg and 200mg formulations), codeine-based cough syrups, and increasingly methamphetamine and other synthetic compounds (HRW, 2019). Inhalants are locally manufactured solvents, petrol, and industrial adhesives. They are also prevalent, particularly among younger, lower-status affiliates. The spatial nodes of this economy are bush bars or joints. Semi-concealed open-air or rudimentarily constructed sites within gang territories where substances are retailed and consumed (Hussein et al. 2027). These sites perform multiple functions beyond commerce. They constitute socialisation arenas wherein subcultural identities are performatively enacted, hierarchies negotiated, and solidarity rituals (collective consumption, narrative exchange) conducted (Ahmed et al., 2024). They also function as operational bases. Recruitment venues, planning spaces, and sites of temporary refuge from security force patrols. The bush bar ecology thus exemplifies the fusion of economic, social, and territorial dimensions characteristic of Kano's gang formations.

Political Thuggery: Perhaps the most politically consequential dimension of Kano's gang phenomenon is the systematic instrumentalisation of youth collectives within electoral competition (Rufai, 2015). These mobilised gangs constitute critical infrastructure for political entrepreneurs seeking to disrupt opposition rallies, intimidate voters, suppress turnout in hostile wards, and, on polling day, perpetrate ballot box theft and result falsification (Umar, 2010). The phenomenon is not novel; thuggery has characterised Northern Nigerian electoral politics since the Second Republic. However, contemporary manifestations exhibit greater organisational sophistication, deeper integration into candidate campaign structures, and more systematic remuneration (HRW, 2019).

The political-gang nexus is asymmetrically symbiotic. Politicians acquire disposable coercive capacity without formal responsibility or accountability, whilst gangs receive financial payments, drugs, weapons, and protective impunity from arrest and prosecution (Fourchard, 2011). This impunity dimension is decisive; it signals to gang members and their

communities that state security apparatus are not neutral enforcers of law but rather resources selectively deployed against some offenders whilst accommodating others, contingent upon political connections (Hills, 2008). Post-election periods frequently witness the abrupt termination of this protective shield, as erstwhile patrons authorise security force crackdowns to demonstrate governance competence and eliminate now-embarrassing assets (ICG, 2021). This cyclical pattern structures gang-state relations and profoundly shapes gang members' temporal horizons and risk calculations.

Inter-Gang Violence: These conflicts are fundamentally territorial, concerning control over extortion circuits, drug distribution nodes, transport routes, and the symbolic capital accruing from successful defence or expansion of gang dominion (Ahmed et al. 2024). *Fada* clashes exhibit characteristic patterns. Precipitated by perceived encroachment upon established territory, violation of informal non-aggression pacts, or disputes over illicit market shares, confrontations typically involve groups ranging from half a dozen to, on documented occasions, over a hundred participants. Weaponry includes machetes (*adduna*), knives, cudgels, broken bottles, and, increasingly, firearms (Ibrahim, 2017). Lethality has escalated; hospital and media reports document fatalities from *fada* violence with mounting frequency, alongside severe injuries including limb amputations and facial disfigurements.

Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence: Gang presence in public space is productive of distinctive forms of gender-based insecurity. Multiple accounts document the routine harassment of women and girls transiting through gang-controlled territories, particularly during evening hours and in neighbourhoods characterised by weak formal surveillance and limited street lighting (Ibrahim, 2017; HRW, 2019). Modalities range from verbal harassment and unwanted physical contact to sexual assault, with victims frequently unable or unwilling to report incidents to police due to anticipated indifference, secondary victimisation, or fear of reprisal. The gendered dimensions of gang territoriality require analytical specification. Gang masculinities are performatively constructed through public displays of heterosexual prowess, sexual conquest narratives circulating within all-male peer groups as status markers (Barker & Ricardo, 2005). Public space thus becomes a stage upon which masculine competence is demonstrated, and women's bodies become symbolic territory; markers of gang dominance over both rivals and the civilian population (Miller, 2001). This is not incidental to gang activity but constitutive of gang identity and internal hierarchy.

Property Vandalism and Infrastructure Theft: A final activity category, frequently overshadowed by more spectactheftular violent crime, nonetheless carries significant cumulative consequences for community welfare and urban governance. Gangs participate extensively in the and resale of public and private infrastructure components: electrical cables, copper wiring, aluminium roofing sheets, plumbing fixtures, manhole covers, and railway track fittings (Momale, 2018). This activity is economically rational as scrap metal markets provide ready, minimally regulated outlets. It is also logistically facilitated by gang territorial control, which enables covert dismantling and transportation. The community security implications are indirect but substantial. Cable theft disrupts electricity supply, disabling street lighting, refrigeration, and domestic and commercial activities reliant upon the notoriously unstable Kano power grid. Vandalised water infrastructure compounds already-severe deficits in potable water access. These cumulative disruptions erode perceptions of functional urban governance, reinforcing resignation and dependency upon informal, frequently gang-mediated, coping arrangements (UN-Habitat, 2020). They also represent a regressive redistribution of public assets from general taxpayers to criminal networks and their scrap-market interlocutors.

Implications of Gang Activities on Community Security in Kano

This section deals with Implications of gang activities on community security in Kano. The constellation of gang activities elaborated in the preceding section generates cascading and mutually reinforcing consequences for community security across metropolitan Kano. The gang-induced insecurity is not a series of discrete harms but a systemic condition. Thus, the implications of gang activities on community security in Kano include:

Erosion of Public Safety and the Privatisation of Fear

The most immediate and pervasive implication of gang presence is the profound erosion of daily public safety. There are residents of high-gang neighbourhoods like Fagge, Sabon Gari, Nasarawa, Dorayi. These residents and expanding peripheries inhabit what might be termed nocturnal curfew regimes not formally mandated but socially enforced through fear (Momale, 2018). Evening hours witness the withdrawal of legitimate users from streets, markets, and transport nodes, ceding these spaces to gang members and those engaged in illicit economies. This temporal-spatial evacuation carries multiple consequences. First, it systematically constrains economic activity. Market women unable to transport goods during evening hours, artisans compelled to cease

production before nightfall, and consumers reluctant to patronise evening retail outlets experience tangible livelihood diminution (Dan-Asabe, 2019).

Second, it erodes what Jacobs (1961) termed ‘eyes on the street’ - the informal, collective surveillance produced by routine pedestrian presence that constitutes crime’s most effective deterrent. Third, it generates what Pain (2009) identifies as the emotional geopolitics of fear. This fear include the internalisation of spatial boundaries, the mental mapping of safe and unsafe routes, the anticipatory anxiety accompanying necessary movement through gang-controlled territories. This fear is not evenly distributed; women, girls, elderly persons, and ethnic minorities within heterogeneous neighbourhoods experience disproportionately acute safety deficits (HRW, 2019). Critically, the erosion of public safety undermines the social capital upon which functional neighbourhoods depend (Putnam, 2000). Social capital involves networks of reciprocity, trust, and mutual obligation. When residents retreat into domestic fortification, when neighbours cease to know neighbours, when public space becomes the exclusive province of armed actors, the informal social control mechanisms that historically regulated conduct in Kano’s densely settled quarters atrophy.

Normalisation of Violence and Intergenerational Transmission

A second implication, developmental in character and potentially more enduring than immediate victimisation, is the normalisation of violence within the habitus of children and adolescents socialised in high-gang environments. Multiple ethnographic accounts document the progressive desensitisation of youth exposed to frequent displays of coercive force, fatal and non-fatal injury, and the quotidian spectacle of armed young men commanding public space through intimidation (Ahmed et al. 2024). This normalisation operates through several mechanisms. The youth gang clashes, extortion encounters, or security force raids, indicated violence with familiarity, which is common in the urban Kano (Ibrahim, 2017). Narrative immersion constructs aspirational pathways for impressionable youth. The narrative immersion is in form of circulation of gang lore, celebration of particularly ‘successful’ gang figures, vernacular discourses that frame violence as legitimate masculine accomplishment (Ibrahim, 2017). There is material demonstration like the conspicuous consumption of gang-affiliated young men, their access to resources otherwise unattainable within licit economies. Material demonstration renders violence instrumental, a rational career strategy rather than moral aberration (Ahmed et al. 2024).

The intergenerational transmission of gang affiliation is empirically well-documented. Younger siblings of gang members, boys resident in proximity to bush bars, and adolescents recruited into lower-tier roles (surveillance, message delivery, substance retail) progressively assume more central gang functions as they mature (Ahmed et al. 2024). This social reproduction of gang labour perpetuates the phenomenon across cohorts, rendering episodic security force interventions (targeted arrests, camp dismantlements) insufficient absent complementary investments in alternative opportunity structures and counter-narrative cultivation.

Economic Disruption and the Illicit Taxation of the Popular Economy

Gang extortionary practices (*jagaliya*, *kudin kafa*, *tsangaya*) constitute a systematic illicit taxation regime bearing disproportionately upon Kano's vast informal economy. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) estimates that informal employment comprises 80–90% of Nigeria's non-agricultural workforce; in Kano, with its deep mercantile traditions and limited formal sector absorption capacity, this proportion is likely higher. Gang predation upon this sector generates cascading economic insecurities. Direct effects include increased operating costs for micro-enterprises operating on minimal margins. Market traders, transport operators, and small-scale manufacturers compelled to remit regular protection payments experience suppressed profits, reduced capacity for reinvestment, and, in marginal cases, business closure (Dan-Asabe, 2019). These effects propagate along value chains; transporters passing through multiple gang-controlled junctions face compounded extortion, costs ultimately borne by consumers through elevated prices. Informal economy is conventionally conceptualised as operating beyond state regulatory reach. The informal economy operates under an alternative, gang-imposed regulatory framework that is simultaneously extractive and, as earlier noted, occasionally productive of minimal order (Umar, 2010).

Indirect effects encompass investment disincentives and spatial restructuring of economic activity. Capital, even modest capital, seeks secure environments; neighbourhoods with entrenched gang presence experience capital flight to perceived safer zones, reinforcing spatial inequalities and the concentration of poverty (Momale, 2018). Businesses that remain confront elevated security expenditures, representing deadweight losses that could otherwise finance productive expansion or employment generation. This, according to Ibrahim (2017), is due to private guards, fortified premises, surveillance technology. The cumulative consequence is the reproduction and deepening of the very

unemployment deficits that structural analyses identify as foundational to gang formation.

Strain on Law Enforcement and the Legitimacy Deficit

Gang prevalence both reflects and compounds profound deficits in formal policing capacity and legitimacy. The Nigeria Police Force, historically underfunded, undermanned relative to international benchmarks, and organisationally afflicted by systemic corruption, confronts severe constraints in addressing urban gang violence (Hills, 2008; HRW, 2019). These constraints are not merely resource-based but also political and operational. Political-gang nexus generates what might be termed selective enforcement regimes. Gang members possessing political protection operate with impunity. Their arrest and prosecution are not possible due to elite intervention (Rufai, 2015). The elite protection for the gangsters is through the intervention of elected officials, party functionaries, or their intermediaries. This selective enforcement is publicly legible. Residents observe that some offenders face swift sanction whilst others, identically situated in legal terms, evade accountability. The inescapable inference (that law is not a universal code equally applicable but a resource selectively deployed) corrodes institutional legitimacy and extinguishes the voluntary compliance that functional legal orders require (Tyler, 2006).

Simultaneously, allegations of direct police-gang collusion persist. While systematic evidence remains elusive, ethnographic accounts document instances of officers accepting bribes to forewarn of impending raids, return confiscated contraband, or release arrested affiliates (HRW, 2019). Whether such instances represent individual venality or more structured accommodation remains contested; their cumulative effect upon public confidence, however, is unambiguous. In the words of Pratten (2008), communities perceiving security forces as unreliable, corrupt, or actively complicit in gang predation disengage from formal reporting mechanisms.

Undermining of Governance and the Contested Monopoly of Violence

Weber's (1946) foundational definition of the state as the human community claiming successful monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a territory remains the conventional benchmark against which governance capacity is assessed. By this metric, extensive zones of metropolitan Kano exhibit significant state deficits. Gang capacity to exercise coercive force without authorisation or effective suppression by constituted authority constitutes a fundamental challenge to state sovereignty (Rodgers, 2006). This is not, however, a zero-sum

displacement. The gang-state relationship can be more accurately characterised as hybrid governance: overlapping, sometimes competitive, sometimes collaborative, frequently ambiguous (Boege et al., 2009). Gangs do not seek to supplant the state in any revolutionary sense but rather to negotiate advantageous positions within extant power configurations. They secure impunity, access state-distributed resources, and instrumentalise political competition for their collective benefit (Volkov, 2002).

The consequence is not the absence of governance but its fragmentation: the coexistence of multiple, differentially legitimate, and variably coercive governance authorities within shared geographic space. This fragmentation carries profound implications for democratic governance beyond immediate security domains. Elections contested through thuggery rather than programmatic competition produce representatives whose accountability lies with gang patrons rather than constituents (Umar, 2010). State resources diverted to purchase gang compliance represent opportunity costs for social investment. The rule of law, apprehended by citizens as selectively applied, loses prescriptive force. These cumulative deficits reproduce the very conditions that structural analyses identify as generative of political violence more broadly (Keen, 2012). The conditions are weak institutions, elite impunity and popular disenchantment.

Public Health Crisis and Social Reproduction of Vulnerability

The gang-drug economy nexus generates a parallel public health crisis with distinct implications for community security (Hussein, Mukhtar & Umar, 2017). Kano, historically peripheral to Nigeria's major narcotics trafficking routes, has experienced significant expansion of domestic substance markets, with gangs positioned as critical retail distribution nodes (NDLEA, 2022). The health consequences of endemic substance abuse - particularly of tramadol, codeine syrup, cannabis, and solvent inhalants- are multidimensional and intergenerationally transmitted. Individual-level consequences include elevated morbidity and mortality from overdose, contaminated substances, and secondary infections; accelerated onset of psychotic disorders among chronic cannabis and synthetic cannabinoid users; and severe dental, gastrointestinal, and neurological pathologies associated with prolonged codeine consumption (HRW, 2019). Familial consequences encompass economic depletion as dependent users exhaust household resources; domestic violence associated with intoxication and withdrawal; and the breakdown of marital and parental relationships (Barker & Ricardo, 2005).

Community-level consequences include the proliferation of open-air consumption sites as foci of disorder, the recruitment of users into debt-bondage arrangements with supplier gangs, and the reproduction across generations of substance-dependent populations through neonatal abstinence syndrome and disrupted caregiving environments. These health deficits are simultaneously security deficits. Communities burdened by concentrated addiction exhibit diminished collective efficacy, reduced capacity for informal social control, and heightened vulnerability to gang penetration and control (Sampson et al., 1997). The public health and community security crises are thus not discrete but intimately intertwined, each reinforcing the other in a descending spiral that eludes conventional sectoral interventions.

Social Fragmentation and the Territorialisation of Mistrust

The final implication analysed here concerns the production of social fragmentation through gang territorialisation. ‘Yan Daba and cognate groups do not merely occupy space; they actively produce space, inscribing boundaries, erecting both physical and symbolic barriers, and enforcing differential access regimes that segment Kano’s urban fabric into archipelagos of contested control (Momale, 2018). These invisible yet viscerally legible borders generate multiple forms of insecurity. There is freedom of movement like Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is constitutionally guaranteed in Nigeria. This freedom is substantively abrogated for residents required to traverse gang territories to access employment, education, healthcare, or kinship networks (ICG, 2021). Identity markers (dress, accent, neighbourhood of origin) become potential grounds for harassment, extortion, or violence at crossing points. The resulting spatial confinement, particularly acute for women and youth, constitutes a fundamental capability deprivation in Sen’s (1999) sense: the restriction of substantive freedom to choose where and how one lives.

Fragmentation also operates at the symbolic level of collective identity. Ethnic heterogeneity, identified by Social Disorganization Theory as a structural covariate of crime, does not automatically generate conflict; rather, it is the politicisation of ethnic difference within contexts of resource scarcity and institutional weakness that produces antagonism (Albert, 2007). Gang territorialism frequently maps onto and exacerbates existing ethnic and settler-indigene cleavages, transforming neighbourhood identity from a descriptor of residence into a marker of political allegiance and potential enmity. According to Putnam (2000), the cumulative consequence is the progressive atomisation of urban society,

the contraction of cross-cutting solidarities, and the erosion of the collective efficacy essential for both crime control and democratic citizenship.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article examines the nature and implications of youth street-gang activities on community security in Kano Metropolis. Youth street gang activities in urban Kano constitute a significant and enduring threat to community security, one that is simultaneously symptomatic of deeper structural pathologies and generative of new modalities of violence, extraction, and social fragmentation. This article has demonstrated that the 'Yan Daba, 'Yan Banga and cognate formations are not reducible to criminal enterprises alone, nor are they adequately apprehended through frameworks that frame them as mere social deviance. Rather, these collectives emerge at the confluence of profound socioeconomic deprivation, institutional attenuation, political instrumentalisation, and the crisis of masculine identity formation in contexts where conventional pathways to socially recognised adulthood have become structurally obstructed. They are, in the most precise sense, hybrid formations: simultaneously predatory and, on occasion, productive of limited order; economically rational yet symbolically expressive; marginalised yet deeply embedded within political and economic configurations of Kano.

The implications of gang activity for community security, as systematically analysed, extend far beyond the immediate harms of criminal victimisation. Gang presence reconfigures the spatiotemporal rhythms of urban life, effectively ceding extensive zones of the city to nocturnal governance by armed young men. It imposes a regressive illicit taxation regime upon Kano's vast popular economy, suppressing livelihoods, distorting markets, and reproducing the very unemployment deficits that structural analyses identify as generative of gang formation. It compromises the legitimacy and effectiveness of formal policing institutions through both selective enforcement regimes that insulate politically connected offenders and, on credible accounts, direct collusion. It fragments the urban social fabric, inscribing invisible yet viscerally enforced territorial boundaries that constrain freedom of movement, intensify ethnic and settler-indigene cleavages, and erode the cross-cutting solidarities upon which both collective efficacy and democratic citizenship depend. Perhaps most critically, gang violence and the normalisation of coercive masculine performance within gang-dominated neighbourhoods risk intergenerational transmission. Children and adolescents socialised within environments where armed young men command public space,

extract resources, and evade accountability internalise frames of reference in which violence becomes not aberrant but expectable, not morally repugnant but instrumentally rational.

1. Government and NGOs should create targeted youth employment programs, vocational training centers, and sports/recreation facilities to provide alternatives to gang life.
2. Strengthen trust between the police and communities through regular dialogue, non-corrupt engagement, and the establishment of police posts in hotspot areas.
3. There should be effort at expanding NDLEA and public health efforts to provide accessible drug treatment and launch grassroots awareness campaigns on substance abuse.
4. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies should enforce laws against political violence. Government must prosecute politicians who sponsor gangs as thugs.
5. Government should promote formal and informal education, including peace education and conflict resolution skills within school curricula and almajiri integration programs.
6. There should be support for registered, law-abiding neighborhood watch groups that collaborate transparently with police, avoiding extra-judicial actions.
7. It is also important to encourage localized, participatory action research to understand gang dynamics in specific wards and design context-specific solutions.

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