

The Origin And Modus Operandi Of Yan Shila Street Gang In Yola Metropolis Of Adamawa State, Nigeria

¹amon Rimamtanung Stephen, ²henry Ishaya, ³bonzena Dauda Cletus, ⁴ika Emmanuel

¹department Of Political Science, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

²department Of Political Science And International Relations, Taraba State University, Jalingo- Nigeria

³taraba State Polytechnic Suntai Department Of Public Administration

⁴department Of Education Foundation, College Of Education Zing, Taraba State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: Adamwa state witnessed several activities of Yan shila street gang members in Yola metropolis. Yang shila street gang is an organized group of notorious young males and few females that engaged in criminal activities including theft, burglary, and assault, threatening peace and security in Adamawa state. The authors used content analysis that is secondary method of data analysis by relying on Journals, newspapers etc, to carry out this researched, the study adopted strain theory, and findings revealed that lack of jobs and skill acquisition among the youths is the reasoned for the menace of Yan shila street gang in Adamawa state. And this paper recommended that government should create more jobs for the youths and also arrest and prosecute the kingpins that are financing the activities of Yan shila street gang in Adamawa state s

Keywords: Origin, Mudus Operandi, Yan Shila, Street Gang, Yola, Metropolis

Introduction

Shila Boys are youths of 15 to 25 years who engage in street larceny and have been terrorizing the residents of Yola, the Adamawa state capital for years. The bad boys who specialize in snatching of items such as phones, computers, handbags, purses, money, among others, usually disguise as commercial tricycle operators within the city. The gang started its wicked acts during the administration of former Governor Muhammad Umar Jibrilla Bindow. The crime being committed by the Shila Boys is not limited to snatching of properties, but sometimes, they inflict injuries or killed their victims with machetes (Bilyaminu, 2020). This has posed a great threat to the freedom of movement of the people, making it difficult for them to go about doing their normal businesses, because of the fear of being attacked by the Shila street gang (Bilyaminu, 2020).

Shila group's activities rose to its peak towards the 2019 general elections. Reports then showed that phones and other valuable items of politicians and party loyalists were snatched during campaigns. The nefarious acts of the criminals continued even after the inauguration of Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri in May, 2019. The governor, while speaking shortly after being sworn in, promised that, under his watch, security of lives and properties of the citizens will top the priority of his administration. He also gave the Shila Boys two weeks to repent from the act or government will take proactive measures against them. Thus, a couple of months after, the Shila Boys suspended their vicious operations and embraced peace (Bilyaminu, 2020).

After enjoying peace in the state capital for almost a year. Shila boys have in the month of May 2020, resurfaced with a full power of operating in broad daylight which was rarely experienced previously. Reports indicate that the gangsters recently launched attacks at places like Bauchi Street, Nassarawo near Specialist Hospital, Jimeta Modern Market axis, and Bank road all in Yola North, and Wuro Chekke, Sabon Pegi as well as GRA in Yola South, among other places. Findings reveal that some highly placed individuals support the Shila Boys' atrocities through paving the way for their bails at the police stations, thereby compromising the fight against crime and criminality (Bilyaminu, 2020). According to 35 years old Abdullahi a former shila member, said the Shila gang swear an oath of secrecy and they never reveal the identities of others members. The Shila gang also put mark of initiation on their members, later when people began to identify them with the mark; they stop given the mark to new members except the top brass (Ojukwu, 2023).

Nigerian youth, and youth in Adamawa in particular, face an economic crisis. An estimated 70 percent of the youth population of Adamawa who are willing and able to work cannot find suitable employment. On top of this, the poor in Nigeria are confronted every day with visible reminders of the wealth of a select few. Urban structuring around the country places the luxurious, heavily guarded homes of the wealthy right next to slums and shanty towns. With the lack of licit employment opportunities combined with the transparent economic inequality, it is no surprise that so many young people turn to crime to make money (Owonikoko, &. Jude, 2020).

Methodology

The method of data collection used for this study is content analysis, using secondary sources which includes; books, academic journals and other publications or materials related to the subject under study.

The Concept of Street Gang

According to (Wortley, 2010) There is a lack of consensus among academics, law enforcement agencies, government policy-makers, and criminal intelligence analysts with respect to defining street gangs and gang-related activity. This lack of consensus has led to difficulties with documenting the prevalence of gangs, as well as understanding the nature of the relationship between gang membership and violent behaviour.

The Various Criteria used to define Street Gangs have included: (1) age (e.g., members must be adolescents or young adults); (2) the existence of a group name; (3) distinctive group symbols or defining insignia; (4) control of a specific territory or turf; (5) group organization; (6) number of members; (7) durability or stability; (8) formal or informal gang rules; (9) initiation rituals for new gang members; (10) street orientation; (11) regular and/or continuous group involvement in crime, violence or delinquency; and (12) common ethnic or racial background (Wortley, 2010).

(Klein, 2006). In the agreed definition a gang has four defining components: durability, (of at least several months) street orientation, (away from the home, work and school) youthfulness, (average age in adolescence or early twenties) and identity via illegal activity (delinquent or criminal activity is part of the group's essence). Thus, a gang is defined as, "a street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose identity includes involvement in illegal activity." (Weerman et. al., 2009, p.20). Using this definition research has shown that gang violence compared to non-gang violence is more likely to occur in public places, to involve more weapons, more assailants, and more victims (often accidental) who are not personally acquainted with their assailants (Klein, et al., 2006). Gang violence also involves more motor vehicles, more injuries and more associated charges and so gang violence is, on the whole, more complex and more destructive than non-gang violence (Klein, et al., 2006).

Classification of Gangs

According to (Wortley, 2010) Gang can be classified into the followings: **Level one gang** is being characterized by fluid, transient friendship groups, usually based on a common neighborhood and/or cultural identity, and largely spontaneous criminal activity. **A level two gang** is a group that has existed for a significant period of time (e.g., a year or more), and which engages in mostly planned and deliberate criminal activities, but has a largely informal leadership structure. **Level three gang** have also existed for a year or more, but have a hierarchical organizational structure with easily identified leaders and followers, and aim at controlling one or more illicit activities within a certain geographic area. Finally, **level four gang** consist of established criminal organizations having a long, stable history and a sophisticated organizational structure with easily identified leaders. They are entrenched in both the licit and illicit economies, and often use lower level gangs to perform some of the more risky criminal activities (wortley, 2010).

Understanding The Strain theory

This study adopted Strain theory. The central concept of strain theory is that society sets universal goals for its populace and then offers the ability to achieve them to a limited number of people. The resultant inequality of opportunity causes a strain on cultural goals. This, Merton (1938) proposes, leads to anomie (Durkheim 1893); a breakdown in the cultural structure due to an acute division between prescribed cultural norms and the ability of members to act in line with them (Merton 1938).

The consequence of anomie is that people adapt to their circumstances by adopting a specific form of behavior (Merton 1938). Cohen (1955) depicts gang members as working class youth who experience strain resulting in status frustration. Status frustration may be resolved by the youth associating with similar others in order to "strike out" against middle class ideals and standards. In turn, this leads to the formation of a delinquent subculture where instant gratification, fighting, and destructive behavior become the new values. It is a rebellion that is considered to be right precisely because it is wrong in the norms of the larger culture. Cohen argued that a child experiences frustration and tension due to the unequal opportunities offered in a meritocratic society that claims to operate on egalitarian principles of equal opportunity.

Strain results when individuals are inadequately socialized to accept the legitimate means available to them. Inadequate socialization includes; unstructured leisure time, a failure in the educational system to provide sufficient resources, and the child's misunderstanding of what school requires of him or her. Further examples of inadequate socialization include meager community resources and educational toys and facilities in the home. The child experiencing these social deprivations gradually sinks to the bottom of the educational hierarchy and experiences feelings of status frustration involving self-hatred, guilt, loss of self-esteem,

self-discrimination, and anxiety. The child blames him/herself for the failure and copes with it by seeking alternative avenues for status achievement such as street gang membership (Cohen 1955).

Origin of Yan Shilla Street Gang in Yola Metropolis of Adamawa State, Nigeria

Yan Shilla is a relatively new gang based in Yola metropolis of Adamawa State. There are many views on the evolution of the Yan Shilla street gang in Adamawa State. As a result, there are at least four versions of the origin of the group. One version traced the origin of the group to the flushing away of the Yan Kalare gang in the neighboring Gombe State. This version explains their origin that when the Yan Kalare group was displaced from Gombe State, they first settled in Ngurore, a suburb town near Yola. There, they started regrouping and then moved to Yola. Later, the group was hijacked by politicians and started using them as political thugs, especially during the 2015 general elections but after that, the politicians abandoned the group. The group, therefore, took to criminal activities as a means of livelihood in Yola to survive (Owonikoko, & Jude, 2020)^{ss}.

According to this category of the story, the Yan Shilla street gang is the fallout of the Yan Kalare, and the only difference is in the name. The second version of the origin of the group says the group is a transformation of the Shinco Boys, who operated in the state ((Owonikoko, & Jude, 2020)). Shinco Boys is a gang named after an area in Yola metropolis and was believed to be funded by a prominent political figure from the town. The third version of the origin of the group says a prominent politician in Yola for political reasons created the group in 2015. From the period of the creation of the group until 2017, it was relatively peaceful but started criminal activities during 2017, and became a serious security threat during 2018 (Owonikoko, & Jude, 2020).

The fourth version says the group evolved over time and was manipulated by the political elites during the 2015 elections. The fourth version of the origin of the groups is relatively more popular among security agencies. A Nigerian police officer in charge of the group in Adamawa State explained during an interview that: Shilla Boys has been in existence for long but it was not as pronounced as is it today. By 2016, we started receiving reports of their activities. By that time, they were not many, they were hiding. By 2017, the group became known and became large...by 2018, the group started operating openly –a very important factor in the evolution of this group, to be factual is politics and election (Owonikoko, & Jude, 2020).

The Modus Operandi of Yan Shilla Street Gang in Yola, Adamawa State Nigeria

They operate using tricycle that is locally called keke napep. The tricycle normally contains the driver and one or two persons masquerading as passengers. They drive to secluded areas where there are very few people, study unsuspected pedestrians especially women with bags or phones or any other valuables, snatch them and zoom off their tricycle. But their activities are not limited to snatching (Owonikoko, & Jude, 2020)

Members of the group are involved in phone theft, bag snatching, and money stealing. They are also involved in armed robbery, burglary, raping, drug and substance abuse, kidnapping and forceful defilement of minors. At the emergence of the group, their criminal activities were confined to a deep forest called 'small Sambisa', named after the dreaded Boko Haram hideout in Borno State. Sooner than later, they started invading the city with various kinds of criminal activities. The group has grown into a notorious monster engaging in broad daylight robbery using knives, cutlers, daggers, scissors and many other objects. Members of the group also disguise as commercial tricycle riders with one or two of its members as passengers, picking other unsuspecting passengers, driving them to an area where there is less concentration of people in order to rob them of their belonging, dropping them there or even forcefully pushing them out of the moving tricycle before zooming off. They also use guns at night for house-to-house robbery (Owonikoko, & Jude, 2020).

Causes of Yang Shila Street Gang

A clear majority of People believe that the lack of local employment opportunities and other activities to keep the youth occupied causes young males to be susceptible to the influence of gangs. Such views mirror the way community leaders have spoken in the past about youth vulnerability to recruitment into violent extremism and points to a widespread belief across the region that youth are especially vulnerable to participation in violence, whether through gang violence or acts of violent extremism. Despite the youths' strong disapproval of the Shila Boys, many of the respondents agree with the diagnosis that the group's emergence is a symptom of the current economic conditions in Adamawa. Many youth describe how challenging it is to gain employment in Adamawa due to the lack of companies offering gainful employment opportunities in the area. In addition, many young adults believe that the job market is unfair, with nepotism and connections the most influential factors in securing employment. In addition, several respondents cite having to pay thousands of naira upfront to secure a position (Nigeria Northeast Connection Quarterly Conflict Analysis Accessed 20 June 2024).

Government Response

On the assumption of office as the new government in Adamawa State, Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri banned the group (Ochetenwu, 2019). The proscription has significantly securitized the group as an existential security threat and this has increasingly drawn the attention of security agencies towards the group. And, there has been an increase in security surveillance in the state. Several checkpoints have been established, and a highly offensive security operation called Operation Farauta (Farauta in the Hausa language means hunt) has been launched. This has led to the arrest and killing of over 500 members of the group across the state (Audu Madaki, Commissioner for Police, Adamawa State, Press Briefing held with journalists on July 15, 2019). Furthermore, the government has also put in place policy to regulate ownership and operation of tricycles in the city to curb the use of tricycles for operations by the group (Owonikoko, & Jude, 2020)

Youths Outcry against the security personnel's

Many youths also express a lack of faith in law enforcement's ability to handle the Shila Boys threat posed to their local communities. Many youths are frustrated by the inability of law enforcement to distinguish between Shila Boys members and non-members. Many young adults also exhibit disillusionment over the many cases where Shila Boys were released back into the community soon after arrest by security officials, as one participant explains: It is even better to catch a thief and take him to the authorities than to catch a Shila member. Because a thief will be held under custody in cell for some days, but the Shila member will just call his "Oga" (boss), and he will be released immediately, even before you that handed over him to the police leave the station (Nigeria Northeast Connection Quarterly Conflict Analysis Accessed 20 June 2024). A former shila member name Abdullahi said they give Police 5000, or 10,000 naira and they let them go. He blames the Police, for contributing to the crime rate (Ojukwu, 2023).

Conclusion

Since 2017, the capital of the Adamawa region of Nigeria, Yola-North and Yola-South, has seen the ascendance of a new criminal group: Yan Shila, or the Shila Boys. Specializing in petty theft the snatching of cell phones, purses, backpacks, etc. this criminal gang predominantly made up of young men has sparked public terror. In May of 2019, fear of the group was on the rise, and the governor of Adamawa State, Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri, banned the group and carried out a series of arrests, an act that formally marked Yan Shila as a security threat

Recommendations

- There is also a need for effective collaboration between the police and the host community for the purpose of solving community crime problems. These will firstly, enhance individuals to freely give information about the criminals and crimes perpetrating in the community.
- The government of Adamawa should provide poverty reduction programs that will assist unemployed youths and fund should be given to youths who acquired some skills so that they will be able to start-up a business
- Government should arrest and prosecute the kingpins that are financing the activities of Yan shila street gang in Adamawa state, that will help in mitigating the menaces of Yan shila street gang

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