

The Evolution And Development Of Yan Kalare : A Study Of Street Gangs In Gombe State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Gombe State, like the rest of Nigeria, is home to large numbers of unemployed young men who have little opportunity for legitimate employment or socio-economic advancement, in Gombe some of these youth have formed loosely organized criminal gangs and turned to violent crime to make a living. Residents of Gombe generally refer to the members of these gangs collectively as Kalare or “Kalaré Boys.” The Kalare boys have proven easy prey for politicians who offer them small amounts of money, drugs, alcohol, and weapons in exchange for engaging in acts of intimidation and assault during campaigns. The authors relied on content analysis that is secondary method of Data analysis to carry out this researched. And findings revealed that Kalare Boys are involved in so many political thuggery and criminal act such as abduction of rivals, stuffing of ballot boxes, chasing and intimidating of voters during and after election in Gombe state. This paper recommended that **Risk factors**-Preventing gang recruitment can be achieved by addressing the risk factors that make young people vulnerable to joining gangs. The risk factors are inequality and social exclusion

Keywords: Evolution, Development, Yan Kalare, Street Gangs, Gombe State, Nigeria.

Introduction

Gombe State, like the rest of Nigeria, is home to large numbers of unemployed young men who have little opportunity for legitimate employment or socio-economic advancement. As is also true across many other parts of Nigeria, in Gombe some of these youth have formed loosely organized criminal gangs and turned to violent crime to make a living. Residents of Gombe generally refer to the members of these gangs collectively as *Kalaré* or “*Kalaré Boys*.” In parallel with other situations discussed in this report, the *Kalaré* boys have proven easy prey for politicians who offer them small amounts of money, drugs, alcohol, and weapons in exchange for engaging in acts of intimidation and assault or simply to accompany their campaigns in a demonstration of muscle. An activist who works to rehabilitate ex-*Kalaré* youth who have turned away from violence and crime told Human Rights Watch that “they take drugs, they are out of their minds, but that is what government wants. Politicians go to their meeting places and give them money, motorbikes, and alcohol (Human right watch, 2007).

“*Kalaré Boys*” Recruited and armed by politicians, the dreaded gangs of Gombe State, have continued to harass perceived enemies of their pay masters. Their activities predated the current administration which has adopted various measures to curb their menace. Political thugs have remained a nightmare to the residents (Toby,2026).

In some other parts of the north, they are called Yantauri, Sara-Suka, Yan-Daba and ECOMOG. They go by different names in other parts of the country: Area Boys in Lagos; Egbesu in Bayelsa; Bakassi Boys in Abia State. Gombe State, a land of immense business potential in northern Nigeria, is soaring to new heights with its rapidly growing infrastructure and population. Unlike many other states in the north, Gombe has been able to avoid the scourge of banditry, kidnapping, and insurgency, making it a supposed safe haven for business ventures and aspirants alike (Toby, 2026).

Although Gombe State is generally peaceful, the presence of youth thuggery remains a significant threat. For many years, since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999, Gombe residents have been constantly bothered by the disturbing activities of a group of notorious thugs called ‘*Kalaré*’. (Toby, 2026).Initially, these thugs served as political vanguards during political campaigns, carrying billboards, posters, and acting as bodyguards to politicians. Sadly, they

have now become violent gangs that perpetuate fear and intimidation among innocent residents in some parts of the state (Toby, 2026). It's a fact, that political thuggery has long been a part of Nigerian politics – where politicians hire thugs as a show of muscle. They intimidate and sometimes even abduct rivals, stuff ballot boxes, chase and intimidate voters. After 20 years of this vicious circle of violence, the cumulative effect has been to entrench a culture of (Toby, 2026).

Methodology

The method of data collection 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 Gangs

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 with understanding the nature of the relationship between gang membership and violent behavior (Wortley, 2010).

A street gang, according to the Euro gang research program, is a durable, street-oriented youth group whose identity includes involvement in illegal activity. This definition consists of five definers essential qualities of a street gang. (1) The gang consists of a group at least three, usually more people. (2) Gang members are typically teenagers or young adults. (3) Gangs exist for some length of time that is they are not founded for collaborating in one specific crime. (4) Street gangs occupy the public space: gangs are conspicuous, which is why they cause public unease or fear. (5) Gangs are involved in illegal activities as part of the gang's identity. This does not mean that everyone associated with the gang commits offences, but rather that the gang as a collective is associated with the willingness to commit crimes and especially violence (EUCPN, 2022).

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).

Setting

Gombe State (Jewel in the Savannah), is located in the North East geopolitical zone, was created out of the then Bauchi State in 1996, with Gombe town as its administrative and commercial capital. The State covers an area of 20,265km² and shares common boundaries with all the five other States in the North East: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Taraba and Yobe. The State has Eleven (11) Local Government Areas (LGAs) and 114 Wards. The Local Government Areas are: Akko, Balanga, Billiri, Dukku, Funakaye, Gombe, Kaltungo, Kwami, Nafada, Shongom and Yamaltu/Deba (<https://cirddoc.org.accessed> on 3 April 2026)

Gombe State originated from the fusion of two distinct large groups: the Gombe Emirate in the North and the ethnic grouping in the South, known as Tangale-Waja. The 2006 population census gave the State's population figures at 2,353,000. Major tribes in the State include Waja, Tangale, Tera, Fulani, Bolewa, Kanuri, Cham, Tula, Pero/Shonge and Kamo/Awak; however, Hausa language is widely spoken all over the State (<https://cirddoc.org.accessed> on 3 April 2026).

Economic/Commercial/Investment Profile: The unique location of Gombe at the centre of the North East has made it a resting and meeting point for travellers and traders from different parts of the geopolitical zones and beyond, long before the State was created. The people of Gombe State are not only commercially oriented, but also large scale farmers, especially of millet, beans, maize, rice, sorghum, bambara nut, groundnut and sesame, which are basic raw materials in high demand by industries within and outside the State. Agriculture engages about 80% of Gombe's active population, it has been enhanced by irrigation which is made possible due to the presence of three multipurpose dams, namely Cham,

Balanga and Dadin Kowa. Two of these dams also have hydro electric power potentials and are popular tourist attractions (<https://cirddoc.org> accessed on 3 April 2026).



Map of Nigeria indicating the location of Gombe State.
(Source: <https://cirddoc.org> accessed on 3 April 2026).

The Evolution and Development of Yan Kalare

Gombe state is home to a number of youths that have formed gangs who turn to crimes in order to make a living out of it. The residents of Gombe state generally refer to these notorious gangs as Yan Kalare. Political events and rallies are never carried out without these Yan Kalare thugs that are mobilized to threaten and scare away opponents or prevent the possible attack by enemies (Dailytrust Newspaper, July 2, 2013:Hassan (2011) explained that these Yan Kalare groups were originally hunters known to move in groups for the purpose of hunting wild animals. Lamido (2008:Yakubu & Bilkisu 2021).further explains that during the mid-1990s, a man known as Kalare was invited to Gombe state to attend a victory ceremony hosted by some hunters in Jekadafari ward, within Gombe metropolis. The guest, Kalare, performed very well and was appreciated and hailed. Afterwards, he received many gifts in recognition of his performance by the people of Gombe state. Eventually, youths in Gombe state joined the profession of hunting and idolized the man Kalare", especially in the promotion of hunting activities in the state.

According to Abdulaziz (2016:Yakubu & Bilkisu, 2021), explained that prior to the return to democratic rule in 1999, there exist a group of youths whose mission was hunting and were generally referred to as Yan Farauta (hunters). They are known to help and assist each other through attending of naming ceremony, weddings, turbaning, among other local events. Some of them were also blacksmiths, farmers and long distance vehicle drivers. They are also known to seek protection from herbalist and wanzamai (local barbers) by collecting charms that they wear or carry around, which helps in making them immune to sharp and dangerous objects. However, after the return to democratic rule in 1999, and also two years into the administration of the former Governor of Gombe state, late Abubakar Habu Hashidu, who came into power under the defunct All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), some of these hunters broke into fight with each other while attending a naming ceremony. And the popular Yan Farauta turned into the dreaded Yan Kalare. Politicians afterwards, took advantage of this sudden change and began to show their support to these Yan Kalare groups by way of assisting them with money, food stuff, weapons and drugs. The Yan Kalare were then recruited to intimidate electorates and harass political opponents. These politicians also visit their „temples“ which refers to the Yan Kalare thugs meeting places and shower them with gifts of all kind.

Yan kalare and Political Thuggery in Gombe state

Mohammed (2013) also conceived Political thuggery to mean any negative behaviour employed in order to alter, change or influence by force or coercion, the electoral behaviours of voters or voting pattern or possibly reverse electoral decision in favour of a particular individual, groups or political party. In Gombe state, Yan Kalare are involved in Political Thuggery activities, according to Civil society, and other sources in Gombe allege that prior to the elections of 2003, PDP officials in Gombe recruited unemployed young men, paid them and armed them to intimidate their opponents, chase away voters from polling stations and disrupt voting. They played a significant role in rigging the

outcome to oust the incumbent All Peoples' Party (APP) Governor Abubakar Hashidu and pave the way for the installation of Danjuma Goje of the PDP(Human right watch, 2007).

And many Kakare Boys are being rewarded because of the role they play in Political Thuggery activities. A Prominent former politicians in Gombe told Human Rights Watch that many powerful figures within the Kalare gangs are in fact on Gombe's state and local government payrolls. One former government official gave Human Rights Watch a list of Kalare leaders, many of whom, it was claimed, occupy senior positions within the state government, including as special advisors and personal assistants to the governor. Other activists, lawyers and civil servants in Gombe town confirmed the connection, adding that these leaders and their associations are well known in Gombe(Human right watch, 2007).

Yan kalare and Criminal activities in Gombe state

From politically sponsored crimes, they turn into criminal activities such as raping, assault, extortion, and maiming innocent civilians with knives, machetes, or daggers, between 2003 and 2024, the notorious gang have killed hundreds of people and injured scores of innocent civilians or members of their rival gangs. In September 2006, Kalare Boys attacked the convoy of the national secretary of the All Nigeria Peoples Party, Senator Saidu Umar Kumo (now deceased), destroying over 20 vehicles and injuring many of his followers (Toby,2026).

These human rights violators have not spared members of the armed forces either. On Sunday, 25 September 2022, there was a clash between police and the Kalare Boys. Two people were injured, a passerby and a gang member. Recall that hoodlums, suspected to be 'Kalaré' boys were said to have stormed the residence of a famous Islamic preacher in the state, Sheikh Albani Kuri and murdered him. The ugly development caused tension in the state. In October 2023, another victim, a 58-year-old woman was stabbed to death by a youth in Jeka da Fari community in the Gombe State metropolis, and less than a week after, a female student at the College of Education (COE) Billiri, in Billiri local government area of the state, was also murdered by hoodlums in her off campus apartment. Record has it that on November 5,2021, a clash between suspected members of Yan-Kalare and YanSara Suka left several people dead(Toby,2026). Senator, Muhammad Danjuma Goje , also a former governor of the state was attacked en-route Gombe city from the airport for a wedding. Though he escaped the ambush laid by the Kalare boys; his windscreen was smashed with a machete (Toby, 2026).

The causes of Yan Kalare include the followings.

According to (Bello, 2023).The factors that cause Kalare are:

- **Lack of Job Opportunities:** some youths, they withdrawn themselves from school because they observed that even their seniors that graduated from school at different level have nothing to do, they were not employed.
- **Availability of Hard Drugs:** The availability of hard drugs in our society due to the negligence of security agency or government, had immensely contributed in the persistent of thuggery activity.
- **Social Media:** Media is playing a great role in promoting thuggery activity as asserted by many scholars. This usually happens due to some foreign films like blue films, some war films, that were imported, and some indigenous films especially the Nollywood cassettes, popularly known as Nigerian films, where many acts of social vices were practically taught. The other form of social media includes magazines, Newspapers; internet etc. where illicit sex is taught or advertised.

Government Responses

In an effort to address the menace of Yan Kalare in the state, the administration of the former governor Muhammad Danjuma Goje created a policy which was intended to provide youths with employment opportunities in the state. An agency known as Gombe State Environmental Protection Agency was established, where youths benefitted from the policy. These youths received financial assistance and loans so as to enable them engage in small scale businesses (Abubakar, 2015: Yakubu & Bilkisu 2021).The administration of Muhammad Danjuma Goje also created the Anti-Kalare squad, as a response to the numerous complaints received from many residents in the state. The Anti-Kalare squad was tasked with the responsibility of responding to distress calls by residents of the state and also to engage in a 24 hours patrol within the metropolis (Muhammed, Kamsiah and Lucy, 2017).

Also, on his assumption into office in 2011, the former governor of the state, Dr Ibrahim Hassan Dankwambo made efforts to ban the activities of Yan Kalare thugs. He created policies which are meant to assist in eradicating the menace of Yan Kalare in the state. These policies include the Talba Empowerment Scheme (TES) and the Talba Youth Orientation and Rehabilitation Programme, which enrolled and trained in batches over 2000 youths, most of which were Yan Kalare thugs. The Talba Empowerment Scheme (TES) was meant to assist in changing the mind set of these Yan Kalare thugs so that they can become productive and useful to the society (Ejere, 2011). At the start of the programmes, willing youths surrender their weapons and were trained as road marshals, sanitary officers and security assistants, who will assist the police in locking away bad people (The Nation, June 7, 2016). However, these policies and programs introduced by different administrations did not succeed in completely eradicating the menace of political thuggery in Gombe state, especially because the presence of these Yan Kalare thugs are felt in every (Yakubu & Bilkisu 2021).

In its bid to remove the state from political urchins popularly known as ‘Yan Kalare’ who are used to cause mayhem under the guise of politics, Gombe State Government has said that it is determined to end the activities of the dreaded restive youths. Gombe State Governor, Muhammad Inuwa Yahaya made the commitment at the Gombe State NYSC Orientation Camp, Amada, during the commencement of a two weeks induction and training of 500 youths for the Gombe State Security, Traffic and Environmental Corps (GOSTEC). The Governor said that, “GOSTEC is a home-grown innovation aimed at harnessing the energies of our youths in state building, in line with our human capital development initiative”. Politicians in Gombe State are known to harbour and make use of the ‘Yan kalare’ political thugs against opponents during campaigns and other political activities, but Governor Inuwa Yahaya also said that, “the menace of using our youth in political thuggery and criminality for the selfish interest of politicians will not be condoned by his administration”. (Akanji, 2026).

According to the Governor, “We remain determined to end the ‘Kalare’ in Gombe State. He further reiterated his administration’s commitment towards bringing an end to youth restiveness through innovative approaches by providing them with necessary skills to engage in decent jobs and cater for themselves, their families and the society at large. He said, “we are witnessing the induction of 500 GOSTEC trainees as no fewer than 2,000 youths will be engaged by the state government in collaboration with the At-Risk Children Project (ARC-P). “These youths will be posted across all the 11 LGAs to serve as Traffic, Security or Environmental Superintendents in our communities”, he explained. He explained further that GOSTEC is a squad of Gombe youth, nominated from all over the eleven LGAs of the State, selected and to be trained to shoulder the responsibilities of enforcing relevant traffic, security and environment laws in collaboration with statutory agencies to ensure a safe, clean and decent environment (Akanji, 2026).

Conclusion

Yan Kalare gangs have engaged in politically motivated attacks, rape, and killing of innocent individuals especially during election periods. These Yan Kalare thugs are also easily identified by the weapons they carry such as machetes and sharp knives and their identities are known by many residents in the state. Once election is near, these dangerous weapons remain in their hands which will assist them in carrying out their deadly acts

Recommendations

According to EUCPN (2022). Identified some recommendations that will serve as the mitigations to street gangs menace the are:

- **After-school activities**-The preventive effect of adequate and accessible sports or cultural activities is significant. Group activities boost social cohesion and social control and participants can develop individually and enjoy success. Especially when local role models are involved in such activities, they may offer a great opportunity to establish relationships of trust with local youth. They are also well-placed to mediate gang conflicts
- **Family therapy and parental support**-Interventions that aim to support parents and address problems in families have the potential to prevent gang recruitment and involvement. Parental support programs stimulate positive reinforcement methods in parenting to foster pro-social behavior and healthy parent-child relationships. Family-oriented interventions have a multidisciplinary and more directly address imminent or already present

delinquent behavior in young people. Several family therapies and parental support programs have proven effective; others may be considered promising.

- **Risk factors**-Preventing gang recruitment can be achieved by addressing the risk factors that make young people vulnerable to joining gangs. The risk factors are inequality and social exclusion, negative childhood experiences, and the proximity of one or more street gangs. Identifying at-risk individuals within the broader group exposed to socio-economic risk factors is challenging. It requires detailed information about the neighborhood and its people that can only be obtained through long-term personal engagement, for instance through street work or community-oriented policing.

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