

**GANG VIOLENCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN OYO STATE,
NIGERIA: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS, DEVELOPMENTAL
CONSEQUENCES AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES**

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ABSTRACT

Gang violence has emerged as an important security and development challenge in Nigeria, particularly in urban and semi-urban communities where unemployment, poverty, drug abuse, social inequality and weak institutional responses interact. This study examines the relationship between gang violence and national development in Oyo State, Nigeria, focusing on its socio-economic drivers, developmental consequences and institutional responses. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and obtained quantitative data from respondents in selected areas of Oyo State. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation and simple regression analysis. The findings indicate that drug abuse, poverty, youth unemployment, peer influence, wealth inequality, political patronage, family breakdown, social-media influence and rapid urbanisation are important factors associated with gang violence. Gang violence explained 35.5% of the variation in economic activities and 37.1% of the variation in investment. It also explained 58.0% of the variation in education, 60.3% in public safety and 38.2% in community cohesion. With respect to institutional responses, respondents expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of existing security arrangements. Of 433 respondents, 64.5% rated the Nigeria Police Force as ineffective or very ineffective, while 56.8% gave similar ratings to the Amotekun Corps. The study concludes that gang violence in Oyo State is not merely a criminal-justice problem but a multidimensional development and governance challenge. It recommends integrated interventions centred on youth employment, drug-abuse prevention, educational development, community participation, intelligence-led policing and improved coordination among security institutions.

Keywords: Gang violence; national development; youth unemployment; drug abuse; investment; social development; security institutions; Oyo State.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence remains one of the major threats to political stability, economic development and social cohesion in contemporary societies. Gang violence is particularly significant because it involves organised groups whose activities may extend beyond isolated criminal incidents to include intimidation, territorial conflicts, cultism, extortion, drug-related activities, political thuggery and other forms of violent criminality. The dissertation conceptualises gang violence as organised group-based criminal or aggressive activities that affect individuals, communities and social stability.

The emergence and persistence of gangs are influenced by a combination of social, economic and institutional conditions. Poverty, unemployment, inequality, inadequate educational opportunities, family instability, peer influence and drug abuse can increase young people's vulnerability to gang recruitment. Weak law enforcement, ineffective policy implementation and political manipulation may further enable gang activities to persist.

The problem is not peculiar to Nigeria. Across many African societies, rapid urbanisation, youth unemployment, social fragmentation and weak institutional capacity have contributed to the growth of violent groups. In Nigeria, gang-related violence exists alongside other security challenges, including kidnapping, armed robbery, cultism, political violence and youth gangs. The

dissertation observes that such activities threaten public safety, disrupt economic activities and erode trust in institutions.

The developmental implications of violence are substantial. Economic development requires a secure environment in which individuals can work, businesses can operate and investors can make long-term decisions. Similarly, social development requires functioning schools, safe communities, public trust and effective institutions. Gang violence can undermine all these conditions.

The relationship between peace, security and development is also reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 16, which emphasises peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice and effective, accountable institutions. Persistent violence therefore represents not only a security problem but also an obstacle to broader development objectives. Oyo State provides an important context for examining this relationship. The dissertation identifies reported gang activities, armed robbery, cult clashes and youth-gang confrontations in Ibadan, Ogbomoso and other parts of the state as concerns affecting local businesses, schools and public safety.

Although government and other stakeholders have introduced interventions, including security arrangements, youth engagement, vocational initiatives and community-based approaches, gang violence continues to manifest in different forms. The persistence of the problem raises questions concerning the adequacy, implementation and orientation

of existing interventions. This study therefore examines gang violence in Oyo State from a development perspective. Rather than treating gang violence solely as a law-and-order issue, the study investigates its underlying socio-economic conditions, its effects on economic and social development, and the effectiveness of institutional responses.

Despite efforts by the Oyo State Government, security agencies and community leaders to control gang violence, the problem continues to generate concerns for economic and social development. Economic activities and investment are affected, while public safety, education and community trust remain vulnerable. The dissertation consequently identifies the need for a systematic examination of the causes, effects and control of gang violence in the state.

A major problem is that the conditions facilitating gang recruitment may remain inadequately addressed. The dissertation identifies unemployment and limited economic opportunities, poverty, low educational attainment, income inequality, urbanisation, financial instability, weak parental supervision, drug abuse and political thuggery as important socio-economic factors.

At the same time, gang violence produces consequences that extend beyond the immediate victims of violence. It can disrupt businesses, discourage investment, affect school attendance and performance, threaten public safety and weaken community

cohesion. The dissertation's findings indicate that these effects are statistically significant.

The effectiveness of institutional responses is another concern. Although government policies, the Police, Amotekun and community-based interventions have been deployed, the empirical findings suggest substantial dissatisfaction with their performance. This raises the question of whether existing responses adequately address both the immediate security threat and the underlying causes of gang violence. The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between gang violence and national development in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study is guided by three research questions: what are the major socio-economic factors contributing to gang violence in Oyo State, Nigeria? To what extent does gang violence affect economic and social development in Oyo State, Nigeria? How effective are government and security-sector responses in addressing gang violence in Oyo State, Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gang Violence and Socio-Economic Factors

Gang violence is influenced by a combination of structural and social factors. Poverty and unemployment are frequently associated with youth vulnerability to criminal networks because they limit legitimate opportunities for income, social mobility and personal development.

The dissertation's review indicates that youth unemployment and economic hardship are important conditions associated with youth involvement in gang-related crime. It further identifies drug abuse, peer influence, family breakdown and inadequate educational opportunities as factors that may reinforce gang recruitment.

Drug abuse is particularly important because gangs may participate in the distribution and consumption of illicit substances. Drug markets can create competition between groups and encourage violent behaviour. Evidence reviewed in the dissertation similarly links hard-drug use with violent crime and identifies unemployment, peer pressure and limited educational access as contributing conditions.

Political factors also deserve consideration. Research reviewed in the dissertation shows that criminal gangs may become connected to political structures through patronage and mobilisation for electoral violence. Such relationships can blur the boundary between criminality and political activity and undermine public trust and economic development.

The implication is that gang violence should not be reduced to individual criminal behaviour. It must also be examined within the social and economic environment in which gangs operate.

Gang Violence and Economic Development

Security is an important condition for economic activity and investment. Persistent violence may increase business costs, disrupt transportation, reduce working hours, damage property and discourage investors.

The dissertation found that gang violence negatively affects both economic activities and investment. It reports that the frequency of gang-related crimes hinders business operations and discourages existing and prospective investors because of the insecurity associated with gang activities.

This relationship is important because investment decisions are influenced not only by expected financial returns but also by perceptions of security and stability. Consequently, gang violence can create a development cost that extends beyond direct losses arising from criminal incidents.

Gang Violence and Social Development

National development includes human and social dimensions. Education, public safety and community cohesion are important indicators of the ability of individuals and communities to participate productively in society.

Gang violence can undermine education by disrupting schooling, discouraging attendance and creating conditions in which young people become vulnerable to recruitment. It can also undermine public safety by creating fear and reducing confidence in institutions.

Community cohesion is similarly threatened. Persistent violence may weaken trust between residents, discourage social gatherings and reduce collective participation in community-development activities.

The dissertation's regression results confirm significant negative effects of gang violence on education, public safety and community cohesion.

Gang Violence and Institutional Responses

Government responses to gang violence may include policing, legislation, social-welfare programmes, youth empowerment, community policing and local security initiatives.

The dissertation examines government policies, the Nigeria Police Force, the Amotekun Corps and community-based interventions. It finds considerable weaknesses in perceived institutional effectiveness.

For example, respondents were largely undecided about whether social-welfare programmes had reduced gang membership, whether government infrastructure investment had reduced recruitment and whether existing legislative frameworks were adequate and properly enforced.

This suggests that the existence of intervention programmes does not necessarily mean that communities perceive them as successful.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Disorganisation Theory

The study is anchored on Social Disorganisation Theory

The theory explains crime and deviance partly through weaknesses in community organisation and informal social control. Communities characterised by poverty, instability, weak family structures and ineffective social institutions may have difficulty regulating behaviour and preventing criminal activities.

The theory is appropriate to this study because several of the socio-economic conditions identified in the dissertation—unemployment, poverty, family instability, peer influence, weak parental supervision and weakened community structures—relate directly to the capacity of communities to exercise informal social control.

The theory also provides a link between the causes and consequences of gang violence. Socio-economic disadvantage may weaken community institutions and facilitate gang recruitment. Gang violence can subsequently deepen social disorganisation by undermining trust, education, public safety and community cohesion.

Thus, gang violence can create a reinforcing cycle:

Socio-economic disadvantage → weakened social organisation → gang recruitment → violence → developmental disruption → further social disorganisation.

This perspective provides a useful framework for interpreting the three research questions examined in the study.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain information from respondents concerning the causes, consequences and control of gang violence in Oyo State.

The geographical scope was Oyo State, Nigeria. The study covered selected local government areas and involved residents, community leaders and security personnel. The study period covered 2021–2026.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, while relevant qualitative information was also obtained through interviews and open-ended responses. The questionnaire covered socio-economic drivers, effects on development and perceptions of government and security interventions.

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation and simple regression analysis. The dissertation reports 450 respondents for the main quantitative analysis, while the institutional-effectiveness

tables contain 433 valid responses. The present article retains these reported figures rather than altering the original dataset.

Mean scores were used to assess respondents' level of agreement with questionnaire statements, while regression analysis was used to determine the effects of gang violence on selected development indicators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: what are the major socio-economic factors contributing to gang violence?

The study identified several socio-economic factors associated with gang violence.

Table 1

Major Socio-Economic Factors Associated with Gang Violence

Factor	Mean score
Drug abuse/substance addiction	4.16
Poverty/lack of basic amenities	4.11
Youth unemployment	4.10
Peer pressure/social influence	4.03
Wealth inequality	4.00

Factor	Mean score
Political patronage/elite sponsorship	4.00
Broken family structures/parental neglect	3.94
Social-media glamourisation	3.94
Rapid urbanisation/rural–urban migration	3.86

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

All the factors recorded mean scores above the 2.50 decision benchmark. Drug abuse recorded the highest mean score (4.16), followed by poverty (4.11) and youth unemployment (4.10).

The finding suggests that gang violence is associated with a combination of economic deprivation and social vulnerability. Drug abuse may facilitate violent behaviour and criminal networks, while unemployment and poverty may reduce legitimate economic alternatives for young people.

The finding is consistent with the dissertation's conclusion that unemployment and limited economic opportunities, poverty, low educational levels, income inequality, urbanisation, financial instability, weak parental supervision, drug abuse and political thuggery constitute important conditions associated with gang violence.

The prominence of peer pressure also supports the argument that gang membership may be socially learned and reinforced within particular networks. This is important because interventions that focus only on individual offenders may fail to address the group and community environments through which gang behaviour is reproduced.

Research Question Two: to what extent does gang violence affect economic and social development?

The second research question was examined through five development indicators: economic activities, investment, education, public safety and community cohesion.

Economic Activities

Table 2

Regression result on the effect of gang violence on economic activities

Statistic	Value
R	.596
R ²	.355
Adjusted R ²	.354
F	246.837
Sig.	.000
B	-.526
T	-15.711
P	.000

Source: Researcher's computation, 2026.

The regression model was statistically significant. The R^2 of .355 indicates that gang violence accounted for approximately 35.5% of the variation in economic activities. The coefficient was negative ($B = -.526$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of gang violence were associated with lower levels of economic activity.

The finding demonstrates that gang violence has an economic cost. Violence can interrupt normal commercial operations, increase security expenditure and discourage people from conducting business in affected areas.

Investment

Table 3

Regression result on the effect of gang violence on investment

Statistic	Value
R	.609
R^2	.371
Adjusted R^2	.370
F	264.110
Sig.	.000
B	-.523
t	-16.267
p	.000

Source: Researcher's computation, 2026.

The model indicates that gang violence explained 37.1% of the variation in investment. The relationship was negative and statistically significant ($B = -.523$, $p < .001$).

This suggests that insecurity associated with gang violence discourages both existing and prospective investors. The finding supports the dissertation's argument that gang violence worsens the investment climate and increases the perceived risks of doing business.

Education

The study also found a significant negative effect of gang violence on education. The regression model produced $R = .613$, $R^2 = .580$, adjusted $R^2 = .578$ and $F = 38.890$, indicating that gang violence explained approximately 58.0% of the variation in the education measure.

This finding indicates that gang violence can undermine human-capital development. School disruption, fear, parental concerns and exposure of young people to gang recruitment can affect educational participation and attainment.

Public Safety

The regression result for public safety produced $R = .658$, $R^2 = .603$, adjusted $R^2 = .601$ and $F = 11.575$. The coefficient for gang violence was $-.042$, with $p = .019$, indicating a statistically significant negative effect.

This result is consistent with the basic nature of gang violence as a threat to personal and community security.

Community Cohesion

Table 4

Regression result on the effect of gang violence on community cohesion

Statistic	Value
R	.618
R ²	.382
Adjusted R ²	.381
F	276.967
Sig.	.000
B	-1.088
t	-16.642
p	.000

Source: Researcher's computation, 2026.

The model indicates that gang violence explained 38.2% of the variation in community cohesion. The coefficient was negative and statistically significant (B = -1.088, $p < .001$).

This is a particularly important finding because community cohesion is fundamental to collective action. Gang violence may weaken trust among residents, disrupt social gatherings and discourage participation in community-development activities.

The dissertation consequently concludes that gang violence undermines the social foundations required for sustainable development.

How effective are government and security-sector responses?

Government Policies

The findings reveal mixed and generally weak perceptions of government interventions.

Respondents were largely undecided about whether social-welfare programmes had reduced gang membership, with a mean score of **2.76**. Government investment in infrastructure as a mechanism for reducing gang recruitment recorded a mean of **2.83**, while the adequacy and enforcement of legislative frameworks recorded **2.60**.

These findings suggest that respondents did not perceive existing government measures as sufficiently effective in addressing the problem.

Nigeria Police Force

Table 5

Respondents' Assessment of Nigeria Police Effectiveness

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	24	5.5

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Effective	58	13.4
Neutral	72	16.6
Ineffective	164	37.9
Very ineffective	115	26.6
Total	433	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The Amotekun Corps received a somewhat better assessment than the Police, but the overall perception remained negative. **56.8%** of respondents rated the Corps ineffective or very ineffective, while only **23.8%** rated it effective or very effective.

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The findings show a predominantly negative assessment. A combined **64.5%** of respondents rated the Police as ineffective or very ineffective, compared with only **18.9%** who rated them effective or very effective.

This result indicates a significant gap between the presence of conventional policing institutions and citizens' perceptions of their capacity to control gang violence.

Amotekun Corps

Table 6

Respondents' Assessment of Amotekun Effectiveness

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	31	7.2
Effective	72	16.6
Neutral	84	19.4
Ineffective	148	34.2
Very ineffective	98	22.6
Total	433	100.0

Although the positive rating for Amotekun was slightly higher than that of the Police, the overall pattern indicates that a majority of respondents did not believe that either security institution was doing enough to control gang violence.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal that gang violence in Oyo State is a multidimensional phenomenon with structural, social and institutional dimensions.

First, the study establishes that socio-economic conditions are important in understanding gang violence. The prominence of drug abuse, poverty and youth unemployment indicates that gang violence cannot be effectively addressed without addressing the conditions that make gang recruitment attractive or possible.

Second, the findings demonstrate that gang violence has significant developmental consequences. The negative regression coefficients for economic activities, investment, education, public safety and community cohesion demonstrate that

violence affects both the material and social foundations of development.

Third, the study identifies an important institutional dimension. The relatively low positive ratings for the Police and Amotekun suggest that security agencies face challenges in translating institutional presence into effective control of gang violence.

The findings are therefore consistent with the study's overall conclusion that gang violence is not an isolated security issue. Rather, it is strongly connected with socio-economic circumstances and has consequences for economic activities, investment and social development.

The evidence also supports the Social Disorganisation perspective. Socio-economic deprivation and weak social institutions may facilitate gang formation, while gang violence subsequently weakens education, public safety, social trust and economic activity, thereby reinforcing the conditions associated with social disorganisation.

CONCLUSION

Gang violence represents an important threat to national development in Oyo State. The findings of this study demonstrate that its causes, consequences and control cannot be understood from a purely law-enforcement perspective.

The study found that drug abuse, poverty, unemployment, peer influence, inequality,

political patronage, family breakdown, social-media influence and urbanisation are important factors associated with gang violence.

The study further established that gang violence significantly and negatively affects economic activities and investment. It also has significant consequences for education, public safety and community cohesion. These effects demonstrate that violence undermines both the economic and social foundations of development.

The findings on institutional responses further indicate that existing interventions have not generated sufficient confidence among respondents. The Police and Amotekun received predominantly negative assessments, while government social-welfare, infrastructure and legislative measures did not receive strong positive assessments.

The study therefore concludes that gang violence in Oyo State is simultaneously a security, socio-economic and governance problem. A sustainable response must address its underlying causes while improving the capacity, coordination and responsiveness of security institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Targeted youth employment programmes

The Oyo State Government should implement sustainable employment, entrepreneurship and vocational programmes targeted at youths in communities vulnerable to gang recruitment. The focus should be on actual livelihood opportunities rather than short-term training alone.

2. Strengthening drug-abuse prevention

Given that drug abuse recorded the highest mean score among the identified socio-economic factors, drug-prevention, rehabilitation and public-awareness programmes should be strengthened and integrated into youth-development initiatives.

3. Improved educational intervention

Government should expand access to quality and affordable education, including remedial and vocational opportunities for out-of-school youths. This can reduce educational exclusion and provide alternatives to gang involvement. The dissertation similarly recommends educational intervention as a means of reducing vulnerability to recruitment.

4. Strengthening economic activity and investment

Security guarantees and appropriate investment incentives should be provided in gang-prone communities to restore investor

confidence and protect legitimate economic activities.

5. Improve the capacity of security institutions

The Police and Amotekun Corps should receive adequate equipment, training and intelligence capacity. The emphasis should be placed on prevention, early warning and rapid response rather than only reacting after violence has occurred.

6. Improve inter-agency coordination

There should be stronger information sharing and operational coordination among the Nigeria Police Force, Amotekun Corps, other relevant security agencies, local government authorities and community-based security structures.

7. Institutionalise community-based intervention

Community-based programmes should be sustained in partnership with traditional rulers, religious leaders, youth organisations and community policing structures. Such arrangements can improve social cohesion and facilitate early identification of at-risk youths.

8. Address political exploitation of gangs

Political actors should be discouraged from using violent youth groups for electoral or political purposes. Stronger enforcement

mechanisms should be applied where political patronage contributes to the mobilisation of violent groups.

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