

GANG AND URBAN VIOLENCE PREVALENCE ON DEMOCRATIC SUSTENANCE

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Abstract

Violence is a phenomenon that occurs everywhere. It has severe consequences on the growth and development of any country. Gang syndicates in different urban and rural areas across the world are the major suppliers of violence in the world. The rate of growth of gang memberships across the rural and urban regions of the world is a challenge that all governments must proffer solutions to. In a democratic regime, the rate of growth of violence reduces the chances of good governance and democratic sustenance. This means that the more there is violence, the lesser democratic development and sustenance. The theoretical framework of tyre burning is used to explain the phenomenon of violence processes. This usually begins with a peaceful protest that degenerates into violence. The paper concludes on the premise that engaging the youths in productive activities will reduce gang membership and urban violence.

Keywords: Democracy sustenance, Gangs, Governance, Tyre Burning Theory and Violence

INTRODUCTION

There is a rapid growing concern about cases of urban violence and political crises across developed and developing countries of the world. This can be seen as the process and consequences of urbanization sweeping across the world. Olutayo (1994), Aniekwe

is a hindrance to urban peace, political growth and national development of any country. However, there still remains inadequate evidence on these issues and still less evidence about whether urban violence, gang violence and political crises are related, if so, to what extent are they related and the way to get out of the problems?

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and Kushie (2011) and Aluko (2014) also support the assertion that violence

What are the causal mechanisms that underline the processes, the relationship and the synergy among the issues of the urban violence, gang violence and political crises? Urban violence is the outbreak of crises which has adverse effects on lives and properties of the people living in a geographical space. This may involve the use of small and light weapons or the use of weapons of mass destruction against a perceived target which is usually the government. This might be a form of ethnic cleansing, religious riots or political violence.

Gang violence is a systematic highly organised or semi organised group attack on social facilities and developmental projects of the community. The quest for power acquisition also makes specific individuals to be excessively powerful than state institutions and laws thereby resulting into gross violation of basic and essential rights of others in the state. This phenomenon in most cases results into agitations and violent attacks which will eventually degenerate into the breakdown of law and order and political violence in such state.

Violent attacks often leave the stamp of burnt off properties and particularly the symbol of tyre burnt off on the highway through which the protesters passed through. The 'Tyre Burning' is the violence symbol as a remembrance signature and a critical symbol of violent attacks in a community where urban and gang violence has taken place. Therefore, the Tyre Burning Theory (Aluko, 2016a; Aluko, 2016b) is used to explain the aftermath of gang violence, urban violence and political crises occurrence, transmission and how they become vulnerable tool against socio, economic and political development for the

moulding and sustenance of a viable democratic system.

GANG, GANG CULTURE, VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE CLARIFICATION

There are different perspectives to concepts in social sciences. This makes it difficult to have a universally acceptable definition of concepts in the social science. This conceptual clarification challenge is also visible in almost all concepts in Political Science fields of study. The concepts to be clarified in this context are the concept of Gang, Gang culture, Violence and Political Violence respectively. Aluko, Olorunsuwa, Mu'awiyya, Balogun, Ogundare, Sayuti, Iyau, Nwaorgu and Oyewole (2015) and Ezell, (2018) in their study of gang and gang violence opined that gangs are groups of people who have common focus, ideology and perception of the society with a notion of destroying the societal norms, values and believe.

Gangs focus on making lives difficult for the people, causing havocs such as raping, drug addiction, armed robbery, murder and other evil social vices. Sharp, Aldridge, and Medina (2006) perceived gangs in their study as a group of three or more that spends alot of time in public spaces, has existed for a minimum of three months, has engaged in delinquent activities in the past twelve (12) months, and has at least one structural feature, i.e., a name, leader, code or rules. This framework of mind however captures the existence of gangs but limit it to a numerical nomenclature

In another studies, Hakkert, van Wijk, Ferweda, Eijken (2001) have suggested that gang is a group of young people with a separate

view of the society and they have collective agreement on their purposed actions against the society. Their actions, beliefs and agenda makes them antisocial or criminal in nature within the society. This definition is a more focused view on gang activities and it juxtapose their internal structure with their external actions.

On the other hand, some researchers (Bennett & Holloway, 2004) do not consider criminality as a necessary criterion for defining a gang, while Howell, (1998) argued that the absence of criminality makes the definition of gang too broad. In a summary, gangs are groups of people who have been together for a time; be it virtually that is electronically or physically with the aim of carrying out some distinct functions which are usually against the socio-political order of the community.

Gang Culture in the same vein as gang only enjoy the attribute of random repetitiveness of actions and dispositions to daily issues and routine of gang activities. The Centre for Social Justice (2010) reported that gangs operates in a range of frequent criminal actions. The repetitiveness and frequency of the group actions brings out the culture of the gangs. They vividly concluded that;

“Gang culture is a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, identify with or lay claim over territory, have some form of identifying structural feature, and are in conflict with other, similar, gangs.” The Centre for Social Justice(2010)

PSHE & Citizenship (2012) perceived gang culture as the regular activity of a group of people with a shared interest and a common identity such as tattoos, dress code, moral decadence and violence. Gang culture does not necessarily mean violence perpetuation. The culture maintained by these gangs are common identity of their families religion or some other prestigious glamour.

The concept of violence in social science has many connotations. However, violence or social disorganization as interchangeably used by Olutayo (1994) is a natural phenomenon to all human societies and it has become a social problem where it increases to an intolerable level. This definition is quite rich in natural reasoning but it has a narrow view of all what violence is. This is because tolerance is a relative term with different levels of measurements and limits in different societies of the world. The most common notion is that violence entails the use of physical force, usually aimed at injuring or damaging the target of the violence. The tools of violence can range from flying fists, to clubs, bullets, nerve gas, and nuclear missiles (Danzinger, 1998). Alanamu, (2005) and Aluko (2017) broaden the typology of violence to include political violence and non-political violence such as domestic, economic and social violence.

Political violence is a violence that is connected to political activities in a community. These have to do with electoral violence, violence induced due to perceived inequality in the allocation of political gains in the society and violence induced due to the marginalization of a social (ethnic or religious) group by the government. Igbuzor (2010); Aniekwe and Kushie (2011) considered political violence to be any act of violence perpetuated in the course of a political activity, including pre,

during and post political events and may include any of the following acts: 'thuggery', use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate political opponents and halt electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with the political processes.

A well encompassing concept of political violence is portrayed by Anifowose (1982). He tries to include the actions, the perceived target(s) and the effect or the aftermath of the perpetuated political violence. He noted that political violence involves the use of threat and actual use of physical act carried out by an individual or some people within a state against another individual, groups and their property. Such use of physical act are carried out with the intent to inflict injury or death to person(s), destruction of property(s) and in which the objective, choice of targets, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects all have premeditated political undertone. Such political impacts are mostly directed at modifying the behaviours of others to obey the people perpetuating the violence.

In the opinion of Aluko (2014) and Aluko, et al (2015), political violence can be summarised as the whole gamut of issues that points to all forms of cruel collective attacks in all spheres of life such as the social, economic, psychological, ethnic and religious sphere within a political regime, directed at effecting a perceived change in the whole political system. This implies that violence of all sorts within a political entity has political orientations.

TYRE BURNING THEORY

Crime and violence occurs daily in human

societies. This makes human lives in such society to be short, nasty and brutal. The beginning of violence is aggressions, chaos and restlessness in the society. The reasons to engage in violence are centred on perceived neglects from the government. This neglect leads to a peaceful protest which may degenerate into a violent encounter against the government. This process of peaceful agitations or protests metamorphosed into violence in a rapid form and is usually complicated by other intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as religion, culture, distribution of public good and international actors' involvement among other factors.

Usually a little issues trigger some enunciations which change the motive of the peaceful demonstrators into a chaotic scenario (Aluko 2016a). Can violence be referred to as either volatile or peaceful at any point in time? Tyre burning theory gives the indication that burning of tyre phenomenon is the indicator of chaotic violence occurrence in a community. It is an aftermath indication or sign of a chaotic violent attacks and breakdown of law and order in the society. The theory focuses on the burning of substances most importantly tyres; others substances destroyed may include vehicles and other abandon wreckages of broken shops, windows, houses and also to the extent of killing of human beings.

Also, in the process of violence leading to burning of substances, the commuters got invoked by perceived political, economic, social or geographical favouritism, nepotism, aggrandisement, patron-client, patrimonial politics, ethnicity and negligence by the government and law enforcement agencies. Aluko (2016b) further noted that the peaceful protesters who are on the lawful deviant due to perceived unjust norms in the society

organised themselves just to pass on their grievances to the government but suddenly get their peaceful protesting instruments like ply cards and banners exchanged for heavy protesting instruments. The heavy instruments include sticks, stones, flying fists, guns and combustible materials among others. The hall mark of the 'heavy' protest is burning of tyres on the road, destruction of properties such as houses, looting of shops, killing of government officials and other member of the public. The burning of the tyres on the roads is a key signature of violence of what so ever capacity. Aluko (2016a) and Aluko (2016b) succinctly noted the pictorial progression of violence leading to tyre burning syndrome that the protesters;

get themselves together and move in cluster chanting offensively and agitating peacefully at the initial stage but suddenly get infuriated by either law enforcement interception, psychological over-stimulation or a planned work of the protesters. Suddenly the ply cards and banners turn to sticks and stones and the hallmark of the protest and violence is burning and destruction of properties such as cars, shops, motorcycles, houses and even human life. The final signature to be left on the major roads and pedestrian pathway after the end of the violence is carbons of incombustible tyres which is remains of the burnt tyres. Tyre burning is the hallmark of violent protest in a community which simply indicates a breach in law and order that the state security agencies could not nip to the bud before it onslaught.

The underlining assumptions is that the indicator of chaotic demonstration or violence outlook in any society is burning of substances, national flags burning, house breaking, breaking of windows, smashing of cars and burning of tyres on the major road or in the location where the sphere of the violent occurred. The most rampant of the indicators of urban violence and violence in the community is tyre burning. The quick sign of chaotic violence demonstration is burning of tyre on the road by the gangs or the aggrieved protesters. This is a violent symbolic left over which is conspicuously seen many days after the chaos had been settled.

The deprivation of the basic rights of the majority of the people is a vulnerable tool which propels violence in the society. This is against the social, political and economic development for the moulding and sustenance of a viable democratic system. This implies that whenever there is violence, the socioeconomic growth of such states will be shut down temporary or for a long period of time depending on the extent of the violence. Therefore, the extent of violence will determine the extent of negotiation, recalculations, enforcements or the rebuilding that the political atmosphere of the community needs to embark upon.

IMPACTS OF GANG AND URBAN VIOLENCE ON DEMOCRATIC SUSTENANCE

Over the past decade, numerous studies have documented a general increase in juvenile gang membership and gang-related activity (Spergel & Curry, 1993; Thornberry et al., 2003; Stoll, 2017). This growth is no longer a strictly urban issue, because gang activity has been noted in suburban and even rural settings

(Goldstein & Soriano, 1994, Martin, 1997 and Klein et al 2001). Elliot, Huizinga and Ageton, (1985) cited in Evans et al (1999) noted that gang expansion has grown to an alarming level in many communities of the world. Sanders, (2017) also noted that gang members are involved in high rate of all types of crime and drug use compared to the general adolescent population. Gang membership is a potential violent supplier and a hindrance for development and democratic peace sustenance.

Moreover, since the 1990s it is becoming clearer that the rural areas across the world and in Latin America have not escaped the historically urban and suburban problems often associated with gangs, adolescent violence and drug usage (Kingery et al 1991; Bachus, 1994; Patton, Lane, Leonard, Macbeth and Smith 2017). There is a need for information regarding the growth of gangs in rural settings and how rural gang members may differ or relates with their urban counterparts. This is because the relationship between the rural gang culture and their urban counterpart has become blurred in the form of language, music, body markings, and clothing. It has also become more of a mainstream problem throughout the countries of the world, making it more difficult to identify actual gang members from those students who may superficially identify with gang culture and fashion (Hethorn, 1994; Alleyne and Woods 2010; Dammert, 2017).

In the opinion of Cantrell and Cantrell, (1993) that rural educators have become interested in how to determine the extent of serious gang activity in their schools and what preventive measures can be taken to address gang expansion. Little is known, however, of the prevalence of rural gang members or how

they may differ from their urban peers. However, their modes of operations are the same and they always have negative impacts on the community such as raping, armed robbery, destruction of lives and properties among others. However, the level of their negative impacts on the community and democratic development depends on their level of sophistication. This level is conditioned by their level of access to drugs and weapons.

No doubt, in conjunction with the popularization of gang culture, Klein, Maxson, and Miller, (1995) noted that the spread of new gang activity is principally indigenous in nature, with up to ninety (90) small cities of populations of ten thousand (10,000) or less now possess active gangs. All of these cumulate to an upsurge in violence and a slowdown in democratic sustenance. The OJJDP (2001) also underscore the fact that in 1999, law enforcement agencies reported active youth gangs in all of the America's largest cities those with populations of 250,000 or more, forty seven percent (47%) of suburban counties, twenty seven percent (27%) of small cities those with populations below 25,000 and eighteen percent (18%) of rural counties. Although many gangs continue to be based on race or ethnicity, gangs are increasingly diverse in racial or ethnic composition.

Law enforcement agencies responding to the 1998 National Youth Gang Survey, estimated that more than one-third (36 percent) of youth gangs had a significant mixture of two or more racial or ethnic groups (National Youth Gang Center, 2000). Small cities had the largest proportion of gangs with mixed race or ethnicity. The Midwest had a larger proportion of mixed gangs than any other region. While in developing countries, there are more less educated, semi educated

and a significant number of uneducated youths in gangs and gang violence engagements in the forms of school cultism, political thugs among others (Aluko 2014; 2016a). All of the cases of gang culture and violence negatively affect the democratic structure because it diverts the government attentions from developmental projects to rehabilitation of gang members.

However, as gang culture becomes more normative among youth in urban and rural settings, the risk of hard core gang development in rural environments has increased. Changes in rural environments due to exposure to satellite television and the internet communication that had isolated many rural youth had accelerated the influence of urban gang culture on many rural communities therefore leading to bad behaviours, violence and poor contribution to the democratic sustenance (Maxson 1993; Evans et al 1999; Bullock and Tilley 2008).

However, UNHCR, (2010) findings indicates that there is no longer a significant rural/urban difference in how gang members have lived in their communities with the translocation of urban gang members as the primary cause of the recent rise in rural gang activities. This supports previous studies that have found the spread of gangs to be largely a home grown phenomenon such as government neglect to the needs of the different age groups in the community and poor access to basic amenities of life such as food, clothing and housing by the deprived persons (Randle and Bichler, 2017; Bohmer, and Shuman, 2018).

Therefore, the more prevalent gang activities are in a country the lesser the peace and growth rate in the political, economic and social status of communities. This implies that the government will spend more money to build up peace and maintain the security of lives and

properties, rehabilitation of gangs and social services. However, such amount of money used for the rehabilitation of gangs and the reduction of the gang violence could have been used for other developmental projects which will benefits the entire state. Sustainable peace is most needed for democratic growth and sustenance. In the locations where there are frequent outbreak of violence, frequent agitations and the disturbance of public peace, both local and foreign investors will not be encourage to start up businesses which might improve the socio-economic development of the location.

In any democratic governance, gangs are potential instruments for violence. In many developing countries and a few developed countries, gangs are usually employed by the individuals to foment troubles in the political system. The violence generated may have political, religious or ethnic inclination. In the developing countries where unemployment and government policies on security, employment and youth empowerment and development are weak or not in existence gangs of various outlook such as political, ethnic or religious gangs are prominent.

The democratic system will become polarised and development will become slower than when there is peace. The prevalence of gang violence leads to more urban violence and less growth in the state. Also where gang culture prevails, the little available developmental projects in the state will be wrecked down, tyre burning theory phenomenon becomes prevalent, lives of people will be in jeopardy and productive efforts of human personnel will be wasted through the violence.

CONCLUSION

Gang culture breeds gang violence and gang violence leads to urban or rural violence. Violence of whatsoever nature results into reduction of democratic peace and democratic sustenance. Sustainable peace in a democratic system determines the rate of growth in a system. Democratic sustenance is a pivot to development and growth of any community. The onset of peace is synonymous to the end of violence and tyre burning phenomenon symbols will be eradicated. Whenever gang culture, membership and associations are reduced, urban violence and gang violence scale of operation will reduce while the prospect for democratic development and sustenance increases.

In curbing this gang menace, government policies should be targeted on the reduction of gang activities in either the urban and rural areas by the active engagement of the youths and the vast population in the economic sectors for productive activities in the country. A country with many gangs who are not re-engaged in productive economic activities will end up with many social vices and packets of violence unleashed on the community. The destruction of properties, burning of tyres and generally unsafe community will be the characteristics of such environment.

Law enforcement agents must be well equipped to be able to identify, combat, defeat and manage the gangs so as to have a peaceful community. A proper government rehabilitation policy and scheme is needed in such community so as to be able to stop the gang membership and gang culture. This will eventually reduce the prevalence and the impacts of the gang violence on the sustenance

of peace, development and democracy in the country.

The tyre burning theory exemplifies a peaceful atmosphere of protest in the society which turns into a chaotic situation due to a perceived unjust norm and government inadequate provision to forestall such occurrence. The resultant aftermath of the situation is usually tyre burning on the street and destruction of properties. The government and other stakeholders like civil organizations should emphasis the promotion of peaceful coexistence of all divergent groups in the society and the equitable distribution of the socio political and economic public goods so as to reduce gang culture, violence and enhance democratic sustenance. The youths who are prone to get into gang membership should be engaged in the means of production in the community so as to reduce the attempt to fractionise the community on the basis of perceived maltreatment of their socio-political or economic groups.

Any community that over look and undermines the activities of violence will enhance gang membership, gang build up, gang culture and gang violence. This will cumulate into urban violence and the destruction of lives and properties. Government must also embark on empowerment of civil societies in educating parents and the general public to forestall gang culture in the community. Sensitization projects for the vulnerable groups must also be done so as to psychologically re-birth' the gang members and prevent reoccurrence of violence in the community. This will in turn help every members of the community to have the orientation of state building and national development for a sustainable development in

the country at large instead of gang membership and urban violence prevalence.

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