



Research Paper

Urban Violence and Security Challenge in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined urban violence and security in Nigeria, highlighting its adverse effects on urban peace and stability. It argued that urban violence threatens security, impacting the socio-economic well-being and development of urban residents. This escalation in violence has resulted in increased insecurity, loss of life, and property. Using Anomie theory, the paper suggested that societal expectations without legal means to achieve them drive criminal behavior. The discrepancy between societal goals and accessible means to success can lead individuals to resort to illegitimate methods. Drawing from secondary data sources, the paper identified factors contributing to urban violence and their adverse effects on urban peace and stability. The study recommended that the Nigerian government take pragmatic measures, emphasizing the creation of job opportunities, improvement of social amenities in rural and urban areas, and enhancement of security measures in urban centers.

Keywords: Urban violence and Security.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Urban violence imperils the safety and welfare of individuals, communities, and societies globally. With the swift rise of urbanization, cities grapple with a myriad of issues linked to crime, conflict, and violence. In Nigeria, major urban centers are plagued by persistent urban violence. Inter-ethnic clashes, religious and political intolerance, boundary disputes, youth unemployment, urban poverty, and economic despair among young graduates and school leavers are prevalent. These factors exacerbate the wealth gap between the affluent and the impoverished, fostering a sense of exploitation among the underprivileged. Insufficient housing, inadequate transportation and public utilities, deficient social infrastructure, ethnic bias, political discord, governmental disregard for laws, unequal treatment under the law leading to impunity for some offenders, lack of government respect for judicial independence, and the infiltration of violent foreign cultures via mass media further exacerbate tensions in urban areas (Anyanwu 2024; Jiaxuan Yue et al.2022; Taiwo et al. 2022;Waila& Mubi 2011).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) in its global reports published in 2002, violence is characterized as the "intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group of the community either resulting in or having a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation." Tamuno (1993) defines violence as the unlawful use or threat of force; Domenach (1988) opines that violence is the utilization of force, whether overt or covert, to obtain from individuals or groups something they are not willing to give of their own volition.

The urban center serves as a fertile breeding ground for various forms of violence. Being the epicenter of economic, political, and social activity, it acts as a melting pot for individuals from diverse backgrounds, regardless of race, religion, or culture. As noted by Anyanwu (2024), it is perceived as a battleground for class competition and the struggle for control over economic resources and political power. The deteriorating economic and political conditions in urban areas often lead to demonstrations, riots, and conflicts, as highlighted by (Anyanwu 2024; Ukoji&Ukoji 2023; Jiaxuan Yue et al.2022). Due to the anonymity afforded by urban living, it becomes a sanctuary for criminals such as armed robbers, thieves, kidnappers, rapists, arsonists, and murderers, who carry out their nefarious activities without fear of identification.

Anyanwu (2024), Essien (2016) and Waila& Mubi (2011) further argues that the concentration of civic organizations and associations in urban centers makes them susceptible to violence. Women's groups, ethnic associations, student unions, trade unions, and professional bodies, among others, serve as catalysts for unrest within cities. This is supported by Osaghea (1994), who points out that strikes, consumer boycotts, riots, and protests often originate from these groups. Moreover, urban centers are prime targets for terrorists and militants

who use them as hubs for gathering intelligence and planning attacks. Ukoji & Ukoji (2023) and Jiakuan Yue et al. (2022) also observe that urban areas harbor a significant population of homeless, unemployed, and impoverished individuals who can be easily manipulated and recruited to disrupt the peace. These marginalized groups are susceptible to incitement and can be coerced into turning peaceful demonstrations violent. Additionally, urban areas tend to have a sizable contingent of troublemakers who are prone to violence, making them convenient tools for political leaders and the elite to exploit for personal gain and settling scores. Given the various security challenges posed by urban violence that have undermined the development and tranquillity of urban centres, this paper aims to analyse and assess the contributions of urban violence to the escalating security challenges in Nigeria. The study addresses questions such as: What are the causes of urban violence? What are the effects of urban violence and its impact on security challenges? Additionally, it explores the impacts of urban violence on the emotional and health well-being of urban residents, as well as on the development, peace, and stability of urban centres. The paper also proposes solutions to revive the deteriorated state of these urban areas.

Theoretical Framework

ANOMIE THEORY

Anomie is a concept introduced by French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) in the 20th century, describing a state of normlessness marked by upheaval in social values, often linked to rapid social change and disorder. Durkheim first applied the term in his influential study on suicide, identifying it as a social condition that could lead to higher suicide rates. Robert Merton (1938) expanded on the concept in his strain theory, defining anomie as the strain between societal expectations and goals and the socially acceptable means of attaining them.

This study adopted the Anomie theory, originally formulated by Robert Merton (1938), to explore the correlation between security and urban violence, a pervasive issue in many Nigerian cities. The term "anomie" derives from the French word denoting normlessness or lawlessness, as conceptualized by Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) in the 20th century. Durkheim defined it as the absence or violation of societal norms and core values guiding human behavior. Robert K. Merton later adapted Durkheim's anomie-strain theory into the means-end paradigm in 1938.

According to the Anomie theory, society establishes goals, standards, and values without providing adequate opportunities for achieving them, leading to the emergence of crime and criminals. Merton argued that while all societies endorse certain goals and means for achieving them, not everyone can pursue success through legitimate channels. This imbalance exerts pressure on individuals, prompting various forms of deviant behavior, including rebellion, retreatism, ritualism, innovation, and conformity.

Merton's typology of individual adaptations to societal pressures, known as the "plus-minus paradigm," categorizes responses to structural strains. These adaptations include Conformity (+ +), Innovation (+ -), Ritualism (- +), Retreatism (- -), and Rebellion ($\pm \pm$), each representing different combinations of acceptance and rejection of societal goals and means.

An analysis of the Anomie theory sheds light on the prevalence of serious crimes in urban areas. The disparity in wealth and economic hardships drive urban dwellers, particularly those in lower socioeconomic classes, to seek alternative means of achieving societal goals, often resorting to violence. This phenomenon exacerbates urban violence, undermining peace and stability in cities.

The theory also underscores the role of youth in perpetrating urban violence, as they face economic deprivation and frustration due to blocked opportunities for success. In a society where wealth is equated with social status, many youths view crime as a legitimate path to prosperity, disregarding societal norms and values.

Overall, the Anomie theory offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of urban violence and its impact on security, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address socioeconomic disparities and promote lawful avenues for success.

VIOLENCE AND URBAN VIOLENCE

In the urban cities of Nigeria, violence manifests in various forms depending on the nature of the acts being perpetrated. Anyanwu (2024) asserts that violence entails causing injury, harm to individuals, or damage to property. However, the state, in its efforts to maintain peace and stability, may resort to the use of violence to enforce law and order through established organs or security agencies. This use of force, which may be termed as violence, is purportedly for the greater good of the populace and the national interest, aimed at protecting lives and property. In such instances, the state exercises its monopoly on power, acting in the interest of the general well-being of its citizens. Consequently, the state may employ force or violence against suspected individuals who pose a threat to others or may aid in foreign incursions into the state.

The escalation of urban violence in major Nigerian cities can be attributed to persistent factors such as rising unemployment, perceived injustices in resource allocation, severe economic crises, and ineffective

security agencies, among others. According to Albert (1994), urbanization plays a significant role in exacerbating urban violence, as the growth of urban areas attracts a diverse array of individuals with varying motives. This influx of people into urban centers leads to population increases and development, which, while creating employment opportunities, also contribute to the emergence of violence rooted in the social, political, and economic dynamics of cities.

Okunola et al (2020), Waila & Mubi (2011), Tamuno, (1991) elucidates that urban violence stems from the perceived obstacles to achieving goals and the struggles encountered by urban residents in making ends meet. The frustration arising from the challenges of sustaining livelihoods and aspirations in urban environments often drives individuals to resort to violent crimes. Moreover, the social, cultural, and economic pressures inherent in urban life can lead to maladaptive behaviors, resulting in egregious acts of violence. This maladaptation arises from the stress and strain of attempting to reconcile societal expectations with available means. When these two facets are in conflict, it engenders deviant behavior due to the incompatibility between goals and means, as affirmed by Stren (1992), particularly evident in the declining infrastructure prevalent in many developing country cities.

The continuous growth of urban populations has led to a depletion of resources and the overuse of infrastructure within cities, thereby hampering their capacity to function effectively. Anyanwu (2024) highlights that educational institutions, infrastructure, power supply, and social amenities are essential for the proper functioning of urban centers. However, violence persists in these areas because the different sectors comprising the urban environment vie for access to the necessary resources and materials for daily life, intensifying tensions within the city.

Despite the state's efforts to manage demand, population growth, particularly among youths, has outpaced its capacity to meet their needs. As Osaghea (1994) suggests, urban areas serve as hubs for social, economic, and political processes, thereby creating an environment conducive to conflict and violence. Urban policies and planning have been identified as contributing factors to the endemic violence in cities, exacerbating issues such as housing shortages, the proliferation of slums and informal settlements, inadequate policing, and the abandonment of essential services.

The prevalence of unemployed youths, unmarried urban residents, and homeless individuals presents opportunities for political groups to exploit and manipulate them for their own ends. This vulnerability is exploited by political elites and leaders, leading to the escalation of violence during legitimate demonstrations, elections, and social and religious gatherings.

According to Osaghea (1994), several factors contribute to the escalating urban violence, including rising divorce rates, family disintegration, weakening traditional and cultural norms, shifts in urban lifestyles, the proliferation of academic institutions, and the concentration of major industries within urban areas. Moreover, the aspirations of rural migrants seeking opportunities in urban centers often clash with the harsh realities of limited employment prospects, inadequate housing, low wages, and high living costs, leading to frustration and susceptibility to manipulation by the ruling class. These frustrations, compounded by economic crises, result in various forms of violence and crime as individuals seek to alleviate their hardships, disrupting the peace and tranquillity of urban centres.

(Guerra, & Smith, 2006; Anyanwu 2024, Moser, 2004; Osaghea 1994) argues that the pronounced social class disparities and structural inequalities exacerbate urban violence in the country. Various factors contribute to this increase, including the presence of violent ethnic militias, incidents of suicide, terrorism, instances of military and police brutality, and civil unrest. Consequently, urban areas have become synonymous with violence due to the diverse groups and organizations present within them.

Violence is perpetrated by various groups and targets specific, manifesting in different categories in the urban areas. These categories include political, institutional, economic, economic/social, and social violence. Political violence, committed by state and non-state actors, includes guerrilla conflicts, paramilitary clashes, political assassinations, and armed conflicts between political parties. Institutional violence involves state and informal institutions, such as extra-judicial killings by police, abuse by health and education workers, vigilante social cleansing, and lynching amongst others. Economic violence encompasses organized crime and business interests, leading to intimidation, street theft, robbery, kidnapping, drug trafficking, car theft, small arms dealing, and assaults. Economic/social violence involves gangs, street children, and ethnic violence, resulting in territorial disputes, petty theft, and communal riots. Social violence includes intimate partner violence, public sexual violence, child abuse, inter-generational conflict, and routine daily violence, manifesting through physical and psychological abuse, incivility, road rage, bar fights, and uncontrolled arguments, (Elfversson & Høglund 2023; Okunola et al 2020; Moser 2004; Muehlenhard & Kimes 1999; Obateru 1994; Tamuno 1991)

CAUSES OF URBAN VIOLENCE

The rise in urban violence is closely tied to the escalating unemployment rates in urban centres. Youth unemployment incentivizes violence as a means of economic survival, providing young individuals with resources garnered from various criminal activities to meet their needs. Inyang (2009) underscores the role of youth unemployment as a driving force behind activities such as kidnapping, emphasizing the adage "an idle mind is the devil's workshop." Bello & Jamilu (2017) further elaborate on the pivotal role of youth and adolescent unemployment in the increasing incidents of kidnapping, as lack of employment opportunities pushes them toward engaging in various forms of violence within urban settings, including robbery, theft, assault, and burglary.

Moreover, moral and cultural decay has contributed significantly to the surge in urban violence. The erosion of moral and cultural values in urban areas has propelled youths toward various forms of violent behavior. Onovo (2009) highlights the glorification of fraudsters by societal leaders as a contributing factor to the persistent increase in crime rates in Nigeria, attributing this trend to the pursuit of materialism and the loss of societal values. This loss of moral compass has normalized immorality and fraudulent activities among urban dwellers, undermining traditional principles of peace, stability, and coexistence.

Furthermore, the deteriorating educational system in urban areas has exacerbated urban violence leading to a surplus of school leavers and unemployed youths who resort to violence to make ends meet. This influx of unoccupied youths has resulted in a proliferation of crime across various urban locales. Overall, the combination of deteriorating educational standards and rampant unemployment has positioned the youth as primary perpetrators of urban violence, (Rajni 2015; Onovo 2009; Bello & Jamilu 2017)

Political instrumentalism and leadership failures have contributed significantly to urban violence, with youths often manipulated by political leaders to perpetrate various forms of violence and criminal activities in urban areas. Bello & Jamilu (2017) highlight how political corruption fosters kidnapping as a means to achieve political objectives, with ransom funds being used to finance movements or agendas. Political leaders exploit youths to carry out social vices, including rape, assassination, murder, riots, and repression, undermining peace and security within the nation. This leadership failure exacerbates crime rates as disillusioned youths emulate their corrupt mentors, justifying their criminal actions.

Domestic violence also plays a role in facilitating youth violence, as violence learned within the home environment can manifest in urban settings. Giddens (1998) defines family violence as physical abuse directed by one family member against another, impacting children who may witness or experience such aggression. Many youths, traumatized by domestic violence, seek refuge in urban areas, where they may form alliances with peers to commit violent acts. The negative influence of familial violence perpetuates a cycle of violence that spills over into urban settings.

Furthermore, urban violence is fuelled by inequality and exclusion, as highlighted by Moser (2004). When urban residents are marginalized from economic opportunities and social participation, feelings of alienation and frustration can escalate into violence. Additionally, lack of equal access to jobs, amenities, and social positions further exacerbates these tensions, driving some individuals to resort to crime and violence as a means of survival in urban centres plagued by poverty and inequality.

CONCEPTUALISING SECURITY

The concept of security has evolved significantly over the past century, transitioning from traditional notions to encompass a broader, non-traditional perspective. Traditionally, security management was primarily the responsibility of the state, as articulated by political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes (1662), who emphasized the state's role in guaranteeing the security of lives, property, and law and order through its political sovereignty and monopoly of violence. However, with the end of the Cold War and the advent of globalization, security management has taken on new dimensions which encompasses a wide range of non-traditional threats, such as information warfare, drug trafficking, nuclear pollution, disease epidemics like HIV-AIDS, corruption, human trafficking, and internal insurgency, CSS (2011). This shift in focus from external hostilities to internal challenges reflects the changing nature of security in the modern world.

According to the White Paper on Defence in South Africa (1996), security is viewed as a comprehensive condition wherein individuals live in freedom, peace, and safety, participating fully in governance, enjoying fundamental rights protection, accessing resources and necessities, and inhabiting environments conducive to health and well-being.

Igbuzor (2011) defines security as the situation resulting from measures established to protect persons, information, and property against hostile influences and actions, ensuring conditions for normal daily activities without threats to lives or properties. Additionally, security entails protection from chronic threats and harmful disruptions, as emphasized by Eme (2011), who underscores stability, livelihood continuity, predictability of daily life, protection from crime, and freedom from psychological harm as essential components.

Furthermore, security may be understood as protection against future threats, or the activities involved in safeguarding countries, buildings, or individuals from danger, as articulated by Wehmeier and Ashby (2002). Overall, these diverse perspectives highlight the multidimensional nature of security and the imperative of addressing various threats to ensure the well-being and safety of individuals and communities.

Security can be succinctly defined as the safeguarding against various forms of harm, whether physical, economic, or psychological. Scholars emphasize that security entails freedom from fear, turmoil, danger, hostility, violence, war, and any other events that may cause unease for individuals and nations. Imobighe (2002) underscores the pivotal role of security, stating that "without security, individuals within a state will find it difficult to engage in productive activities." Similarly, Abraham (2020) emphasizes that without security, "the state is bound to experience great difficulty in harnessing its human and material resources towards meaningful development and the promotion of the general well-being of the people." Hence, security revolves around the protection of lives and property, mitigating threats (including natural disasters and artificial hazards), and preserving peace and security within society.

URBAN VIOLENCE AND SECURITY

Urban violence profoundly affects security within urban centres, manifesting in high levels of crime such as assaults, rapes, burglaries, and robberies, instilling fear and anxiety among residents. This sense of insecurity restricts movement, undermines freedoms, and creates tension in affected areas. According to the World Bank (2011), urban violence disrupts solidarity and relationships among urban dwellers, leading to decreased mobility in violence-prone areas and undermining overall security, peace, and stability.

Moreover, urban violence disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups, including women, children, and visitors to urban centres, who face heightened risks of rape, sexual assault, and other forms of violence, contributing to increased anxiety and fear in urban environments.

Furthermore, the psychological toll of urban violence on urban dwellers is significant. The trauma inflicted by violence can lead to anxiety, depression, and mental health issues, fostering a pervasive sense of insecurity and suspicion among residents. The World Bank (2011) underscores that trauma experienced in urban violence may perpetuate a cycle of violence, as traumatized individuals may resort to violence themselves, further exacerbating security concerns within the city.

Furthermore, exposure to trauma resulting from urban violence has detrimental effects on individuals' lives. The fear of victimization, feelings of insecurity, and vulnerability to further violence can erode the psyche of urban dwellers, leading to heightened stress levels and the development of conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These psychological impacts may reduce community cohesion, social interaction, and participation, while also limiting the mobility of urban residents. Additionally, victims may adopt new social patterns in response to their traumatic experiences.

In terms of social impact, urban violence disrupts the social fabric of urban communities. The persistent rise in urban violence undermines trust and collective actions among residents, as highlighted by the World Bank (2011). Fear and distrust generated by violence can weaken community cohesion, deter investment, stigmatize neighbourhoods, and restrict educational and employment opportunities. Consequently, neighbourhoods plagued by crime and violence may experience social disintegration, creating fertile ground for further violence within urban centres.

Moreover, areas prone to crime and violence may suffer from poor infrastructure and neglect by governmental and industrial entities, exacerbating poverty and social inequality. Urban violence disrupts social networks and collaborative efforts toward communal living in urban centres, while also increasing police presence and inconveniencing residents, leading many to relocate to safer areas.

Urban violence poses significant obstacles to the economic development of urban centers, as emphasized by the World Bank (2011), which asserts that it "impacts economic development by drastically reducing growth and producing long-lasting detrimental social impacts." High crime rates associated with insecurity deter local and foreign investment, impede government developmental plans, and decrease productivity and business activity. This, in turn, leads to a rise in unemployment, discourages investors, and reduces patronage, while also increasing government spending on security, infrastructure rehabilitation, and social amenities in crime-prone areas.

Furthermore, urban violence displaces urban dwellers, compelling many to seek safer environments with lower crime rates. Victims of urban violence live in constant fear and often seek refuge elsewhere. However, mass migration strains resources, infrastructure, job opportunities, and social amenities in destination areas, leading to competition and overcrowding, (Rajni 2015; Imobighe 2002, Moser, 2004; Osaghea 1994)

The negative impact of urban violence extends beyond economic considerations, affecting the security, well-being, and life expectancy of urban dwellers. The pervasive fear and anxiety resulting from violence disrupt social and economic activities. Despite efforts to maintain peace and stability, the persistent rise in urban violence undermines these goals. According to Igbuzor (2011), security is essential for individuals to carry out

their daily activities without threats to their lives or properties. However, the continued increase in urban violence challenges the government's ability to guarantee the safety and security of its citizens, creating a significant gap in security provision.

II. CONCLUSION

Urban violence permeates the tranquillity and stability of urban centres, disrupting the social, economic, and emotional well-being of urban dwellers. This pervasive issue has seen a consistent rise alongside the process of urbanization. Primarily attributed to disaffected youth, urban violence manifests as a response to frustration and disenchantment with societal structures. Its repercussions are profound, resulting in loss of lives and properties, widespread trauma, and the displacement of urban residents.

Urban violence, rooted in factors such as unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion, poses significant challenges to security within urban environments. The study reveals that rising unemployment rates, moral and cultural decay, and a deteriorating educational system have significantly contributed to the surge in urban violence. The influx of idle youths has led to increased crime across urban areas, while political instrumentalism and leadership failures have further exacerbated the issue, affecting the security framework. To address this pressing issue, it is imperative for government authorities to implement comprehensive strategies. This includes creating employment opportunities to alleviate economic hardship and reduce feelings of marginalization among vulnerable youth populations. Additionally, enhancing social infrastructure and amenities in both rural and urban areas can help reduce migration pressures and foster community cohesion.

Furthermore, effective governance, strong leadership, and robust security frameworks are essential in containing and addressing the root causes of urban violence. By prioritizing social welfare programs, promoting inclusive economic growth, and fostering dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders, governments can work towards creating safer and more resilient urban environments for all citizens.

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