

**NIGERIAN YOUTHS INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICAL VIOLENCE: THE ROLE OF PEER PRESSURE,
DRUG ABUSE, SOCIAL DOMINANCE AND GANG MEMBERSHIP**

BY

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Abstract

This study examined peer pressure, drug abuse, social dominance and gang membership as predictors of involvement in political violence among street urchins in Lagos metropolis, Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Three hundred and eighty-seven (387) street urchins randomly selected from the four areas of Lagos metropolis (Oshodi, Mushin, Lagos Island and Ijora) were participants for the study. They responded to a self-report questionnaire containing standardised scales. Data was analysed using frequency, Mean, Standard Deviation, t-test and PPMC at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that gang involvement, social dominance and peer pressure jointly predicted political violence ($R^2 = 0.63$, $F(3,384) = 23.18$, $p < .01$). It was also found that gang involvement, drug abuse, social dominance and peer pressure all had significant relationship with political violence among street urchins in Lagos metropolis, and that street urchins with high dominance orientation tend to be involved in political violence more than street urchins with low dominance orientation. It was also found that each of peer pressure ($\beta = .82$; $t = 12.98$, $p < 0.01$); and social dominance ($\beta = .57$; $t = 10.66$, $p < 0.05$) had significant relative contribution to the prediction of political violence. Recommendations include that; vocational guidance should be given a place of priority as street urchins these days do not have the prerequisite qualification for most available employments, hence the temptation to engage in anti-social behaviour such as political violence. Useful suggestions for further studies were also offered.

Keywords: Drug abuse, Gang membership, Peer pressure, Political violence, Social dominance Orientation

Introduction

Since Nigeria's political independence in 1960, political violence has grown ingrained in the political atmosphere and culture, with most elections since then (1964, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019) characterised by widespread violence. Political violence refers to any sort of violence that occurs during the political process. Violent assault on politicians and/or electorates, disrespect for opinions and practices during the election process, the use of force by political parties and their supporters to intimidate opponents and threaten the democratic peace of a society before, during, and after elections, and any unruly act that seeks to undermine or delay the democratic process are all examples of this (Ezeokoli et al., 2019). Youths are at the epicentre of political violence in Nigeria. Youths are at the heart of political violence in Nigeria, where they are formed into youth wings that are exploited by party henchmen for political violence and criminal operations in exchange for a token amount of money. The engagement of youths in political violence endangers Nigeria's embryonic democracy and the rule of law. Youths have been discovered to be involved in the use of force to interrupt political meetings and the voting process, as well as in the use of hazardous weapons to frighten voters and in causing physical harm or injury to those involved in electoral procedures.

Young people in Nigeria have been involved in some unusual acts of violence. Youth violence has reached historic proportions, according to Ezeokoli et al., (2019). Murder, religious uprisings, party fights, cult battles, shooting, stabbing, abduction for ransom, armed robbery, including armed bank robbery, theft, burglary, rape, rioting against government policies, vandalism, ethnic militancy, and so on are examples of these acts of violence. Violence is frequently conducted by well-organized and hierarchical gangs or political militias. Their membership consists primarily of youths who have turned into war machines and engage in a variety of activities such as harassment, intimidation, maiming, and alleged killing of political opponents, which frequently take place in open spaces such as praying grounds, motor parks, and major highways, which serve as the primary residences of the street urchins (Ishola, 2011). According to Nweke (2005), factors that are responsible for youth-led political violence include the following: A good number of youths who participate in acts of political violence come from embattled and economically poor homesteads. They are either uneducated or school drop-outs. The high rate of unemployment and underemployment especially among graduates of tertiary institutions is yet another factor that accounts for the high incidence of youths participation in political violence; moral decadence in youths and as well as the political manipulation of the psycho-cultural dispositions of youths towards elections by political elites have equally generated violent competition at elections. Poverty, ignorance, gang involvement, inequitable distribution of natural resources; arms proliferation as well as lack of political willpower to prosecute perpetrators of political violence are

some of the major causes of political violence in Nigeria (Ugiagbe, 2010). Onwudiwe and Berwind (2010) have identified factors that promote political violence in Nigeria to include dissatisfaction with government performance, competition for resources, inter and intragroup distrust, joblessness and unscrupulous attitude of politicians with little or no respect for the rule of law.

One of the major phenomena fueling the perpetration of political violence is the membership of gangs and drug abuse. A gang is a collection of people, mainly young people, who share a similar identity and participate in illegal activity. A gang is defined as a group of two or more members that has criminal acts as its primary or secondary goal. They are generally long-lasting, mostly street-based groupings of young people for whom crime and violence are intrinsic to the group's identity (Adeniyi & Jinadu, 2021). Gang members often have similar social, cultural, and psychological qualities (Adeniyi & Jinadu, 2021). There is little question that the majority of youngsters who join gangs do so for protection, fun, respect, money, or because a buddy is a member of a gang. According to Aluko (2014), gangs are becoming a haven for juvenile violence, which is a common occurrence in Nigeria. Basically, gang behaviour has become a major danger to the country's social stability (Adeniyi & Jinadu, 2021). Drugs such as alcohol, cannabis, and tramadol are commonly used psychoactive substances, and their usage continues to be a major public health problem. Alcohol is a risk factor for approximately 60 illnesses and injuries, including noncommunicable diseases (Ajayi, Owolabi & Olajire, 2019). Youths establish gangs and are frequently observed "hanging" out with friends experimenting with new activities, including substance usage. Young individuals frequently begin by using "gateway" substances such as cigarettes and alcohol, and then proceed to additional substances to the point where they govern their behaviour (Anyanwu et al., 2016). Substances are used for a variety of reasons, including anxiety suppression or mustering the confidence to talk to the opposite sex, as a method of integrating into the desired gang or social groups, and as a means of feeling "high" at all times. Alcohol consumption among this demographic is frequently accompanied by the use of other psychoactive drugs, which exacerbates the harmful consequences on individuals.

Nwolise (2007) have identified that political violence results from the belief of those in power in perpetrating themselves through social dominance. Through their activities, they have engendered structural imbalance, including coercion of citizens by government to register or vote, unequal opportunities for political parties and candidates, abuse of power of incumbency in order to stay in power. Thus, the youths who are their followers tend to emulate them in carrying out political violence. Akingboye (2001) has also observed that most youths especially those who are desperately in need have problems in making and taking decisions. Höglund (2006) also identified that political violence were perpetrated by leaders high on social dominance by both the incumbent power holder to avoid defeat and the opposition elements seeking to wrest political power from the governing party. Also, prevalence of political violence in Africa's new democracies may be a product of a culture of violence and social dominance orientation (Ugiagbe, 2010). Onwudiwe and Berwim (2010) posit that competition for natural resources as factors that promote political violence while Ugiagbe (2010) identified proliferation of arms, drug use, and lack of transparency as well as exposure to violence in the mass media as factors that can predispose youth to political violence.

Pressures from peers are always influencing youth susceptibility to violent behaviour. Many youths will do risky, dangerous, or illegal things when in the company of their peers that they would not do when on their own. Peer pressure, like any other psychological stress, can make a youth vulnerable to violence. Peer pressure can influence behaviours (pressure to have another drink, be more sexually active, vote for a certain person) or may influence thinking and values. It can be direct with peers verbally making statements that encourage thoughts/behaviours and it can be indirect with peers behaving in a way and rejecting when others do not fall into line. Peer pressure refers to how individuals adopt a certain course of action, which is sanctioned by their peer group (Chatterjee et al., 2017). Young persons learn to relate to peer group for different roles and to experiment with interpersonal interaction skills that will eventually transfer to the world of adults (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). The peer group is not a formalized and institutionalized agent of society; it has no legal definitions, no formally ascribed functions or duties, yet it pervades the life of the adolescent to a greater extent as he grows older, and it performs increasingly big functions in teaching him the ways of behaviour (Yeh, 2006). In a study that was focused on how violence in the community relates to delinquency and substance use in adolescents, Zinzow et al. (2009) found that when adolescents form relationships with people who display antisocial behaviour, they are likely to take part in the behaviour themselves. The major purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of peer pressure, drug abuse, social dominance and gang membership on youths' involvement in political violence in Lagos metropolis. The main study was designed to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To determine the influence of peer pressure, drug abuse, social dominance and gang membership on youth political violent behaviour in Lagos metropolis, Lagos State.
2. To examine the joint contribution of the independent variables to the prediction of political violence
3. To examine the relative contribution of each of the independent variables to the prediction of political violence

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There would be a significant relationship among peer pressure, drug abuse, social dominance and gang membership on youth involvement in political violence.
2. Peer pressure, drug abuse, social dominance and gang membership will jointly and independently predict youth involvement in political violence.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design of the ex-post facto type. Thus, the researcher established the influence of peer pressure, drug abuse, social dominance and gang membership on political violence among youths in Lagos metropolis. The study has four independent and one dependent variable. The dependent variable is political violence among youth electorates while peer pressure, drug abuse, social dominance and gang membership are the independent variables.

The population of the study covered the entire street urchins in Lagos metropolis in Lagos State of Nigeria. The sampling procedure was the multi stage sampling technique. At the first stage a random selection of four (4) settings within Lagos metropolis (Oshodi, Mushin, Lagos Island and Ijora) was done. Then purposive sampling technique was used to draw 387 participants for the study. These participants were youths with the age range of 18 to 40 years. More than two-third (76.4%) of the respondents were males while 23.6% were females. The age distribution shows that 38.2% of the respondents were 14-25 years of age, 36.6% were 26-35 years, 25.3% were 36-40 years of age. About 61.4% of the respondents were singles, 36.6% were married. 19.2% of the respondents had no formal education, 13.8% had primary school certificate, 43.1% had a secondary school certificate and 23.6% had higher education. About 68.3% of the respondents lived in the house. More than 77.2% of the respondents reported that they are not in full time work while 23.8% reported that they have part-time job such as bus conductors, drivers, POS operators, sport betting agents, cyclists and Keke drivers.

A structured questionnaire was used in this study as the tool for data collection. The instrument was also translated to Yoruba language to facilitate easy comprehension among the non-literate boys in garage. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section A. This section tapped most of the relevant demographic information of the participant. These demographic characteristics include: Age, sex, religion, ethnic group, socio-economic status, occupation, and level of education completed. This section was pre-coded and therefore: Age was measured as written by the respondent; sex was measured as male scored as 1 and female scored as 2; Ethnic group, level of education, occupation, religion, and socio-economic status, were also listed out and coded accordingly. Social Dominance Orientation was captured using A 16-item scale developed by (Sidanius & Prato, 1999) was used. It is a self-report scale developed to measure people social dominance orientation at individual levels. The Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDOS) can be administered within 4 to 5 minutes. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert type response scale ranging from (1) = strongly disagree, (2) = disagree, (3) = undecided, (4) = agree and (5) = strongly agree. The overall scores theoretically range from 5–80. Scores above the mean implies high level of SDO while scores below the mean indicate low level of SDO. Items 9 to 16 were reverse coded. The authors reported Alpha Coefficient of 0.76 and a test-retest reliability of 0.82 in their initial study. In this study, the scale has Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients of 0.72 and Guttman split-half coefficient of 0.85.

Peer pressure was measured using the peer influence (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007), which assesses the degree to which youths act autonomously in interactions with their peers. Participants read two conflicting scenarios (e.g., “Some people go along with their friends just to keep their friends happy” but “Other people refuse to go along with what their friends want to do, even though they know it will make their friends unhappy”) and are asked to select which statement is more like them (=1) and then to assess the strength of their endorsement (5 = sort of true or really true). Ten scenarios are presented, each examining different dimensions of possible influence, such as going along with friends, fitting in with friends, and knowingly doing something wrong. Higher scores indicate less susceptibility to peer influence. Internal consistency at the indicated adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .73$) and

adequate fit of the scale to the data (comparative fit index [CFI] = .94 and root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .04). A five-item scale created by Harper et al. (2008). It looks at a variety of gang-related actions (such as donning gang colours, participating in gang fights, using gang signs, and writing gang graffiti on walls) to get a complete picture of gang activity. Interviewees were requested to assess how frequently they engage in gang-related behaviour on a 4-point scale. High scores indicate a high level of gang involvement. The scale alpha coefficient was 0.68. The items "participating in gang fights" and "putting gang graffiti on walls". The current study recorded a reliability of 0.95 alpha. The Addiction Severity Index (ASI; McLellan, Luborsky, O'Brien, & Woody, 1980) is a frequently used evaluation tool in the field of substance misuse. The lifetime usage of alcohol, marijuana, tramadol, street drugs, i.e. loud, colorado objects (reported as number of months used throughout lifetime) was utilised for the purposes of this study. Internal reliability for the alcohol and drug component is .85, and test-retest reliabilities range from 0.72 to 0.87. Engagement in Political violence was measured using the 8-item Attitude towards Political violence scale was developed by Aguiyi and Onuorah (2011). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert type response scale ranging from (1) = strongly disagree, (2) = disagree, (3) = undecided, (4) = agree and (5) = strongly agree. The overall scores theoretically range from 5–45. Scores above the mean implies high level of ADEVS while scores below the mean indicate low level of ADEVS. Items 2, 3, 5, and 8 were reverse coded. The authors reported Alpha Coefficient of 0.73 and Guttman split-half coefficient reliability of 0.80.

In collecting data for the study, the researchers seek the consent from chairmen of the garages and parks within the sample area in Lagos metropolis; Oshodi, Mushin, Lagos Island and Ijora, and reached out to the garage boys for their consent to participate in the study. Two research assistants were recruited from among the garage boys (who were not among the participants) who assisted in the distribution of questionnaires to their colleagues. The youths were assured of utmost confidentiality of their responses and were asked to be honest in responding to each of the items. While four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the participants, only three hundred and eighty-seven (387) completed copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and were found usable for data analysis. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics (such as frequency, measures of central tendency such as Mean, and dispersion such as Standard Deviation) and inferential statistics such t-test for independent samples and Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance).

Results

Hypothesis One

There be will be significant relationship between gang involvement, dominance orientation, and peer pressure on political violence. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the result presented in table 1.1

Table 1.1: Zero Order Correlation showing relationship between gang involvement, drug abuse, social dominance orientation, and peer pressure on political violence

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Political violence	25.55	11.82	-				
2. Drug abuse	15.22	5.14	.58**	-			
2. Gang involvement	18.99	5.89	.41**	.59**	-		
3. Dominance orientation	48.56	12.18	.45**	.47**	.59**	-	
4. Peer pressure	32.37	12.29	.68**	.69**	.54**	.57**	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results obtained from the test are shown in table 1.1. The table shows that there was significant positive relationship between drug abuse ($r = .58$, $df = 385$, $p < .01$), gang involvement ($r = .41$, $df = 385$, $p < .01$), social dominant ($r = .45$, $df = 385$, $p < .01$), peer pressure ($r = .68$, $df = 385$, $p < .01$) and political violence. The result implies that increase in drug abuse significantly relate to increase in political violence. The result indicates that increase gang involvement and dominance orientation significantly relate to increase in political violence. There was significant positive relationship between peer pressure and political violence. The result implies that respondents who are high on peer pressure significantly reported high political violence. The hypothesis is thus accepted.

Hypothesis Two

There will be significant joint independent influence of the independent variables on political violence. The hypothesis was tested using multiple regression and the result was presented in table 1.2

Table 1.2: Multiple regression analysis showing the effect of gang involvement, drug abuse, social dominance orientation, and peer pressure on political violence

	Beta			R	R ²	df	F	Sig.
(Constant)		3.46	.001	.79	.63	4,398	23.18	<.01
Drug Abuse	.38	3.39	.01					
Gang involvement	.570	8.15	<.01					
Social Dominance	.486	10.66	<.05					
Peer Pressure	.615	12.98	<.01					

Table 1.2 reveals that gang involvement, dominance orientation, and peer pressure jointly predicted political violence ($R^2 = 0.63$, $F(3,196) = 23.18$, $p < .01$). When combine gang involvement, dominance orientation, and peer pressure accounted for 63% of the change observed in the self-report of political violence. This revealed that the collective presence of gang involvement, dominance orientation, and peer pressure have significant influence on political violence. Table 1.2 above shows that independently peer pressure ($\beta = .62$; $t = 12.98$, $p < 0.01$), drug use ($\beta = .38$; $t = 3.39$, $p < 0.01$), gang involvement ($\beta = .57$; $t = 8.15$, $p < 0.05$) and social dominance orientation ($\beta = .49$; $t = 10.66$, $p < 0.05$) have significant independent effect on political violence. It implies that peer pressure and gang involvement contributed most to the prediction of political violence while dominance orientation contributed the least to the prediction of political violence.

Discussions

The result of the first hypothesis tested revealed that there was significant positive relationship between gang involvement, drug abuse, social dominance orientation, peer pressure and political violence. This could be due to the fact that street urchins engage in territoriality i.e maintaining and collecting dues from drivers' motorist in earmarked garages and transits zones depending on their closeness and patronage by politicians who needs them as body guards and election riggers during elections. They often depend on their reputation to garner money or influence of motorists and politicians. Also, the larger proportion of these boys have no steady job and act as part-time drivers in the garages. The finding of the study is in agreement with that of Usman (2009) who also identified poverty, illiteracy, desperation of politicians to cling unto power and that of Adeoye and Mohammed (2005) who submit that gang involvement, poverty as well as lack of transparency on the part of electoral body are causes of political violence among the Nigerian youths. This finding confirms the findings of Pratto et al. (2006) who found that Americans high on social orientation significantly favour the bombing and harm coming to Afghan civilians among university undergraduates. The findings are also in tandem with the findings of Badejo and Stevens (2012), who have demonstrated that a host of contextual and environmental factors influence youth engagement in political violence.

The second hypothesis examined the extent that gang involvement, drug abuse, peer pressure and social dominance when taken together predict youth involvement in political violence among street urchins was confirmed. The result demonstrated that gang involvement, dominance orientation, and peer pressure jointly predicted political violence. In combination, gang involvement, socio dominance orientation, and peer pressure predicted 63% of the self-report of political violence. It demonstrated that collective presence of gang involvement, dominance orientation, and peer pressure has significant influence on political violence. This confirms the findings of Pratto et al. (2006) who found that Americans high on social orientation significantly favour the bombing and harm coming to Afghan civilians among university undergraduates. In the same vein, Michinov, Dambrun, Guimond, and Meot (2011) who demonstrated people with dominant social position display higher levels of prejudice (violence) than do others. In addition, Guimond, Dambrun, Michinov, and Duarte (2003) have also shown that SDO mediates the relationship between in group position and prejudice. The findings also confirm the submission of Ugaigbe (2010) who is of the view that poverty, ignorance, gang involvement, inequitable distribution of natural resources; arms proliferation. This finding was also confirmed by Onwudiwe and Berwind (2010), who identified factors that promote political violence in Nigeria to include dissatisfaction with government performance, competition for resources, inter and intra group distrust, joblessness and unscrupulous attitude of politicians with little or no respect for the rule of law. The finding also supports the robust findings that youths with deviant peers are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour than individuals without deviant peers (Brendgen, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 2000; Farrington, 2004; Heinze, Toro, & Urberg, 2004). This finding is in agreement with Onwudiwe and Berwim (2010) who found that corruption in the body polity, quality of family life, competition for natural resources as some of the factors that promote political violence. The result is further supported by the findings of Ugiagbe (2010) who identified proliferation of arms, drug use, lack of transparency as well as exposure to violence in the mass media as factors that can predispose

youth to political violence. Also, Cross and Madson (1997) found gender differences in racial attitudes to be small, inconsistent, and limited mostly to attitudes on racial violence.

Conclusion

Consequent upon the findings of this study, the following conclusion was drawn: peer pressure, drug abuse, social dominance and gang membership were predisposing factors of youths' involvement in political violence. From the results of the study, there exists a consistent opinion that gang involvement, social dominance orientation, peer pressure predisposes youths to political violence. This trend raises a fundamental question about the capacity and ability of the Nigerian state to curtail the problem of street urchin and political thuggery. This is associated with young people seeking to make ends meet. Government must create an enabling environment which will have meaningful impact on the youths and assist them in realizing their full potentials and growth.

Implication of Findings

The study identified that peer pressure, drug abuse, social dominance and gang membership fuels political violence among youths. As such skill acquisition programmes, enlightenment campaigns, and formal education among others will serve a crucial purpose in reducing tendencies of political violence among the youths. For formal education to help curb youth restiveness in the country our education has to be modeled towards value inculcation and citizen education at all levels of our education. Majority of young male with the label 'touts' involved in road culture and immerse themselves in deviance, as a result of 'their adoption of aggressive street-tough personas and attitudes as a means of warding off potential aggressors. And as a problem that has ravaged and permeated the entire bloodstream of our political system, it has become imperative for Nigerians to know the danger that it poses to strengthening and deepening the nation's democracy with concomitant effect on national development. For the nation to be able to achieve this and strengthen democratic institutions and deepen democracy, politicians, their supporters and the electorate alike should shun all forms of electoral and political violence. After this sustained process and strategy of political education, apprehended perpetrators of political violence and politics of bitterness should be punished according to the existing law.

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