

**Beyond Proscription:  
Rethinking Government  
Response to ‘Yan Shilla’ Gang  
Violence in Yola Metropolis of  
Adamawa State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

Adamawa State in North-Eastern Nigeria has been battling with the Boko Haram crisis for over a decade. While the group is yet to be significantly decimated, a new gang known as *Yan Shilla* has emerged and continues to wreak serious havoc among the inhabitants of the state. Within a month of the emergence of a new political administration in the state in May 2019, the group was banned. This paper critically examines the implications of the proscription of the group, and general peace and security of the state. Using the theory of securitization, the paper argues that, although proscription of the group has heralded attention of security agents to the threat of the group, it does not constitute sustainable management of gang violence in the state. The root of the crises such as widespread poverty, decadence in education, and increase in school drop-out rates have fuelled the emergence of the criminal gangs in the state. Consequently, the paper recommends that the Nigerian government and the state in question should consider addressing the root causes of its myriad of security challenges by addressing widespread poverty, education, and unemployment among the youths. Similarly, the government should prioritize education through funding and also criminalize political patronage of these gangs by the politicians. Finally, it is also recommended that good governance should be entrenched in the political administration of the state.

**Keywords**

Proscription, *Yan Shilla*, gang violence, Adamawa State, Nigeria, security education, good governance

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## Introduction

Global security is plummeting because of the activities of armed groups that continue to constitute an internal security threat to the modern state. Nigeria is one of the numerous countries with multiple security challenges. These challenges range from banditry to cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, terrorism, and militancy among others, and are orchestrated by organized criminal gangs. The North-eastern region is now tagged as one of the most dangerous in the country, and this is due to the activities of Boko Haram. Adamawa State is one of the three states most affected by Boko Haram terrorism. While the threat of Boko Haram insurgency is yet to be completely vanquished in the whole of the North East and Adamawa State. In particular, the threat of a dreaded gang called the *Yan Shilla* has emerged and continued to spread in the state. For a state that is already embroiled in intense security fragility, the need for a response to a security threat is very important. The new government of Adamawa State, which unseated an incumbent in the 2019 elections, came in with a strong policy against the group by proscribing such groups. The question to ask is *how* strategic and apt is this policy approach to the threat of *Yan Shilla* in Adamawa State? This paper aims to critically examine the proscription of the *Yan Shilla* gang in Yola metropolis of Adamawa State, Nigeria. It explicates the origin and development of *Yan Shilla*. Further, it enquires into the threat posed by the 'Shilla Boys' gang in Yola metropolis of Adamawa State. The paper also evaluates the engagement approach previously used by the government including the recent proscription of the group by the new regime of the state. It also analyses the effects of the proscription policy on the activities of the groups and the general atmosphere of short- and long-term peace and security. The study is carried out against the background of securitization theory.

## Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Primary and secondary data were sourced and utilized for the paper. Primary data collected for the paper were qualitative in nature. They were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted held with journalists, government officials (including police officers from Adamawa State), and inhabitants of Yola metropolis and the arrested members of the *Yan Shilla* gang in the custody of the police using random and purposive sampling. FGD sessions were held with several inhabitants of Yola metropolis. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was used to select participants in the FGD sessions. Inhabitants who had encounters with members of the *Yan Shilla* gang were initially purposively selected, snowballing the process for further participants. A total of two FGD sessions were held; one with the male group and another with the female group. Each of the FGD sessions had 10 persons in attendance. Data collected from the interviews and FGD sessions were triangulated with the secondary data collected from textual materials.

## Understanding Securitisation Theory

This study is anchored on securitization theory. The theory of securitization was developed by the Copenhagen School to provide the spectrum along which issues can be plotted. The tenet of securitization theory is that a concern can be framed as a security issue and moved from the ordinary level to the level where it will be given a serious concern by articulating it as an existential threat, or a question of survival. It holds that issues are classified as extreme security issues to be dealt with urgently when they have been labelled as 'dangerous', 'menacing', 'threatening', 'alarming' and so on, by a securitizing actor who has the authority and power to move such issue beyond politics to a level that it would be seen and treated as threatening security

(Eroukhmanoff, 2018). Therefore, security issues are not simply out there but rather must be articulated as problems by securitizing actors, which may be government, political elites or even civil society. Thus, when such an issue is securitized, urgent action is taken to address it and its existential threat for safety or survival of the referent object. The theory advances that national security policy is not naturally given, but carefully designated by politicians and decision-makers through speech act. Therefore, the security threat is not only constructed, but it is also prescribed, which means that if it emanates from a political agent with certain political motives, insensitive and non-security issues can be securitized, all because there are power and authority embedded in where the speech comes from.

A number of criticisms have been levelled against securitization. Part of the criticisms is the possibility of manipulation and abuse by the government, politicians, political elites or any other securitizing agent (Emmers, 2007). Beyond this, there are two other striking demerits of securitization. First, declaring an issue, actor, group or object a security threat that deserves special attention usually warrants the coercive approach of the state, which may involve the use of the state's instrument of coercion. This may warrant a concentration of resources that would have been used for human capital development into dealing with the threat of such a group or actor. Second, in securitization, the securitizing object will be given excessive security attention and in doing that, it may aggravate its threat beyond the limit that the state can deal with. This stems from the view that securitizing the object, state, government or any other securitizing actor may use excessive power that may radicalize or increase the level of radicalization of the securitizing object. This essentially played out in the management of Boko Haram. It started as a religious sect but the securitization of the threat of the group by the government and deployment of excessive coercion led to the serial mismanagement of the group by the security agents and this contributed to the transformation of the group from mere religious sect to a terrorist group (Mohammed, 2014). Thus, in securitizing a threat of a group, it is important to know that using coercive or hard-power approach alone cannot clear away the threat. Owonikoko and Danjibo (2019) have observed that there is a need to apply rather a subtle approach that addresses the root causes of the threat posed by a group.

### **Understanding Gang as Violent Non-State Armed Group**

The gang is one of the typologies of violent non-state armed groups in the Post-Cold War era. It is one of the most noticeable groups threatening peace and security in the contemporary world. They constitute a 'significant worldwide phenomenon with millions of members' (Hagedorn, 2005:153). Despite the security threats posed by gang groups in the contemporary world, defining the term has been fraught with 'long and rancorous' debates among scholars in criminology and security studies (Hagedorn, 1998). Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate the group from other forms of violent non-state armed groups such as terrorists, insurgents, rebels, militia, militant, 'Sobel' and criminal network groups in terms of strategic deployment of violence (Barrow and Huff, 2009). Scholars such as Thrasher (2013), Moore (2010), Klein (1995) and Hagedorn (2005) have defined gangs in different ways. While there are marked differences in their definitions, they seem to agree in some ways on what gang groups are. From all these definitions, some characteristics of gangs can be deduced such as:

1. Gangs are predominantly made up of youth between the ages of 12-30. This is why some scholars prefer to refer to them as youth gangs.

2. They are a predominantly urban phenomenon in modern large cities.
3. They are usually made up of people who are marginalized socially and economically in society.
4. They are usually loosely organized and moderately cohesive groups.
5. They are involved in criminal activities.

The last characteristic of gangs has been one of the most debated in the study of gang groups. For many scholars such as Spergel (1990), Klein (1995) and Miller (2001) criminal acts are intrinsic behaviours of gangs. On the other hand, scholars such as Short (1990), tend to disagree. However, most scholars of criminology and security studies agree that gangs are composed of youths on the wild side of the continuum and are prone to orchestrating the violence.

Although, virtually all the countries of the world have gangs (Esbensen, Brick, Melde, Tusinsk and Taylor, 2008), in Africa, globalization and widespread urbanization have created a fertile ground for the growth of criminal gangs. There is virtually no country in the region that does not contend with gang violence in their domains. For instance, in South African *skollies* were a well-known gang during the 20th Century (Pinnock, 1984), *number gang* in South African prisons (Shurink, 1986), and *Rarry boys* in Sierra Leone (Abdullah, 2002) have made their marks on the society. All these groups have been directly or indirectly involved in the security challenges that confront African states in the contemporary world. Usually, they transform into rather dangerous violent groups in the end and threaten the stability of a state. Therefore, there is and need for the states to take this threat more seriously.

### **Proscription as Armed Group Engagement Approach**

Proscription, forbidding or banning something from operating, is one of the engagement approaches for the management of dangerous and violent non-state groups. It may come through an executive order or an act of parliament depending on the nature of the government (Owonikoko, 2016). The declaration is normally followed by military or police action to enforce it. The essence of the policy is to isolate, stigmatize or delegitimize the armed group constituting security threat (Muller, 2008), and it normally follows from the securitization of the existential threat posed by such groups.

### **Origin and Development of Yan Shilla Gang in Adamawa State**

Nigeria has been described as the hub of Africa's organized crimes because of the prevalence of various gangs in the country (Lunde, 2006). Most of these dangerous gangs include *Kauraye* in Kaduna and Katsina States, *Yan Daba* and *Yan Dauka Amarya* in Kano State, *Yan Sara Suka* in Bauchi State, *Yan Kalare* in Gombe State, among others. *Yan Shilla* is a relatively new gang based in Yola metropolis of Adamawa State.

There are many contestations on the evolution of the *Yan Shilla* gang in Adamawa State. As a result, there are at least four versions of the origin of the group. One version traced the origin of the group to the flushing away of the *Yan Kalare* gang in the neighboring Gombe State<sup>1</sup>. This version of their origin states that when the *Yan Kalare* group was displaced from Gombe State, they first settled in Ngurore, a suburb town near Yola. There, they started regrouping and then moved to Yola. Later, the group was hijacked by politicians and started using them as political thugs, especially during the 2015 general elections but after that, the politicians abandoned the group. The group, therefore, took to criminal activities as a means of livelihood in Yola to

survive (Mr. Vandi Joshua/Journalist/Male/35). According to this version of the story, the *Yan Shilla* gang group is the fallout of the *Yan Kalare*, and the only difference is in the name. The second version of the origin of the group says the group is a transformation of the *Shinco Boys*, who operated in the state (Mr. Inuwa Abdullahi/Journalist/Male/50). *Shinco Boys* is a gang named after an area in Yola metropolis and was believed to be funded by a prominent political figure from the town. The third version of the origin of the group says a prominent politician in Yola for political reasons created the group in 2015. From the period of the creation of the group until 2017, it was relatively peaceful but started criminal activities during 2017, and became a serious security risk during 2018 (Personal interview, Umar, resident of Jambutu). The fourth version says the group evolved over time and was manipulated by the political elites during the 2015 elections. The fourth version of the origin of the groups is relatively more popular among security agencies. A Nigerian police officer in charge of the group in Adamawa State explained during an interview that:

[...] *Shilla Boys* has been in existence for long but it was not as pronounced as is it today. By 2016, we started receiving reports of their activities. By that time, they were not many, they were hiding. By 2017, the group became known and became large...by 2018, the group started operating openly – a very important factor in the evolution of this group, to be factual is politics and election [...] (Personal interview, Abdullahi, police officer at the Adamawa State Headquarters of the Nigerian Police Force, June 15, 2019).

Although these versions of the origin of *Yan Shilla* gang group in Adamawa State may be different, there is a link between them — political exploitations. The political use of gang groups in Nigeria is not new. It has a rich history that is dated to colonial and immediate post-colonial eras in Nigeria when independence was approaching, and the colonial administration began to give way to the new ruling class and the rich aristocrats, the emirs and elites to begin to align themselves into political parties. In his study titled '*Yan Daba*', '*Yan Banga*' and '*Yan Daukar Amarya*': *A Study of Criminal Gangs in Northern Nigeria*, Emmanuel Dawha traced the origin of '*Yan Daba*' in Kano metropolis to the opening of political space and the formation of political parties prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960. In his explanation, '*Yan Daba*', a criminal gang that still exist in Kano, was created by Northern Elements Progress Union (NEPU), an opposition party in the first republic, to serve as special kind of bodyguards for the stalwarts of NEPU against the oppression of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) that used the security apparatuses of the state and traditional council especially the *dogarai*<sup>2</sup> to wear-out opponents.

Unfortunately, the First Republic did not last long as Nigeria's democracy in the First Republic (1963-1966) was truncated by the military takeover on January 15, 1966. The long years of military involvement in politics (1966-1979 and 1983-1999) resulted in a ban on political activities and made politicians and their protégés redundant and jobless. Added to this was the harsh economic situation of the country during the military era. Thus, the political thugs protected by the politicians had to look for means of livelihood elsewhere. Having been used to violence, they formed gangs to carry out various forms of criminal activities. Nigeria returned to democracy on May 29, 1999, and the country is currently enjoying the long spell of democratic practice spanning over two decades (1999-2019). This period has witnessed the unbridled use of criminal gangs by political elites as thugs to carry out assassinations, intimidation of opponents, ballot snatching, etc. (Kushee, 2008). They are usually contracted and

armed for the duration of elections, armed and organized, but are abandoned after that. These weapons are subsequently used against the masses to make living. This has been the trend since 1999, and the case of the *Yan Shilla* gang may not be too different from this.

### **The Threat of *Yan Shilla* Gang Group in Adamawa State**

The criminal activities of the group can better be understood from the meaning of the name of the group. The group's name known to the people is *Yan Shilla*, a Hausa phrase which means 'little hawks'. ('Yan' means 'children' while 'Shilla' is Hausa name for hawk bird<sup>3</sup>). Apparently, the people, having noticed the manner in which they carry out their operations, might have given the name to them. It is common in Nigeria to give dangerous groups names reflecting their activities or ideological standpoint. For Instance, the people because of their aversion for western civilization (including western education) popularly call *Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad Boko Haram*. Thus, while members of the group refer to themselves as *Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad*, the people call them *Boko Haram* to reflect their activities (Danjibo, 2010; Onuoha, 2014). This is also the case with *Yan Shilla*.

Hawk is known to be a prey bird with keen eyes and very efficient in hunting with its magnetic claws. The similarity in mode of operation of members of the group with the preying tactics of hawk may have warranted the naming of the group as *Yan Shilla* by members of the public. Interview with a journalist who has been covering activities of the group for over two years in Yola metropolis contended:

The people have noticed the ways and manner they carry out their operations given the name 'Yan Shilla' to the group. They operate using tricycle that is locally called *keke napep*. The tricycle normally contains the driver and one or two persons masquerading as passengers. They drive to secluded areas where there are very few people, study unsuspected pedestrians especially women with bags or phones or any other valuables, snatch them and zoom off their tricycle. This is why the group is called 'Yan Shilla' but their activities are not limited to snatching (Personal interview, Mr. Vandi Joshua, interviewed, July 15, 2019 at Yola, Adamawa State).

Members of the group are involved in phone theft, bag snatching, and money stealing. They are also involved in armed robbery, burglary, raping, drug and substance abuse, kidnapping and forceful defilement of minors (FGD with the female respondents). At the emergence of the group, their criminal activities were confined to a deep forest called 'small Sambisa', named after the dreaded *Boko Haram* hideout in Borno State. Sooner than later, they started invading the city with various kinds of criminal activities. The group has grown into a notorious monster engaging in broad daylight robbery using knives, cutlers, daggers, scissors and many other objects. Members of the group also disguise as commercial tricycle riders with one or two of its members as passengers, picking other unsuspecting passengers, driving them to an area where there is less concentration of people in order to rob them of their belonging, dropping them there or even forcefully pushing them out of the moving tricycle before zooming off. They also use guns at night for house-to-house robbery (FGD with the male respondents).

### **Previous Government Response to the Threat of ‘Yan Shilla’**

One of the responsibilities of the state is to provide security for the lives and properties of the people. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section 13, Sub-section 2b states that ‘the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.’ Unfortunately, the various levels of government in Nigeria have lived below the expectation of the people in the provision of security. Governments at the various states in Nigeria have set aside a large budget for the provision of security; however, the issue has not been taken seriously. There is no denying the fact that the *Shilla* group in Yola was actually underrated and was treated non-seriously by the government and security agencies. This gave the group the opportunity to evolve and expand in the state. As the violence of the group increased, the government launched a special security operation known as Operation Tsaro (Tsaro in the Hausa language means security).

The primary essence of the formation of the security group was to curtail the excesses of the gang in the state and address other sundry security issues. Therefore, between July 2016 and October 2017, Nigeria Police Force (NPF), State Security Service (SSS) and other security services, in separate or combined operations, arrested over a hundred members by raiding deep forest hideouts’ (Personal interview, Abdullahi, police officer). One of the major challenges of the security operation was that it was much more defensive rather than been offensive in nature. The personnel of the security operation would always wait for members of the gang to carry out their activities before they would take action (Personal interview, Jumai Abubakar, Resident of Jambutu). Another major challenge of the security operation was low funding (Personal interview, Abdullahi, police officer). Consequently, the response of the security operation to the activities of *Yan Shilla* diminished. This gave the group further impetus to commit more violence against society. Hardly does a day pass without a report of ‘*Shilla Boys*’ attack in Yola metropolis. The group’s activities are so terrible, that people could hardly sleep with their two eyes closed in the capital city (Adamu Maiyaki, Commissioner for Police, Adamawa State, Press Briefing held with journalists on July 15, 2019). This made the new regime of Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri to declare a prohibition policy on the group in June 2019.

### **Prospects of the Proscription of *Yan Shilla* Gang**

On the assumption of office as the new government in Adamawa State, Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri proscribed the group (Ochetenwu, 2019). The proscription has significantly securitized the group as an existential security threat and this has increasingly drawn the attention of security agencies towards the group. Resultantly, there has been an increase in security surveillance in the state. Several checkpoints have been established, and a highly offensive security operation called Operation *Farauta* (*Farauta* in the Hausa language means hunt) has been launched. This has led to the arrest and killing of over 500 members of the group across the state (Audu Madaki, Commissioner for Police, Adamawa State, Press Briefing held with journalists on July 15, 2019). Furthermore, the government has also put in place policy to regulate ownership and operation of tricycles in the city to curb the use of tricycles for operations by the group.

However, proscribing violent groups like the *Yan Shilla* has never proven to be effective in Nigeria. Sequel to the outbreak of ‘Bakassi Boys’ in southeast Nigeria in 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo declared the proscription of the group and issued a shoot-at-sight order to the military against any member of the group (Johannes, 2003). The same was also declared against the members of the O’odua People Congress (OPC) in South West Nigeria (Ikelegbe, 2001). In these two cases, the groups were simply

driven underground with the proscription policy while they continued and even increased their violence against the state. Dudouet (2011) explains that armed groups usually perceive proscription policy as a 'badge of honor' which encourages them to increase their violence. Thus, 'proscription tends to encourage state repression of armed dissidents and usually fuel radicalism' (Dudouet, 2011:1). During the various FGD sessions with inhabitants of the Jambutu area in Yola metropolis, all the participants claimed that the proscription policy of the state has failed to stop the activities of the group. Rather, members of the group have only moved their operations away from city centers or opened places to secluded areas where victims can easily be attacked. The implication is that there may be a temporary pause in the activities of the group because many have been arrested, and others are at large, but this may not indicate the end of their violence. Although the commissioner for police has promised that members of the group 'will be charged for armed robbery so that they can go to jail and Adamawa State will be free' (Audu Madaki, Commissioner for Police, Adamawa State, Press briefing held with journalists on July 15, 2019), this does not mean sustainable peace. However, having members of the group easily convicted in the court has been seriously doubted.

There are at least two reasons for this doubt. First is because most of the members of the group are juvenile whose ages are less than 18 years. Therefore, the problem may arise as to whether they can be tried in the court of law when they have not reached the statutory age. Second is the question around prosecutorial capacity and diligence of the officers of the NPF. They have been criticized nationally for lack of evidence handling and mismanaged prosecution strategies. The officer in charge of *Shilla* Group, during interview with the authors also said: 'in the next one week, the *Shilla* boys will be taken to court for prosecution but I can tell you, they will be released' (Personal interview, Abdullahi, police officer at the Adamawa State Headquarters of the Nigerian Police Force, June 15, 2019). Obviously, he has accused the court system in Nigeria of corruption but part of the problem is lack of prosecutorial diligence by the police officers because a court will give its judgment based on the evidence provided by the prosecutors, as the burden of proof is with the prosecution. Unfortunately, their conviction and imprisonment lead to a further radicalization inside the prison. The absence of correction and reformation centers further hardens their criminal skills and they become a threat to the state (Owonikoko and Ashindorbe, 2019).

In conclusion, proscription cannot be an effective long-term approach to the crisis of gang violence in Adamawa State. It only suppresses group activities temporarily. As explained above, some inhabitants of Yola metropolis believe that *Yan Shinco*, a previously existing group transformed into a *Shilla* gang. With the proscription of the *Shilla* gang by the government of Adamawa State and serious security crackdown, the inhabitants of the metropolis believe that activities of the members of the group have been reduced but not completely halted. They expressed that a new group that uses machetes as a robbing weapon has now emerged in the state. This new gang group is called *Gar da Gar* gang (*Gar da Gar* is Hausa statement which can be translated to mean 'face to face') (Personal interview, Abdullahi, police officer at the Adamawa State Headquarters of the Nigerian Police Force, June 15, 2019). This kind of transformation of the criminal groups into a more deadly group is not new in Nigeria. The evolution of Boko Haram can be linked to 'ECOMOG', a criminal group patronized by notable politicians in Borno State (Albert and Danjibo, 2004; Onuoha, 2014).

## Towards A Sustainable Management of Yan Shilla Gang Violence

Addressing *Yan Shilla* gang violence and other sundry security challenges in the state need a robust strategic approach beyond the usual kinetic approach of the state. Some stakeholders have suggested an amnesty for members of the group to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate them back into society. The granting of amnesty to criminal groups constituting security threats to the Nigerian state is not new. In fact, it has become a popular approach for armed insurrections and widespread criminality in Nigeria since 1999 and it is being abused. Because of the manner in which it is always applied in Nigeria, it usually looks like state appeasement to threaten groups or an indirect way of rewarding criminality in the guise of engendering peace (Owonikoko, 2018). Consequently, the abuse of the approach is one of the reasons for continuing crime in Nigeria. Similarly, granting amnesty to members of the group is not robust enough because it does not address the root causes of gang violence in the state as a long-term approach. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the root causes of gang violence in Adamawa State.

The tree model problem is very apt at illustrating the security problem posed by the *Yan Shilla* gang. Essentially, a tree has three parts- the root, the stem, and the branches. The root supplies all the nutrients needed for the tree to blossom. These nutrients are supplied through the stem to the branches, which are the final consumers. Cutting the branches of a tree or its stem does not essentially lead to the elimination of the tree. The root has to be located and removed. In Africa, especially in Nigeria, the general tendency to address conflicts, crises, crimes, and insecurity constitutes focusing on surface issues. This is also the case in the engagement of Adamawa State with the gang violence of *Yan Shilla* in the state. *Yan Shilla* gang violence in Adamawa state is a manifestation of structural imbalance within Adamawa State that requires attention; one of which is widespread poverty.

With a maximum crude oil production capacity of 2.5 million barrels per day, Nigeria is ranked as Africa's largest crude oil producer and the sixth- largest in the world (Nigeria National Petroleum Commission, nd). Unfortunately, this has not transformed into a better life for the citizens of the country. Out of the total population of 198,825, 421, almost 94,787,664 are living in poverty<sup>3</sup>. This makes Nigeria the country with the largest number of poor in the world. Among the 36 states in the Federation of Nigeria, Adamawa State is the third poorest state after Sokoto State and Katsina State (Ikenwa, 2019). Although Boko Haram insurgency and other criminal activities are usually pointed out as the reason for the widespread poverty of the state, the role played by continuous bad governance and political leadership of the state is to be blamed. Many political leaders in the state, including a former governor, have been tried and found guilty of corruption (Sahara Reporter, 2014). Resultantly, the state inhabitants have been deprived of democracy, good governance and basic amenities of life. The demographic group most affected by widespread poverty in the state is the youth. Over 70 percent of the youth population of the state who are willing and able to work cannot find reasonable employment in the state (Ahmad Sajoh/Former Commissioner for Information and Strategy/52). Lack of employment opportunities for this demographic group increasingly drives them into criminal activities including gang violence.

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<sup>3</sup>The approximate population of the countries is based on the record of [www.worldometer.info/world-population/](http://www.worldometer.info/world-population/)

Apart from this, other socio-political problems such as decadence in education and an increase in school dropouts are significant factors in gang violence in the state. Decadence in education is quite profound in Adamawa State. It is driven largely by a lack of interest in education by the political leadership of the state that has resulted in low funding to the sector in the annual budget of the state. One of the outcomes of poor funding of education in the state is the lack of infrastructures like schools and classrooms. Another major problem that contributed to decadence in education in the state is the politicization of employment of teachers, and this cronyism has resulted in the employment of incompetent teachers. In most cases, job slots for teaching in the post-primary sector are sold to job-seeking, but incompetent and disinterested teachers (Personal interview, Mr. Augustine Vulapa, teacher). Another significant issue in the prevalence of gang violence in Adamawa State is the large and increasing number of out-of-school children. According to the United Nations, five countries in the world are with the highest number of out-of-school children and Nigeria has the highest among them with 13.2 million children.

Sr. No.	Country	Population (Approx.)	No. of Out-of-School Children
1	Nigeria	201.3 million	13.2 million
2	Pakistan	204.9 million	5.6 million
3	India	1.3 billion	2.9 million
4	Ethiopia	110.3 million	2.1 million
5	Sudan	42.5 million	2.7 million

**Table 1:** Five Countries with the Highest Number of Out-of-School Children in the World

**Source:** TVC News Programme, March 19th, 2019.<sup>3</sup>

Over 60 percent of the incidents of out-of-school children are in Northern Nigeria and Adamawa State has one of the highest (TVC New, April 16, 2019). There are two problems resulting from the increasing number of out of schoolchildren in the state that contributed to gang violence in the state. One is the phenomenon of child-breadwinning, or hawking for food during school hours. This started in Nigeria in the 1990s after the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Jega, 2000) but has increased in intensity. This practice has partly been encouraged because the Child Rights Act has not been applicable in the state. Child Rights Act was passed to serve as a legal document for the protection of the rights of children. Nigeria adopted this act in 2003 but it is yet to be implemented in most of the states in northern Nigeria. For instance, out of the seven states in the Northwest region, only Kaduna State has enacted this law. Similarly, out of the six states in the Northeast region, only Taraba State has enacted the law. Adamawa State and the remaining four states in the region are yet to implement this act. The second aspect is the adoption of Quranic education

as an alternative to costly and unaffordable western education by many children, popularly known in local parlance as *Almajiri* (Hannah, 2012).

*Almajiri* is a corrupt spelling of the Arabic word *Al-Muhajirin*. This is a situation where young boys between the ages of five (5) to fifteen (15) or so are sent far from home to study the Quran, Hadith and other branches of Islamic knowledge in an informal setting without financial support from their wards or parents. The schoolteachers (Muallams), teaching hundreds of children, are expected to take care of these children, and may send these children to streets for begging due to lack of funding. The role *almajiri* plays in gang violence, terrorism, and insurgency in northern Nigeria is not trivial and has been well documented in the literature (Dawha, 1991; Awofeso, Richie and Degeling, 2003; Danjibo, 2010). Their role in widespread violence in northern Nigeria is a major reason for the government's decision to ban such practices. According to National Security Adviser to the President, 'they (*almajiri*) are a huge problem to the society. Many of them end up becoming criminals, drug addicts and willing tools in the hand of those who have very dangerous intentions' (Cable News, 1991; Nasir, 2019). Most of them are from polygamous families with a large number of siblings and poor parentage (Ya'u, 2000; Dan-Asabe, 1991; Dawha, 1996; Abeebe, 2011; Hannah, 2012). As the theory of relative deprivation tells us, where there is a wide discrepancy in the communities where the poor and the rich live in close proximity to one another, a general feeling of anger, hostility and social injustice on the part of inner-city youths may occur. This may be so because of the experience of frustration due to poverty while also seeing the opulence of their neighbors but are deprived of benefiting from it. Thus, they may resort to crime, to attain success like their neighbors (Michael and Gary, 2007). All participants in the interview and FGD sessions express the belief that some ex-*Almajiri* graduates exist in the regular members of the criminal gang. An effort to robustly and sustainably address gang violence and sundry security issues in the state must address all these root causes.

## Conclusion

The threat of the *Shilla* gang in Adamawa State is real and with the proscription of the group by the new government of Adamawa State, one might not expect to see the end to the criminal violence of the gang in the state. Also, there is the fear that a new threat group that is more brutal than *Yan Shilla* may have arisen in the state. To sustainably address gang violence in the state, there is a need to address the structural imbalances within the state that provide ground to increasing gang violence and criminality. First, the government of the day must address widespread poverty and youth unemployment in the state by improving the skills and training of the youths and assisting them to be self-reliant. Governor Muritala Nyako's administration (2007-2014) created many skills acquisition centers around the state, where the youths could be trained but those facilities have been abandoned.

The state should also address pervasive decadence in education through increased funding. More so, a deliberate policy that makes education, at least, up to secondary level free and compulsory should be introduced. Already, the new governor has assured the indigenes of the state that the state would pay for the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) for all Senior Secondary School Students in the state as a way of improving school enrolment in the state (Lawal, 2019). However, this may not be adequate because the problem for most parents and guardians has always been how to financially support their children until they get to senior secondary school. The state should also criminalize child labor by domesticating and enforcing the Child Rights Act. Once this is done, child breadwinning activities will be curtailed. Additionally, the demand for accountability

and transparency from the government of Adamawa State is very important. This will promote good governance that is currently lacking in the state. Lastly, the government of the state must criminalize patronage of gangs by politicians and ban *almajiri* system. These have a direct impact on gang violence in the state. Unless these measures are taken, criminal activities of gang groups will continue to haunt the state.

## Endnotes

1. Gombe State is a neighboring state to Adamawa State. Its capital is Gombe, one of the most beautiful capital cities in the North East, is less than 200 kilometers away from Yola. Yan Kalara gang tormented the capital city. This group carried out political and non-political violent crimes especially between 2003 and 2011 before the ex-governor of the state outlawed the group. See Human Rights Watch (2007). *Criminal Politics: Violence, ‘Godfathers’ and Corruption in Nigeria*. Vol. 19, No. 16(a). Available at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/nigeria1007/nigeria1007web.pdf>.
2. *Dogarai* is the plural of *Dogari*. They are traditional security personnel of the emirs.
3. During interaction with students of Peace and Conflict Studies in Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, a new nuance was brought to the name of the group. It was revealed that the word *Shilla* in the Hausa language, which is the widely spoken language in the area, could also mean infant, teenage or underage. This, however, is debatable.
4. The secondary school teacher interviewed informed one of the authors that the first batch of students goes to school between 7 AM and 12 noon, while the second batch attends the school between 12 noon and 5:30 PM.

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