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Editorial Desk

I have the honour of introducing the inaugural issue of the *LASU Journal of Multidisciplinary Nigerian Studies (LASUJMNS)*, Volume 1, Number 1 (December 2025). This maiden publication represents a significant step in the commitment of Lagos State University to advancing rigorous, multidisciplinary scholarship focused on Nigerian realities.

LASUJMNS was established to provide a credible academic platform for high-quality research that interrogates the social, economic, political, educational, cultural, and technological frameworks in Nigeria. The journal responds to the growing need for scholarly work that moves beyond single-discipline approaches and offers integrated, evidence-based perspectives capable of informing policy, practice, and public discourse.

As a peer-reviewed, biannual, open-access journal, LASUJMNS is committed to academic excellence, ethical publishing, and accessibility. All submissions undergo a rigorous double-blind peer review process in line with international best practices and the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Only original, methodologically sound, and relevant manuscripts are considered for publication.

The articles featured in this inaugural issue reflect the multidisciplinary scope and scholarly standards of the journal. They address contemporary Nigerian issues across key sectors, which offers insightful analyses, empirical findings, and practical implications that contribute meaningfully to national development discussions.

I sincerely appreciate the dedication of the Editorial and Advisory Boards, the professionalism of our reviewers, and the confidence of the authors who contributed to this first volume. Their collective efforts have laid a strong foundation for the journal. On behalf of the Editorial Board, I invite scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to engage with this issue and to partner with us in building a vibrant platform for multidisciplinary Nigerian studies.

Prof. M. O. B. Mohammed, FNAEAP

Editor-in-Chief

LASU Journal of Multidisciplinary Nigerian Studies (LASUJMNS)

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A SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES, COSTS, AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO YOUTH CRIME IN LAGOS STATE SINCE 1999

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Abstract

Youth are a crucial age group for societal development, yet they are predominantly involved in criminal activities, posing a significant threat to the society's security and development. This paper investigated the causes, costs, and government responses to youth crime in Lagos State since 1999, using extant literature, newspaper reports, government and police records, and semi-structured interviews to inform effective and sustainable solutions. The study adopted a socio-historical perspective and employed a qualitative methodology, incorporating content analysis. The study found that while armed robbery has recently decreased, mainly due to the establishment of the Lagos State Security Trust Fund (LSSTF) and its accompanying security facilities, youth crime persists, manifesting in internet fraud, theft, 'one chance robbery,' drug peddling, and sexual-related offences, resulting in economic and socio-psychological costs for perpetrators, victims, their relatives, and the government. The study further revealed that the persistence of these crimes is attributed to the government's inability to adequately address their root causes, including inadequate economic opportunities, broken homes, poor law enforcement, inefficient judicial system, and corruption. The study recommended that the Lagos State government should actively enforce its Child's Rights Law to reduce children's susceptibility to crime, create more economic opportunities for youth, and ensure substantial welfare for security and law enforcement agents. The study concluded that intensifying efforts and holistically addressing all the causes of youth crime is essential, considering the crucial role of youth in societal productivity and development and the government's primary objective of protecting lives and property.

Keywords:

Crime, Government, Lagos State, Youth, Responses

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Introduction

Crime is an act that contravenes established law and is punishable by the state (Wigwe, 2016:5; Okonkwo, 2018:20; Vaithulla, 2021:1). Crime is a phenomenon that varies in nature and usually has adverse effects on the socio-economic fabric and development of society. Lagos State has historically attracted youth criminality due to its urbanisation, population growth, and economic competition, evident in its status as one of Africa's largest economies (Ojo and Ojewale, 2019; Wahab, 2025). Historical records revealed that youth crime has been a recurring issue in Lagos State, dating back to the era of Jaguda and Boma boys in the 1920s (Fourchard, 2006; Heap, 2012). Notorious figures like Isola Oyenusi, Isiaka Busari (a.k.a. Mighty Joe), and

Jimoh Ishola (a.k.a. Ejigbadero) exemplify the historical involvement of youth in criminal activities in Lagos State (Olukoju, 2018).

In response to the prevalence of crime in the State, successive military regimes, from Mobolaji Johnson (1967-1975) to Buba Marwa (1996-1999), and the two democratic governments in between (1979-1983 and 1992-1993), implemented various strategies to tackle crime. Notably, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and 'Operation Sweep' were established during the administrations of Michael Otedola (1992-1993) and Colonel Olagunsoye Oyinlola (1993-1996), respectively, to combat armed robbery (Shodipe, 1997; Malumfashi, 2020). At the dawn of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, youth crime persisted, manifesting notably in armed robbery (Osifodunrin, 2007). The persistence of youth involvement in criminality is evident in the arrested suspects Anu Adeyemi (29), Lanre Ade (25), Sunday Ayoade (26), Odemudia Osaze (28), and Isaiah Alobi (27), who unsuccessfully robbed a WEMA bank in the Dopemu area of Lagos State in 2008 (Kehinde, 2014).

Given that youth are the most important age group for societal productivity and development, and considering the Nigerian constitutional provision in Section 14(2b) that 'the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government,' it is crucial to examine the causes, costs, and government responses to youth criminality in Lagos State since 1999. This examination will ultimately help identify effective and sustainable strategies to combat youth crime, enhance state security, and foster development

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on strain theory and social disorganisation theory, building on the foundational works of scholars such as Robert Merton (strain theory) and Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (social disorganisation theory), as well as Émile Durkheim's work on social solidarity, anomie, and the role of social norms in shaping behaviour (Curran and Renzetti, 2001:101-117). Strain theory suggests that individuals may turn to crime when they are unable to achieve their goals through legitimate means. Social disorganisation theory posits that communities lacking social cohesion and collective efficacy are more susceptible to crime. These theories underscore the significance of socio-economic factors, including unemployment, poverty, dysfunctional families, unmet needs, and environmental influences, as potential triggers for youth involvement in crime.

Literature Review

Some studies identify poor family structure, urbanisation, economic competition, and environmental influence as factors responsible for youth involvement in criminality in colonial Lagos (Olawoyin, 2005; Fourchard, 2006; Aderinto, 2007; Heap, 2012). Other studies highlight that armed robbery, 419 (fraud), murder, drug trafficking, toutting, and hooliganism were the criminal activities that characterised Lagos State between the 1960s and early 2000s (Adisa, 1994; Adisa, 1997; Osifodunrin, 2007; Ikuomola et al., 2009; and Nwalozie, 2011). While Ellis (2016) historicises organised crime in Nigeria from the colonial period to the 2000s, Adetunji-Adeoye (2022) documents it from the 1970s, both highlighting fraud and cybercrime, drug trade, and trafficking as rampant crimes in Lagos State in the post-independence era. Ajaegbu

(2012) and Nwankwo and Okolie-Osemene (2016) argue that armed robbery, rape, and murder were recurring crimes in Nigeria, with Lagos State as one of the major areas of occurrence, in the early 2000s. Ojo and Ojewale (2019) examine the dominance of various lethal and non-lethal crimes, especially cultism, theft, armed robbery, and kidnapping, identifying urbanisation as the key cause of their prevalence in some Nigerian cities, such as Lagos State.

Other studies examine the 'Yahoo Yahoo' phenomenon among Nigerian youth, arguing that technology and spirituality are significantly influencing youth culture, leading to new forms of crime that contradict African cultural values (Tade, 2013; Oludare, 2016; Oyenuga, 2017; Adejoh et al., 2019). Others highlight notorious cult groups like the Badoo Boys, One Million Boys, and Awaawa Boys, which have threatened Lagos State's peace and security until coordinated efforts by formal and informal agencies combated them (Adejoh & Ajayi, 2020; Bogie, 2021). Although existing studies provide valuable insights into youth crime trends, causes, consequences, and responses, they often focus narrowly on specific aspects, leaving a gap in comprehensive coverage of the period from 1999 to date, which spans Nigeria's Fourth Republic, a gap this study aims to address.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilising content and socio-historical analysis. It draws on various sources, including extant literature, newspaper reports, government documents, internet sources, semi-structured interviews, and non-participatory observation.

Discussion and Analysis

Youth as the Predominant Age Group of Crime Perpetration in Lagos State

Sanni (2025), citing data from the Lagos State Rapid Response Squad (RRS), a unit of the Lagos State Police Command, 3rd Edition (2020), noted that the crimes committed in Lagos State are mostly by young people. According to him, the age range of suspected criminals and ex-convicts is 15 to 51 years, with a mean age of 33 years. Reinforcing the notion that youth dominate crime statistics in Lagos State, Sanni (2025), noted further that 88 out of 99 (88.88%) suspected and convicted criminals in the data from RRS 3rd edition (2020) fall between 15 and 37 years old. This is corroborated by 1990 research jointly carried out by the Federal Directorate of Investigation and Intelligence (FDII) and the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) that "active robbery in Nigeria was perpetrated by youth between the ages of 18 and 29 who are aided by adults between the ages of 30 and 40 who act their sponsors, receivers, and sellers of stolen goods" (Osifodunrin, 2007:222). While the above data show a male dominance, female youth are significantly involved in sexual offences, particularly prostitution, where they often feature as culprits. For instance, in 2024, arrested, prosecuted, and convicted commercial sex workers in Lagos' Obalende area ranged from 20 to 34 years old (Akoni, 2024).

Table 1. Statistics of Some Criminal Cases (2012 – 2023)

Offences	2012	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
	12	13					19			22		

Armed Robbery	40 5	60 5	87	471	366	10	32	200	19	19	2,214
Theft/Stealing	9,8 08	6,1 06	10,0 13	10,1 62	11,7 41	10,8 95	9,1 71	5,80 0	11, 97	7,53 1	93,204
Burglary	2,3 58	1,5 83	2,16 0	2,57 8	2,15 3	2,14 7	1,2 85	1,27 5	1,3 14	2,20 7	19,060
Rape/Assault	85 8	38 6	513	497	418	588	45	243	52	272	4,753
Kidnapping/Abduction	13 8	37	142	73	97	Nil	1	2	28	63	581
False Pretence (Fraud)	3,3 04	2,7 02	4,49 6	4,49 7	5,23 6	4,01 6	3,0 97	2,31 6	3,8 20	2,36 8	35,852
Breach of Public Peace	3,9 48	13 3	2,82 2	5,91 0	5,45 6	4,60 8	Nil	4,32 7	11, 67	3,25 0	42,127
Cultism									13	36	49
Total	20, 81 9	11, 55 2	20,2 33	24,1 88	25,4 67	22,2 64	14, 03 6	14,1 63	29, 37 2	15,7 46	197,840

Source: Research and Planning, Lagos State Police Command, Ikeja, 2012 to 2023.

The table above shows that the Lagos State Police Command recorded 197,840 cases of lethal and non-lethal crimes, including cultism, fraud, kidnapping, armed robbery, burglary, theft, fraud, and rape, between 2012 and 2023, excluding 2014 and 2021 due to unavailable data. Notably, the table highlights the prevalence of theft/stealing (93,204 cases), breach of public peace (42,127 cases), false pretence (fraud) (35,852 cases), and burglary (19,060 cases), majorly among youth in Lagos State.

Causes of Youth Crime in Lagos State

Economically, factors such as unmet basic needs like food and shelter can drive individuals to crime. A Yoruba proverb says: "*Ti ebi ba kuro ninu iṣẹ, iṣẹ buṣe*" (once a person can feed himself, the burden of poverty lessens significantly). In Nigeria, hunger, poverty, and unemployment significantly contribute to youth criminality (Ojo & Ojewale, 2019:175; Paice, 2021:24; Adedokun, 2023:11). Still, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory suggests that even fulfilled basic needs do not guarantee lawfulness, as unmet higher-level needs can drive criminal behaviour (Maslow, 2013:9; Trivedi & Mehta, 2019:38). Indeed, the extravagant lifestyles of notorious criminals like convicted fraudster Ramon Abbas (Hushpuppi) and kidnapper Chukwudubem Onwuamadike (Evans) suggest that while unemployment and poverty precipitate criminality, human unlimited wants, greed, and get-rich-quick syndrome are inclusive of the economic causes of property crime in Lagos State. Furthermore, rapid urban population growth fuelled by intensive migration due to insecurity in other Nigerian states has resulted in heightened economic competition, strained social welfare and infrastructural

services, and increased social vices in Lagos State (Campbell & Page, 2018; Ojo & Ojewale, 2019:175-180).

Politically, since 1999, political patronage, corruption, as well as poor and inefficient governance have continued to precipitate criminalities among youth in Lagos State. As regards political patronage and clientelism, members of the National Union Road Transport Workers (NURTW) have been the major supplier of thugs, recruited among its members, to advance successive Lagos State governor's electoral campaigns (Agbibo, 2018; Abdul-Wasi & Ifeanchi, 2020). The low ranking among this group of people are homeless, unemployed, and the destitute (Adisa, 1997) who sometimes turn to entrepreneurial crime (Campbell, 2019:29). Arguably, corruption, defined as "the large-scale transfer of public resources for private interests" (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018:x) among the ruling class, has continued to exacerbate unemployment (Nwaogwugwu, 2021), inequalities in resource distribution, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient welfare-enhancing services. This, in turn, has led to insecurity and rising criminality (Osiki, 2021). For instance, corruption has rendered law enforcement agencies ineffective, inefficient, and poorly equipped (Adegoke, 2014), resulting in Lagos being underpoliced (ASP O. Sunday & ASP A. Olaitan, personal communication, February 6/21, 2024), with a population of approximately 22 million people and less than 20,000 police personnel (New Telegraph, 2023).

Furthermore, there has been alleged complicity between some law enforcement agents and criminals (Newsdirect, 2020), allowing youth crime to persist and thrive in an environment of impunity. For instance, a police corporal named Christ Oboko confessed to supplying arms and ammunition to criminals in various states, including Lagos (Agha, 2016). Samuel Emmanuel, a Nigerian Army soldier, was also found guilty of involvement in an armed robbery case in Lagos State (Ufoh, 2025). Similarly, inadequate court facilities and personnel, poor remuneration, and corrupt practices among some judges contribute to the persistence of youth crime in Lagos State (Ayuba, 2023). Many offenders believe they can evade punishment due to the system's inefficiency and corruption, with issues like bribery and delays (Abiodun et al., 2019). The case of Evans, a convicted kidnapper, highlights the system's slow pace; he was arrested in June 2017 but not convicted until February 25, 2022 (Bolaji, 2022). Additionally, jailbreaks, such as the 2014 Kirikiri Medium prison break where five condemned prisoners escaped (Abiodun et al., 2019), are a concern. As Osifodunrin aptly noted, "Evasion of justice by criminals through jail breaks and other forms of escape was undoubtedly a potent factor that encouraged criminality" (Osifodunrin, 2007:194)

Socially, factors such as broken homes, irresponsible parenting, and peer and environmental influences have also been contributing to youth crime in Lagos State. The Yoruba often say: *"omo ti a ko ba ko ni yio gba ile ti a ko ta"* (building a house without training a child is like laying a foundation of a house on the surface of the air). In his famous Album titled "Family Planning" Barrister (1981) also sang, *"ko kewu, ko tu 'n kawe, alaru, ko ko ise, wo 'n pe alaru, o duro o; iru won ni o 'n ya Jaguda ni o"* (failure to provide children with religious and secular education, skills/vocational training, and laziness of such children to labour, often lead them to future involvement in criminal activities). This underscores the crucial role of family

in shaping a child's moral values. In an interview conducted with four young boys at a pedestrian bridge in Oshodi in February 2024, two of these boys, 15-year-old Abdul-Aziz and 15-year-old Mubarak, left home due to their parents' separation and lack of care. Although these boys claim to work as load carriers to survive, observation revealed that they are substance abusers. This highlights how social disintegration—particularly broken homes and irresponsible parenting—significantly increases vulnerability to crime among neglected children. The narrative of an armed robbery gang member also highlights the significant role of peer influence and environment in motivating young people to engage in criminal activities. According to the member:

The first one (he went for robbery), I no know about anything, na Sylva (Sylvester the gang leader) call me sey make I follow them, me sef con do follow them. That one (robbery), we pack phones, den con give me some wey I sell. I con follow them go club for Apapa, we carry babe and spend the money. They con call me again, I con they fear, they con they abuse me sey I no get mind. I con sha follow them, nah in police con catch us... (Crime Fighter, 2023).

Indeed, the role of peer influence and environment in drawing young people is also increasingly evident in cybercrime, particularly Internet fraud ('yahoo yahoo'). According to Adejoh et al. (2019:12), "Young people's desire to emulate expensive lifestyles of friends around them can put them under pressure to join cyber syndicates and perpetrate Internet fraud, and youth are more likely to engage in juvenile cybercrimes such as hacking and online bullying if their friends are into it." This finding is supported by Oyenuga's study, which highlights that access to the internet and peer influence are major drivers of youth involvement in cybercrime (2017:vii). At this juncture, it can be said that social problems are the paramount causes of youth crime, significantly underpinning the economic and political factors. Indeed, "The corruption of values is even more detrimental and damaging to society" (Fashola, 2023:15). In other words, the corruption of values precipitates various forms of criminality. When societal fabrics, structures, institutions, and values become compromised, the economic and political systems are undermined, thereby further exacerbating criminality among youth.

Costs of Youth Crime

a. Economic Costs

The costs of crime are multifaceted, encompassing both economic and socio-psychological effects that can impact individuals and society directly and indirectly. Since 1999, the economic costs of youth involvement in criminal activities in Lagos State have included losses from stolen and destroyed properties, and substantial expenditures on crime control measures and prevention. Notable incidents include the 2012 robbery of bureau de change operators in Oke Koto, Agege, where approximately ₦25 million and £153,000 were stolen (Channel Television, 2012), and the 2020 attack on a bullion van on Ado Road in Ajah, which resulted in the theft of a significant sum of money (Omojuyigbe, 2020). The most common forms of reported economic crime are theft of mobile phones, money, motorcycles/cars, and burglary (Omotosho & Ajade, 2023). According to the Research and Planning Department of the Lagos State Police Command, the total monetary loss from these crimes between 2019 and 2021 was

approximately ₦106,860,800, with ₦47,056,000 recovered (Research and Planning Department, Lagos State Police Command, Ikeja, 2019-2021).

Recently, kidnapping has become one of the most lucrative crimes in Nigeria. Notorious kidnapper Evans was linked to ransoms amounting to billions of naira, including a \$1.2 million ransom demand for one victim (Ezeamalu, 2017). The late Oniba of Iba land, Oba Goriola Oseni, reportedly paid ₦15.1 million in ransom to kidnappers in 2016 (Ugbodaga, 2016). Additionally, the "Badoo" cult and notorious groups like the "Awawa Boys" and "One Million Boys" have been involved in burglary, robbery, and instilling fear in people's minds (Adejoh & Ajayi, 2020). The aftermath of the EndSARS protest in 2020 was particularly devastating, with widespread destruction, burnt buildings, looted shops, and destroyed properties, resulting in substantial economic losses, job losses, and increased poverty (Ochi & Mark, 2021). Various forms of fraud have also been economically costly, depriving rightful owners of their hard-earned money and property. For instance, Nigerian banks lost ₦15 billion to electronic fraud in 2018 and ₦3.5 billion between July and September 2020 (Adepetun, 2022).

Furthermore, criminal activities have indirect economic costs to the government. The government not only pays for lawyers in criminal cases involving the State but also bears the cost of maintaining prison inmates. The Nigerian government budgeted ₦22.44 billion for feeding prison inmates nationwide in 2023 (Opanuga, 2023). According to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2017), Lagos State had the highest number of prison inmates, with 7,396 inmates, representing 27.77% of the country's total prison population. According to the Lagos State Criminal Information System, this number had increased to 9,044 in 2019 edition (Oladimeji, 2019), posing an economic burden on the government. With the feeding allowance for prison inmates increased by 50% (₦750 to ₦1,125) in 2024 (Lasisi, 2024), the daily and yearly expenditure on feeding prison inmates in Lagos State would be approximately ₦11 million and ₦4 billion, respectively, based on the 2019 inmate population figure. Additionally, Lagos State government has been expending huge funds on security facilities. For instance, in 2015, Governor Akinwunmi Ambode's administration spent ₦4.765 billion on new security equipment, including helicopters, armored personnel carriers, and vehicles (Ugbodaga, 2015).

b. Socio-psychological Costs

There have also been significant socio-psychological costs associated with youth crime in Lagos State since 1999. In the State, victims of various crimes especially traffic and 'one chance' robberies, often experience trauma, assault, and physical injuries. One victim recounted being taken through her unusual route, hit, robbed of her ATM card, phone, and jewelry, and having a balm applied to her eyes before being dropped off a moving vehicle (R. Adenekan, personal communication, February 8, 2024). Another victim and her mother were hit in the eyes and threw down from a moving bus, leaving lasting trauma for both (M. Adeleke, personal communication, February 11, 2024). Indeed, physical assaults and loss of valuables characterise the phenomenon of 'one chance robbery' in Lagos State (Tade & Faisol, 2023). Similarly, victims of sexual offenses, including rape and forced prostitution, often face severe trauma and health problems. Several heart-wrenching accounts highlight the trauma experienced by sex trafficking victims, who are frequently forced into prostitution, subjected to rape, and coerced

into abortions by their traffickers (Aworawo, 2018). Notably, given the prevalence of HIV/AIDS since the 1990s, particularly among sex workers (Aderinto, 2015), victims of sex trafficking have been at heightened risk of infection and severe health complications (Aworawo, 2018).

Drug trafficking, which facilitates drug abuse, is also socio-psychologically costly in several ways. Firstly, it influences youth to engage in criminal activities. Secondly, it has detrimental effects on the health and socio-economic lives of young people. According to Asikhia (2018), drug and substance abuse have severe consequences for youth in Lagos State, including increased engagement in crime, higher school dropout rates, poor academic performance, impaired memory, and mental health issues. This position is similar to that of the Chairman of NDLEA, Buba Marwa, who also noted that young people struggling with drug abuse are more likely to experience strained peer relationships, juvenile delinquency, financial issues, and wasted resources (Adejoro, 2023). Indeed, drug abuse has had a profound impact on young people in Lagos State, affecting their well-being, productivity, and potential contributions to society. The visible signs of drug abuse are concerning, with many young people appearing disheveled, mentally distressed, lethargic, and erratic in public spaces.

The point to be further emphasised is that perpetrators and victims of crimes, as well as their relatives, friends and colleagues, often experience social isolation and disintegration. Drug abusers, in particular, tend to dissociate from their families and friends to associate with others who share their habits, especially in areas where drug abuse thrives. This situation worries, traumatises and depresses their family members and close associates, who may also avoid them. Beyond social disintegration, trauma, physical injury, and economic loss, crimes such as armed robbery, cultism, kidnapping, rape, thuggery and hooliganism have continually led to loss of life in Lagos State.

Table 2. Recorded Crime Fatalities in Lagos State (2012-2023)

Year	No. of Cases	Police Fatalities
2012	390	32
2013	167	37
2014	Not Available	Not Available
2015	186	8
2016	268	6
2017	209	4
2018	201	2
2019	271	2
2020	247	6
2021	247	1
2022	196	2
2023	185	Nil
Total	2,567	100

Source: Research and Planning, Lagos State Police Command, Ikeja.

The table indicates that between 2012 and 2023, the Lagos State Police Command recorded 2,567 deaths due to various crimes, and 100 police officers lost their lives to armed robbers. According to the Nigerian Watch (2017-2024), Lagos State has been one of the most affected states, recording the highest number of crime-related fatalities, primarily due to incidents of cultism, domestic violence, and hooliganism. For example, in 2015, six people were killed by suspected party thugs in Amukoko, Lagos, and in 2020, a clash between thugs affiliated with rival NURTW factions in Ijesha resulted in two deaths (Godwin, 2015; Igbonwelundu & Ogundare, 2020). In 2017, despite a nationwide decline in crime, Lagos State recorded the highest number of death casualties from crime scenes, largely attributed to police crossfire with armed robbers and mob actions (Nigerian Watch, 2017).

Despite the 2018 crackdown on the Badoo cult in Ikorodu, Lagos continues to experience significant cult-related incidents, casualties, and fatalities, particularly involving the Aiye and Eiye confraternities, with hotspots including Ikorodu, Mushin, Agege, Shomolu, Lagos Mainland, Kosofe, Badagry, Ojo, and Alimosho (Nigerian Watch, 2017-2024). For example, the Nigerian Watch (2017-2024) reports show that cult-related violence resulted in significant fatalities across Nigeria between 2017 and 2024, with Lagos often most affected. In 2019, 536 people were killed in 168 incidents, with Lagos recording the highest number of deaths (115), followed by Delta (67) and Rivers (60). The following year, 427 people died in 164 incidents across 19 states, with Delta and Lagos each recording 69 deaths each. In 2021, Lagos and Delta again topped the list, with 75 and 62 fatalities, respectively.

Additionally, there were heinous cases of rape and murder, such as the gang-rape and death of 11-year-old Favour Okechukwu in Ejigbo in 2020 (Usman, 2020), the alleged rape and murder of a 22-year-old woman by a Lagos BRT driver in 2022 (Agbaje, 2022), and the alleged rape and murder of a 78-year-old woman by Jelili Lawal in October 2023 (Ugwu, 2023). Furthermore, drug trafficking has resulted in loss of lives, for both the traffickers and users. On January 8, 2014 four suspected drug traffickers were gunned down by the NDLEA operatives in Mushin, Lagos State (Sulaimon, 2014). Also, internet fraud has been linked to murder and ritual killings (Duru, 2022), as evident in two cases: Afeez Olalere, a 32-year-old man, allegedly killed his 21-year-old brother for money rituals after an herbalist advised him to sacrifice a sibling for success in internet fraud, with claims that his mother encouraged him to do so (Olowolagba, 2022); and Adeeko Owolabi, a 22-year-old man, who allegedly killed his girlfriend, Miss Favour Daley-Oladele, a final-year student at Lagos State University (LASU), for money rituals, with the help of Prophet Segun Phillips (Olatunji, 2020).

Government Responses to Youth Crime in Lagos State

Given that: "The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government" as provided in Section 14 (2b) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), responses to youth crime by the government are inevitable. Since

1999, the Lagos State government has implemented various strategies to address youth crime, focusing on economic, social, legal, and infrastructural aspects.

a. Armed Robbery and Other Related Offences

At the inception of his administration, Governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu of Lagos State (1999-2007) declared a policy of "zero tolerance" against crime, particularly armed robbery, which posed a significant threat to the State's security (Whiteman, 2014). The Tinubu administration however reorganised and renamed 'Operation Sweep,' a special security outfit established during the military regime of Colonel Olagunsoye Oyinlola (1993-1996) and became operational and effective during the regime of Colonel Buba Marwa (1996-1999) (Ogunbambo, 1998/99), into the Rapid Response Squad (RRS). This move aimed to enhance the State's security apparatus and tackle crime, especially armed robbery, more effectively (Balogun, 1999). Prior to the Tinubu-led administration, community-led initiatives for community policing existed, such as the Neighbourhood Watch formed during Colonel Marwa's regime (Marwa, 1998). The Tinubu administration formalised these initiatives, and his successor, Babatunde Fashola (2007-2015), further developed them. This culminated in a full-fledged agency in 2016 when the Lagos State House of Assembly, during Governor Akinwunmi Ambode's administration (2015-2019), passed a bill creating the Lagos State Neighbourhood Safety Agency (LNSA). The LNSA operates as a community policing initiative, aiming to complement the regular police by providing intelligence, preventing crime, and facilitating arrests, thereby enhancing security across the state through a community-focused approach (Ambali & Araba, 2020).

During the administration Fashola, the Lagos State Security Trust Fund (LSSTF) was also established to look into modern ways and means of combating the growing menace of violent crimes in the State. Governor Fashola also banned Okada (motorcycle) in certain areas of Lagos State (PM News, 2012). Although the ban was criticised for being anti-people and elitist, as it hindered movement and affected the livelihood of many Okada riders (Nwanna, 2019), it significantly reduced crime and accident rates in the State (Business Day, 2016). Importantly, the LSSTF initiative has continually bolstered the State's security with various modern security infrastructures and communication systems, including the motivation of RRS operatives through monthly allowances, leading to better crime detection, response, and prevention by the police in Lagos State (Akintola, 2024). A notable example is the swift response of the police in foiling a Wema bank robbery in the Dopemu area of Agege in 2008, where some gang members were killed and five were arrested (Oyibo, 2008; Kehinde, 2014). In 2023, Governor Sanwo-Olu announced that Lagos State recorded zero armed robbery attacks on banks and financial institutions for four consecutive years (December 2019 to December 2023), attributing the success to consistent funding of security agencies by the LSSTF (Owolabi, 2023). However, it is worth noting that there were bank attacks in Epe in February 2023 by hoodlums and an attempted bank robbery in Oko Oba in September, which the police foiled (Nurudeen, 2023). Indeed, unlike in 2012 and 2013, when police fatalities were 32 and 37, respectively, by 2015, the number had decreased to 8 (as captured in Table 2). This downward trend continued, with

fatalities further dropping to 2 in 2019. However, in 2020, the figure rose again due to the #EndSARS protests, during which six police officers lost their lives (Sunday, 2020).

Table 3. Achievements Recorded by the Police, 2011-2020

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Armed Robbery	55	345	50	68	50	92	40	Nil	Nil	Nil	650
Armed Robbers Arrested	138	494	459	459	408	459	306	312	301		4,375
Armed Robbers Killed										1,039	
Foiled Robbery	319	137	130	59	38	46	29	18	25	22	823
Kidnappers Arrested				329	316	379	298	189	269	211	1,991
Cultists Arrested					26	37	32	9	11	2	117
					105	173	37	707	255	316	1,593
CONVICTION	2012	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	Total
Armed Robbery	23	Nil	Nil	4	3	Nil	Nil	1	Nil	Nil	31
Burglary	442	423	208	466	208	94	49	125	9	27	2,051
False Pretence/Fraud	400	292	373	616		292	393	285	461	298	4,473
					1,063						
Breach of Public Peace	265	70	844	987	948	70	622	598	1566	418	6,388
Kidnapping	Nil	Nil	5	Nil	1	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	6
Rape	Nil	27	48	55	31	27	10	12	21	2	233
Theft	850							890			
		1,231	1,478	1,658	2,211	1,231	1,377		1,905	1,302	14,133
											25,358

Source: Research and Planning, Lagos Police Command, Ikeja.

The table shows that between 2011 and 2020, the Police arrested and killed 4,375 and 823 armed robbers, respectively, while 1,991 armed robberies were also foiled. Within the same period, a total of 117 kidnappers and 1,593 cultists were arrested. The table also shows that the Police secured the conviction of 25,385 criminals involved in armed robbery, fraud, breach of public peace, kidnapping, theft, and rape, with theft accounting for over half (56%) of the total convictions and kidnapping accounting for the least, about 0.02%. Although kidnapping is relatively low in Lagos State, the Lagos State House of Assembly (LSHA) passed the Kidnapping Prohibition Law in 2017, which prescribes severe penalties for kidnappers. According to Section 2-3 of the law: "Any person who forcibly takes, holds, abducts, detains or captures; instills fear in another for the purpose of kidnapping. . . commits an offence, and is liable on conviction to life imprisonment; where death occurs, the offender is liable to a death sentence; and 25 years imprisonment for demanding ransom."

Beyond the collaboration of the RRS with other security agencies, in apprehending and dismantling suspected cult members, particularly the Badoo cult (Odita & Diamond, 2017;

Ojoye, 2018), to further combat cultism, the Lagos State Government enacted the "Prohibition of Unlawful Societies and Cultism Law of 2021" which prescribes stiffer penalties, including 21 years imprisonment for convicted cultists and 15 years for those found guilty of abetting cultism (Adediran, 2021). The RRS and LNSC have contributed to reduced crime rates and improved human security in Lagos State, though the LNSC faces operational challenges due to equipment shortages (Ambali & Araba, 2020). For instance, LNSC personnel lack adequate modern technological devices and efficient communication links to quickly inform the police about impending, suspicious, or actual criminal activities. Moreover, they frequently shoulder the costs associated with reporting and pursuing criminal cases, further straining their operations (I. Emmaueal, [LNSC personnel], personal communication with the author, February 20, 2024).

b. Responses to 'Yahoo Yahoo' (Internet Fraud)

To combat financial crimes, the Federal Government of Nigeria, under President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration (1999-2007), established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003 (Obasanjo, 2014). The EFCC's mandate includes cracking down on advance fee fraud (419) and financial fraudsters who use the internet to deceive unsuspecting users and international partners. Similarly, Section 419 (A-B) of the Nigerian Criminal Code provides that: "Any person who by any false pretence or by means of any other fraud obtains for himself or any other person, is guilty of a felony, and is liable to imprisonment for three year; If the thing is of the value of one thousand naira or upwards, he is liable to imprisonment for seven years." This provision and similar others empower anti-corruption agencies like EFCC to arrest and prosecute financial fraudsters in Nigeria. Between May 2023 and May 2024, the EFCC secured 3,175 convictions, many of whom are 'yahoo yahoo' fraudsters (Onje, 2024). However, government's efforts to combat fraud have been hindered by limited personnel, resources, and corruption of some of the EFCC personnel and the brutality and exploitation of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigerian police, leading to the latter's disbandmen. (Falola, 2021).

c. Responses to Sexual Related Crimes

Sexual-related crimes have also attracted various responses from the government. For example, Sections 142(1)(a) and (b) of the Lagos State Criminal Law criminalise prostitution and related offences like breach of public peace during dislodgement operations, while Section 168(1)(d) prohibits acts that cause annoyance and disrupt public peace. It is with this provisions that the Lagos State Government, through the Environmental Sanitation Corps (LAGESC), in 2024, secured the conviction of 12 commercial sex workers to eight months imprisonment over offences bordering on prostitution, and breach of peace (Akoni, 2024). Additionally, the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT), two Special Sexual Offences Courts. as well as the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (DSVA) and the Sex Offenders Register were established in 2015, 2018, and 2021, respectively, to provide a holistic response and speedy justice to issues of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in the State.

Indeed, between May 2019 and August 2021, the DSVRT handled 10,007 reported cases, including 177 rape cases, 255 attempted rape cases, and 246 sexual assault cases (Opara, 2023). This data suggests that despite efforts to combat rape in the State, it remains a prevalent issue. Furthermore, pimping, underage prostitution, and brothel operation are penalised under Section 223 (1-4) of the Nigerian Criminal Code. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP), was also established in 2003 to enforce laws against human trafficking (NAPTIP, 2003). The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPPLEA), amended in 2015, prescribes minimum penalty of two years imprisonment and a fine of ₦250,000 for sex trafficking, and ₦1 million involving a child below 7 years old (Gbenga-Ogundare, 2022).

Although NAPTIP has been making efforts to combat sex trafficking, its focus has been more on transnational trafficking (Aderinto, 2015). The limited focus of NAPTIP on domestic prostitution and sexual exploitation in local brothels, particularly involving young people, is arguably hindering the agency's effectiveness, and potentially contributing to the persistence of sexual crimes and exploitations, in defiance of the existing provisions especially around nightclub areas (Sanni, 2023). Added to this is the corruption, compromise, complicity, and inefficiency of security agencies in enforcing laws related to sexual crimes. Through observation, the author has witnessed the police apprehending and exploiting commercial sex workers, drug peddlers, and abusers, after which they are released, on several occasions around nightclubs in the Akowonjo area of Lagos. Indeed, as aptly put by Aderinto (2015:170), "Whenever the police raid brothels and arrest streetwalkers (while letting their male customers go), it is mostly because prostitutes and brothel operators refuse to pay the 'protection' money that guarantees legal toleration."

d. Responses to Drug Trafficking and Abuse

The establishment of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in 1989 by Decree No. 48, has continued to help in the enforcement of laws against the cultivation, processing, sale, trafficking, and use of hard drugs, and other related matters (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2000). Section 20 (2a-b) of the NDLEA Act provide punishment of life imprisonment for certain categories of drug trafficking; and a sentence of 15 years imprisonment but not exceeding 25 years for possession of drugs or use thereof. The NDLEA, the Office of the First Lady of Lagos, several other non-governmental organisations have also been actively involved in organising seminars, outreach programmes, sensitisation initiatives, and rehabilitation efforts, particularly targeting school-going children and youth. Yet, drug peddling has persisted in Nigeria, particularly Lagos State where security operatives and environmental agents regularly apprehend drug peddlers. Between 2020 and 2022, the NDLEA made significant strides in combating drug trafficking, arresting 26,458 suspects, prosecuting 3,733, and securing convictions with various jail terms and asset forfeiture (News Agency of Nigeria, 201) while also seizing over 5,500 tonnes of drugs and ₦450 billion in cash, and destroying 772.5 hectares of cannabis farms (Premium Times, 2023). In November 2024, in a single raid, Lagos task force arrested 53 suspected drug peddlers in Gowon Estate, Egbeda area, Lagos State (Idowu, 2024).

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the high concentration of the NDLEA's operations to strategic locations like airports and seaports, while neglecting street-level enforcement, and, perhaps shortage of enforcement agents, have allowed drug peddling and abuse to fester among youth in Lagos State. Additionally, there have been allegations of corruption and collusion between NDLEA agents and drug peddlers, as exemplified by the case of suspended DCP Abba Kyari, who was alleged of dealing in cocaine and accused of attempting to obstruct the NDLEA officers through bribery (Ayitogo, 2022). Indeed, the involvement of high-ranking officials and the significant financial resources tied to drug trafficking suggest that perpetrators often exploit loopholes and use bribery to evade justice. Also, the NDLEA's focus on rehabilitating, counseling, and releasing drug users is concerning, considering the number of cases recorded—29,400 cases between 2020 and 2023 (Daramole, 2023). The argument is that the acclaimed rehabilitation and frequent release of drug peddlers and addicts have undermined the deterrent effect of the legally prescribed punishments for drug trafficking and abuse, thus contributing to the persistence of the drug-related crime in Lagos State.

e. Responses to Thuggery and Hooliganism

The phenomenon of thuggery and hooliganism often associated with the activities of "area boys" and "unorganised" transport/motorpark revenue collectors (Fourchard, 2021) have also continued to attract the attention of Lagos State government. As the Governor of Lagos State, Tinubu identified with the "area boys," and was nicknamed "Area Boy Governor," which he considered a badge of honour to maintain relationship with NURTW, partly for political exigencies (Whiteman, 2014). In 2000, Tinubu had categorically stated that: "plans are in top gear to engage the miscreant youth known as "area boys" in befitting work which will discourage them from bad behaviour" (Ajunwa, 2000). Thus, from the period of Tinubu's administration, many "area boys" have continued to be integrated into various transportation, environmental, political, and security agencies of Lagos State, rather than leaving them to unemployment and poverty. Yet, the integration of "area boys" into the Lagos State bureaucracy, has continued to raise concerns about their involvement in systematic extortion, and violent practices especially in the transportation sector, allegedly supported by political elites (Fourchard, 2021).

Nevertheless, successive Lagos State administrations have been empowering and employing graduates to stem poverty, unemployment, and crime. For example, the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund (LSETF), established in 2016 during Governor Akinwunmi Ambode's administration (2015-2019), and the THEMES initiative, led by Governor Sanwo-Olu, were established for these purposes. Similarly, through a range of diverse initiatives, including vocational training centres offering various skills and digital programmes like the LAG-UP project focusing on tech, the government has been empowering its youth. Indeed, various reports indicate that tens of thousands of youth have been trained and certified in various skills across the State through the Lagos State Ministry of Youth and Social Development and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty (WAPA) (Adebanjo, 2025; Akinwande, 2025).

Conclusion

This paper establishes that the causes and costs of youth involvement in criminality in Lagos State since 1999 are multifaceted, with socio-economic, psychological, and political implications that have concerned the government and prompted multidimensional responses. While certain violent crimes, such as armed robbery of financial institutions, has significantly decreased in Lagos State, likely due to the establishment of the Lagos State Security Trust Fund (LSSTF) and its accompanying security measures, other crimes among youth persist. These persistent crimes include internet fraud, sexual offences, drug peddling and abuse, theft, hooliganism, thuggery, and residual cultism. They impose substantial economic and socio-psychological costs on perpetrators, victims, their families, and the government, such as trauma, physical injury, lost productivity, loss of lives and property, general insecurity, and hindered development.

Furthermore, the study revealed that unemployment and poverty trigger youth crime, while greed and unmet desires fuel its persistence. The breakdown of social structures, such as dysfunctional families, and negative environmental and peer influences continually exacerbate the problem. This issue manifests in interconnected ways, including inadequate child upbringing and neglect, which often leads to street life and exposure to detrimental influences. Consequently, these children lack education, become unemployable, and are economically disadvantaged, making them susceptible to criminal tendencies and recruitment into various forms of crime.

Finally, the study revealed that the various socioeconomic, political, and legal responses to youth crime in Lagos State have been inadequate, inefficient, and ineffective in combating these crimes as expected. The reasons for this inadequacy include insufficient security facilities, underpolicing, poor law enforcement, failure to address root causes (notably faulty family structures), an inefficient judicial system, and pervasive political and economic corruption.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study recommends that the Lagos State government, at all levels and other stakeholders, should operate within their capacity and legal responsibility to:

1. Intensify the provision of modern security and infrastructure facilities across the State, prioritising strategic locations and crime-prone areas.
2. Recruit more well-trained security and law enforcement personnel and ensure deliberate, strong, and continuous collaborative efforts among relevant stakeholders for effective state and local community policing.
3. Provide regular training and sensitisation for former thugs, "area boys," and other individuals recruited or employed into various public sectors or agencies, particularly in transportation. Additionally, impose strict sanctions on anyone found guilty of misconduct.
4. Create extensive job opportunities, skills acquisition, and empowerment programs for the teeming youth. Additionally, provide reasonable remuneration and welfare packages

that commensurate with the work of security and law enforcement agents, considering current economic realities.

5. Actively enforce the 2007 Child Rights Law to protect children, ensuring a safe environment for their growth. In other words, in respect to several provisions of the law, children from broken homes who are neglected, abused, and exploited should be placed under government care, provided with training, and supported for their betterment and the society's benefit, rather than abandoning them to vulnerability and potential involvement in crime. Similarly, the State government should enact or effectively enforce laws penalising irresponsible parents, holding them accountable for their actions and inactions.
6. Monitor security and law enforcement agents using technological facilities, such as installing CCTV cameras in their duty areas and zones of operation, and impose strict sanctions on those found complicit in crimes they are meant to prevent or enforce.
7. Make provisions to cater for individuals who commit minor crimes (especially economic ones) due to justifiable necessity, through measures such as rehabilitation, empowerment, or employment opportunities.
8. Promote accountability and transparency as a watchdog mechanism for political office holders, appointees, and administrators responsible for governance, as well as the governed. Just as the executive has the power to sanction corrupt and non-performing appointees, the electorate also has the power to vote out corrupt and non-performing elected officials.
9. Collaborate with all stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, educational institutions, community development associations (CDAs), traditional institutions, and families, to promote security and civic engagement. This collaboration should be built on a culture of "see something, say something, do something."
10. Promote efficient, fair, and prompt delivery of justice by establishing specialised courts to address specific crimes. Additionally, the government should ensure convicted hardened criminals are jailed to serve as a deterrent, exemplar, or for reform, for them and other potential culprits. Specifically, the Lagos State Governor should summon the courage and political will to sign death warrants for condemned murderers.

Conclusion

Aligning with the social structure of the causes of crime, this paper concludes that government responses to youth crime in Lagos will remain ineffective unless the underlying socio-structural and economic causes are thoroughly and comprehensively addressed by the government and other stakeholders. To achieve this, the government and other stakeholders must leverage their available resources and legal authority to mitigate the driving factors of youth crime. The combination of recommendations offered in this paper will effectively address the causes of crime, prevent and combat them, and consequently enhance security, and promote good governance in Lagos State.

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