




COVID-19:
GANGS
TAKE ADVANTAGE

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Our researchers employed methods such as one-on-one interviews and desk research to collate the available data. Our editors sifted through the data and prepared the report, using various proprietary tools to fact-check and copy edit the information gathered.

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INTRODUCTION

Barely two weeks into the lockdown of Lagos and Ogun states and the Federal Capital Territory; a directive given by President Muhammadu Buhari on 29 March to help curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, armed robbers in communities between Lagos and Ogun states have taken to the streets, striking fear in the hearts of residents. Residents in Owode, Ilepa, Ifo, Arigbajo, Itori, Dalemo, Ijoko, Ogba Ayo, Mosa, Joju, Sango, Ota, Oniyale among other communities in Ifo and Ado-Odo Ota local government areas of Ogun State complained about how hoodlums have been dispossessing them of their valuables day and night.

There was also unrest in FESTAC Town, Jankara and Ifako-Ijaiye neighbourhoods in Lagos in the afternoon of Saturday, 11 April, as gangs encircled the populated areas to rob residents and loot shops. The unrest spilled over to Abule Egba, Ogba in Ikeja, as well as some communities in Agege Local Government Area.

A resident in the Agege area, Ademola Adebayo, narrated how Onyabo Boys, a group made up originally for vigilante purposes, harassed residents by collecting their mobile phones at Toll Gate, Agege, while issuing them with receipts to show in case they are harassed by their colleagues at a different bus stop. He also talked about how the group operates in large numbers of at least 30 kids, strategically making it impossible to resist harassment especially at night. "They always start by hailing you to give them money, the moment you look at them and take your face away, they start following you and subtly threatening you. Once it's 7pm or 7:30 when everywhere is dark, everyone is vulnerable.

They don't even need to beg you for money. it becomes robbery at this point," he said.

As a result, residents of some of these areas have formed vigilante associations and tasked them with keeping watch all night to ward off what they suspect to be "cult groups" taking advantage of the lockdown in their neighbourhoods to commit violent crime. Around the Abule Egba neighbourhood, residents have sought to protect themselves by asking each compound to offer a man to join in the vigilance efforts.

A resident of Jakande Estate, Isolo, who did not want his name published, said that the robbers began operations at Iyanu Ejigbo area. A letter allegedly written by the robbers was sent to Bungalow Unit neighbourhood in the same estate, informing residents of their intent to rob.

In Ibogun community of Ifo Local Government Area in Ogun state, the frequency in the spate of robberies has led to an exodus of people looking to escape from the town. The people who are left behind have resorted to lighting bonfires at night in order to keep vigil over their neighbourhoods.

Patience Ogbo, a journalist in Lagos, reported that from Thursday, 9 April till the Easter weekend, different areas, especially suburbs in the state, experienced robbery attacks on residents by armed robbers who are also armed cult groups.

The cultists, mostly between the ages of 15 and 30, were armed and seen moving from street to street, sometimes during the day, terrifying residents and stealing money, foodstuff and other valuables such as mobile phones and jewelry. In some areas the residents have constituted themselves to security watch groups to look after themselves and their properties.

Residents who spoke to SBM researchers said that the gang members mostly belong to the following groups: Awawa, KKK, Mandoti Cult, One Million boys and Pamelekun.

A respondent said, "These cult boys pretended to be fighting rival groups in their communities. They instilled fear and while the residents felt it was a supremacy fight, the cult groups took advantage and unleashed themselves on the residents. They are taking the opportunity of the lockdown to strike and steal. Hunger is part of what led them to do this as they do not work and seeing the opportunity, they seized it to loot, kill and destroy."



GANG WARS IN LAGOS

In a video report¹ published in September 2019, **SBM Intelligence** chronicled the history and locations of the various gangs in Lagos.

The words “gangs” and “cults” are used interchangeably in everyday Nigerian usage. Some of the well-known gangs in Lagos include the Awawa Boys in Agege, the One Million Boys in the Ajangbadi and Ojo areas, the EFCC Boys in Shomolu, the Fellin Stealing Boys in Bariga, the Skippo Boys in Ebute-Metta, the Toba Boys in Mushin, the Falapa Boys, the Onola Boys, Seگو Boys, and Idumota Boys, who are based in and around Lagos Island. The Aiye Boys and Eiye Boys are largely based in Ajah, while the Vikings are in Ladipo and Alaba markets.

Some of the boys involved in the current mayhem in Lagos have been identified as members of Awawa Boys, a gang of juvenile delinquents mostly from Northern Nigeria, who operate out of Agege. Added to the mix are a rival gang known as “One Million Boys” made up of youths from Yoruba ethnicity, who also operate out of Agege. It has been said that both gangs were in cordial relations with each other until ethnic rivalry set in and drove them into fighting turf wars after Awawa Boys split. Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos has repeatedly seen some of the worst gang related incidents in the state. On 23 February 2020, pandemonium broke out at the Ladega and Laketu areas of Ikorodu, when gang members, suspected to be of the Aiye and Eiye confraternities, engaged in supremacy fights that left at least three people dead. This incident happened just four days after two unidentified youths who were said to be phone repairs were shot dead right behind the BRT bus terminal at Ikorodu Garage.

The violence is not restricted to the mainland alone as the Lekki-Ajah axis has witnessed incidents of gang wars. On 14 April 2019, three suspected gang members were beheaded during a clash between rival groups on the main road around Abraham Adesanya Estate, Ajah, leaving many severed heads scattered all over the road.

¹ SBM Intelligence on YouTube: Gangs of Lagos | <https://bit.ly/3c7Thxo>



UNEMPLOYMENT

Between 2016 and 2017, data from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that Lagos was the most crime infested state in Nigeria, a ranking coming after the Economists' Intelligence Unit ranked Lagos as the third worst city in the world after Dhaka in Bangladesh and Damascus in Syria.

In the third quarter of 2018, unemployment² in Ogun state stood at 16.4%, while Lagos reported a rate of 14.6%, according to the NBS. There has been no unemployment data since then but the situation is likely to have worsened considerably. The recent ban of commercial motorcycles and tricycles by the Lagos state government—a form of transportation mostly associated with the youths of Lagos—further added to the existing unemployment challenge.

Unemployment and underemployment as at the last survey conducted in 2018 for labour in Nigeria stood at 40%, a significantly high percentage at the time. It is expected that job loss and insecurity are currently trending high as global markets have retrenched and local markets are following suit, while some 'markets' are breeding inflation.

Food prices in markets across the country have inflated as a result of the lock down exercise. An SBM quarterly survey for food inflation showed³ that food prices had risen by 2-4% due to panic buying, more demand on essential commodities, low supply and high cost of transportation due to restriction of movement.



HELPLESS POLICE

The general rise in criminal incidents has overwhelmed local law enforcement agents in the country. Nigeria has roughly 301,737⁴ police officers, giving it a police-to-citizen ratio of 1 to 666, which is way less than the UN's recommended police-to-citizen ratio of 1:400. This gross inadequacy was noted⁵ by a former inspector general of police, Ibrahim Idris when he recommended in May 2017 that the Nigeria Police Force requires an additional 155,000 personnel to adequately provide security for the country, and to achieve this, the force needs to recruit 31,000 cadets annually for five years.

Mr Idris's statement did not take into account the claim by an Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Rasheed Akintunde, that only 20 percent of policemen in the country were engaged in protecting the general population⁶, while the bulk of the force (80%), were involved in providing personal security for prominent Nigerians.

In addition to the glaring shortage of police officers, police welfare has also seriously hampered the efficiency of the force. In the proposed 2020 appropriation bill, the Federal Ministry of Police Affairs, comprising of all police formations and commands, the ministry itself and the Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil, Kano, was given a total allocation⁷ of ₦409.14 billion (\$1.01 billion at the parallel exchange rate, 9 April 2020). Of this figure, the capital expenditure was allocated ₦13.3 billion, a mere 3.25 percent of the budget. In the approved bill, however, ₦410.5 billion was given to the Ministry of Police Affairs, capital expenditure is ₦15.9 billion, while recurrent expenditure is ₦394.6 billion. It is important to note that given

² Proshare: Akwa Ibom State Reports Highest Unemployment Rate of 37.7% in Q3 2018 - NBS | <https://bit.ly/2XGtSa7>

³ SBM Intelligence: The SBM Jollof Index: The black swan glides in | <https://bit.ly/2RCBbvy>

⁴ Punch: IG's alarm on police strength, funding | <https://bit.ly/2wKni7A>

⁵ Premium Times: Nigeria requires additional 155,000 police personnel – I-G | <https://bit.ly/2XCbdw1>

⁶ Sahara Reporters: 80 percent Of Our Policemen Are Deployed To Protect Politicians And VIPS, Says Nigeria Police Chief | <https://bit.ly/3eqJ15h>

DATE	STATE	LOCATION	CASUALTIES
07/01/19	Imo	Obowo LGA	
20/3/19	Lagos	Mile 12	
27/3/19	Edo	Esan South East	1
08/05/19	Ondo	Akoko South East LGA	1
08/08/2019	Taraba	Takum	4
15/08/2019	Kano	Kano	1
12/11/09	Bayelsa	Ogbia	
12/11/09	Kaduna	Sanga	3
13/11/19	Kaduna	Chikun	
02/12/19	Anambra	Ekwusigo	2
25/01/20	Delta	Ogwashi-Uku	1
28/01/20	Edo	Ovia North East	
03/02/19	Rivers	Oyigbo	
04/02/20	Delta	Oshimili North	3
17/02/20	Ondo	Irele	2
03/03/20	Delta	Udu	3
10/03/20	Cross River	Obudu	1
11/03/20	Bayelsa	Yenagoa	
21/03/20	Ogun	Yewa North	1
04/04/20	Abia	Umuahia	1
07/04/20	Enugu	Enugu-Nsukka road	3

Recently, a six-man robbery gang attacked two police checkpoints in Enugu State, snatching AK-47 rifles from some policemen manning the spots. The robbers, who were operating in a tricycle otherwise known as 'keke', reportedly stabbed three policemen and burnt a patrol vehicle. The incident took place along Enugu-Nsukka Road by Ugwu Oju Nike on 7 April, during the enforcement of the partial lockdown in the state to contain the spread of coronavirus pandemic.

CONCLUSION

According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the number of coronavirus positive cases as at Sunday, 12 April stood at 323, with 85 recovered and 10 deaths. Most of the cases reported are in Lagos which shares a boundary with Ogun, this reality forms a part of President Buhari's decision to declare lockdown in both states.

One of the major concerns surrounding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is its impact on economic activities, as the two-week long lockdown in two Nigerian states and the federal capital means significant reduction in economic activity, leading to increase in unemployment as well as hunger for citizens in these areas. The federal as well as some state governments have directed that funds allocated for relief be disbursed to communities with the poorest people, although there is no transparency on the distribution processes, most of the poorest citizens are still helpless and prone to different forms of vices in order to survive.

As states continue to stimulate the economy through direct cash transfers and the distribution of relief items, a process of managing the effects of inflation and recession will need to fall in place as a result of the reduction in economic activities all over the world. States at this time are vulnerable to additional disruption of orderliness. Residents of New York, one of America's richest states were seen engaging in gun purchases just before the lock down in their state; residents in Lagos and Ogun are currently displaying similar elements of self protectionism against home invasions and robbery attacks.

The main challenge confronting the government now is to maintain the tough balancing act of managing a growing health crisis while addressing the economic and social anxieties of millions of Nigerians. What the government is doing is not speaking as robustly to the economic pressures being wrecked by the pandemic, especially on poor Nigerians as it is trying to do with the health situation. The current pandemic, however, is a pandemic which is extracting significant economic costs at all levels of social organisation - from government to individuals. Policymakers need to realise that it does not serve the national interest to disproportionately focus on only one aspect.

ABOUT SBM Intel

Founded in 2012, SBM INTELLIGENCE, an arm of SB Morgen, is an organisation devoted to the collection and analysis of information.

We offer comprehensive analysis for, and support to governments, businesses and NGOs. SBM Intelligence runs a Nigeria-wide network of contacts and associates.

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