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Original Research

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC HARDSHIP IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

LAWAL Adamu Abubakar
Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Baze University, Abuja.
Email: abubakar.lawal@bazeuniversity.edu.ng

ABSTRACT
This paper is grounded in the realm of Security Administration in relation to Youth Unemployment and hard economic conditions as socio- economic issues that challenge Nigeria with far reaching implications for National security. The study aims to examine the impact of unemployment and economic hardship on Nigerian youth leading to significant crime rate. The paper adopts descriptive survey of qualitative data. Findings reveal that, criminal activities such as banditry, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, telephone snatching, political thuggery and other social vices found among the unemployed youth have a negative impact on Nigeria's National security. The paper recommends among others that, Federal Government should collaborate with the private sector industries such as; technology, agriculture, and manufacturing to create job opportunities for Nigerian youths and to achieve this collaboration, Government should support the private sector for tax rebate, import duty waiver or exemption on essential items such as machineries, spare parts and raw materials.

Keywords: Youth, Youth Unemployment, Economic Hardship, National Security, Violence.

INTRODUCTION
The issues around youth unemployment and hard economic conditions as catalyst to National Security issues have over the years generated discussions in the public domain and therefore enriching the growing body of literature in Security Administration studies. While some developed countries are facing the problem of aging population resulting into lack of active youth population that are energetic enough to help among other things build the economy, provide manpower for central bureaucracy and the security sector, developing countries including Nigeria have abundant youth that are largely undeveloped and their potentials not harnessed and hence constitute a problem to National Security and development.

Official records of National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2024 revealed that, Nigeria's current economic struggles with youth unemployment and other key indicators is showing little improvement thus: "… the youth unemployment rate stood at 6.5 percent in the second quarter of 2024, marking the highest unemployment rate among Nigerians aged 15-24 and 25-34. This follows a more alarming 8.4 percent youth employment rate in Q1 2024, while the overall national unemployment rate was 4.3 percent in Q2 2024."

In recent economic outlook report, the NBS projected that youth employment for 2025 in Nigeria is expected to hover around 6.5 percent, based on the latest Q2 2024 figures.
The persistent youth unemployment crisis coupled with hard economic condition in Nigeria has raised concerns about potential unrest and escalation of crimes such as banditry and kidnapping, armed robbery, Insurgency, Election crisis, among others. The concern is predicated on the premise of historical patterns in other nations, such as Colombia, Chile, Sri Lanka, and Ecuador suggesting that, sustained high youth unemployment rates often lead to protests and political instability. Nigeria's Nation-wide protests on October 1, 2024, which called for urgent action on youth employment and economic reforms was an example of warning sign and therefore constitute a great challenge to National Security.

The most recent unemployment rate outlook in Nigeria is the report on the planned recruitment exercise in the four paramilitary agencies of the Federal Ministry of Interior. Within few weeks of the advertisement, the board of the agencies received through its portal, applications from 1,911,692 applicants vying for only 30,000 positions representing only 1.57% of the candidates that would secure a position, clearly underscoring the high unemployment rate in Nigeria. This situation of unemployment coupled with harsh economic hardship in Nigeria significantly worsen National Security. The aim of this paper is to

i. Evaluate youth unemployment rate and economic hardship in Nigeria
ii. Determine how unemployment rate and economic hardship can significantly worsen National Security

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Youth

The term youth has no single definition. It has varying definitions by scholars, cultural groups, countries and organisations. The United Nations (UN) defines youth as persons in the age range of 15 to 25years. The World Heath Organisation (WHO) reporting on violence and health define youth as persons between the ages of 10-29. Statistics on crime in the Northwest territories of Canada describe youth as persons between the ages of 12 to 17years. In the United States, youth are individuals under the age of 21years and in Nigeria, the National population commission (NPC) defines youth or a young adult as persons between the ages of 18-24. As opposed to this definition in Nigeria, various ethnic groups and some socio-cultural organisations have broader definition of youth. From the above definitions, it is clear that, there is no exclusive definition of youth, the definition is influenced by the socio-political and economic environment.

Unemployment

The definition of the term unemployment like many social science concepts can be problematic. This is especially because defining unemployment is accentuated when unemployment is placed against many of its variables such as: low-wage employment, under employment, informal employment, etc. Inspite of the difficulties in defining the concept, attempt is made in this paper to make some forms of definition or description of the concept in order to create a compass for clear understanding of this paper.

Unemployment exists when persons or individuals that are fit and eligible does not have a job or work to do for some compensation. This thinking resonates with the ideals of the Nigerian Constitution especially chapter 2 dealing with the fundamental principles of state policy (stating that, the primary objective of government is protection of life and property and welfare of citizens) as well as the agenda of the United Nations on sustainable development goals aimed at enhancing Human Development, Eradication of Extreme Poverty, achieving Universal Primary Education, Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women, Employment and Decent Jobs, etc.

The argument here is that, if government appropriate enough funds to address Human Security issues including youth unemployment and hard economic conditions, the threat to National Security would be minimal. If youth are not having engaging jobs, they can be used to perpetrate violence and this threaten National Security. Creation of job opportunities and addressing hard economic conditions will enhance National security. Unemployment according to Hayes, A, (2025). Online page "… a situation where a person actively searches for employment but is unable to find work".

National Security

Indeed, the concept of National Security has attracted the attention of scholars, Practitioners of Security and Intelligence art, Military art practitioners, Border security agents, law enforcement and other Strategic organisations in Health, Economic, Environment, Human Security sectors of the society all leading to acquisition and documentation of huge literature in the area of Development Studies and Security Administration Studies alike. The interests of the diverse groups in the Security Administration Studies led to the emergence of two schools of thought. The first school made up of mainly practitioners of security art, military art, law enforcement agents. These practitioners approach National Security from the angle of sovereignty, territorial integrity and internal security placing emphasis on the physical aspect of National Security. Scholars such as Zabadi, Francis, Imobighe, Held, Romm belong to the first school. Held, (1998: 226) describes National Security as the "acquisition, deployment and use of military force to achieve national goals". Security is also defined as the freedom from threats to a nation's capacity to develop and defend itself, promote its values and lawful interest Imobighe, (1990 :224). Zabadi (2005: 3) describe Security as a state in which people or things are not expose to danger of physical or moral aggression, accident, theft or decline. The emphasis in these definitions is the survival of the state and preservation of its citizens. In other words, the state can resort to the use of force for the safety of its territory and its people. Francis (2005 :22) define Security as a state of being safe and the absence of fear, anxiety, danger, poverty and oppression. Romm, (1993) describe National security as the absence of risks or danger and the fear that the values of the state can be attacked now or in the near future. The second school of thought broadened the spectrum of National Security to include Health Security, Food Security, Economic Security, Political Security, Community Security and Personal security. The focus of the school is essentially on the wellbeing of the individual in the society. This is the notion of human security that has regained traction in the public domain, mostly following the disruptive impact of the global pandemic and geo- political tension in Eastern Europe. According to UNDP Human Development Report 1994, Human security can

be said to have two main aspects. It means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression, and second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruption in the patterns of daily life. From this definition Nigeria would be seen as providing human security to its citizens, if genuine efforts are put in place to address the current economic hardship such as high inflation in the country

Economic hardship

Palmer (2024) online page, defined economic hardship as a state in which individuals face significant difficulties in meeting their basic needs due to limited financial resources. This typically translates into challenges related to Food security, Health care access and Education opportunities. The definition partially captures the present economic conditions of Nigerians pointing out to the difficulties most Nigerians faces meeting with their basic needs largely due to the high cost of living crisis. Economic hardship also refers to "severe financial and resource challenges faced by individuals or communities including unemployment, poverty and lack of access to basic needs, which create conditions of vulnerability and social instability". (United Nations, 2023)

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts documentary analysis sourcing secondary data from journals, newspapers, internet resource, reports of National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the world bank.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Frustration Aggression Theory

Sigmund Freud and Dollard Dupe propounded the frustration Aggression theory. In their view frustration leads to aggression when citizens either as individuals, families, communities, are faced with challenges such as unemployment, poverty, marginalisation, discrimination, poor living conditions and lack of other basic necessities such as food, shelter, etc. Individuals in such conditions get frustrated and such frustration drive them to all manner of criminalities. Ademola (2006:47) succinctly explained the frustration-aggression theory against the assumptions of the realists and biological theorists when he states that:

> The main explanation of the frustration-aggression theory provides that, aggression is not just undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct as realists and biological theorists assume but it is the outcome of frustration and in a situation where the legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way the society is structured, the feeling of disappointment may lead such as person to express his anger through violence that will be directed at those they hold responsible or people who are directly or indirectly related to them.

Ademola's assertion above clearly express the implications of youth unemployment for National Security in the manner the legitimate desires of Nigerian youth to have a decent employment after graduation at any level of education are denied good livelihood directly or

indirectly for lack of employment. This is in addition to hard economic conditions occasioned by unfriendly or anti-people's policies of the government. Against the popular slogans such as" education is the key to success" and "youth are the leaders of tomorrow", the Nigerian youth may tend to be disappointed with government for its inability to generate employment that will guarantee their success after acquiring education and hence occupy the position of leadership as the saying goes. The issue is compounded by hard economic conditions that makes it difficult for citizens including the youth to have a meaningful living standard. The implications of all these may lead Nigerian youth to express their anger through violence and their anger as educated persons could be heightened knowing fully well that Nigeria is a wealthy nation earning billions of USD from oil revenue yet, there is no adequate planning for youth employment among others. The anger of the youth arising from the inability of government to address the issue of unemployment and hard economic conditions could lead to violence that will be directed to people in position of power or people directly or indirectly related to them as Ademola (2006) noted. It is clear from the analysis above that, the threats to National Security are more likely to emanate from internal sources such as the issue of youth unemployment. The question now is, how does one evaluate the implications of youth unemployment in Nigeria for National security? In response Government must take responsibility of protecting its citizens. Inspite of the criticisms of the frustration aggression theory. The theory is relevant and applicable and therefore adopted for this study.

Rate of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Nigeria faces a severe youth unemployment crisis with high rates of unemployment and underemployment among young Nigerians leading to wide spread economic hardship and Security challenges. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in its 2023 report revealed a youth unemployment rate of 42.5%. Echoing the gravity of the unemployment crisis Adeniji, (2024) online page in his work, titled "Nigeria in crisis due to youth unemployment", citing the NBS 2023 report noted that:

> Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa faces a youth unemployment crisis. In 2023, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) estimated that, with over 60 percent of Nigeria's population under 30years old, about 33 percent of that demographic are unemployed. This alarming figure reflects the harsh realities that millions of young Nigerians face daily and paints a troubling picture of a country full of potentials but held back by a lack of chances for its young people.

Current Economic Hardship Crisis in Nigeria

The economic hardship crisis in Nigeria did not start today, it has been a long battle for most Nigerians struggling to make both ends meet. Nigerians have over the years been faced with challenges related to food security, healthcare access, education opportunities, among others. These challenges are largely caused by issues such as; poor infrastructure (not allowing the informal sector of the economy to function), corruption, lack of economic diversification and not too long ago, the issue around government policy decisions such as: removal of fuel

consumption subsidies and floating the nations' currency leading to sharp depreciation of the Naira and contributing to high inflation, without putting in place the necessary palliatives that would have cushioned the effects from the onset. This view is supported by Anietie (2024) online page who lamented that:

> Nigeria is grappling with its worst cost of living crisis in nearly 30years and President Bola Tinubu; who was praised as a "renewer of hope" just last year, is partially responsible. With deepened poverty and frustration over government inaction leading to public outrage and protests, the country is once again at an inflection point and it needs a stark policy turn around to face its economic woes.

However, the government introduced cash transfer programme, an adhoc programme that was meant to according to Anietie, (2024) cushion the impact, but these measures fall far short of addressing meaningfully the current economic hardship. "The cash transfer programme announced last October aimed to give out 25,000 naira (15USD) to 15million people within a three-month period. By December, only 1.7million people had benefitted from the program", Nigeria's economic hardship therefore fuels national security challenges by increasing poverty, unemployment and a desperate population prone to crime and illicit activities that destabilizes communities and fuels the growth of criminal and terrorist groups such as the elements of Boko Haram in the Northeast and the Bandits/kidnappers in the Northwest Nigeria.

Implications of Youth Unemployment and Economic Hardship Crisis for Nigeria's National Security

The implications of youth unemployment and economic hardship for National security are far reaching. Beyond National Security, economic hardship exacerbated by unemployment also affect long- term socio- economic development of Nigeria. Citing Adedeji (2021) Ogoh and Prisca (2024) online page noted that:

> The implications of economic hardship and youth involvement in communal conflicts in Nigeria are profound and multi-faceted, influencing not only the immediate security landscape but also the long-term socio- economic development of the country. Economic hardship exacerbated by unemployment, poverty, and limited access to education, has created a fertile ground for youth to be drawn into violent conflicts. The lack of economic opportunities, particularly for young people in rural areas, has led to the increasing involvement of youth in communal clashes, often manipulated by political or ethnic leaders to advance personal agendas.

Unemployed youth manifest behaviour such as; armed robbery, use of illicit drugs and trafficking, political thuggery, telephone snatching, murder, Insurgency, banditry and kidnapping for ransom. These behaviours place serious burden on National Security. In Nigeria, there is no doubt that, the issue of youth unemployment is becoming a social problem. The issue is even compounded by the hard economic conditions in the country. The hard

economic conditions in Nigeria caused by structural issues like corruption, poor infrastructure, and a lack of economic diversification alongside government policy decision such as; the removal of fuel consumption subsidies, which despite what Nigerian Government presents as its intended benefits, has increased drastically living cost and exacerbate inflation, a volatile currency caused by the floating of the Naira (the Nigerian currency) high unemployment, and inadequate social safety nets further contribute to the crisis and have the potential of harming National Security by fuelling social unrest such as; youth restiveness as well as aggravating the menace of kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, telephone snatching and other violent activities out of desperation. The nation's present and future of peace and security is therefore threatened by the growing number of unemployed youth with no prospects of securing a descent job now or later, and that is why at the slighted opportunity especially when there is breakdown of law and order in a conflict situation as it is in most regions in Nigeria today or during elections, the unemployed youth who are frustrated and facing difficulties meeting their basic needs, due to economic hardship are ever available for recruitment and they take up arms and fight as bandits, kidnappers, militants and political thugs. Corroborating this assertion Egwu et al, (2014:365) noted that:

> …. the frustration that accompanies the existence of the unemployed youth and crime act reflect on Political and ideological unrest and violence. Moreover, the unemployed youths in the long run questions government authority and causes of the problem on the leadership. As a matter of fact, unemployed youths are political and security instruments and social-economic weapon, because of their causes and effects which are traced on both factors. In other words, the desperate unemployed and alienated youths are always ready to take arms in exchange for small amount of money, who are easily recruited as political thugs and ready to eliminate opponents at the flimsiest excuse, also unemployed youths are at the centre of conflict and crime.

The rate of unemployment in Nigeria clearly manifest an alarming proportion following the announcement by the federal Ministry of Interior of its decision to commence recruitment exercise in the para-military agencies under her supervision through its website, effective from July 14, 2025. The portal officially closed on August 10, 2025 and recorded a total of 1,911,692 applicants across the four para-military agencies namely: Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Nigeria Correctional Service (NCS), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Nigeria Fire Service (NFS). Vacancies available and for the over 1.9million applicants to compete is only 30,000 positions representing 1.57% clearly underscoring the high unemployment rate in Nigeria.

Break down of Applicants for employment in the agencies under the Ministry of Interior on State-by-State Basis

1.	Abia	31,743
2.	Adamawa	68,468
3.	Akwa-Ibom	52, 592
4.	Anambra	32,963
5.	Bauchi	52, 226
6.	Bayelsa	11,693
7.	Benue	110, 776
8.	Borno	57, 013
9.	Cross river	32,264
10.	Delta	28,016
11.	Ebonyi	23,633
12.	Edo	32,610
13.	Ekiti	32,736
14.	Enugu	41,333
15.	Gombe	45,023
16.	Imo	48, 344
17.	Jigawa	44,505
18.	Kaduna	114,707
19.	Kano	89, 501
20.	Katsina	77,008
21.	Kebbi	34,651
22.	Kogi	116, 378
23.	Kwara	78,510
24.	Lagos	14,227
25.	Nasarawa	76,760
26.	Niger	79, 616
27.	Ogun	42,093
28.	Ondo	54,016
29.	Osun	62, 447
30.	Oyo	67,305
31.	Plateau	63,548
32.	Rivers	22,244
33.	Sokoto	31,164
34.	Taraba	45, 250
35.	Yobe	38,226
36.	Zamfara	29,320
37.	FCT	30,347

Source: Compiled from CDCFIB Recruitment Portal.

Findings and Analysis

From the table above, the statistics shows a worrisome situation, underscoring a very high unemployment rate in Nigeria. The states of Northwest bedevilled with incidents of banditry and kidnapping, ethno – religious conflict and other criminal activities such as; telephone snatching (leading to attacks and sometimes killings of victims that shows resistance) and political thuggery have a huge unemployment rate, with the epic centres of banditry and kidnapping namely; Zamfara state (29,320 applicants), Katsina state (77,008 applicants), Sokoto state (31,164applicants), Kebbi state (34,651 applicants), Kaduna state (114,707 applicants) and Kano state with incidents of political thuggery and telephone snatching having a total of 89,501 applicants. The implications of the high figures in the Northwest Nigeria raises concerns about potential political unrest, escalation of banditry and kidnapping for ransom and telephone snatching all leading to loss of lives and properties.

The North central state of Benue (**110, 776** applicants) and Northeast state of Taraba (45,250 applicants) known for communal conflicts could also experience escalation of communal conflicts looking at the alarming figures, clearly underscoring high unemployment rates in both states. The states known with incidence of armed robbery such as Lagos state (14,227 applicants), though having low figures compared to other states is neither here or there. The low figures from Lagos state can be explained giving the economic opportunities in Lagos. The youth may not have shown interest in such places of work because it may not pay them as much as what they can generate through other means legitimate or otherwise. The Southwest geo- political zone including Lagos state has been afflicted by surge in cybercrime, domestic crime, cultism. The high rate of unemployment as depicted in the table above in respect of the entire Southwest portend danger because of the likelihood of escalation of the crime rate in the zone.

The Southeast geo- political zone that is bedevilled by ritual killings, commercial crime, abduction and secessionist agitation could experience more youth joining existing gangs. The South- South geo- political zone could experience more threats of Militancy, environmental agitations and oil bunkering due to high rate of unemployment, except for Bayelsa state (11,669 applicants) with low figures compared with other states of the federation.

Borno (56, 013 applicants), Yobe (38,226 applicants), and Adamawa (68,468 applicants) states of Northeast Nigeria that have had for years suffered Boko Haram insurgency may have resurgence of Boko Haram activities due to high rate of youth unemployment.

Bauchi (52,226 applicants), and Gombe (45,023 applicants) states of Northeast also known with incidents of political thuggery such as; the activities of “Sara Suka” group and “Yan Kalare” group could experience escalation of their activities especially as Nigeria is approaching another round of election in 2027. It is quite worrisome that, almost all the acts of criminality that bedevilled the geo- political zones in Nigeria are attributed to youth as perpetrators. Political leaders should therefore have an in-depth look at the number of applicants that applied for employment in the four agencies of the Ministry of Interior as an eye opener and a potential National Security threat. The bandits, Boko Haram, Mahamudawa insurgent group, Lakurawa insurgent group, the militants, armed robbers and other Rural and Urban gangs can take advantage of the current unemployment rate to recruit the unemployed

youths and increase the strength of their foot soldiers. Beyond the varying dimensions of insecurity in different geo- political zones in the country Political leaders should be deeply concern about the current high unemployment rate in Nigeria bearing in mind the experiences of countries such as Colombia, Chile, Sri- lanka, and Ecuador that suffered mass protests and political instability

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is clear that, youth unemployment is a very serious issue in Nigeria. This paper has shown that, the exploding youth bulge and unemployment coupled with hard economic conditions in Nigeria threaten Nigeria's National Security especially when young men and women have little or no prospects and comfortable livelihood, they can easily be recruited by various criminals' gangs to destabilise the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Federal Ministry of Education should consider reviewing the Nigerian Education Curriculum to include entrepreneurial skills in order to prepare graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers.

ii. The cycle of rising insecurity necessitates serious actions. Government should therefore develop comprehensive strategies that will address root causes like, inequality and unemployment alongside robust security measures.

iii. Government should create people centred policies guided by human rights considerations in formulation and implementation of such policies as subsidy removal.

iv. Nigerian voters should demand from political leaders to prioritize transparency in public engagement.

v. Government should take que from the previous government on the policy that guided the petroleum trust fund's (PTF) spending's, in addition to seeking inputs from the general public on how the savings from the petroleum subsidy removal can be re-invested in social programmes that would benefit Nigerian people.

vi. Government should create the right aligned social Security system that provide income support to citizens throughout their life time.

vii. Federal government should as a matter of urgency take a strategic decision to create employment opportunities in the Military, Law enforcement, Security and Intelligence agencies and other strategic government organisations in order to on one hand boost the strength of these organisations to effectively address security challenges facing the country and on the other hand absorb a greater number of the Nigerian youth who are desperately in need of employment to earn a living.

viii. Federal Government should collaborate with the private sector industries such as; technology, agriculture, and manufacturing to create additional job opportunities for Nigerian youth. To achieve this collaboration, government should support the private sector in tax rebate, import duty waiver or exemptions on essential items such as machineries, spare parts and raw materials.

ix. As an immediate measure Federal government should ensure that, there is transparency in the processes of the current recruitment exercise in the four Security agencies of the Ministry of Interior. The 774 local governments in Nigeria should benefit. This would frustrate any possible recruitment drive by insurgents, Bandits and other criminal elements

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