

CAUSES AND EFFECT OF POLITICAL THUGGERY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines and assesses causes and effect of political thuggery in Nigeria. This paper discusses the ugly phenomenon of thuggery in the body politics of Nigeria. It critically examines the reasons for the prevalent incidences of political thuggery in Nigeria. Thuggery is violent behaviour, especially of a criminal nature. "A cowardly act of mindless thuggery "the Nigerian political scene has experienced violence and thuggery in varying degrees. Ruffians hired or instigated by politicians to intimidate their opponents define thuggery as an act of violence or behaviour. It is therefore safe to say that thuggery in Nigerian politics is a means to an end. This paper discusses in detail the menace of political thuggery in Nigeria's democratic system. It critically examines the reasons for the widespread incidences of thuggery in the country, especially during political campaigns for elective offices, and periods of general elections, and even re-run elections as Nigeria's political system is characterized by thuggery, violence, harassment etc. Overall, political thuggery is characterized by robbery, intimidation, gangsterism, murder, physical assault and often involves physical combat between two opposing gangs or groups, which ultimately generates inter-personal or group hostilities. Since the pre-independence General Elections of 1959, politics in Nigeria has been characterized by thuggery and violence. The study reveals that poverty, unemployment, financial attractiveness of elective positions, the value system of wealth accumulation, and an ineffective security agency account for the incidence of political thuggery in Nigeria. Political thuggery hinders public accountability of elective officers and thus is a bane to good governance in Nigeria. Relying on secondary data, theoretical mode of analysis was adopted in order to understand that ethical issues, party intrigues, as well as political violence became so prevalent in electioneering process in Nigeria and called for sober reflection. It is in the light of this that this paper believes that political Thuggery has brought a lot conflicts in Nigeria among ethnics, nations, religions and tribes.

KEYWORDS: 1.Assault 2.Crime 3.Democracy 4.Election
5.Politicalthuggery 6.Security Thuggery 7.Violence. 8. Nigerian Politics.

**** INTRODUCTION ****

1.1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1995:1031) defined thug as "any person who uses violence or brutality". Thuggery, according to the Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1998:952), simply means "violent act or behaviour by ruffians". Also, Lawal cited in Idris (2011:1) views thuggery as criminalization of politics. He noted that when politics is criminalized, it is left in the hands of ruffians, thugs and hooligans, while the good citizens are scared away. Political thuggery hinders public accountability of elective officers and thus is a bane to good governance in Nigeria. It's also increases the crime rate and the emergence of credible candidates in elections and thus is a threat to the achievement of democratic dividends and exercise of citizenship rights in Nigeria. Based on these findings, the study recommends that government should make elective offices less attractive financially and conceited government programs and policies should be aimed at alleviating unemployment and poverty and strengthening the capacity of security agencies. Government must consistently educate citizens and youth on the evil of political thuggery and violence. Overall, politicalthuggeryis characterized by robbery, intimidation, gangersterism, murder, physical assault and often involves physical combatbetween two opposing gangs or groups, which ultimately generates inter-personal or group hostilities. As earlier stated since the pre-independence General Elections of 1959, politics in Nigeria has been characterized by thuggery and violence. The researcher would want to know whether the overall assessment of political thuggery has a positive or negative effect on democracy and the instituted Government as a whole.This paper therefore, highlights the antecedent of thuggery, the causes and effects of thuggery on the Development of the state, the theoretical framework of thuggery and suggests counselling intervention that could reduce the prevalence of thuggery in the society.

1.1

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Thuggery is violent behavior, especially of a criminal nature. "a cowardly act of mindless thuggery" the Nigerian political scene has experienced violence and thuggery in varying degrees. This paper has attributed the insecurity situation in the state to the recent upsurge of political thuggery. It is quite apparent that from the beginning of the 21st century, Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented cases of insecurity in every sphere of human endeavour. Violence has reached its peak, and Nigeria, which was hitherto a more relatively peaceful country, has suddenly begun to experience unrest. Analysis done on political thuggery by different writers reveals that political thuggery hinders public accountability of elective officers thus a bane to good governance in Nigeria; increases crime rate thus a threat to the achievement of democratic dividends and exercise of citizenship rights in Nigeria.

1.1

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the causes and effect of political thuggery in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to;

- i. Examine causes and effect of political thuggery in Nigeria
- ii. Determine whether political thuggery has a negative or positive effect on
Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Political thuggery is an aspect of social violence, which is devastating in Nigerian democracy. The menace has become detrimental to democratic sustainability in Nigerian politics in which thugs move mostly in groups victimising, terrorising, intimidating, and injuring innocent individuals and politicians. Unemployment among youths and its attendant poverty and frustration makes them willing tool for thuggery in the hands of desperate politicians; desperation or 'do or die' politics among some politicians, and the negative impact of money politics in the country's present-day democracy. Crime and warfare share some attributes with political violence, but political scientists do not define them as political violence. Political violence is violence perpetrated by people or governments to achieve political goals. It can describe violence used by a state against other states or against non-state actors. It can also describe politically motivated violence by non-state actors against a state or against other non-state actors. Political violence is violence perpetrated by people or governments to achieve political goals. Some other reasons include the phenomenon of Godfatherism in democratic Nigeria; lack of political ideology and principle, and the absence of internal party democracy in contemporary Nigerian political parties. These reasons have largely encouraged dictatorship and arbitrariness among political leaders at different levels.

Improving democracy therefore requires that we must find ways to reduce the role that greed, rivalry and fear play in the electoral process, especially in young democracies such as those in Africa. However, the study aimed at determining the causes and level of the effect of political thuggery and violence in Nigeria. Therefore, political thuggery is a serious threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria because it scares credible candidates, including women from active participation in democratic process. It has also given rise to the militarization of the political space with the consequent proliferation of arms, ammunition and other dangerous weapons purposely for acts of criminality, including thuggery. This, in turn, has resulted in many unresolved politically motivated assassinations across the country, which diminishes the essence and value of the country is evolving democratic culture.

The need for urgent intervention through counselling has therefore, become quite imperative. This is borne out of the belief that counselling remains the only potent option that can positively affect the lives of youths who are being manipulated by the political class, to commit heinous crime through thuggery.

2.2

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENT OF THUGGERY

Thugs travelled in groups across the Indian sub-continent for six hundred years. There were numerous traditions about their origin. One recorded by D. F. McLeod traced it to seven Muslim tribes formed from those who fled Delhi after murdering a physician. Another traced it to seven great Muslim families who fled after murdering a favoured slave of Akbar. These original Muslim Thugs spread Thuggee amongst Rajputs, Hindus, Lodhis and Ahirs. According to other traditions by Thugs, they were Kanjars or descended from those who worked in the Mughal camps.] Others have blamed the rise of Thuggees on the disbanding of armies in employment of Indian rulers after the British conquest. The word thug or thuggery was coined from a Hindu word THAG or THAGI, which refers to a murderer, a swindler (cheat or rogue), and an assassin, cut throat or ruffian (Funk &Wagnalls, 1975). This description shows clearly that a thug is someone whose behaviour is rough and violent. He/She can kill and destroy fellowhumans without any feeling of remorse. His/Her concern is to achieve a set target by eliminating every obstacle, whether human or object to satisfy the desire of his or her master.

Historically, “thugs are members of a religious sect in India who, in honour of ‘Kali’, the Hindu goddess of destruction, strangled and plundered their victims. The thugs considered their murders as pious rites, performing them in accordance with a set ritual (Funk &Wagnalls, 1975, p.142)”. It is suggested that the sect known as the thugs came into existence at about the 13th century. Membership was usually hereditary and opened to both Muslims and Hindus. This sect, according to Funk &Wagnalls, was however, suppressed by the British colonialists in the 1830’s. To take advantage of their victims, the thugs would join travellers and gain their confidence; this would allow them to surprise and strangle the travellers with a handkerchief or noose. They would then rob and bury their victims. This led to the thugs being called Phansigar (English: "using a noose"), a term more commonly used in southern India.

In Nigeria, the political tussle between Akintola and Awolowo during the first republic (1960 -1969), which witnessed an unprecedented violence, is one of the earliest crises recorded in post-colonial era. Isichei (1984) asserts, “the unpopular minority government of Akintola used violence and coercion in the attempt to stay in power”. Whether this assertion is true or not, events that followed revealed that both parties employed the services of thugs to bring about confusion, practical violence, assassinations, threats, assaults, public intimidations and a total breakdown of law and order in Yoruba land. Thuggery has been a common feature in Nigerian history since independence but it is quite difficult to ascertain the exact time it became an indispensable part of the Nigerian polity.

2.3 POLITICAL THUGGERY IN NIGERIA

Political thuggery occurs mostly in the electoral process of the three levels of governments in Nigeria (federal, state and local). Electoral democracy in Nigeria involves the conduct of elections by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) to fill elective political positions at the federal level.

Ebonyi state director of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Dr Emma Abah has linked incidents of thuggery as reasons why Nigerian public lost confidence in electioneering across the states of the federation. Dr Abah, urged youths in the state to resist bid by desperate politicians to use them as tool to format violence in 2019 elections. He made this call at the weekend during a one-day security sensitisation programme ‘Against Political Thuggery, Kidnapping and Drug Addiction’, at Afikpo North local government area of Ebonyi state. Abah who was represented by state NOA Assistant Director Mr. Theophilous Nwakpor, insisted that the menace of political thuggery in Nigeria has to be checked in order to alien with the concept of democracy and its sustenance for the people and by the people. Political thuggery or violence manifests itself mostly at the empirical referent of regular and periodic elections. Political thuggery or violence is the use of thugs, private armies and physical force to threaten or harm political opponents or rig elections. As UNESCO (2005) observes, it could results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, deprivation or mal-development.

"Some Nigerians have lost confidence in the politics of the nation this is as a result of political thuggery perpetrated by youths who politicians employed their services during elections. "So we are using this opportunity to inform youths to guide against being used by desperate politicians as thugs because they will use you and dump you after achieving their selfish political goals. " We are also telling parents, traditional rulers and other stakeholders to rise up to the challenges of ensuring that their children and subjects are not use as tools for thuggery in 2019 elections. "Do the right thing and if you see something, say something, " Abah insisted.

Earlier, the Chairman of the Afikpo North local government area, Mr Ogbonnaya Oko-Eyum said to make elections free, fair and credible, political thuggery, kidnapping and drug addiction must be quickly addressed. Oko-Eyum was represented by the Council 's Vice chairman, Mrs Patricia Obila who also urged parents especially mothers to ensure good and effective parenting. "Majority of youths who indulge in most of the heinous crimes come from broken homes with little or no proper upbringing and these youths will resort to drugs, "Oko-Eyum said.

Political thuggery is an "obstacle" to democracy and it hinders the attainment of the aforementioned referents without which democracy is worthless. For example, public accountability is a myth because Nigerians and Africans in general have not been able to hold their elected representatives accountable. Ensuring public accountability in Nigeria is not only cumbersome but problematic.

2.4 CAUSES OF POLITICAL THUGGERY IN NIGERIA

- **Unemployment:** Unemployment is the state of being unemployed. Unemployment is defined as a situation where someone of working age is not able to get a job but would like to be in full-time employment. Tejvan Pettinger June 3, 2017. Unemployment has been identified as a major social, economic and political problem in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, unemployment in Nigeria increased every day. More than 60% of millions of unemployed Nigerians are said to be between the ages of 15 and 44 (Akanbi, 2012:28). Thus, youth unemployment is said to near the 50% mark. The existence of this huge 'army' of idle hands was perhaps the reason why President Jonathan predicted the possibility of a revolution in Nigeria (Oni, 2011:21).

The majority of youth in this nation are jobless, with no means of livelihood, they are impoverished, and mercenary politics becomes the way out. The politicians capitalize on this and recruit the youth who not only constitute the pillar of society but also the most vulnerable to the self-inflicted poverty, as their thugs and touts to perpetrate violence. Unemployment and its associated economic deprivation, frustration and helplessness lures many youths into political thuggery which is not only a criminal act, but a dangerous misadventure.

- Poverty: Poverty is a multifaceted concept, which may include social, economic, and political elements. Absolute poverty, extreme poverty, or destitution refers to the Poverty is the scarcity or the lack of a certain amount of material possessions or money. Poverty is a multifaceted concept, which may include social, economic, and political elements complete lack of the means necessary to meet basic personal needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Poverty also lures youths to thuggery. Nigerians living in poverty rise to nearly 61% 13 February 2012 and has risen more this figure as at 2018. A new report by The World Poverty Clock shows Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the extreme poor people in the world. India has a population seven times larger than Nigeria's. The struggle to lift more citizens out of extreme poverty is an indictment on successive Nigerian governments, which have mismanaged the country's vast oil riches through incompetence and corruption and helplessness lures many youths into political thuggery, which is not only a criminal act, but also a dangerous misadventure.
- The Phenomenon of Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics: In contemporary Nigerian politics, many Godfathers maintain army of thugs who intimidate political opponents, snatch ballot boxes during elections and play other key roles in manipulation of election results in accordance with the wishes of the godfather. Okohue (2011:1) stated that since the return of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999 the god- fathers have remained a force to be reckoned with. The fear of the godfathers, according to him, was the beginning of wisdom especially in their political territories. He noted that no contestant of political office could achieve his ambition without the blessing of the godfather. He concluded

that the roles of the godfathers in the country's political environment were as important, if not more important than that of the electorate.

Thus, the phenomenon of godfatherism has been largely responsible for the prevalence of political thuggery and the subversion of the electoral integrity of the country. Falade (2010:39) observed that: While the electoral body (INEC) has been receiving knocks for elections gone wry in Nigeria, it is a known fact that the problems of rigging, violence, ballot snatching and ballot stuffing and other forms of election malpractices, as well as police collaboration with political thugs, are well beyond the electoral body, or the person who chairs the commission (Falade, 2010:39). It is the godfathers who recruit, finance and empower the political thugs who engage in political violence and manipulation of the electoral process to satisfy the wishes of their sponsors.

- Sit-tight Syndrome - This has become a phenomenon in Nigerian politics. This is a situation in which an individual tries to hold on to power for personal aggrandizement or gains. In an attempt to hang on to power, leaders often create a regime of violence, repression and bloodshed. They organize political thugs, hooligans and scavengers to sing their praises, intimidate opponents and kill them if they become intransigent (Oyatope, 2003:115). The unnecessary and uncoordinated urge to control, dominate and amass wealth for their progeny in the infinite future by the politicians informs the emergence of the sit-tight phenomenon

- The Desperation or 'Do Or Die' Politics among Politicians. The desperation among some Nigerian politicians to win elections and occupy political offices by all means is a major cause of the prevalence of political thuggery and violence in the body politic of the country. The desperation or "do or die" politics became more worrisome since the return to civil rule in 1999. Fabowale (2011:12) accurately observed that. In Nigeria, politics is not a game. It is war. The blood-stained pages of the nation's political annals, its do-or-die character exemplified by thuggery, violence, blackmail and vendetta that define political behaviour of stakeholders all testify to this (Fabowale, 2011:12)

- Prebendal politics – In Nigeria, politics is conceived as an investment. The politicians, having invested colossally on campaigns and other political activities, coupled with the existing system of winner takes all, would want to win at all cost. And the need to employ the use of thugs and touts to destabilize and rig elections becomes inevitable, especially when such politicians are not popular candidates.

- Refusal to accept electoral defeat in good faith is also a fertile factor that can breed thuggery and trigger violence in politics.

- Impact of Urban Violence and Gangersterism: The existing culture of urban violence and gangersterism in Nigerian cities has raised the crescendo of political thuggery in the country. As a result of the existence of various social gangs in urban cities whose stock in trade is stoking violence at slightest opportunity, it has been easy for desperate politicians to engage their services as thugs.

- Absence of good governance and low political culture are also contributed factors to the menace of thuggery and violence. Hunger, marginalisation, incapacitation, intolerance, domination, apathy etc can also cause political violence.

- Lack of Internal Party Democracy This is one of the major problems that have encouraged political thuggery in Nigeria's political environment. Lack of internal democracy within a political party entails that a powerful clique within the party may hijack the party's leadership and structure, and arbitrarily takes party decisions and actions in its favour, and to the detriment of popular will of the larger membership

- The Negative Impact of Money Politics: The enthronement of money politics in Nigeria's political arena is the major cause of political thuggery in the country. As politicians spend a lot of money to secure political offices, they\ employ the services of thugs to ensure the realization of their political ambitions either by fair or foul means.

2.5 EFFECT OF POLITICAL THUGGERY IN NIGERIA

Political thuggery poses a serious threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria in the following ways:

- Thuggery leads to the militarization of the political environment. This scares away credible and patriotic individuals from active participation in the democratic process. This hinders the effort towards consolidation of democracy in the country.
- It contributes immensely in the proliferation of arms and ammunition in the country which, in many cases, are employed for rigging elections and harassment and intimidation of political opponents of the sponsors of the thugs.
- Thuggery has contributed in no little measure in creating the unfortunate scenario in most of the states whereby only the political party in power calls the shot in public affairs, and ignores or muzzles the opposition. Omotosho (2012:9) in reference to the Southwest Nigeria decried the existing political situation resembling that of one party state in the geo-political zone. He lamented that ‘the one party nature of our states makes our politics look like the power plays (rather than politics) of a criminal gang
- Moreover, thuggery has been largely responsible for the evolution and sustenance of violent political culture in the country. This has emboldened some desperate politicians to threaten and actually resort to violence when they fear that they might lose elections. For instance, the Osun State Governor, Rauf Aregbesola was reported to have called on the APC supporters to attack security agents with charms and amulets during the August 9, 2014 governorship election in the state (see Wahab, 2014:48). The alleged calls for the use of amulets in the voting arena could possibly scare away large number of voters and thereby derail the peaceful transition of power through credible election. It is in view of this comment credited to the governor that he was described as “one of the dangers of democracy in Nigeria” (See Wahab, 2014:48).
- Thuggery is a tool for the perpetration of political violence and subversion of democratic order. Some political leaders employ the services of thugs to intimidate majority of party members in order to impose candidates during party primaries, and to ensure that such candidates win the general elections.
- It also discourages the electorate or voters from exercising their franchise and thereby creates the unacceptable situation of ‘low turnout’ during general elections.

3.1**CONCLUSION**

Political thuggery involves in Domination and marginalization of sections and groups and persons in the acquisition and sharing of political positions, rigging of elections and manipulation of political process in favour or against certain groups, sections and persons; and falling apart of sponsors and those sponsored (Godfather and God sons) over contracts, appointments or methods of management of states. Political thuggery and violence is an endemic feature of most political systems in the world. This is particularly true of developing states like Nigeria where political thuggery, killings, violence, malpractice and rigging became endemic characteristics of elections at federal, state and local governments. This has remained largely unchecked and has affected negatively the delivering of democratic dividends, exercise of citizenship right of voting and public accountability. This paper has established the fact that political thuggery is one of the most serious security challenges in Nigeria so all hands must be on deck to ensure that this trend is discontinued so that the problem of political thuggery, violence and insecurity is curtailed.

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