

# Political Thuggery and Insecurity in Nigeria (2015 – 2021)

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## **Abstract**

*Political thuggery is the intentional use of physical force threatened against another person that either result in injury, death, psychological harm within a Political circle. In recent time, the Nigerian political system has witnessed increased political thuggery and at the same time experienced rising insecurity ranging from kidnapping, armed robbery, ritual killings, terrorism etc these has created a lot of concerns both at the national, regional and international level. Based on the aforementioned this paper examined Political thuggery and insecurity in Nigeria, 2015-2021. The paper utilized Elite theory as its theoretical framework and relied on secondary sources of data from books, journal articles, periodicals, newspaper, working paper and magazines. Data collated were analyzed using content analysis and the findings revealed that; there is a link between political thuggery and insecurity in Nigeria, this is because political thuggery provides a breeding ground for kidnapping, terrorism, ritual killings, armed robbery, and drug addiction and all these threatens the safety of citizens and the country as a whole, thus recommended stiff penalty for both the politician and the thug, establish a mechanism for demobilizing, recovering weapons, re-orientation of the thugs and politicians, and proper education. The paper concluded that political thuggery is responsible for the rising insecurity in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Political thuggery, Insecurity, Nigeria, Politicians, Youths*

## **Introduction**

Political thuggery refers to the use of thugs by those politicians who are desperate for political offices; they engage and recruit these thugs as a tool for intimidation, harassment,

assassination, arson, and blackmail of their political opponents. Politicians engage idle & unemployed youths in thuggery for their self-fish interest during political processes such as

campaigns and snatching of ballot boxes (Hassan, 2011).

Political thuggery has become one of the glaring characteristics of the political processes in developing economies, particularly Nigeria. This act has given rise to a series of crises, political violence, rebellion, arms proliferation, and political instability. The phenomena have destroyed lives and properties, choosing the wrong candidates, electoral malpractices and manipulations, robberies, kidnapping, terrorism, different splinter groups, arms smuggles, banditry, further underdevelopment, etc. Political thuggery has resulted in political apathy for fear of intimidation and violence, the masses do not exercise their franchise and do not see the political process as one of the civic duties that are a responsibility on their part participating the political process. In the past years in Nigeria especially in Lagos, Bauchi, and Anambra State, there have been issues of ballot boxes being snatched by thugs and this has resulted in violent conflict and loss of lives. A case in point was the killing of Youth corpers in Bauchi, and the death of some thugs in Isolo Lagos. Insecurity is the presence of fears and threats to lives and properties.

While insecurity according to Beland (2005) is the state of fear or anxiety arising from a tangible or alleged absence of protection. It refers to the absence of proper freedom/liberty from threat or danger. There has been a growing spate of political thuggery since the beginning

of the fourth republic, a situation whereby desperate politicians recruit and engage youths to do some dirty jobs for them during the campaigning process and thereafter abandon them without withdrawing those weapons given to them during the electioneering process. Some of these thugs are not educated, while the educated ones are unemployed, having been pampered by these desperate politicians during the electioneering process and abandoned to their fate thereafter with no means of livelihood. Hence, having illegal weapons at their disposal takes to another lucrative venture, such as robbery, intimidation of innocent citizens, terrorism, kidnapping, ritual killings, banditry, and other negative vices to earn a living.

This situation is worrisome as most Nigerian citizens cannot sleep with their two eyes closed. However, opinions are divided in public discourse on whether the rising spate of insecurity in Nigeria is attributable to political thuggery. For instance, Ozoigbo (2019) revealed that insecurity is one of the factors responsible for political thuggery while Umar (2019) averred that poverty, unemployment, financial attractiveness of elective positions, and ineffective security agency account for the rising incident of political thuggery. Contrary to these views, Umar (2019) further revealed that political thuggery accounted for the rising insecurity.

Furthermore, scholars have written extensively on political thuggery and democracy but paid less attention to the relationship between political thuggery and insecurity in Nigeria. It is against the above stated, that this study is conducted in order to unravel the relationship between political thuggery and insecurity.

### **Literature Review**

Different Scholars have defined political thuggery from various perspectives. According to Shankyla, political thuggery can be defined as any act of oppression, violence, hooliganism, brutality, or gangsterism, whether leading to death or intended to pose a threat to perceived political opponents before, during, or after elections with intention of attaining political result.

Political thuggery, especially at elections may range from acts such as destructively inciting acts, being in illicit possession of offensive weapons to scare or oppress voters, snatching of ballot boxes, and actions resulting in forcing voters from exercising their franchise.

Political thuggery is an act that contradicts the harmony and peaceful co-existence of the people living together. It's an illegitimate and disordered way of acquiring political power to undermine mutual perception for narrow ends by self-imposition. (Howell, 2004). Thus, political thuggery is the act of criminalizing politics, i.e hijacking of politics by hooligans, thugs, hoodlums, and

ruffians, this is because descent people are scared away because they cannot be engaged in such an act of criminality. The recent events in the country attest to that (Asiegbu, 2011). Agagu (2010) defines political thuggery as the illicit and unauthorized use of coercion to effect decisions against the will of others. Similarly, Oni (2014) describes it as an inappropriate way of acquiring political power or an act of suppression, violence, hooliganism, brutality, and intimidation.

Insecurity is the antithesis of security. The concept of insecurity has been given different meanings and interpretations because of the different ways it impacts on persons. Some conception of Insecurity entails; danger; want for safety, uncertainty; lack of stability, lack of protection, etc. All these concepts have been used by different people to describe insecurity. However, all these descriptions have a general reference to a state of vulnerability to loss of life, property, and harm. However, Beland (2005) defined insecurity as the state of fear or anxiety stemming from an alleged lack of protection. It refers to the absence of freedom from danger. This conceptualization reveals physical insecurity as the most glaring kind of insecurity and it sprang into other forms of insecurity such as economic security and social security.

Nigeria has suffered a rising spate of insecurity in recent times, this insecurity includes armed robbery, kidnapping, insurgency, ritual killings,

etc. In a study Ogaboh and Coker (2010) examined political thuggery and democratic dividends in Nigeria, employing secondary data and personal observation, the study revealed that poverty unemployment, financial attractiveness of elective positions, the value system of wealth accumulation, and an ineffective security agency account for the occurrence of political thuggery in Nigeria. In another study, Umar, Doho, and Sule (2018) investigated the effects of political thuggery on sustainable development, utilizing Elite theory and qualitative data analysis; the findings revealed that thuggery instilled fears among candidates which impeded political participation of the electorate. In a related study, Mbaya (2013) analyzed the implication of political thuggery on socio-economic and political Development in Borno State. The study employed both primary and secondary data and the findings indicated that poverty, high rate of unemployment, high rate of illiteracy among youth, and families having so many children they cannot carter for by their income are the root cause of the high rate of thuggery in the state.

Similarly, Adeleke (2016) examined political thuggery and voter turnout in the fourth Republic general elections in Southwestern Nigeria. Utilizing the Social exchange theory and descriptive statistics the study revealed that thugs were hired to engage in all forms of electoral malpractices, and the fear of being

killed and psychological trauma has given rise to voters' apathy.

In another study Oluwagbohunmi (2017) investigated curbing political thuggery and violence among Nigerian youths, using qualitative data the findings revealed that political thuggery and violence constitute political problems that climax into political instability and endanger democracy.

However, Ibrahim and Mulhtar (2017) in a study examined the nexus between corruption and political kidnapping in Nigeria. Employing qualitative data the findings indicated that corruption is indirectly connected to kidnapping whereby corrupt politicians use political thugs and abandon them to the business of kidnapping to earn a living.

Similarly, Umar (2019) investigated the causes and effects of political thuggery in Nigeria. The study critically examined the reason for the rising spate of political thuggery in Nigeria especially during political campaigns for elective offices. Employing secondary data, findings reveal that poverty, unemployment, financial attractiveness of elective positions, and ineffective security agency account for the incidence of political thuggery in Nigeria.

In another study, Ozoigbo (2019) analyzed insecurity in Nigeria: Genesis, consequences, and panacea. Using qualitative data the study revealed that, unemployment, poor leadership, porous borders, and arms

proliferation non-obedient to the rule of law are the causes of insecurity. From the review above it would be observed that the findings in the earlier studies are inconclusive.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Elite Theory. This theory was propounded by the popular writings of Mosca (1939) and Pareto, (1935). The theory emerged to clarify political authenticity in their political system. It explains political and social interactions among individuals and groups in their societies concerning decision-making, power relations, and resources. The theory presumes that the political community is classified into two, the few minorities who are united, well-coordinated, self-secured, and above all have the power to assign values to the communities, and the majority who are unorganized puzzled without the political power to formulate policy. (Umar, Doho & Sule, 2016). The Elite maintained different statuses in their political system and this gave them the impetus to conduct themselves the way they like. In Nigeria, the political elites engage jobless and uneducated youths in thuggery, they use them as tools to achieve their selfish interest during campaigns and political processes. These thugs snatch ballot boxes and intimidate both the political opponents and the electorates. (Hassan, 2011). Most often these political Elites in their desperation to retain political power indulge in different vices and

means, neglecting the peaceful co-existence of their societies and communities. They recruit and arm some youths that will remain loyal to them during the electioneering process and they, in turn, reward them with money and weapons for their loyalty.

### **Methodology**

This paper utilized secondary sources of data collection, such as books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines periodicals, etc., and qualitative analysis.

### **The Relationship between political thuggery and insecurity in Nigeria.**

Political thuggery has created a worrisome situation in Nigeria, its impacts threaten the security of lives and properties and the cooperative existence of Nigeria. During the electioneering period, politicians recruit arms and sponsor thuggery, they engage the services of political thugs to intimidate cause mayhem, and inflict injuries on their political opponents; thereafter elections these weapons are left in the hand of these thugs and the politicians at this moment disengage and abandons them. In a bid to earn a living these thugs find another lucrative use for the arms by engaging in all sorts of criminality, ranging from kidnapping, ritual killings, terrorism banditry, armed robbery, etc. creating insecurity across the country. According to Tafa (2009), political thuggery leads to the breakdown of law and order and insecurity emerges, he noted further

that insecurity in any society spells doom and does no good to anyone.

Again insecurity occurs in society as a consequence of the activities of criminals arising from arms proliferations. A situation where arms and ammunition are left in the hands of thugs during and after elections. The result has been insecurity, ranging from assassination, unknown gunmen, incessant kidnapping, terrorism, etc.

Similarly, Obasanjo (2002) noted that Nigerian politicians at times spill blood to retain political power which is the doorway to amassing wealth. This view illustrates the engagement of political thugs; and highlights how blood is interchanged for political power which invariably catalyzes to loss of lives and insecurity. In affirmation to this, Blue print report (2020) stated that some politicians in Nigeria who were bent on attaining political success during the last general elections recruited young boys into their network and armed them with sophisticated weapons to do their bidding during the poll.

Corroboratively, Bello (as cited in Blue Print Newspaper, 2020) revealed that some top politicians are behind the spate of insecurity in Nigeria. In furtherance to this claim, Oni (2022) observed and warned that Nigeria politicians should note that the banditry that characterized the nation presently, is attributed to the events that took place during the 2015 presidential election where foreign mercenaries were allegedly recruited

as fake drivers, voters, policemen and soldiers and imported into the country by desperate politicians who wanted to acquire political power at all cost. He further emphasized that politicians should learn a lesson from what his party did in 2015 by allegedly importing voters and thugs from neighbouring countries to rig elections only for them to stay back and constitute a security threat by engaging in criminal activities ranging from terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, unknown gunmen, armed robbery, etc unleashing mayhem on innocent Nigerians.

In concordance with this assertion, Umar (2019) argued that political thuggery is characterized by robbery, intimidation murder, gangsterism, and physical assault between two opposing groups which later metamorphosed into insecurity. Thus, he noted that thugs kill and maim innocent citizens, and this acts of thuggery is most glaring in Nigeria's political scene.

In a similar vein, Abubakar (2015) contend that thugs attacked innocent citizens, as they hardly get their targets, they try to attack anyone that comes their way. This act constitutes a security threat. Furthermore, political thuggery truncates the electoral process, kills innocent citizens, creates fears among opponents, inflicts injuries on individuals, violate human rights destroy properties, and creates insecurity. Political thuggery had given rise to insecurity ranging from

murder, armed robbery kidnapping, terrorism, etc. A case in point is the spate of insecurity witnessed in Anambra State during the electioneering year 2021, which illustrate that arms and ammunition had unlawfully gotten into the hands of individuals who used them for criminal activities. Again, the scenario that played out in Anambra State in 2021 portends the danger of political thuggery and its consequences on the security of the citizens. From the foregoing, it is obvious to state that political thuggery is directly connected to the insecurity presently experienced in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Political thuggery being one of the major features in Nigeria political scene had given rise to a series of post-election violence, political assassinations, kidnapping, terrorism, banditry, and armed robbery. This has resulted in the loss of lives and destruction of properties, these actions and activities of political thugs have given rise to insecurity in the country. Thus, this paper concludes that there is a relationship between political thuggery and insecurity in Nigeria, this is because political thuggery provides a breeding ground for kidnapping, terrorism, Political assassination, ritual killings, armed robbery, and drug addiction etc, all these threatens the safety of citizens and the country as a whole.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the paper recommends:

- The government enforces stiff penalty for both politicians and political thug who engages in the act of thuggery, they should be proper orientation and awareness of the danger of political thuggery.
- Government should establish a mechanism/agency charged with demilitarization, demobilization, and re-orientation of these political thugs; train some and empower the others.
- Family, religious leaders, and schools should be engaged in inculcating strong values in children and youths about the danger of political thuggery.

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