



Politics and the Thugs of War

Policy Recommendations

1. Nigerian politics needs to be made attractive to only those who are committed to developing the society.
2. All firms and individuals providing security services to politicians should be registered with biometrics.
3. Forensic science and DNA analysis should be used to unravel political murders.
4. Politicians who rely on violent thugs should be named, shamed and disqualified.
5. Tackling youth unemployment will help in making youth less willing to be recruited as political thugs.

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of **Nextier SPD**.

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As political campaigns and support mobilisations for the 2019 general elections gather momentum, incidence of thuggery has become widespread across Nigeria's political landscape. On the 13th of December 2018, a group of armed thugs attacked and inflicted injuries on some All Progressives Congress chieftains in Ebonyi State . Similarly, in the recently concluded party primaries, gun-toting thugs were on the rampage in a number of states in Nigeria. Employed and deployed by politicians as guards, [thugs are often used to harass, kidnap, or even assassinate](#) political opponents. Besides killings, political thuggery has [wide-ranging implications for democratic consolidation](#) in Nigeria as well as on the image of the country in international circle. While Boko Haram, Niger Delta, and farmer-herder conflicts have attracted the attention of government, policy makers and non-governmental organisations, dangers posed by thuggery has received scant interest from stakeholders. Following these developments, this edition of Nextier SPD Weekly examines the challenges posed by political thuggery in Nigeria and makes recommendations on how the violence can be addressed.

Political desperation has been a major hallmark of Nigeria's democratic experience since the return to civil rule in 1999. [Politicians have often resorted to violence to promote their private and sectional interests](#). One of such violent strategies has been political thuggery. Incidentally, in Nigeria, like in most African states, it cannot be dissociated from the form and character of the political contestation for power¹. Politics is a fierce game in Nigeria because it is one of the surest means to power, wealth, and fame. As a result, a number of politicians recruit, [arm and pay able-bodied young men to carry out nefarious activities on their behalves and their political ambitions](#). These thugs,

who act [as personal security guards are often used to maim and kill](#) their political opponents within or outside their parties. During electioneering period in Nigeria, political thugs who are mainly young men and women are 'transformed into something more akin to American gangland fights for control of the drug trade'². Such entrepreneurs of violence have been largely responsible for the [litany of unresolved political murders](#) in the country. It is alleged that thugs were responsible for the death of former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the federation, Bola Ige, who [was gruesomely murdered in Ibadan on December 23, 2001](#). On some occasions, [thugs have perpetrated the kidnap](#) of opponent politicians or their relatives to force a devised political result such as their withdrawal from electoral competition. In the same vein, some thugs have been used to [snatch and stuff ballot boxes](#) in order to secure undue victory for their masters. These criminal operations and antics have led to [violent clashes between rival thugs with devastating consequences](#). Public response to thuggery has mainly been condemnatory. Though a few thugs have been arrested, yet their trial was scuttled by the politicians they worked for. Some bold policy steps can be implemented to arrest the ugly trend of thuggery.

1. Nigerian politics needs to be made less attractive to political entrepreneurs who see it as a route to wealth and fame. It should be made attractive to only those who are committed to developing the society. This can be achieved through various measures such as demonetisation of the process. For example, if the salaries of members of the

1. Osaghae, Eghosa E. 1989. *The character of the state, legitimacy crisis and social mobilisation in Africa: An explanation of form and character*. *Africa Development*, 14 (2), pp. 27–53.
2. Collier, P., Elliott, L., Hegre, H., Hoeffler, A., Reynal-Querol, M. and Sambanis, N. (2003) *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank and Oxford University Press).



National Assembly, governors, and ministers are pegged to that of Permanent Secretaries, politics will become less of a do-or-die game worthy of hiring thugs for. This will pave the way for those who genuinely want to serve the people.

2. All firms and individuals providing security services to politicians should be registered and their employees identifiable using tools such as biometrics. This will enable the authorities to easily identify and trace those involved in criminal activity around a politician. It will aid investigation, prosecution, and sanction.
3. Forensic science and DNA analysis should be used to unravel political murders. Several political units and officers should be trained on how to use such tools and techniques to resolve killings including those perpetrated by thugs. This will help bring culprits to justice and serve as deterrent for others. It is scandalous that 17 years after the murder of Bola Ige, perpetrators of the crime are still at large.
4. Politicians who rely on violent thugs should be named, shamed and disqualified. Such public disgrace will serve as deterrent to violent politicians. Implementing step 2 above, will help in identifying thugs who are affiliated to politicians.
5. Many researches on political violence, thuggery and violent conflict identified youths as the herald of such omen. In many instances, unemployment and poverty have been identified as reasons while

youths are willing tools in the hand of politicians who for morsel of bread easily recruit them to do the dirty jobs. According to Samuel "out of deep frustrations and poverty the youth in their large number become vulnerable to the whelms and caprices of the political demagogues, who resort to violence and other unjustifiable means to actualizing their objectives"³ Therefore, with rise in youth unemployment in Nigeria [at 36.50 percent](#), youths will continue to be involved in political thuggery. Job creation and the reduction of the huge poverty level among Nigerian youths will help in checkmating their recruitment as political thugs.

Finally, Nigerian politics is often written off as a dirty game because the rules governing political contestation and elections are violated with impunity such as the resort to the use of thugs by politicians. Like other games, in politics there are winners and losers. So every politician must imbibe the sportsman's spirit that politics is not a do-or-die affair but a game of competition, bargaining, and consensus for the promotion of public rather than private interest. Youth involvement in political thuggery poses a threat to Nigerian democracy, stability, peace and security. This is because such violence easily grows from political thuggery to religious and ethnic violent conflicts which in the past has led to many death and injuries.

3. Samuel, O. (2017) "Youth Involvement in Political Violence/Thuggery: A Counter Weight to Democratic Development in Africa" *J Pol Sci Pub Aff* 2017, 5:3 DOI: 10.4172/2332-0761.1000280