



Policy Recommendations

1. Accountability and transparency are needed in the management of public funds in Nigeria.
2. Politicians who mobilize political thuggery should be sanctioned.
3. The international community should impose visa ban on politicians who perpetrate violence.
4. Families of those killed should seek redress in court rather than resigning to fate.

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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Rivers State has dominated the news media for some of the wrong reasons in recent months, from intra- and inter-violent party relations, (ab)use of youth gangs, political assassinations, militarization of polls, to outright electoral violence. Indeed, the [scale and frequency of violence](#) in the oil-rich state is above the national average among non-insurgent states in Nigeria. However, despite the recent escalation of violence, the descent of the state to 'rivers of blood' started many years ago. For example, Rivers State was one of the major flashpoints of violence before, during and after the 2015 general elections. Similarly, the state maintained this [ignoble reputation in the 2019 electoral cycle](#).

gubernatorial election has remained inconclusive in the state. Following these developments, this edition of Nextier SPD Weekly examines the politics of violence in Rivers State and makes recommendations on how the ugly trend can be reversed. Most analysts explain the phenomenon of violence in Africa using the primordial framework hence the excessive focus on identity relations. These scholars and policy analysts often trace the root causes of violence to ethno-religious hatred between different identity groups (Horowitz, 1985). Undeniably, intertribal wars dotted the African political landscape some centuries ago and religiously-motivated insurgent violence remains a modern day reality.

Nevertheless, the incessant orgy of violence in Rivers State is better understood through the prism of instrumentalism. Unlike [primordial explanations](#) which underscore the role of ethno-religious factors in conflict situations, the instrumentalist framework sees violence as a strategic tool to promote elite's self-related agendas.

Even though Rivers State is ethnically diverse, yet recent cases of violence have not been based on identity. A Rivers Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate allegations of killings during the 2015 election cycle in the state revealed that out of the [97 cases of murders, 94 of them occurred](#) between November 15, 2014, and April 11, 2015 - an average of 19 killings a month. Similarly, out of the 50 murder cases documented during the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections across the country, [over 30 cases](#) were recorded in Rivers State alone.

Rather than ethnicity, violence in Rivers State has been driven by elite political avarice. Since 1999, political actors in the state have mobilized [cult groups](#) and militants against their rivals in a bid to control the commanding height of the state's economy (Ibaba, 2011). Rivers State is one of the richest and most developed states in the country largely on account of its abundant oil wealth which has transformed the state into an industrial hub. Thus, enormous revenue allocations accrue to the state from the Federation Account every month. This rentier logic accounts for the [desperation of political parties to capture](#) the state by all means. It is widely believed that the resources of Rivers State are used to finance the federal activities of the party which controls the state. Thus, the militarization and deployment of thugs in Rivers State's 2019 elections by the All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic Party respectively are violent attempts to capture the state in order to control its huge fiscal resources.

Thus, a number of measures are needed to address the ubiquity of violence in Rivers State politics.

1. Accountability and transparency are needed in the management of public funds in the state. Civil society, non-governmental organizations and members of the public should monitor the use of Rivers State funds in order to minimize abuse such as using the resources to fund violence or party's campaigns.
2. Politicians who mobilize political thuggery should be sanctioned. Any politician who incites violence or deploys thugs against their opponents or members of the public should be prosecuted and disqualified. The refusal of INEC to give Certificate of Return to certain politicians who perpetrated violence in the 2019 election is commendable in this regard.
3. The international community should impose visa ban on politicians who perpetrate violence. Members of the international community should go beyond threat and actually place visa ban on politicians who perpetrate violence. This is crucial as many Nigerian politicians cannot do without travelling to Europe and other industrialized countries as class symbol or to bank their ill-gotten wealth.
4. Families of those killed should seek redress in court rather than resigning to fate. Family and friends of victims of election violence should press charges against killers of their loved ones and their sponsors. If such disgruntled persons are made to face the wrath of the law and pay damages for their crimes, the rate of politically-motivated killings will reduce.

Finally, politics should be de-monetized so that responsible persons who are motivated by public interests can engage in it. This is particularly true in Rivers State where political rascality has been institutionalized and violence entrenched as norm.

References

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