



SOCIAL ACTIVITY AND CRIMINALIZATION OF POLITICS IN CROSS RIVER SOUTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study discussed societal activities and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. More precisely, this study examined the extent at which the use of thugs during election relates with criminalization of politics. To guide the study, one research hypothesis and one research question was formulated. Cross-sectional survey study design, involving the use of qualitative and quantitative methods was adopted. Through the use unstructured interview and questionnaire, a sample of four hundred 400 respondents was selected from the study area using a multi-staged sampling technique. Furthermore, a simple percentage system of analyzing data was employed for the interpretation of the research question while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis tool was utilized to test the research hypothesis. The study concluded that the use of thugs in political activities directly relates with the criminalization of politics as this menace has led to all forms of criminality during and after election period in study area in particular and Nigeria in general. The study revealed that there is a significant relationship between the use thugs in political activities and the criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District State. Given the results, the subsequent policy suggestions among others; were made which include: There is urgent need for government to strengthen public-private-partnership (PPP) as one of the best policy options and economic approaches. This will assist in the provision of employment to able youths across Nigeria thereby pooling people out of poverty and unemployment who may be willing tool in the hands of politicians.

KEYWORDS: Social activity, Use of thugs, Election impropriety, Criminalization of politics, Violence, Destruction of life and property, National Security

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's political and electoral experiences since 1999 to the most recent general election in 2023 have left sad memories of criminalization of politics. In fact, violence has

saturated the political atmosphere in the country. For instance, the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and most recently the 2023 general elections were marred by widespread fraud and by extension unparalleled partisan violence.

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The election violence in 2007, 2011 and 2015 led to severe harm to the political atmosphere in Nigeria, including loss of lives and properties worth billions of Naira (Abah and Nwokuwu, 2015). Hardly surprising, Abdu-Raheem and Bamgbade (2023) observed that the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria, in particular, stand at the vanguard of scholarly examination due to the prevalent electoral violations and malpractices that have flawed the democratic process such as the use of thugs.

The elections in Nigeria have been marked by widespread misconduct in the form of partisan violence, including political thuggery. The 2022 Electoral Act criminalizes the use of thugs in electoral process in Section 125. Political thuggery is a process of using extrajudicial means in the course of the contest for or in exercising political power including intimidation, harassment, assassination, blackmail, and arson. Political thuggery, according to Idris (2011), is the criminalization of politics. According to the researcher, when politics is criminalized, it is left in the hands of thugs, ruffians, and hooligans, while good citizens are scared away. Political corruption is detrimental to good governance and the development of the Nigerian state as a whole because it prevents elective officers from being held accountable to the public. This is due to the fact that political thuggery is characterized by robbery, intimidation, gangsterism, murder, and physical assault. It frequently involves physical combat between two opposing gangs or groups, which ultimately leads to aggressions between individuals or groups. Additionally, it contributes to an increase in the rate of crime and the emergence of untrustworthy candidates in elections, posing a threat to Nigeria's democratic dividends and citizenship rights.

The Nigerian political scene has been characterized by various forms of crime such as corruption, cultism, violence, unkept promises to mention but few. These have limited political participation to those who can muscle their way through these crimes. The various forms of political crimes have also brought voters apathy which made the citizens not to have confidence in the government.

According to Gberevbie (2014), electoral violence has really dispirited citizens' involvement in the political process in many states in Nigeria, and this development foretells serious danger to Nigeria's democracy because

Without sufficient turnout, elections would not reflect the people's preference. It is quite obvious that from the beginning of the 21st century, Nigeria has witnessed unparalleled cases of crimes and insecurity in all areas of human activity. Violence has reached its peak, and Nigeria, which was hitherto a more relatively peaceful country, has suddenly begun to experience unrest.

Since Nigeria's return to participatory democracy in 1999, the nation has not fared better on issues of political accountability, transparency, and good governance. Instead, its body politics has been mired in a crisis of governance, consequent upon mismanagement of national resource, non-accountability, and legitimacy crisis arising from the conduct and administration of her electoral processes.

The criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District of State is clearly reflected in the gravitating use of thugs which has culminated in loss of lives and destruction of properties during elections. This menace in recent times has been seen to be worsening rather than improving as often times those who win the election do not reflect the overall interest of the masses but rather few Godfather's whose interest is to use the office of imposed leaders to amass wealth for personal gains rather than the good of the general populace. Robert K. Merton Anomie theory was used as theoretical anchorage. This theory asserts that when an individual has internalized a certain goal, and when the legitimate means for achieving that goal are blocked, the individual is under pressure to resort to illegitimate means to achieve the goal. The politicians in the context of Nigeria can achieve their desire in elections through means that are against the generally acceptable principles of electoral process in Nigeria. This implies that during elections, most candidates have realized the fact that winning through free and fair election is obviously impossible based on their existing bad records, thus the use of illegitimate means such use of thugs becomes paramount and is employed without minding its associated effect of loss of lives and destruction of valuable properties during and after election which all help in enhancing the criminalization of politics in a democratic country like Nigeria. Does the use of thugs in political activities relate to criminalization of politics in the study Cross River South Senatorial District? Arising from the research question the following

Hypothesis was set. There is no significant relationship between use of thugs and criminalization of politics in River State South Senatorial District. The study covers from 2003 to 2023.

The crisis of criminalization of politics in every electoral process in Nigeria is gradually gaining global recognition considering its associated effect in the nascent democracy of the country. The fact that Nigeria elections, since independence have been characterized by the use of thugs in political process, arising from this weakening crisis, this study sought to examine societal activities and the criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District.

Also, the obvious fact that from the extant literature consulted and used for the study clearly shows that no existing literature has adequately emphasised the influence of societal activities and the criminalization of politics vis-à-vis use of thugs in Cross River South Senatorial District clearly establish a gap in the literature. Accordingly, the quest to fill this existing gap in the literature thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge makes this study extremely important in the scholarship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Violence and Criminalization of politics in Nigeria

Obeten (2016) states, "Political violence during an election is an illegal interference with the election process." Vote counts are influenced by fraud to influence election outcomes, either by increasing the vote share of preferred candidates, decreasing the vote share of rival candidates, or both. Incorrect vote counting, intimidation at polling places, and illegal voter registration are all components of the scheme, which is also known as vote fraud. The legal definition of electoral fraud varies from country to country. While some forms of voter fraud are prohibited by electoral law, others are in violation of general laws like those pertaining to assault, harassment, or libel. It went even further by defining electoral fraud as an event that not only destabilizes a democracy but also has the potential to cause a credibility crisis for an election process, making it difficult for people and voters to reject an election process and its results. Yadudu (2008), explained the reason why politics is characterized with violence in Nigeria, where he lamented that politicians, particularly the oppositions believed that, their opponents

who are in office will not conduct a free and fair elections. As a result, they do everything possible whether by fair or foul means to retain their offices. Thus, Yadudu (2008) added that political violence is employed to further the cause of perpetuations in office or to unseat an incumbent. Even though, Yadudu's discussion on political violence did not cover the actors in political violence, it has explained some of the reasons why politicians employ violence. This also shows that the author is interested on the politicians and not the actors or argents of political violence.

While in his contribution, Ochoche (2007) stated that, in true democracy it is believed that, every individual is politically relevant, as votes are the means of which societies used in choosing their leaders. But because of the conflicting inter-play of socio-political interest and other forces have linked elections with fierce battle where all sort of weapons and strategies are utilized. In addition, Ochoche, stated that religious, ethnic sentiments and power of incumbency had also made election to become a do or die affairs leading to massive destruction of lives and properties. However, Ochoche's study could not talk about the involvement of youth in to the act of political violence due to the changing patterns of political violence. Furthermore, youth were not use as argents of political violence as it is now in Nigeria.

Violence in Nigerian contrary to violence in other countries or societies it's involved both threat and the actual inflictions of physical injury on individual opponent or perceived groups that may likely hinder the goals attainment of the either of the party of candidate. The year 2003 general elections had witnessed unprecedented increase in the act of political violence where youth were used as agents of political violence all over the country. This has also led to the formations of different groups of political thugs with difference names in almost all the geopolitical regions (Ojong, 2019, Eteng & Agbor, 2018).

In the North Eastern parts of the country there are groups such as "YanKalare" in Gombe State, "Ecomog", in Borno state, "Shunku Boys" in Adamawa state a "Sara Suka" in Bauchi state Lagos we have Oduwa People's Congress (OPC) other group are the "Area Boys", in the Niger Delta region there

Exist the "Egbesu boys", and in Calabar they have Bakassi Boys (Bashir, 2013; Mbaya, 2013). While in the North western part of the country there are groups like the Yan Daba in Kano (Dan" Asabe, 2011). As results of the emergence of these thugs group so many cases of threats, intimidations and loss of lives were reported by both government and nongovernmental organizations since the year 2003 to date.

2.1.2 Overview of Electoral fraud and it effect on Criminalization of politics in Nigeria

In Nigeria, leaders that emerged victories in her elections rigged themselves into the corridors of power and this restricted the chances of true candidates from winning the election even though they are the people's choice. In a society where candidates are imposed against the will and choice of the people, democracy cannot be consolidated there. Also, election riggings over the years in Nigeria have aided to the violation of the principle of fundamental human rights which A. V. Dicey advocates as the right to life for every citizen born in a country. Nigerian democracy aims to ensure political stability and promote fundamental human rights. Elections in Nigeria which should have been a prelude for achieving a stabilized government accompanied with people's consent have contradicted these standards because of electoral fraud. This is a serious concern hence the stability and secured environment needed for the success of democracy have been severely jeopardized.

Elections conducted since Nigeria's Independence have been a do or die affair and this has made the peace-loving Nigerians to be dead scared in exercising their voting rights hence the suicidal nature of the politics. Evidence has shown that the rate of citizen participation in elections these days have drastically reduced due to electoral fraud and lack of qualified candidates.

Adehikan (2010) notes that because of the history of electoral frauds, elections in the country have been associated with political tension, crisis and even violence. Actually, politics is seen as the only game in town, and it is played with extreme seriousness for the winner wins everything and the looser loses everything. This quest to win election by all means has also claimed the lives of both

electorates and some popular candidates by some hoodlums who want to control the government by dubious means. As a result, those who have the interest of Nigeria at heart have resorted to shun politics for fear of a sudden death in the process and this has posed a serious threat to Nigerian democracy and its consolidation. Worse still, electoral body which would have been neutral and ensure a free and fair election have become biased, because in some cases they are employed by some power brokers to serve as a rescue mission to some illegitimate candidates to the detriment of popular candidates and Nigerian electorates to ensure that their unpopular candidates emerged victorious in elections, they have seen election rigging as a way out against the general wish of the popular candidates, electorates and good of Nigerian democracy.

Kurfi (2005) has observed, rigging is almost synonymous with Nigerian elections. The main aim of election rigging or malpractice is to frustrate the democratic aspirations of citizen's who have voted or would have voted into office. These days, votes do not count because, come rain, come shine, the electoral management body must deliver and no one questions their decisions. In fact, the elections conducted in Nigeria have been cruelly contested that the success of the democratic order has been compromised. This ugly electoral malpractice and rigging has a general negative effect on Nigeria's democratic future because the trend is increasing instead of reducing. The trends have actually undermined the chances of successful elections and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

2.1.3 Political thuggery and criminalization of politics in Nigeria.

Political thuggery and violence is an illegitimate and unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desires of others. It represents a disturbance to political equilibrium system of the state. It is all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, its actors including competing political groups as well as incumbents or its policies. Therefore, political thuggery is an illegitimate and violent means of seeking political power with a view to subverting national opinion for parochial ends through self-

Imposition. It is simply the criminalization of politics. When politics is criminalized, it is left in the hands of ruffians, thugs and hooligans because the good people are scared away (Howell, 2004). In Nigeria, the general perception is that male politician formulates and finance political crises than their women counterpart. This is because women find it difficult if not impossible to breed and keep thugs for political purpose. Due to the near anarchical nature of Nigerian polity and society, women who want to participate in politics usually discover that the political environment is often unfriendly. Rather than being democratized, the struggle for power among the various contending groups in the polity, the civil disturbances, rise of ethnic-militias and politically motivated killing of opponents are pointers to increasing or simmering militarism of Nigerian state, which has further discouraged women from participating in politics (Adeniyi, 2003).

To Gboyega (2004), thuggery and political violence is indispensable instrument in the hands of hungry power seekers. Since Godfathers are themselves the ruling elite or potential ruling elite, their activities have been institutionalized to the point of subverting the constitution for parochialism and aggrandizement. Political Godfathers are by design placed above the laws of the land including the constitution; they and their thugs can carry arms without hindrance in Nigeria. They are entitled to police escorts and are immune to crime of abduction, harassment and maiming. As well as various political purposes such as intimidating harassment, violence, assassination of their target opponent while some of the thugs are placed on regular salaries, with allowance accompanying their remuneration. Some of them are employed as special adviser, special assistant and personal assistants when they won the election while those who do not fit in for the aforementioned positions are made contractors to the government. Still, some are paid off immediately after the usual assignment (Gboyega, 2004).

Njoku (2012) averred further that politician recruits the youths comprising of men as their thugs and touts. Most of these thugs were used to rig elections in 2003 and 2007 general elections in Nigeria, especially in the

south-west, where most of the bye elections were monitored and conducted by political thugs as officers who were officially designated to do the job was over powered by the hoodlums, causing crises and violence in the voting venues. These thugs compelled innocent people to vote against their wishes. The party agents at the polling booths were threatened to compromise and INEC official were forced to compromise in rigging. This according to Njoku (2012) resulted women political apathy experienced in electioneering process in Nigeria.

Markson (2019) noted that political 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. He also argued that political thuggery 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.

Political thuggery as observed by Ayamba (2007), 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 dedicated not only to committing crimes but also to escaping the appropriate punishment.' Thuggery plays a vital role in sustaining such undemocratic culture.

Ukor (2019) clearly noted that, 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 (Wahab, 2014). 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" (Agbor, 2014).

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. Omotosho (2012:9) observed that it is as a result of the desperation of some politicians and their highhandedness that "there is virtually a total lack of democratic process in our political parties". He noted that the consequence has been that "instead of a process producing a candidate genuinely interested in working for the people, we have rigged process that produce favoured and invariably incompetent candidates". This situation discourages the consolidation of democracy in the country.

Azinor (2017) also noted that political thuggery also discourages the electorate or voters from exercising their franchise and thereby creates the unacceptable situation of 'low turnout' during general elections. In the Governorship elections conducted in five states namely Kogi, Cross River, Adamawa, Bayelsa and Sokoto states there were reports of low turnout of voters in most cases. For example, in Cross River governorship election, there were 1,242,916 registered voters. The total votes cast were 501,117 votes, thus representing less than 50 percent of the total registered voters (Okoro 2012). This was partly as a result of fear of the menace of thugs. It then necessitated the deployment of large number of security personnel to safeguard the lives of voters and as well guarantee the peaceful conduct of the elections

Agbalajobi (2010) believed that women naturally are not as strong as men and so cannot be engaged in thuggery and violence in the course of actualization of their political aspiration because naturally, Nigerian women doesn't like to be seen as thug or perceive as sponsor of such. Women like to preserve their dignity anywhere they found themselves and since Nigeria political terrain embraces thuggery and violence, it becomes difficult for women to compete favorably with men in such situation. Women cannot struggle in the atmosphere of rancour and violence. The fear of being attacked is always in their heart, their

Mind is not as strong as that of men. As mothers, women cannot risk anybody's life for election victory which the men in Nigerian politics care less about.

Nigerian Former President Olusegun Obasanjo (2002) buttress the claim that „Nigerian politician do sometimes shed blood to achieve their relevance in government because political kingdom has for too long been the gate way to the economic kingdom"" this statement captures the content and contest of political thuggery and violence in Nigeria. It demonstrates how blood is being exchange for political power and led to waste of human resources which resulted in the death of able-bodied men who may be useful in the future for national development. Without doubt, Nigerian politics has since independence, been characterized by thuggery and violence which average Nigerian women politician may likely find it difficult to cope with (Obasanjo, 2002).

Agbalajobi (2010) believed that women tend to display complacency in the way of doing things. Therefore, they prefer to remain where they are and maintain the status quo than to be engulfed with crises and violence in the process of making a change. This attitude cannot ensure adequate participation of women in Nigeria politics. This is because of the perpetual fear in their mind.

In discussing the causes of thuggery in Nigeria, Mbaya (2013) had argued that

(i) The majority of youths in Nigeria are jobless illiterates, with no means of livelihood, they are impoverished, and being paid easily to manipulate election results. The political elite capitalizes on this weakness and recruits the youths, who not only constitute the pillar of society but also the most vulnerable to the self-inflicted poverty, as their thugs to perpetrate violence.

(ii) Politics for personal gain – this has become a common feature in Nigerian politics. This is a situation in which an individual tries to hold on to power for personal 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. The unnecessary and uncoordinated urge to control, dominate and amass wealth for their family and friends inform

the emergence of political thugs to be used to win the election by all means.

(iii) Prebendal politics in Nigeria, politics is conceived as an investment. The polelectoral defeat in good faith is also a fertile factor that can breed thuggery and trigger violence in politics.

(iv) The absence of good governance and low political culture are also contributing factors to the menace of thuggery and violence. Similarly, hunger, marginalization, incapacitation, intolerance, domination and apathy etc can also cause political violence

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

(vi) The absence of good governance and low political culture are also contributing factors to the menace of thuggery and violence. Similarly, hunger, marginalization, incapacitation, intolerance, domination and apathy among others can also cause political violence.

Studies have shown that thuggery and violence are basically "carried out by youth whose members are openly recruited, financed, and sometimes armed by public officials, politicians, party officials, and their representatives" (Luqman, 2010). The extremely competitive and ethnically charged nature of Nigerian politics, particularly at the highest levels, makes political stability and sustainable democracy a difficult national asset to secure. For example, length politicians are prepared to go to obtain political office by all means has evidenced the fact that some politicians have gone as far as seeking to create „fake" police and other security forces, by purchasing uniforms for their hired thugs to wear to disrupt electoral activities and manipulated elections results to suit the interest of their sponsors (TSA, 2011)

Additionally, thuggery and violence have contributed remarkably in the initiation of young people who are generally regarded as the future hope of the Nigerian society and custodian of good democratic values into crime. Certain factors prompt this phenomenon including social disorganization resulting from the breakdown of values and norms in the society. The other challenges are encumbered due to negative social changes from the wave of globalization engendered by the movie industry, satellite, and internets as well as

economic meltdown have all contributed to the degeneration (Adisa, 2004 ; Agba, Eteng & Ipole, 2018). For the youth, the consequences are more detrimental. Illegal roadside markets have become fertile grounds for petty thefts, daylight robberies and other criminalities that involve the youths. In a way, these youths are also co-opted and exposed to violence by the nature of their engagement in para-security employments.

Today, political thuggery has become a matter of national security affecting sustainable democracy, especially during campaigns and elections. Security is thus elemental in governance as it is the protection of the lives, rights, dignity and property of the citizens and the resources, territory, sovereignty and the lawful institution of the country. It is also when these institutions utilize the resources of the nation for the provision of secure, just and equitable living conditions for the citizens of the country that they own their legitimacy (Usman, 2006). However, in most African states, including Nigeria, the rulers of the states, empires and politics constitute the major threat to the security of the lives and properties of their own citizens. Meanwhile, the security agencies that exist to checkmate the excesses of such leaders become the propagators of disunity because of their political ambitions. These and much more have spoiled the process of sustainable democracy in the Fourth Republic.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design and scope

The study adopted cross sectional survey designed. This designed is considered appropriate for this study because it has the capacity to accurately gather necessary information within a limited time frame. The designed is economical and focuses on studying large and small populations with emphasis on relative incidence, distribution, and interrelation of sociological and psychological variable (Isangedeghi, Joshua, Asim & Ekuri. 2014). Cross sectional survey designed was an essential tool in understanding the socio-political activities and criminalization of politics.

The study area for this study is Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The choice of this area is as a result of the appalling and exacerbating state of criminalization of politics

In the area and the researcher's familiarity and proximity to the area.

Cross River state have three (3) Senatorial Zones / Districts. They are Cross River Central Senatorial Zone / District, Cross River North Senatorial Zone / District and Cross River South Senatorial Zone / District. The study is mainly centered on Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State which is a political creation that has existed in Cross River State Nigeria for decades. The district comprises seven local government areas otherwise referred to as greater Calabar; namely Akamkpa, Akpabuyo, Biase, Bakassi Calabar Municipality, Calabar South and Odukpani all the LGAs are electrified but study is limited to the local government headquarters already listed. The district has three Federal constituencies and 200 council wards (Ogban-lyam (2014).

The study is basically concern with societal activities and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District of State. The study is centered on the effect of use of thugs in political activities and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District, Nigeria. The study covers from 2003 to 2023.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study comprised of all the inhabitants in seven (7) Local Government Areas in of Cross River State South Senatorial District. This specifically is made up of male and female who are 18 years and above by age and are considered to be educated enough to provide effective and well-grounded answers relating to societal activities and criminalization of politics in their area.

Using the 2019 projected population of Cross River State Southern Senatorial District, the population of the seven Local Government Areas that makes up Cross River State is 1,270,420, the breakdown of the population is as shown below.

TABLE 1: LGA in Southern Senatorial District

LGA in Southern Senatorial District	Population size 2019 projection
Calabar Municipal	187,432
Calabar South	191,630
Akpabuyo	271,395
Bakassi	106,771
Odukpani	192,884
Akamkpa	151,125
Baise	169,183
Total	1,270,420

Source: Compiled from 2019 projected population of Cross River State, Nigeria

SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The sampling procedure is multi-staged. The sampling technique adopted for this study is stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. From each of the different Local Government Area that was stratified, three District and the wards that were picked was used as the target area of the study.

wards in the various Local Government Areas were selected using hat and draw simple random sampling technique. Respondents were asked to pick and not return from the hat, three wards from each Local Government Area that make up Cross River South Senatorial District. This is clearly shown in table 4 below.

The sample size of 400 was ascertained using the Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size determinant with a confidence level of 95% and a maximum variability level $p=5$. Out of this sample, 380 survey participants were used for the analysis. This denotes a return rate of 95% Which is regarded reasonable for carrying out data

analysis. Finally, the purposive sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaires to the respondents. The research adopts the purposive sampling technique because it gives the researcher the opportunity of interacting with the respondents in other to ensure that such respondents are intelligent enough to provide firsthand information which is needed to enhance the study.

TABLE 2: Local Government Areas in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State and randomly selected wards

Local Government Areas	Randomly selected wards
Calabar Municipal	Ward 3 Ward 6 Ward 10
Calabar South	Ward 7 Ward 9 Ward 11
Akpabuyo	Atimbo West Atimbo East Ikang North
Bakassi	Abana Atia Ema Amoto
Odukpani	Creek Town I Eki Ikoneto
Akamkpa	Awi Akamkpa urban Ojuk South
Baise	Adim Akpeta/Abini Ehom

Source: Authors field survey 2024

INSTRUMENT OF DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaire contained closed and open ended questions. The questions were based on the key variable to be measured and examined. The close ended questions in addition to ensuring standardization of responses by respondents also provided information/data for quantitative analysis while the open

Ended questions in addition to give respondents the liberty to express freely whatever opinion they may have also provided information/data for qualitative analysis.

Before the real administration of questionnaire, pretest set of questionnaire was carried out. This helped to test the design for the study and also give the researcher the opportunity to know the

People's attitude toward the survey as well as their several sensitivity to some of the questions. The pretest was carried out on a sample of 50 respondents consisting of thirty tertiary institution students and twenty civil servants in order to establish accuracy of content and to ensure that one and the other interviewees and investigator had the similar understanding of the issues under study. This, however, was helpful in identifying variety of possible response.

The unstructured oral interview comprised open ended questions which sought specific information on various aspects of the research objectives. Interview guide was used in order to generate qualitative data, and as such to obtain a comprehensive discernment of the masses disposition of societal activities and criminalization of politics. The unstructured oral interview questions stimulated follow-up-questions which were not part of the initial guide but which is useful to the inquiry objectives and which similarly elicited a wide gamut of information or comprehensive clarifications of the problem raised in the study objective. Above all, numerous answerers were interviewed due to the reality that it has the leverage of making sure that the reasonableness of data presented by lone interviewee can be scrutinized against that granted by alternative interviewee (Meyer, 2001). This helped to improve standardization and categorization of responses into themes.

For easy administration and collection of data for this study, the researcher recruited five (5) research assistants, who are fluent in Efik and English languages and are also conversant with the study areas. The justification for this is that majority of those local government areas are predominantly Efiks this reduced the problem of gaining entry and provided the insider angle to the issue under consideration. Furthermore, awareness of local norms also facilitated the researcher's acceptance among the people. Generally, this was to ensure that the research assistants were effective in data collection process. The research assistants were trained by the researcher for a period of five days to enable the research assistants to be well informed about the study objectives and the research methodology. The minimum qualification for selection of the research assistants was first degree. A total of 400 questionnaires were

Administered to the research participants. The researcher supervised the administration and collection of the questionnaire. The means for data gathering was fore tested at random on chosen population other than the study population to guarantee clearness of contents as well as to guarantee that interviewees, research associates and the investigator are on the same page concerning the problem under consideration.

The questionnaire guide was self-administered. The researcher himself moderated the interview guide, while one of the research assistants took notes. Thereafter, the notes were categorized into themes. The conduct of the interview and the distribution and collection of the questionnaire were carried out on week days and it lasted for a period of five (5) weeks.

This research work addressed the basic principles of research ethics in social sciences. The researcher obtained informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality and data protection by attaching a formal letter to the questionnaire schedule. With regard to avoiding deceptive practices, the questions raised by the researcher in both questionnaire and oral unstructured interview schedule were the questions that addressed only the variable raised by the researcher to address the topic under study.

To address the ethical principle of thoroughness; the researcher defined all the key concepts around which the study is built, the selection of adequate samples for the study, as well as identification of the strengths and the limitations of the research design used in the study. Additionally all the results and findings of the study both the positive and negative aspect were thoroughly communicated. In terms of the principle of objectivity, the researcher remained objective and impartial in all aspects and phases of the study. The researcher did not introduce his subjective feelings and biases to bear into the research design, selection of respondents, communication of the results and findings, and writing and /or asking questions. The questions introduced in the research instruments are worded in such a way as to avoid leading questions (i.e. question leading the respondents to a predetermined answer). The questions are worded in such a way as to allow respondent's views determine the outcome of the results as against allowing the researcher's own values and thinking influence the findings of the research.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The simple percentage was used to analyze data gotten from the field relating to research questions using the simple percentage. Before the analysis of the hypothesis was carried out, the dependent and independent variable was identified as this enabled the researcher to ascertain the best possible statistical technique to use for the analysis. The statistical technique that was most suitable for analyzing the four

Hypotheses is the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis. This analysis was carried out at 0.05 level of significant and 98 degree of freedom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Analysis of research questions**

The summary of the spread sheet showing the frequency and percentage of the respondents based on their responses to the structured questions.

TABLE 4: Analysis of respondent responses to the use of thugs and criminalization of politics in Nigeria

S/N	Questionnaire items	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Commulative percentage
1	The use of thugs for political activities is very common during election in my polling unit?	Strongly Agree	132	35%	35
		Agree	148	38%	73
		Disagree	55	14%	87
		Strongly Disagree	50	13%	100
2	Political thugs are often used to perpetrate different kinds of crimes such as kidnapping of political aspirant, key political actors and electorate in my polling unit?	Strongly Agree	127	33%	33
		Agree	137	36%	69
		Disagree	82	21%	90
		Strongly Disagree	39	10%	100
3	Through the use of political thugs, political candidates who are not the people's choice often emerge as winners in my polling unit?	Strongly Agree	186	48%	48
		Agree	162	43%	91
		Disagree	20	5%	96
		Strongly Disagree	17	4%	100
4	The use of political thugs during election often makes election bloody in my polling unit?	Strongly Agree	129	34%	34
		Agree	152	39%	73
		Disagree	71	18%	91
		Strongly Disagree	33	9%	100
5	The masses in my polling unit are often scared of coming out to vote during election because of the use of political thugs?	Strongly Agree	141	37%	37
		Agree	109	28%	65
		Disagree	82	21%	86
		Strongly Disagree	53	14%	100

Source: Field survey, 2024

The distribution in table 4 shows that that majority of the respondents sampled for the study strongly agreed to the fact the use of thugs for political activities is very common during election in their polling unit. This is based on the fact that, 132 representing 35 percent strongly an agreed, 148 representing 38 percent agreed, 55 presenting 14 percent disagreed while 50 representing 13 percent strongly disagreed.

The table further shows that majority of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that political thugs are often used to perpetrate different kinds of crimes such as kidnapping of political aspirant, key political actors and electorate in their polling unit?. This is based on the fact that 127 representing 33 percent strongly agreed, 137 representing 36 percent agreed, 82 representing 21 percent disagreed, 39 representing 10 percent strongly disagreed.

Also the table shows that majority of the respondents sampled for the study strongly agreed to the fact that through the use of political thugs, political candidates who are not the people's choice often emerge as winners in their polling unit. This is as a result of the fact that 186 representing 48 percent strongly agreed, 162 representing 43 percent agreed, 20 representing 5 percent disagreed, while 17 representing 4 percent strongly disagreed.

The table further shows that majority of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that

The use of political thugs during election often make election bloody in their polling unit. This is based on the fact that, 129 representing 34 percent strongly agreed, 152 representing 39 percent agreed 71 representing 18 percent disagreed, and 33 representing 9 percent strongly disagreed.

Finally, the table shows that majority of the respondents sample for the study strongly agreed to the fact that the masses in their polling unit are often scared of coming out to vote during election because of the use of political thugs. This is as a result of the fact that, 141 representing 37 percent strongly agreed, 109 representing 28 percent agreed, 82 representing 21 percent disagreed while 53 representing 14 percent strongly disagreed.

HYPOTHESES TESTING

The hypotheses used in this study were stated in a null form showing the dependent and independent variable and the statistical tools used for data analysis.

There is no significant relationship between the use thugs in political activities and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District.

Dependent variable; Use of thugs in political activities

Independent variable; Criminalization of politics

Test statistic; Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis.

TABLE 5: Test of hypothesis two using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis (N=400)

Variable	Ex Ey	Ex2 Ey2	Exy	R-cal
Use of thugs in political activities	2617	6732		
Criminalization of politics	986	1974	9967	0.461

Level of significant=0.05, DF=378, critical R-value= 0.126

Table 4 clearly shows that the calculated R-value of 0.461 is greater than the critical R-value of 0.126 at 0.05 level of significant and 98 degree of freedom.

Based on this, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This clearly implies that there is a significant relationship between the use thugs in

Political activities and criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The researcher identified major subthemes associated with the socio-political activities and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State from the participants' narratives of their personal experiences in politics and elections in their area. These are;

- (a) Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) attitude and practices towards elections
- This was discussed under the subtheme
- (a) INEC Monetary Bribery as customary and Systemic

INEC Monetary Bribery as Customary and Systemic

Another significant pattern identified from the participants' narratives of their experiences and that of others on INEC monetary bribery during election in Cross River State was that it had become a common practice to the degree seen as a custom that has permeated the INEC hierarchy. Most of the participants described this in different ways.

For instance, one of them said taking bribes is routine and normal for the INEC during elections in Cross River State and it has happened frequently that the people themselves have well-grown used to it. Another participant described how INEC monetary bribery during election was customary. The participant said that party agents as well as polling unit's chairmen know the rules during elections. Once the election process begins, party agents as well as polling unit's chairmen approach the INEC officers with an envelope of money that has already been budgeted and arranged for them. Inability to perform this custom during an election exposes the party to the risk of losing the election. These illustrate how INEC monetary bribery during election has become a way of life. It went beyond those at the polling units and RAC centers, including the hierarchy of the INEC. It showed how institutionalized the issue is, as demonstrated by the narratives of the participants.

Some of the participants linked the monetary bribery by the INEC to the leadership of the INEC. One of them emphasized that the impunity with which the INEC officials

demand bribe simply shows their superiors are aware of what they do during an election. However, another participant provided a more Substantial dimension of INEC monetary bribery's systemic nature in an election. The interviewee stressed that INEC leadership is not just aware of the widespread INEC monetary bribery but they are actively involved in the process through the ruling party and as such the engines of the process itself.

Presenting this perspective, the participant said bribery INEC officials is part and parcel of the electoral process. Senior officers' attitude gives a powerful impression that they are also active participants of the bribery process also. One may not be entirely wrong to say that the senior INEC officers teach the junior once how to profit from an election through collecting of money in an election.

The perception of INEC monetary bribery in an election as systemic or institutionalized featured strongly in the narratives of many participants of this study. One of the participants particularly emphasized that bribery has become institutionalized among the INEC officials right from the top of the INEC hierarchy to the very least official. The systemic nature of INEC monetary bribery implies that concerted efforts must be made to curb the menace in Cross River State, particularly Nigeria. This participant's perspectives show why INEC monetary bribery during election has become a custom here in Cross River State, and what worries me more is the boldness they use in collecting the money. I am sure that those at the INEC topmost positions get their share of the monetary bribery also during an election.

- (b) The masses attitude towards INEC

Lack of Trust and Confidence in the INEC

Trust and confidence are essential for the public to work with INEC during an election to ensure a free and fair election. Another dimension to the poor relationship between the INEC and the public was the public's lack of trust and confidence in INEC during an election. The idea could be gleaned from these words by a participant the 'public relationship with the INEC is that of suspicion and skepticism'. Mutual suspicions and lack of trust because bribery makes people who have had a concern

with INEC hopeless, and they are not having confidence in the INEC during an election period.

One of the participants was very clear in this when he noted that entrusting the forth coming election on INEC is like entrusting the election on the ruling class. The constitutional right given to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to appoint and remove the INEC chairman compels him to operate within the tentacles of the ruling class. Aside the fact that it is an easy way of making more money for INEC officials it also provides an opportunity for them to secure their job and gain speedy promotion why in office.

Another participant was very clear in this when he noted that INEC officials see election as a means of creating connection with top political officials and as such are prone to protect the interest of this ruling class thus losing the trust of the people. The people now see INEC as the watch dogs that ensure their continuous ruling which is against the interest of the masses. This has grossly made the people loss interest the people have for INEC.

On a similar note, a participant noted that INEC is now owned by the ruling class and as such has very little interest in the wishes of the poor masses. Election period is now seen as a means for INEC to accumulate more wealth for themselves rather than ensuring a free and fair election. The participant further noted that once they are well paid, INEC easily manipulate election results to suit the interest of top political officials thereby losing the trust of the general public.

While pointing out the issue of lack of trust and confidence the INEC, another participant also stressed the negative consequences of the poor relationship with the public. He stressed that trust is earned but INEC attitude has created distrust resulting in a very poor relationship with the people. While reiterating the absence of public trust and confidence in INEC, one interviewee also asserted that most members of the public decide vehemently not to cast their vote because they don't have the trust that INEC will conduct a free and credible election that will truly reflect the interest of the masses.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the analysis of the hypothesis, the finding revealed that there is a significant relationship between the use thugs in political

Activities and the criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District State. This mainly implies that the prevailing use of thugs during election to intimidate voter's as well political aspirant has given birth to all forms of criminal activities during election period. The fact that thugs during election in Nigeria have paved way for all forms of criminal activities has made past elections in Nigeria to be far from credible, free and fair. This is because for an election to be considered free, fair and credible, the electorate as well as aspirant must be free from any form of intimidation or harassment from any group of person. Paradoxically, Nigeria political system is majorly characterized by political thugs whose fundamental task is to intimidate both the voters and aspirant solely for the interest of selected group of individuals who are considered to be the minority in terms of numbers. This finding is in line with Aliyu (2020) who noted that the use of thugs in Nigeria elections has given right to kidnapping of political aspirant as well as vital party members which often times lead to their loss of life, loss of huge amount of money for their ransom, as well compulsion to decline their political interest. The writer further noted that the proliferation of thuggery during elections in Nigeria is as a result of the fact that certain group of individuals who are often referred to as the ruling class are desperate for political power and allowing the masses to decide who should govern them at a particular point in time will definitely be to their detriment to their political interest.

Similarly, Uchua (2019) noted that the fact that thugs are now active set of machinery used by either the ruling class or wealthy group of individuals during an election in Nigeria politics clearly spell doom to the dividend of democracy in the country. While the use of thugs during election has defiled representative leadership as revealed by the study, Uchua further stated that, thugs are mainly the agents used to create chaos during an election which often lead to loss of life and destruction of valuable properties. In line with the study, Amos (2019) noted that in most polling units in Nigeria; voters are scared of coming out to cast their franchise because of the prevalence of thugs and their associated consequences of loss of life and destruction of properties during election period. The masses now feel safe to stay at home during election period rather than been intimidated by thugs in their polling centers during election. These menace of political thuggery has given rise

To all forms of criminalities after the election period as guns and other dangerous equipment's given to thugs during election period are not retrieved after the election. Thus, empowering thugs to perpetrate all forms of violent crimes in their communities.

Most devastating as revealed in the study is that most of these thugs are recycled back to vital government office all in the name of settlement from their political mentors. That is why most thugs are far wealthier than law abiding citizens who are working class. In line with these findings, Ayamba (2018) noted that, most appointees holding key political offices at both the state and federal level are mainly as a result of their adamant struggle for the ruling class to win their past elections. Thus, political appointment is seen as a sign of gratitude for those that unanimously fought and perpetrate all forms of obnoxious practices to ensure they win the election rather than based on credibility as well as integrity. This crisis as revealed in the findings of the study has given right to all forms of criminalities during and after election period.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the thrust of this study is to ascertain societal activities evidenced in election improprieties; such as the use of thugs in political activities, The study titled "societal activities and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State" was carried out as a result of the collapsing state of electoral process which is frequently related with different forms of criminalities in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State in particular and Nigeria in general and the growing need to address this menace for true democracy to flourish. The study concluded through its findings that the use of thugs in political activities has increased the criminalization of politics in Cross River South Senatorial District of State in particular and Nigeria in general. The use of thugs during election is among the conventional practice in Nigeria and this menace has led to all forms of criminality during and after the election period. Most thugs who are well equipped with arms use such arms to perpetrate crimes after the election period. These thugs are also used to obstruct election procedure such as hijacking of ballot boxes,

Destruction of electoral materials, kidnapping of INEC officials, political aspirant and key party members. The use of thugs in political activities has also led to the growing case of criminality during election period. Research in this area can be of immense benefit to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the federal government as it will reveal the existing state of electoral process and the effect of criminalization of politics in the country. This will enable them to competently integrate suitable policies that can successfully tackle this aggravating threat affecting the democracy of the country. The findings from the study will not only serve as a contribution to the already existing body of knowledge on societal activities and criminalization of politics in Nigeria but will also inspire criminology and other researches by providing suitable data for more comparative and theoretical formulation. The main limitation of this study is that its scope is limited to societal activities and criminalization of politics in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria, using the use of thugs as a reference point indicator from 2003-2019. Therefore, data collected and analyzed in this study is centered exclusively on information acquired from the study area. Consequently, to support this research, secondary sources such as internet based materials, textbooks journal articles have employed. Nevertheless, due to the focus on a specific region, caution must be exercised when trying to extrapolate the findings of this study to other sections of the country and even farther.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings and analyses, the following recommendations were proffered to help Nigeria address persistent issues affecting the electoral process *vis- a- vis* use of thugs. Political thuggery needs to be addressed through enhancing the security network of the country prior to election. Arrested political thugs should be adequately prosecuted as this will serve as deterrence to others. The government should strengthen public-private-partnership (PPP) as one of the best policy options and economic approaches. This will assist in the provision of employment to able youths across Nigeria thereby pooling people out of poverty and unemployment who may be willing tool in the hands of politicians.

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