



POLITICAL THUGGERY AND VOTERS' TURNOUT IN FOURTH REPUBLIC'S GENERAL ELECTIONS IN SOUTHWESTERN, NIGERIA

ADELEKE, Gbadebo Fatai

*UNESCO centre for Black Culture and International Understanding
Oshogbo, Osun State, Nigeria*

Abstract

The use of political thugs during electoral process has become an institutionalised phenomenon in Nigeria's democratisation process especially in the Fourth Republic (1999-2015). Past studies had little empirical investigation on thuggery-voters' turnout in specific geographical zone, however, this study examined the use of thugs and voters' turnout in the Southwestern, Nigeria. The theory of Social Exchange provided the analytical framework. Questionnaire was administered to 1504 (Public-office holders:201, Parties' candidates:317, Party-agents:76, Voters:908) respondents, 55 (Passive-voters:30, Independent National Electoral Commission officials:15, Police and Security officers: 10) respondents were interviewed and records were sought. Majority respondents agreed that thugs drove vehicles recklessly to scare voters in opponents' popular communities (65.7%) and thugs snatched ballot boxes and intimidated voters (61.9%). Also, 70.4% of the respondents said that majority of the thugs and security agents were cordial. The paper revealed that thugs were hired to engage in all electoral offences and fear of death and psychological instability had negative effects on voters' turnout. The paper concludes that thugs led major campaigns and engaged in many electoral offences. There is a need for a 5-year transfer of security agents from a station and the establishment of mobile courts is necessary to trial electoral offenders.

Keywords: Political thuggery, Voters' Turnout, Fourth republic, General elections, Southwestern

Introduction

Thuggery is a prevalent problem in Nigeria's democratic dispensation. In Nigeria's recent general elections (1999-2015), thugs were recruited, trained for various political purposes ranging from intimidation, harassment, violence, assassination to election rigging. The use of political thugs has been institutionalised to the extent that they are placed on regular salaries, with allowances accompanying their remuneration like normal civil servant (Abba, 2004).

It became a common feature in political and electoral processes especially during the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections and voters cried foul and fear over this social menace in recent years. Youths were used as bodyguards in Nigeria's 1979 Second Republic but they have now changed to political thugs, who are now disturbing the electoral process. Nigerian leaders employed thugs as special advisers, special assistants, personal assistants and these positions and appointments encouraged many jobless youths to be recruited into these shameful acts (Abba, 2004). On election days, the thugs harassed electoral officials and voters, they cause political crisis and violence in all the polling booths. The thugs forced many electorates to vote against their wishes and harm many voters to satisfy their masters who assigned them such duties. Historically, the British Colonial Government through the traditional institution in the North formed police, judiciary, prison and gangster recruited from Jam'iyyar Mahaukata (crazy men's party). These sets of people are transformed as an instrument of repression and violence against the opposition members in the northern parts of Nigeria. They burnt houses of some opposition members, killed and maimed opponents and caused crisis in many cities. Even in the western part of Nigeria, political thugs spearheaded 'operation wet' during the First Republic in 1963 where many valuable lives lost especially among the opponents. In the 1979 and 1983 general elections, many Nigeria cities witnessed serious burning of houses and mass killing by these political thugs (Isa, 2008). The current wave of thuggery started blowing again during the aborted Third to Fourth



Republics. Institutionalised thugs came into limelight and became a formidable force as a result of rapid unemployed youths (Isa, 2008). The thugs later metamorphosed to ethnic militants such as Odua People's Congress (OPC), Area Boys in Lagos, Egbesu boys or Bakassi Boys in South-south, Sara-suka (cut and stab) in Benue, Yankalare in Gombe, and Yan daba (Jungle boys) in Kano.

The common analysis to the concept of political thuggery by all schools of thoughts was centered on illegitimate action and intent to incite violence. Therefore, political thuggery means an illegitimate act aiming to seek political power that revolves round violence and unauthorised use of force to effect decision against the desire or will of the people (Howell, 2004). It includes acts of intimidation, violence, hooliganism or brutality, no act of gangsters, whether leading to death or not, calculated to pose a threat or scare political opponents or perceived political opponents before, during or after elections and aimed at achieving an undue political result or advantage. Operationally, an act incites or causes others to act in a disorderly manner and being in illegal possession of or usage of offensive weapons with the aim to scare or intimidate voters. In addition to some acts categorised as thuggery is the snatching or destruction of election materials and ballot stuffing acts and undue influence like compelling any person to vote or refrain from voting against his/her will. Politicians who embarked to rig elections especially, in Nigeria carried on these illegal manipulations (Oni, 2015) by the use of political thugs. He further stated that electorates were forced in previous elections to vote against their wishes (Oni, 2015) and the party representatives at the polling booths were threatened to compromise.

Thuggery in Nigeria's democratic system related to ruffians' behaviour in the sense that both have violent and criminal intent, such as stealing, killing, rudeness, hooliganism, touting, intimidation and harassment. All types of behaviour that contradicts peace, harmony and co-existence among groups, whether through illegitimate or violent ways to seek political power is tagged as thuggery (Howell, 2004). With this development, Nigerian thugs were more recognised and powerfully backed in all circumstances than legal voters during and after the elections by these political class and ruling elites (Isaiah, 2004). In campaign periods, teeming youths and thugs harassed and intimidated the opposition members and innocent citizens, and even maimed and killed under the influence of drugs and arbitrary use of political powers. It becomes a social menace when those in power provide the platform upon which these criminal acts are committed and the citizens gradually lose confidence in the political leadership while political thuggery may lead to national security threat. The used of political thugs in the political and election processes instills fear and causes low turnout of eligible voters and it gradually erodes the beauty of democracy gradually in Nigeria. Against this background, the paper examined the use of political thugs and its effects on the voters' turnout in Southwestern, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

There is a criminal law which prevents any illegal act aiming to maim fellow citizen in Nigeria's criminal law or any act of thuggery and hooliganism such as killing and assault. There was little prosecution of such acts especially during the elections' campaign and electoral process. Various Acts directly prohibited any behaviour that might disturb effective participation of electorate in Nigeria. Despite these laws, thuggery is not prosecuted well in Nigeria's recent political dispensation. In the general electoral processes from 1999 to 2015, there were stringent laws forbidding acts of thuggery and violence activities, yet, there were many reported incidences of political violence across the country. After the electoral reforms of 2010, the Act stipulated a maximum of one million naira (N1 million) or 12 months imprisonment for anyone who infringes



on the Act (FRN, 2011:22-23). It was clear that previous laws for checkmating electoral violence were weak, and thus did not adequately address the issue of political thuggery.

In liberal democracy, voting in elections is a very important civic duty of all citizens but over the last few decades, voters' turnout has been steadily declining in the established democracies (Achyuta and Fenske, 2013). This declining trend in voting behaviour has been significantly witnessed in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (between 1999 and 2015) and scholars such as Green and Gerber (2008) have identified poor electoral process as a factor for low voters' turnout. This poor performance in voting and electoral processes has been a matter of concern and controversy among advocates of democracy (Oni, 2015). Many activists and democrats believed that past studies should centre much on a clean electoral process (an election conducted without thuggery intervention) but reverse is the case. Few studies focused on different issues related to electoral laws and processes but little studies critically analysed the use of thugs in political and electoral processes in a geographical zone in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, fills the gap by empirically investigating the effects of political thuggery on the voters' turnout in Southwestern, Nigeria.

The aim of the study, therefore, was to examine the effect of political thugs on voters' turnout in general elections in the southwestern, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to examine the perception of citizens on the general electoral process and to identify some thuggery related factors that affected the voters' turnout. The paper further examines the relationship between the use of thuggery and voters turnout in general election in the Fourth Republic in the southwestern, Nigeria. The following research questions guided the study are: how voters perceived the general political and electoral processes in the Fourth Republic and to what extent is the use of political thugs affect the voting behaviour of people in the southwestern, Nigeria in previous elections.

Focusing on the voters' turnouts in the southwestern, Nigeria in this study is not a misplaced but a deserving one. The present southwestern, Nigeria is part of Western Region in the three-region structure of 1954. The 2006 Census put the population of the zone 27.7 million-representing 19.7% of the Nigeria's population (National Population Commission, 2006). In Nigeria's society, people tagged the zone as reservoir of knowledge and many identified the people in this zone as the most people in the vanguard of struggle for good governance. With this background and a gateway into many other geographic zones, the zone is significant in shaping other geographical zones in achieving maximum participation in social and political goals (Adeleke, 2016).

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Looking critically at the importance of democracy to society in general, one might expect the process to be free and fair with high voters' turnout during the elections but low participation have been witnessed. Presently, in Latin American and African countries, a number of previously undemocratic nations have embraced democratic ideals and principles in areas of 'party primaries', 'rule of law', 'equity and justice', 'one-man one vote', 'distribution and selection of leaders and 'policies' (Onwuemenyi, 2011). With this development and an increasing rate in democratic practices across the globe, Held (2006) noted that democracy has become the fundamental standard of political legitimacy in the globalised world. With the democratic process in the Fourth Republic (1999-2015), low voters' turnout has been recorded and low participation of citizens has been witnessed (Adeleke, 2016).



In finding solutions to low voters' turnout in general elections, Chika and Onyene (2010) observed that the problems of rigging, violence, ballot snatching and ballot stuffing and other forms of election malpractices were responsible for high level of apathy. Omotosho (2012) argues that existing political situation resembling that of one party state in the geo-political zone and lamented that 'the one party nature of our states makes our politics look like the power plays of a criminal gang'. The fear of political thugs made Oladimeji and Ezea (2014) to say that 'unless the Independent National Electoral Commission make adequate security arrangement, these challenges- particularly violence often unleashed by thugs can undermine the electoral process.

Besides, Asiegbu (2011) believed strongly that political thugs and touts have hijacked the entire political and electoral processes and it has become a norm in Nigeria's politics. These thugs compel innocent people to vote against their wishes. These dastardly activities of politicians in hiring thugs have threatened the security and well-being of the citizens. Wolf (1969) defined such violence perpetuated by thugs as 'the illegitimate and unauthorised use of force to effect decisions against the will or desires of others' while Oni (2015) identified many factors that could lead to political thuggery such that many youths were jobless, illiterates and many youths had no means of livelihood. Also, holding on to power for personal gains by leaders often creates a regime of violence, repression and bloodshed and politics is conceived as an investment. He further identified that refusal to accept electoral defeat by politicians remained a serious reason for the rampant use of political thugs in the electoral processes.

Adedoyin (2011) lamented on the rate of assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing by these political thugs. Politicians recruited, trained and empowered thugs to harass, intimidate and victimise perceived political opponents of their political ambition during elections. He further concludes that the use of thuggery has been responsible for low participation of women in politics. The use of political thugs in Nigeria's electoral process has not only led to waste of human resources, but it has also resulted in the death of able-bodied men. The entire process has been characterised by thuggery and violence and the entire politics manifest in acrimony, assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing. It is an indisputable fact that Nigerian politics is not violent-free as demonstrated in the recent democratic process in the Fourth Republic (from 1999 to 2015). Chikezie and Ikemitan (2011) and Oladimeji (2011) emphasised many causes of political and violence in Nigeria and summarised them as poverty and unemployment, sit-tight syndrome of incumbents, refusal to accept electoral defeat in good faith, absence of good governance and low political culture, hunger, marginalisation, incapacitation, intolerance and domination.

Though, political sectors are highly competitive in nature and many politicians resulted to violent in all stages of politics in Nigeria. Jibrin (2007) argued that not all aspirants in many parts of Nigeria can provide the financial needs and many politicians relied on wealthy and powerful individuals known in Nigerian parlance as political godfathers. The godfathers employed the services of political thugs to disturb the political processes. These godfathers are not recognised only on their financial capability but from their ability to deploy violence and corruption to manipulate national, state or local political systems in support of the politicians they sponsor. Scholars like Ndu (2000) and Yusuf (2001) saw youths as neither adolescents nor children characterised by excessive energy that needs to be exerted, which if not guarded, is channeled into negative tendencies and teleguided by the political godfathers on mere stipend. Yusuf (2001) further argues that many politicians lure unemployed young men into committing acts of political violence by making extravagant promises of employment or other forms of illegal government patronage.



Onyekpe (2007) stated that structural unemployment in Nigeria's society results in talents not being used where they are available, hence idle mind is definitely the devil's workshop. Lohor (2002) said that easy access to cheap stimulants by youths remains reason for the escalation of political thuggery and lamented that the re-occurring political violence was capable of creating disorder in Nigeria's democratic process. He further argued that the more widespread and intense deprivation is among members of a population, the greater is the magnitude of violence in one form or the other. Based on these premises, this study centered that the culture of thuggery has not only imbibed and sustained as part of the country's political behaviour, it has been one of the potent causes of voters' low participation.

Social exchange theory explains social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties. The exchange paradigm has its fundamental premise that all social life is treated as an exchange of rewards or resources between actors. This theory is fundamental to this study because it treated life as an exchange of rewards or resources between actors (Cook and Emerson, 1978). In this study, the political gladiators and ruling elites invite the political thugs into the political and election processes. The thugs demanded gifts, protection, financial and material gains from the political leaders. On the other hand, the political leaders used the thugs as instruments to disturb the voting process through acts of hooliganism to retain their seat and political power. The principal tenet of social exchange theory is that human behaviour is in essence an exchange and such nature of social interaction is often the rationale and relevance for sociological theory (Molm, Peterson and Takahashi, 1999). Actors in exchange can be individuals or groups, and inter-group relations are more complex than being sets of market transactions. The assignment may not be comfortable and easily carried out by individuals and groups such as ODU, Egbesu, Area boys, are then assigned to perform the illegitimate duty by the politicians.

The foundation of social exchange theory focuses on the social fact that human beings do not live in isolation, establish interaction with one another, and focus mainly on the exchange of valued resources. The interactions that exist between human beings are established on the norm of reciprocity whether positive or negative (Turner, 1998). In this context, the voters consider their plight, safety and dividend of democracy at the expense of their vote during an election period. Since social exchange theory proposes that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process, the purpose of this exchange is to maximise benefits and minimise costs; therefore, people weigh the potential benefits and risks of social relationships. As a result of unemployment witnessing among the youths and inability to meet up with immediate needs, many youths engage in this risky task of hooliganism and thuggery.

METHODOLOGY

The research design was both exploratory and cross-sectional survey. Both primary and secondary sources of data collection were used and the study adopted quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data on socio-demographic characteristics, perceptions on political thuggery and voting behaviour. In-depth interviews focused on



electoral processes and general electoral processes while relevant records of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were sought.

The selection of sample size for the study was based on multistage sampling that combined purposeful, stratified and simple random techniques. The first stage involved the purposive selection of all the six States (Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti and Lagos) in Nigeria. The second stage involved the compilation of all the names of all public office holders, party candidates and agents of the two major political parties. The parties are Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and Alliance for Democracy later changed to Action Congress of Nigeria, which later formed a coalition of opposition called All Progressive Congress between (APC) in 2014. Only public office holders, parties' candidates that contested and partakes in general elections from 1999 to 2015 were considered. They were stratifying to different positions they vied for such as Presidential, Governorship, National Assembly and State Assembly. The study adopted simple random sampling to select the sample size. The researcher assigned each member of the population a number and then used a computer to generate a random list from which a sample size was derived. Among the public office holders who had occupied one position or the other, either by elections or appointments from 1999 to 2015, the number of respondents selected was 201. Researcher further considered parties' candidates who had vied for one position or the other in selected political parties in the southwestern, Nigeria between 1999 and 2015. Out of this, 317 respondents were selected from the past parties' candidates. Party agents of the two major political parties selected and voters during the stipulated years were also considered as part of sample size. Out of all the parties' agents in the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections, only 76 respondents were selected and 908 respondents were selected from the eligible voters in the zones. In all, 1502 (Public office holders: 201; Parties' candidates: 317; Parties' agents: 76; Voters: 908) respondents formed a sample size for the study. Questionnaire was administered to 1502 respondents and issues concerning the use of political thugs in both campaign and electoral processes were focused.

The paper considered the use of In-depth interviews to complement the data from quantitative data. The researcher interviewed the passive voters, principal Independent National Electoral Commission staff and Police and Security officers. In the pilot study, which was earlier conducted, the researcher identified very passive voters in the six selected states in the Southwestern States. From the list of passive voters, simple random sampling was used to select thirty (30) respondents. In addition to this, fifteen (15) principal Independent National Electoral Commission officials and ten (10) Police and Security officers were selected for the interviews, therefore, a total number of respondents interviewed were fifty-five (55). The research centered on respondents who *voted less than five times* in all the general elections from 1999 to 2015 and they were tagged as *very passive voters*. There were 5 elections each in every general elections (Presidential, Governorship, Senate, House of Representative, and House of Assembly) and 25 elections in all selected general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015). The researcher adopted Gerber and Green's (2008) typology to classified the voters into 5 groups. Voters who participated and voted in the selected general elections up to 5 times ($0 \geq \text{very passive voters} \geq 5$) were regarded as *very passive voters*. *Passive voters* were set of group who scored between 6 and 10 ($6 \geq \text{passive voters} \geq 10$) and *moderate voters* were set of respondents who voted up to 11 and 15 in all the selected elections ($11 \geq \text{moderate voters} \geq 15$). *Active voters* were respondents who voted up to 16 and 20 times, in general elections ($16 \geq \text{Active voters} \geq 20$) and the *very active voters* scored between 21 and 25 ($21 \geq \text{very active voters} \geq 25$). The in-depth interviews further probed on the subject matter of the study especially the use of thugs in both campaign and electoral process, their perception on the process and their voting behaviour. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (percentage) and qualitative data were content analysed.

FINDINGS



Respondents' age was 43.7 ± 9.8 years, 73.2% were males and 26.8% were females. The findings indicated that majority of the respondents are eligible to participate in the voting, political process right from the 1999 general elections. Majority (61.5%) respondents perceived the general political and electoral processes in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria as characterised with flaws and malpractices.

The aim of the study was to examine the effect of political thugs on voters' turnout in general elections in the southwestern, Nigeria. The result of the findings revealed that Nigeria's political terrain and general electoral process have indirectly institutionalised the use of thugs in democratic process. Majority (81.4%) respondents indicated that thugs led in major campaigns and drove vehicles recklessly in front of campaign-train and 65.7% of the respondents believed that thugs disturbed, maimed voters with weapons and arms in opponents' majority community a day prior to election day. The result of the finding agreed with Asiegbu (2011) who believed that political thugs and touts have hijacked the entire political and electoral processes in Nigeria's politics.

One of the interviewees lamented bitterly that:

The elections in Nigeria were neither free nor fair; it was violent and the results that were announced did not reflect the pattern of voting. The result sheets were snatched with the use of hired thugs and arms under police protection, votes and ballot cast were exchanged at gunpoint and in some areas people have to hide for cover. Some had to run and some were inflicted with machete cuts. Ballot papers were thumb-printed and later figures were announced with the full support of Independent National Electoral Commission (Woman/ Identified Passive Voter/ Osun State/2015).

The result of the finding tallied with Balogun's (2009) opinion when he conceded to these facts that the use of political thugs during elections may eventually lead to a state of anarchy. He further lamented that if there is no caution, many eligible voters may not go out to vote in the forthcoming elections. He said:

... electoral violence, could, in conjunction with other prevailing factors lead to anarchy and ultimately to political instability. Our experience in the recently concluded elections indicated that there was unbridled flagrancy in the smuggling and use of arms and ammunition by political thugs and party supporters. The result has been that political opponents were either intimidated or outrightly killed or injured. Many voters refused to go to polling booth and some polling booths look like graveyards with less than ten voters in a booth.

The specific objectives were to examine the perception of citizens on the general electoral process and to identify some thuggery-related factors that affected the voters' turnout. In addition, most (61.9%) respondents agreed that thugs snatched ballot boxes, intimidated opponents, voters and electoral officials while 70.4% of the respondents confirmed that thugs and security agents were in cordial relation, and thugs served as informants to the police officers. The implication is that illegal arms got into the hands of unauthorized persons who used them for criminal activities especially during the elections. The summary of the finding showed that voters



were prevented from casting their votes on the election day as a result of merciless attack by thugs. The finding also buttressed Adedoyin's (2011) view on the rate of assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing by these political thugs in Nigeria.

In order to corroborate this finding, one of the respondents said that:

With the way the democratic process especially at election period is going on in this country, it is gradually developing into a culture of 'war-lordism' where what you require is to have a private army or youths that are armed to compromise the police and the Independent National Electoral Commission and declare a winner. For instance, in the 2007/2015 general gubernatorial elections in my ward, four thousand three hundred votes were for a party while two hundred and fifty-three votes were recorded for the other party. Later, I heard they tried at gunpoint to change the results and eventually cancelled it and recorded different and separate winning result to the losing party (Man/ Identified Passive Voters/ Ogun State/ 2015).

One of the respondents among the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials corroborated this finding and said that:

It is a disappointment that the culture of thuggery, intolerance and unruly conduct by partisans still bedevil the electoral process in our country. He further regretted how mobs of armed youths disrupted the electoral process in some areas, harassing and intimidating innocent voters. Electoral officials were also intimidated, harassed and threatened, while some Independent National Electoral Commission supervisory officials were assaulted. Regrettably, despite the overwhelming show of force by armed youths during the election, security agents failed to intervene, Independent National Electoral Commission is concerned that under the circumstance, the elections were conducted in an unwholesome atmosphere that interfered with voters' exercise of their freedom of choice (Male/Independent National Electoral Commission Staff/Ogun State/2015).

One of the respondents from the Independent National Electoral Commission further re-affirmed this finding result that:

This sort of hooliganism and thuggery must not be allowed in our political process because it subverts the fundamental principle of free, fair and credible elections; and, I urge security agencies to remain vigilant and to promptly intervene, whenever necessary, against the use of thugs to intimidate or harass voters, thereby subverting the political process. The thugs killed the youth serving corps that were used as ad-hoc



staff of Independent National Electoral Commission in 2007 in Oyo state and nothing came out of the investigation. The thugs behaved as if there was no police or security agents in the state, behaved as if elections period is criminal free days (Man/ Independent National Electoral Commission Staff/ Oyo State/ 2015).

In addition to this finding, an electoral officer confessed in a Punch Newspaper April 17, 2015 that:

...These are not the original results we had in the polling centers. Not all the figures we have presented are the real ones. The politicians and the elders, as well as some armed thugs, forced us to give them the original result sheets. They threatened to deal with us if we fail to obey their instructions.

This is an indication of force the electoral officers suffered in the hands of politicians and thugs against the interest and consent of citizens. The findings further revealed that thugs were hired to rig elections, to kill and to engage in other social vices. Fear of death and psychological instability prevent voters from exercising their civic rights.

One of the respondents corroborated this finding and said:

The voters were enticed with cash and goods everywhere, and cajoled into voting according to instruction. The entire state were flooded by mercenaries, who were imported from everywhere to, if need be, kill and go. The exercise of 2007 to 2015 general elections was more of a show of financial strength than the capturing of the wishes of the people. Besides, election materials were diverted on the way to the units, while some were forcefully taken away from units with the assistance of mercenaries to unknown destinations (Man/ Identified Passive Voter/ Lagos state/ 2015).

In addition to the finding, one of the respondents painfully stated that:

When I called the security agents, especially the police in care of elections monitoring to the scene of incident, the thugs continued their action and the police team leaders were called by nicknames by the leader of the thugs. Unfortunately, the team left without any arrest and the thugs continued their action without interruption or fear of arrest. We all left the polling centre and ran for our dear life and I vowed in the 2003 general elections not to participate in any future election (Man/ Identified Passive Voter/ Ekiti State/2015).

In order to complement these findings, the records from the Independent National Electoral Commission showed that voters' turnout from 1999 to 2015 general elections attested to the



findings that the use of thugs had a negative effect on general participation of voters. In the 1999 and 2003 general elections, the estimated population of the country was about 77.8 and 129.9 million people respectively. The total number of citizens that qualified and registered to vote in the 1999 general elections was 57.9 million while 60.8 million registered in the 2003 general elections. During the presidential elections in 1999, about 52.3% of eligible voters participated effectively in the exercise while 69.1% voted in 2003 (Transitional Monitoring Group, 2008). On National Assembly elections, about 40.7% and 49.3% voters' turnout were recorded in the 1999 and 2003 general elections respectively. These records indicated that majority of the people that were qualified and registered to vote refused to vote due to rigging and use of thugs by politicians on the election periods.

One of the respondents corroborated these records and he said:

Only the strong-minded ones participated in the 2003 general elections since the political thugs and active politicians chattered vehicle to warn every member of my constituency. They moved round all the towns and villages around 1.30 am to inform all the voters to stay away from the polling booths on a day before the elections and sang various war songs. In the front of village police post, the opposition party members intercepted the vehicle in the midnight and there was a serious fight and clash between the thugs and the opposition, which claimed six lives. There were only two police officers on duty with no arms or ammunitions. On the day of the election, few people came out to vote since the entire village was afraid for the security of their lives (Man/ Identified Passive Voter/ Osun State/2015).

In the 2007 and 2011 general elections, the estimated proportion of the population of citizens who are eligible to vote was supposed to be 71.0 million and 81.7 million respectively. Out of these, 61.6 million and 73.5 million registered to vote which is 86.7% and 90.0% of eligible voters respectively. These records indicated that 13.3% and 10.0% of eligible voters ignored registration exercise respectively. Out of registered voters in the 2007 and 2011 general elections, about 57.5% and 53.7% voted in the presidential elections respectively (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2011). The records indicated that about 42.3% and 46.3% of the qualified citizens ignored voting in both years. On the National Assembly elections, about 22.3% and 25.8% voters' cast their vote in the 2007 and 2011 general elections respectively. It showed that majority (77.7%, 74.2%) of qualified voters ignored voting exercises in both elections as a result of use of political thugs and other electoral malpractices.

In order to corroborate this record, one of the police officers interviewed lamented on the high level of involvement of political thugs on the election days and he said:

I lost my immediate senior police officers during one of the parties' primaries in this State to party thugs in one of the prominent parties. The thugs from the two camps or groups in the same political party clashed and the police officers



intervened and were eventually killed in the process with other party supporters. It looked like a joke when four prominent thugs involved were arrested and were bailed out by prominent party leaders barely a week after the incident. Though, several debates and counseling followed from the police station that saving people's life should not be a priority but saving one's life first. The family of the deceased got a token after five years from the government and since then, I have learnt how to run away from the polling booth anytime the political thugs invaded (Man/Police Officer/Ogun State/2015).

No significant difference in the 2015 general elections in terms of turnout compared to previous ones, out of 87.8 million that were supposed to register only 67.4 million registered to vote while 43.7% voted (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2015). The record indicated that 33.5% of estimate age population that were supposed to register and vote performed their civic responsibility, which showed that majority (66.5%) of the qualified voters refused to register and vote in the 2015 general elections.

In support of this record by one of the respondents who hate to vote in any scheduled general elections said:

We do not pray for constant elections in my community because of past crisis we witnessed during the past election processes, the level of competition was too high and people do run from their homes and hide in their farmland to rest for two or three weeks. Nobody will come to our aid or rescue and our village head always warn us to leave our home for these thugs. The political thugs invaded our village a week to the election day and burnt almost seven houses and twelve huts during the 2007 general elections. I was among those who were selected by the community to follow the victims to the police station. To my surprise, more than ten communities launched the same complain to the police as at the time we reached the police station. We returned back to our community and since then our village head has been warning every member of his domain to stay away from the village during the election periods. All elections' results declared by the electoral officers had been manipulated ones in our community (Man/Identified Passive Voters/ Ekiti State/2015).

Conclusion

Political campaigns and general electoral processes were characterised by acts of political thugs in the southwestern, Nigeria. Majority respondents perceived the entire electoral process in the fourth republic's general elections in the southwestern states to be characterised with flaws and malpractices. The rampant used of political thugs had negative effect on voters' turnout. Majority



respondents said that thugs led major campaigns and engaged in all electoral offences. Most respondents agreed that thugs drove vehicles recklessly during the campaign to scare opponents especially in opponents' major communities. The result of the findings further revealed that thugs were in cordial relationship with the police officers and other security agents. In addition, the political gladiators always used thugs as instruments to acquire political powers and the lives and votes of innocent citizens were less important to them. As a result of all these illegal acts, the voters in this selected geographical zone were apathetic in nature. The paper concludes that the incidences of politically motivated violence are rising across the country. The police officers should not be permanently stay in a place for more than 5 years without transfer and a task force should be established to monitor the activities of police officers during the election process. There is a need for network communication between the security agents, party agents and the ad-hoc Independent National Electoral Commission officials during the campaign periods and election days. Moreover, there is urgent need to have a standing mobile electoral offence courts to try intruders, thugs and collaborators (such as election officials or ad-hoc staff, security agents) who always truncate the campaign and electoral processes in every local government in the country. Both the security agents and electoral officials should be trained on the ability to curb the thugs on the election days to increase voters' participation in the Southwestern states, Nigeria.

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