

POLITICAL THUGGERY: A THREAT TO DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the ugly phenomenon of thuggery in the body politic of Nigeria. It critically examines the reasons for the prevalent incidences of political thuggery particularly during general elections and even re-run elections in the country. The paper identifies such reasons as unemployment among youths and its attendant poverty and frustration which makes them willing tool for thuggery in the hands of desperate politicians; desperation or 'do or die' politics among some politicians, and the negative impact of money politics in the country's present-day democracy. Some other reasons include the phenomenon of god-fatherism in democratic Nigeria; lack of political ideology and principle, and the absence of internal party democracy in contemporary Nigerian political parties. These reasons have largely encouraged dictatorship and arbitrariness among political leaders at different levels. This, for example, has resulted in the imposition of candidates for various elective offices by powerful cliques within political parties, using thugs to compel obedience and instill fear in the majority of party members. Political thuggery is a serious threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria because it scares credible candidates, including women from active participation in democratic process. It has also given rise to the militarization of the political space with the consequent proliferation of arms, ammunition and other dangerous weapons purportedly for acts of criminality, including thuggery. This, in turn, has resulted in many unresolved politically motivated assassinations across the country, which diminishes the essence and value of the country's evolving democratic culture.