

YOUTH HOOLIGANISM AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN GOMBE STATE

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Abstract

The Youth involvement in negative social vices such as hooliganism and political thuggery is generally on the increase in Nigeria, and it is more alarming when the country is engaged in election processes. Youth in the country are often engage in lawless activities and to some extend changing their behaviors permanently and becoming lawless citizens instead of being an active group for economic and political development of the country. The prevalence of such activities especially during election period is a phenomenon that caught the attention of researchers and security operatives. The therefore generated data from primary source from 265 questionnaires distributed among a purposive sample arrived at using Krejcie & Morgan (1970), and the response from the field was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Also, secondary data was generated from analysis of existing literature. At the end of the work, it was revealed that political elites in the state are capitalizing on the vulnerability of the youth because of poverty and some social problems and are engaged them in political hooliganism and Thuggery. It is therefore recommended among others that government needs to initiate a program that will attempt to address poverty among Nigerians, shifting attention to vocational system of education so that the teeming youth can learn one trade or the other and be self-employed.

Key Words: Hooliganism, Thuggery, Youth Vulnerability, Election Process and Political Development

Introduction

Nigeria is a country that is blessed with a very large population and with a significant proportion of that population falling with the age brackets of youth. This stratum of the population is the pride of every nation in the world because they are the engine room for growth and national development by virtue of their strength to serve their fatherland. The youth are not only engine room for development but major stakeholders and agents of change in every political system. They have the capacity and wherewithal to bring down a regime that is ineffective and to bring change when effectively managed. Their strength can influence changes in government policies and force the regime to reverse decisions that are unpopular, and that which is not people oriented for the benefit of all citizens, while they can support any policy which some minority quarters of the population felt that it failed to address their selfish interest.

In a liberal democratic system as is the case in Nigeria with multi-party system where citizens are legally free to participate in electing their leaders and being part of governance, the youth population

becomes an important weapon for all political activities. The youth in Nigeria that are faced with numerous social problems has no other option but to use their strategic position to ensure access to economic and political powers. The youth in other parts of the world and even the so-called developed democracies are effective agents that spread ideology and, in most cases, either supports a candidate or contest election in that camp and can make differences. But when the youth are neglected or negatively manipulated, because of exuberance they can pull back the hands of development by created negative social vices in the community and susceptible to manipulation by forces of destruction as was witnessed in some political historical developments.

Youth hooliganism was introduced in Nigerian politics dated back the period of the First Republic leading to clashes in the Western Region and some parts of North, but much popularized with the inception of the Fourth Republic and the pointer seems that it has come to stay gradually entrenched in Nigerian politics characterized by the context and culture of work or job as well as a way of life. It becomes even more worrisome for the youths of this

nation, as it appears to have become a legitimate ladder of success. (Esiri,2016).

Youth hooliganism in political activities has become a devastating phenomenon in Nigerian politics, which brought about the loss of lives and destructions of properties, that has negative effects on socio-economic development. Youth hooliganism in elections is characterized with violence, crisis, dispute, rebellion and even war which affected democratic sustainability in Nigeria. The thugs move mostly in an organized group terrorizing, victimizing, injuring, intimidating and even killing not only politicians but also innocent individuals. This seems to be as a result of poor political culture and leaving the activities of campaign in the hands of youths (Wali, 2016), which is the manifestation of negative utilization of the segment of the population characterized by negative political orientation.

Political thugs are often criminals or social delinquents. They are strongly instrumental in distorting electoral results, snatching of ballot boxes, alteration of election results, elimination of political opponents, under the influence of drugs and supernatural powers. They are constantly involved in organized acts of violence, intimidation and blackmail, directed against a political opponent to achieve political objectives (Ortese, 2004). The youth involvement in political restiveness in Gombe state will not be over emphasis, especially with the experience of happenings during the just concluded general elections, the dilemma now is how to get rid of this practice in our political processes.

Literature Review

Youth in Nigeria has become the instrument to coercion by elites to clinched the mantle of leadership, they were persuaded to appease what the elites want that is why the engage in any form of restiveness, hooliganism and political thuggery. Unfortunately, physical realities have shown that violent activities are carried out while political activities like campaigns/elections are going on. The teeming youths who are supposed to have been harnessed or trained towards nation building are used by politicians particularly those in power and the opposition to harass and intimidate the opposition including the innocent citizens and at worse maim and kill under the influence of drugs and political power. Thus, their precious energy is misused in destabilizing the society (Bwaya, 2013). It is general believed that youth everywhere in the world are the backbone of development and when political elites are using this stratum of the society tools of destruction, then the nexus between democracy and national development is at stake. While the teeming

Nigerian youth are engaged in electioneering activities such as campaigns, registration of voters and so on they are equally trained to harass and even kill political opponents and other innocent people, misusing most of their time and valuable energy in destabilizing the society.

Political Thuggery and hooliganism is an act which is associated with stealing, killing, rudeness, hooliganism, touting, intimidation and harassment. It is a behavior that contradicts peace, harmony and co-existence among groups. Hooliganism is an illegitimate and violent means of seeking political power with a view to subverting national opinion for parochial ends through self-imposition this act is usually done by youth through the influence of the political leaders (Howell, 2004). Political Thuggery and hooliganism can be seen as organized act that seeks to influence an electoral process with objective of gaining an unfair political advantage over another and geared towards winning political power by subverting the ends of the electoral and democratic process through intimidation and disempowerment of political opponents by the use of youth and when elections is over the youth of no use and their attentions is need until another election period.

The political elites that are desperate to win election for their personal interest often engage the youth in their shady political activities, as it is generally said, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. However, power is not a common commodity and the determination by some politicians to have it at all cost as well as the greed for money is what has produced the culture of political Thuggery and has continued to perpetuate it in Nigeria (Esiri, 2016).

The corrupt leaders who want to win election and retained power by all means are desperate to achieve their goal, and would not want to leave power so they can use the innocent youth that are vulnerable because of some social deficiencies to harass their opponents or any person that stand between their paths to victory. They resorted to giving the youth hard drugs and token money to engage these activities.

Youth hooliganism is conceived to mean conscious use of threat or physical act carried out by sponsored/hired individual or individuals within political system against another individual or individuals with the intention to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction of property and whose objective have political significance. This means that political thuggery is employed in the struggle for acquisition of political power through

unlawful means or through displacement of criminal behavior (Kwasau, 2022).

Youth hooliganism and Thuggery has becomes major threat to the democracy in Nigeria, the security of lives and properties is not guarantee when thugs engage in their nefarious activities, and they are treat to the security of lives and properties which is common all over Nigeria. Political elites at the states and national levels constitute a major threat to the security of 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 (Wali, 2016). The political elites at all levels are engaged in these activities, and it is not only peculiar to the males in the society, but young girls are now massively involved. They are exposed to hard drugs and other illicit toxicants which made them lose their senses and act in accordance with the wishes and plans of the politicians. Some of these youth are school leavers while some are drop-outs that could not finish their secondary education due to one reason or the other, and most unfortunately the majority was from a poor family. But other join the groups due to influence of peer groups that is the fastest means of recruiting these youths convinced that by involving in such activities it may solve their economic and social problems. There is hardly any boy from the politician's family because while there are engaging these boys in these criminal activities their children are in schools or doing business. The security agencies such as the Nigerian Police, Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps and to some extent the Military because of corruption and influence of these politicians in the government they hardly take punitive measures to stop it but instead they victimize the opposition supporters within the group. The activities of these is negatively affecting the democratic values, citizens are frightened and some under their watchful eyes their children are becoming deviants and criminals in the society.

Research has revealed that the number of youths is relatively increasing in hooliganism not only in Nigeria or Gombe state, but world over with differences in pattern, magnitude and propensity where most of the criminal activities are being carried out by youth. In the past years, there has been an unprecedented and significant increase in the number of young people across the world. There are no fewer than 1.3 billion young people between the ages of 12 and 24 living around the world with over 80% in developing countries. The number of young

people within this age bracket is expected to increase to almost 2 billion by 2050 (Aliyu, 2018).

The figure shows that hooliganism is on the increase instead of decreasing and it is unfortunate that the developing countries that are trying to adopt the western liberal democracy are shown to have the largest percentage of these social vices. The age bracket is alarming and disturbing because this is the stage that these boys can shape their future and to be law abiding citizens that can contribute to the development of their countries and wellbeing of the citizenry that is being manipulated and wasted. The activities of these hooligans are simply the criminalization of western democracy and politics as a whole. When politics is criminalized, it is left in the hands of ruffians, thugs and hooligans, because the good people are scared away. In fact, contemporary events, across the country have clearly demonstrated that Nigerian politics has been hijacked by mostly political thugs. The menace has become detrimental to the democratic sustainability in Nigerian democracy (Asiegbu, 2011).

Youth hooliganism in electoral activities resulted in restiveness and political thuggery, igniting violence and destruction of lives and properties which is unethical to tenets of democracy and political development in Nigeria. The pride of every nation in the world is the youth and it is this group that can either bring development or underdevelopment of any country. While citizens were being encouraged to participate in electing leaders and governance they are instead being scared of the whole project because electioneering period is a nightmare to them, and even after, there is an accompanying widespread of stealing, raping, killings, and to some extent kidnapping because these boys are desperate to continue with the life they were accustomed to during the election period. These youth often form groups with leadership similar to mafia organizations and the qualification of being on top of the hierarchy depends on the level of brutality and killings by that member, and in most cases these groups are engaged in rival fights resorting to killing of a number of persons and even innocent law abiding citizens or a permanent incapacitation of most of those involved in the fight.

Elegbeleye (2005:7), identified one of the factors that can lead to youth restiveness as "perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation". In modern times, the inability of youth to exercise self-control to issues that has led to conflict and protest has been narrowed down to scarcity and unequal distribution of natural resources, non-recognition, marginalizing their society, having feelings of discontentment, non-favorable

government laws, lack of quality education and high rate of employment.

The manifestation of Political Godfatherism or clientism in Nigerian politics is what gave birth to political hooliganism and Thuggery which are a twin evils and a source of wastes of lives of many Nigerian youths and acculturating this negative value in mainstream political socialization. The youths involved are brain washed, deceived and kept as mercenaries that take the politicians to the state thrones who are only relevant during electoral periods and later designated criminals and often jailed for criminal activities. The groups are of no use after election (Esiri,2016).

The alarming manifestation of this dangerous trend in Nigeria's political scene compelled some scholars to start thinking of ways to tackle the problem where it was believed that the teeming youth need orientation and education on how to shun from any form of political irregularities, because if they are well guided they will become a good citizen who desist from criminalities and restiveness. Government must consistently educate citizens and youth on the evil of political thuggery and violence. Overall, political thuggery is characterized by robbery, intimidation, murder, physical assault and often involves physical combat between two opposing gangs or groups, which ultimately generates inter-personal or group hostilities (Aliyu, 2018). The need for urgent intervention through counseling has therefore, become quite imperative. This is borne out of the belief that counseling remains the only potent option that can positively affect the lives of youths who are being manipulated by the political class, to commit heinous crime through hooliganism and thuggery. By educating young people about the negative impact of political hooliganism the society will witness peace before, during and after election periods in Nigeria.

Political thuggery in different parts of Nigeria depends on the conditions, traditions and the levels of political culture of that area. The manifestation of youth hooliganism in political activities in Gombe state was popularized by the emergence 'Yan Kalare' boys in 2003. The 'Yan Kalare' is a group of youth thugs who are initiated and sponsored by desperate politicians of Peoples Democratic Party in the state with the view to capturing the governorship sit from the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) under the leadership of late Habu Hashidu. Politicians from the opposition then ordered the newly formed group with support from key figures at the federal level to maimed, killed and to rig elections in favor of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Alhaji Mohammed Goje. The group became so vicious and fearful in the

whole state with special recognition sanctioned by the Goje's administration from 2003 to 2007. They were engaged in ballot box snatching, intimidating voters, killing opposition party members and inflicting terror in the state. The group act with impunity and even the security operative are victims of the activities of this group. With the support of the state government the group became strong and powerful attracting many youths and introducing this negative political behavior in the polity of Gombe State. This ugly trend continues to follow the political trend of the state since then to the recently concluded general election indicating that it has come to stay and adopted by successive regimes when it comes to election period.

From theoretical perspectives, the utilitarian theory of rational choice by scholars such as J.S Mill and Jeremy Bentham, argued that Youths choose to engage in hooliganism and thuggery after considering personal factors such as joblessness, poverty, financial and material gains as well as situational factors such as the power and authority, influence and protection which includes protection from the aims of the law of godfathers. The politicians target the goal of winning elections and remaining in the office, power and affluence for the sake of money and status and they work towards it with the use of thugs. (Esiri, 2016). It lays much emphasis on individual's involvement in criminal activities and tends to justify the fact that involvement in crime should be beneficial. Thugs are goal oriented. They consider the cost risk and benefit of financial gains and act accordingly. The problem is trailing Nigeria's democratic transition and culminating into a permanent social vice that requires understanding and possible solution.

Methodology

This study generated data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source is from a total of questionnaires administered across a purposive sample drawn from various temples patronized by these youth using Morgans & table of sampling technique. A total of questionnaires were retrieved and for the fact that it as a uni-variate variables, descriptive statistics was employed to analyze the response.

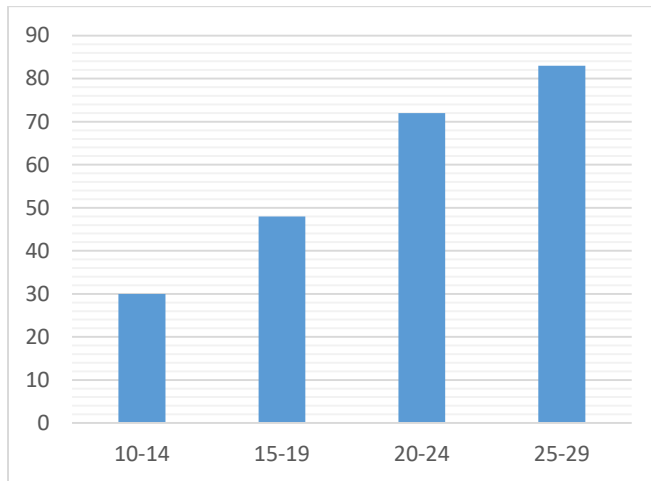
The study also generates data from secondary sources such as official reports, books, journals, articles, magazines, newspapers and other periodic reports and publications that were consulted and carefully analyzed to address the problems.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Age Distribution

Age	Frequency	Percentage
10-14	30	12
15-19	48	19
20-24	72	28
25-29	83	33
30 and above	19	7

Source: Field Work 2023



Source: Field Work 2023

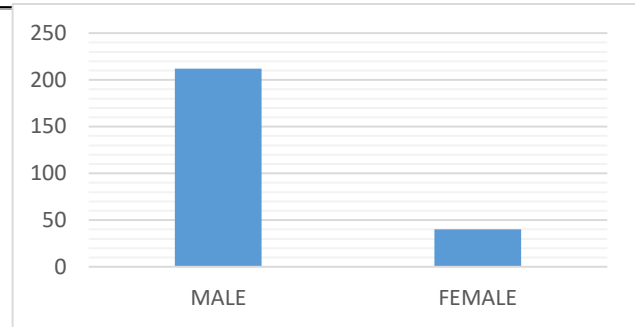
The table above shows that thirty (30) respondents representing 12% falls with the age bracket of 10 – 14, while forty eight (48) respondents representing 19 % are between the ages of 15 to 19, Seventy two (72) respondents representing 28 % are 20 to 24 and eighty three (83) respondents representing 33% are between the ages of 25 to 29.

The majority thirty three percent (33%) of the sample are between the age of 25 and 29 which represent the most productive youth age of a population. Youth within this category are already matured, and are aware of the implications of their actions in the society and are capable of initiating younger ones into the business. For those between the ages of 10 to 14, these are minors that are supposed to be pursuing their education but a drafted into this act. Whatever the circumstance, their parental background or economic factor is a played an important role.

Table 2: Sex

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Male	212	84
Female	40	16

Source: field work 2023



Source: Field work 2023

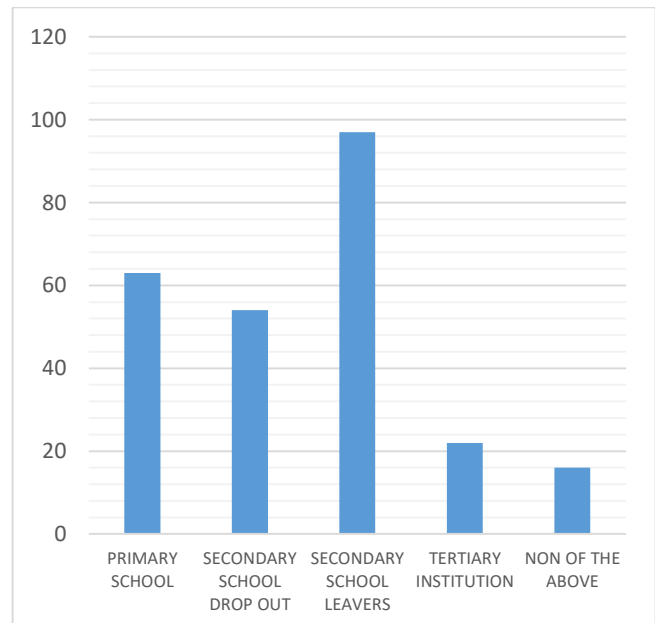
The table shows that two hundred and twelve (212) respondents representing 84 % of the sample population of the sample are male youth, while only forty (40) representing 16 % are females.

The proportion of male youth involvement in political activities and hooliganism is greater comparatively, and predominantly these deviant behaviors are often more prone among the male groups. For the few females, probably they might have some association with some the males in this category and was lured into the group. But whatever the case, the male participation in this activity is alarming and dangerous.

Table 3: Educational Background

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
Primary school	63	25
Secondary school drop out	54	21
Secondary school leavers	97	38
Tertiary institution	22	9
None of the above	16	6

Source: Field Work 2023



Source: Field Work 2023

The information on the table indicates that sixty three respondents representing 25 % attended only primary

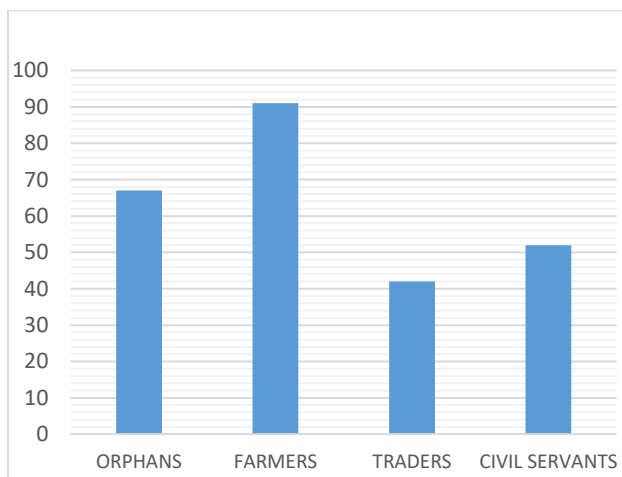
school academically, while fifty four (54) representing 21% dropped out of secondary schools and ninety seven (97) representing 38% are secondary school leavers while twenty two (22) representing 9% attended tertiary institutions but sixteen (16) representing 6% did not attend any school.

From this presentation therefore, a whopping 97 respondents indicated that majority of the youth that are involve in hooliganism and political Thuggery in Gombe are secondary school leavers, a development that arouse attention for further investigation. With this number it is difficult to not to believe that the schools in the state are more-or-less an avenue for grooming these boys instead of shaping their future positively. While for the 16 respondents that neither went to school and were expected to constitute a significant proportion but are the least in the sample did not come as a surprise because they are vulnerable and exposed for easy recruitment into these activities.

Table 4: Parental Background

Parental background	frequency	percentage
Orphans	67	26
Farmers	91	36
Traders	42	17
Civil servants	52	21

Source: Field Work 2023



Source: Field Work 2023

The information on table 4 above revealed that sixty-seven (67) respondents representing 26% are orphans while ninety-one (91) representing 36 % of the sample are sons and daughters of farmers. Forty-two (42) representing 17 % are children of traders or small-scale business men and fifty-two (52) representing 21 % are children of civil servants.

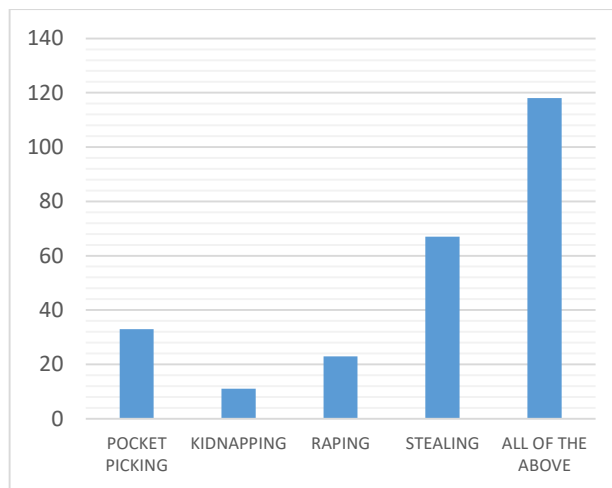
This shows that the majority of youth in this activity which constituted 91 respondents out of the whole

sample population are from families that are farmers. This may not be unconnected with the fact that most of the farmers in the state are residents in rural areas and are self-subsistent in nature with little income. The poverty level in the rural community might be a driving force leading to mass rural – urban drift without any means of survival but to engage in any sort of activity that may earn them a livelihood. While 42 respondents that is the least in all the category of the population’s background that their parents are traders indicates that children of people that are economically better often do not engage in these activities because of the social standing of their parents in the society.

Table 5: Criminal activities involved in

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Pocket picking	33	13
Kidnapping	11	4
Raping	23	9
Stealing	67	27
All of the above	118	47

Source: Field Work 2023



Source: Field Work 2023

From the information above, thirty three (33) representing 13% of the respondents pick-pocketing particularly during political gatherings, eleven (11) representing 4% on the other hand are often engage in kidnapping activities, twenty three (23) representing 9% are involve in rapping activities while sixty seven (67) representing 27 % of the sample are often engage in break-and-enter cases in the state and one hundred and eighteen (118) representing 47% of the sample claimed to be involved in all the criminal activities mentioned.

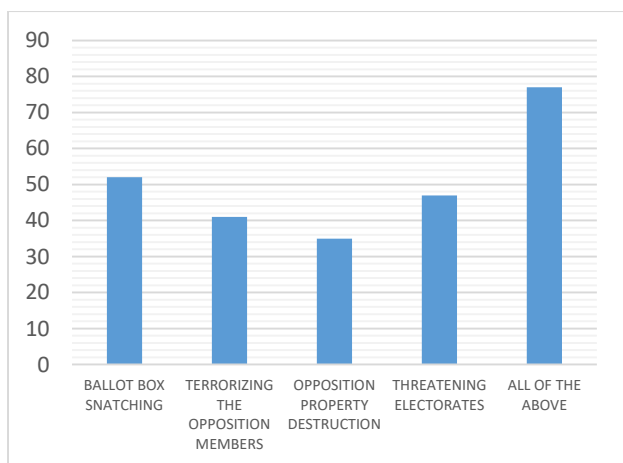
The information indicating that majority percentage of the sample respondents with about 118 out of the population are active in all the criminal activities is a serious societal problem. This pointed to the fact that even after all electioneering activities these boys are

engage in hooligan activities in the state, their activities manifest feasibly during elections because it is a period that several criminal activities are being employed for political gains. For the 11 respondents that constitute the smallest of the group are often engage in more serious crime of kidnapping which not everybody among the respondents will want to be identified with. Those active in this aspect of crime often are under serious influence of drugs and working as a syndicate in the community.

Table 6: Political Hooliganism

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Ballot box snatching	52	21
Terrorizing the opposition members	41	16
Opposition property destruction	35	14
Threatening electorates	47	19
All of the above	77	30

Source: field work 2023



Source: Field Work 2023

A total of fifty-two (52) representing 21% of the respondents engages in Ballot box snatching during elections, forty-one (41) representing 16% of the sample are specialists in terrorizing opposition political party members and thirty-five (35) representing 14% are engaged in destroying properties of opposition political parties in the state. Forty-seven (47) representing 19% of the sample threatens and disturb voters during elections while seventy-seven (77) representing 30% take part in all the activities listed above.

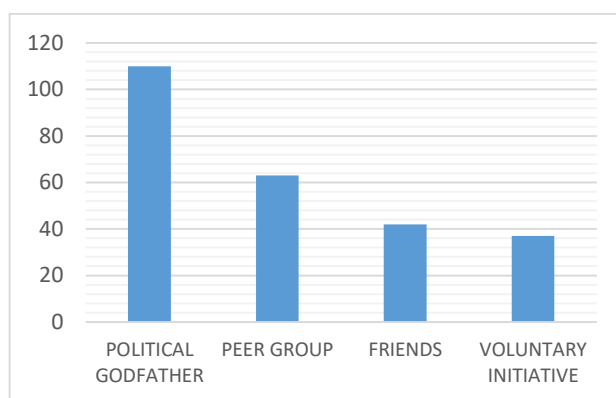
The total 77 respondents that constitutes majority of the respondents that are engage in all hooligan criminal activities during elections does not come as a surprise because all the activities are one way or the other linked, and the elites employ all the avenues for

their political gains. But for 35 respondents who claimed to be involved in destroying opposition party properties might be acting on directives or an attempt to erase the presence of the opposition in the streets. It is even difficult to believe that these group does not engage in other activities because they operates like a mafia clique and are always acting on guided directives.

Table 7: Method of Recruitment into the Group

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Political godfather	110	44
Peer group	63	25
Friends	42	17
Voluntary initiative	37	14

Source: Field Work 2023



The information from the graph show that one hundred and ten (110) representing 44% of the respondents confirmed that they were recruited by political elites in the community who serves as political godfathers, sixty-three (63) representing 25% attributed it to peer group influence while forty-two (42) representing 17% of the sample population claimed that they were recruited by friends and, thirty-seven (37) representing 14% attested to have voluntarily join the group.

The larger segment of the sample population with 110 respondents pointed at political godfathers who recruited and directed them to act the way they were acting and deliberately engaging and exposing them to criminal activities shows the level of political rascality in the country. Youth that are leaders of tomorrow were being destroyed and wasted because of immediate greedy interest. But for the 37 respondents which is the smallest segment of the population that claimed to get involved in these activities voluntarily might not be unconnected with parental background who thought they can achieve their ambitions only through these activities. But whatever the case may be, the moment they are involve in these activities it is difficult to easily change.

Findings

At the end of the study, it was revealed that;

- i. Majority of the youth engaged in hooliganism in the study area falls between the age of 25 and 29. This is a serious security threat for the community particularly with their age bracket
- ii. The activity is predominantly dominated by male youth in the sampled communities
- iii. The majority of the youth involved in hooliganism in the area are secondary school leavers
- iv. The background of the youth indicated that majority of them are sons and daughters of peasant farmers who are economically poor and, in most cases, leaving in rural areas
- v. The work revealed that almost all members of the group are involved in all the criminal activities identified and this pointed to deliberate and organized nature of criminal activities in the state, and
- vi. It is also revealed that these youth are often being recruited by the political godfathers in the state, and are being used as tools for terrorizing the opposition party in the state.

Recommendations

The paper recommends the following as a solution to youth hooliganism and political thuggery:

1. Government should introduce social service programs to engage the youth meaningfully;
2. Promulgation of laws that may impose stiff penalties on politicians that engages in this practice;
3. Electoral laws need to include activities before and during the election;
4. Emphasis needs to be given to vocational training so as to create self-employment for the youth in the country;
5. The government as a matter of concern has to subsidize education to be affordable to low income earners to send their children to schools and to reduce the rate of drop-outs from schools

6. Agents of political socialization must intensify their efforts in educating the youth on the implication of behavior on their future.

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