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## PREVALENCE OF POLITICAL THUGGERY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN KOGI EAST SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Political violence has continued to threaten democratic governance, electoral credibility, and socio-economic development in many developing societies, particularly in Nigeria where political thuggery has become a recurring feature of electoral contests. This paper examined the prevalence of political thuggery and socio-economic development in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State, Nigeria. Specifically, the paper examined the instances, causes, and socio-economic impli of political thuggery in the district. The paper adopted the Marxian Political Economy Theory as its theoretical framework to explain how economic inequality, unemployment, and the struggle for political power encourage the exploitation of vulnerable youths for violent political activities. The paper employed analytical literature review method relying mainly on secondary sources of data, including journal articles, textbooks, newspaper reports, official documents, and institutional publications. The paper revealed that political thuggery remains widespread in Kogi East Senatorial District, particularly during electoral periods where incidents of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, destruction of electoral materials, and politically motivated violence were common. The paper further found that poverty, unemployment, weak electoral institutions, political godfatherism, corruption, and poor enforcement of electoral laws were the major causes of political thuggery in the area. The paper concluded that political thuggery has negatively affected democratic participation, economic activities, social cohesion, and sustainable development in Kogi East Senatorial District. The paper recommended among others, sustainable youth empowerment programmes and stricter enforcement of electoral laws to curb political violence and strengthen democratic governance.

**Keywords:** Political Thuggery, Electoral Violence, Socio-economic Development, Kogi East Senatorial District, Political Economy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Political thuggery remains a major threat to democratic governance and socio-economic development across many countries. It involves the use of violence, intimidation, and coercion by political actors to gain political advantage, influence elections, or suppress opposition. Across the world, political violence has weakened democratic institutions and reduced public trust in governance. In countries such as Brazil and the Philippines, armed groups and political militias have been used to manipulate elections and intimidate political opponents, resulting in political instability and weakened electoral systems (Ramos & McCoy, 2019).

In Africa, political thuggery has continued to affect democratic processes due to weak institutions, ethnic divisions, and poor political culture. In Kenya, ethnic militias and youth gangs have often been used during elections to influence political outcomes, particularly during the 2007–2008 post-election violence that caused severe humanitarian crises and loss of lives (Njenga & Ochieng, 2021). In Zimbabwe, ruling political elites have also relied on violence and intimidation to suppress opposition and maintain political dominance (Juma, 2022). These experiences show how political violence weakens democratic values and promotes authoritarian practices.

Nigeria has also experienced persistent political thuggery, especially during elections. Politicians often recruit groups popularly known as “area boys” or hoodlums to intimidate voters, disrupt political campaigns, and manipulate election outcomes through violence. Such activities have contributed to voter apathy, electoral malpractice, and declining confidence in the democratic process (Ojo, 2020). The 2019 and 2023 general elections witnessed several cases of violence and intimidation, showing the continued influence of political thuggery in Nigerian politics (Ezekiel & Okeke, 2021).

Although the Nigerian government has introduced measures such as biometric voter registration and increased security at polling units to reduce electoral violence, the problem still persists because of political patronage, corruption, and weak enforcement of electoral laws (Akinloye, 2023). This situation demonstrates the need for stronger institutions, political accountability, and active civic participation to protect democratic governance.

Kogi State represents one of the areas in Nigeria where political thuggery has become highly visible. Prior to the 2023 governorship election, reports indicated rising political tension and fear of violence across the state. Hassan (2023) reported concerns raised by community leaders over threats to peace and security in Kogi East, warning that continued violence could disrupt the electoral process. The region has remained politically sensitive because of intense competition for political power and control of state resources (Ojo & Adebajo, 2021).

The 2023 gubernatorial election in Kogi State was characterized by intimidation, electoral violence, and other forms of political misconduct. These incidents created fear among residents and discouraged political participation. Political actors reportedly used thugs to secure electoral advantage through coercion and violence, thereby undermining electoral credibility and democratic principles. Therefore, this paper examined political thuggery and socio-economic development in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State Nigeria.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Political thuggery has affected the socio-economic development of Kogi East Senatorial District. The region depends heavily on agriculture, trade, and small-scale businesses, which are often disrupted during periods of electoral violence. Destruction of property, market closures, and

displacement of residents during political conflicts contribute to economic losses and discourage investment in the area (Ibrahim & Musa, 2023). In addition, political violence weakens social trust and cooperation within communities, thereby reducing social cohesion and community development efforts (Adeyemi, 2023).

The problem of political thuggery threatens democratic legitimacy. Leaders who emerge through violent and manipulated electoral processes may lack public support and legitimacy, resulting in poor governance, corruption, and neglect of public welfare (Ejiga & Linus, 2024). Businesses and investors also avoid politically unstable environments, leading to unemployment, poverty, and low living standards. Fear and mistrust created by political violence continue to weaken social relationships and reduce public confidence in governance (Ejiga & Victor, 2024).

Despite legal provisions in the Electoral Act and efforts by government agencies and civil society groups to reduce electoral violence, political thuggery remains common in Kogi State and other parts of Nigeria (Akinloye, 2023). This situation has created concern over its long-term effects on democratic stability and socio-economic growth. Therefore, the study on political thuggery and socio-economic development in Kogi East Senatorial District is necessary to understand its prevalence, causes, and effects, as well as possible strategies for reducing political violence and promoting peaceful democratic participation.

### **3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER**

The aim of this paper was to examine political thuggery and socio-economic development of Kogi East senatorial district. Specifically, the paper sought to:

- i. Examine the instances of political thuggery in Kogi East Senatorial District
- ii. Identify the causes of political thuggery in Kogi East Senatorial District

### **4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The review of relevant and related literature for this paper was done in line with the aim and objectives and under conceptual review, empirical review and theoretical framework as follows:

#### **Conceptual Review**

##### **Political Thuggery**

Political thuggery generally can be defined as any negative behaviour associated with violence, hooliganism, kidnapping, murder, assassination, gang action and trouble ‘shooting’, that is 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 (Ejiga & Victor, 2024).

Political thuggery involves the domination and marginalization of sections and groups and persons in the acquisition and sharing of political positions, rigging of elections and manipulation of political process in favour or against certain groups, sections and persons; and falling apart of sponsors and those sponsored (Godfather and Godsons). Political thuggery and violence is an endemic feature of most political systems in the world. This is particularly true of developing states like Nigeria where political thuggery, killings, violence, malpractice and rigging became endemic characteristics of elections at federal, state and local governments (Abubakar, 2015).

Achimugu (2024) conceptualizes thuggery as the actions and behaviours of individuals who have succumbed to lack of moral compass and empathy for others by engaging in violence, intimidation, lawlessness, and criminal acts without regards for societal norms and values. He noted that thugs perpetrate crimes such as physical assault, robbery and extortion, often using brute force to achieve their goals. According to him, those who engage in thuggery prioritize their own desires and power

over the well-being of others thereby causing harm and suffering without remorse. Also, Lawal cited in Idris (2011) views thuggery as criminalization of politics. He noted that when politics is criminalized, it is left in the hands of ruffians, thugs, hoodlums and ' hooligans, while the good citizens are scared away. For the purpose of this study, thuggery is any act of politically-motivated violence deployed by desperate politicians to cause mayhem with the ultimate desire of using same to gain ascension to power and retain political relevance.

### **Socio-Economic Development**

The concept of socio-economic development has attracted considerable attention among scholars, development practitioners, and international organizations because of its central role in improving human welfare and societal progress. Although there is no universally accepted definition of the concept, scholars generally agree that socio-economic development extends beyond economic growth to include improvements in social conditions, human well-being, and access to opportunities.

One of the earliest influential contributions to the understanding of development was provided by Seers (1969), who argued that development should be assessed based on the reduction of poverty, unemployment, and inequality rather than merely increases in national income. According to him, a society cannot be regarded as developed if these social problems continue to persist despite economic growth. This position shifted attention from purely economic indicators to the welfare of citizens.

Similarly, Todaro and Smith (2020) view socio-economic development as a multidimensional process involving changes in social structures, institutional arrangements, economic growth, reduction in poverty, and improvements in living standards. Their argument emphasizes that development should result in better access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and social services capable of enhancing human welfare. In the same vein, Sen (1999) conceptualizes development as the expansion of human capabilities and freedoms. He argues that development occurs when individuals possess the freedom and capacity to make meaningful choices concerning their lives, including access to education, healthcare, political participation, and economic opportunities.

Contemporary African scholars have also linked socio-economic development to issues of governance, security, and political stability. Nnoli (2016) argues that meaningful development in African societies requires an environment characterized by peace, accountable leadership, social justice, and equitable distribution of resources. Similarly, Ikelegbe (2013) contends that insecurity, political violence, and weak institutions constitute major obstacles to socio-economic progress because they discourage investment, weaken productivity, and undermine social cohesion.

The views of these scholars reveal that socio-economic development is not limited to economic advancement alone but includes social progress, political stability, human security, employment generation, and improved standards of living. The concept therefore encompasses both material and non-material improvements in the lives of people.

For the purpose of this paper, socio-economic development is defined as the process of improving the economic conditions and social well-being of the people through enhanced employment opportunities, increased productivity, improved access to education and healthcare services, political stability, security of lives and property, social cohesion, infrastructural development, and sustainable participation in democratic governance. This definition is considered suitable for the

paper because it captures the economic, social, and political dimensions through which political thuggery affects the development of Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State.

### **Instances of Political Thuggery in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State**

Political thuggery has remained a recurring problem in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State, especially during electoral periods. The district, which comprises areas such as Dekina, Ankpa, Idah, Ofu, Olamaboro, and Igalamela/Odolu Local Government Areas, has witnessed several cases of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, physical attacks, killings, and destruction of electoral materials. These incidents have continued to threaten democratic participation and socio-economic stability in the region.

One of the most notable instances of political violence in Kogi East occurred during the 2019 Kogi State governorship election. The election attracted national and international attention following the killing of Mrs. Salome Abu, a women leader of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Ochadamu, Ofu Local Government Area. Reports indicated that she was attacked and burnt alive during post-election violence linked to political activities in the area. The incident became a symbol of the violent nature of politics in Kogi East and generated widespread condemnation across Nigeria (Abbah, 2023).

Political thuggery also featured prominently during the 2023 general elections in Kogi East Senatorial District. Reports from several communities in Dekina, Anyigba, Idah, Ankpa, and Olamaboro indicated widespread voter intimidation and attacks on polling units by armed thugs. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reportedly cancelled elections in some polling units in Anyigba and Omala following violent disruptions by political hoodlums (Vanguard, 2023).

In Dekina Local Government Area, particularly in Anyigba, reports showed that armed thugs invaded polling centres, destroyed electoral materials, and disrupted voting activities during the February 2023 elections. Information Nigeria reported that one voter was allegedly shot dead in Anyigba, while several polling units experienced violence and ballot box snatching by hoodlums armed with guns and machetes. The violence forced many voters to flee from polling centres, thereby affecting voter turnout and the credibility of the election process.

Similarly, allegations of political violence and the use of thugs dressed in military uniforms were reported during the 2023 elections in Kogi State. According to Channels Television, political actors accused rival parties of sponsoring armed thugs who destroyed Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) machines, seized ballot papers, and attempted to abduct electoral officials. Some of these incidents were reported in parts of Kogi East, including Dekina and Anyigba.

Ahead of the November 2023 governorship election in Kogi State, civil society organizations and political stakeholders again raised concerns over increasing political violence in Kogi East Senatorial District. The Centre for Peace, Democracy and Development warned about coordinated attacks, killings, and intimidation across the district, urging security agencies to prevent further escalation of violence before the election (Attabor, 2023).

These recurring incidents show that political thuggery has become a major challenge to democratic governance in Kogi East Senatorial District. The continued use of violence during elections has weakened public confidence in the electoral process, discouraged political participation, and contributed to insecurity in the region. Addressing the problem requires stronger law enforcement,

electoral reforms, political accountability, and active civic education to promote peaceful democratic participation.

### **Causes of Political Thuggery in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State**

Political thuggery is usually orchestrated by politicians who employ thugs to eliminate political opposition, manipulate electoral outcomes, or consolidate power (Ojo, 2023).

Poverty and unemployment stand out as some of the most significant drivers of political thuggery in Nigeria. Widespread economic deprivation leaves many young people vulnerable to recruitment by political elites who exploit their frustration and financial desperation. According to Alemika (2022), the absence of sustainable livelihoods and the erosion of state welfare structures have created a large pool of disenfranchised youths who perceive political violence as a means of survival and social recognition. Agbiboa (2021) similarly observes that unemployed young men are often drawn into political thuggery through promises of quick financial rewards, protection, and political patronage. The situation is particularly visible in regions like Kogi East, where limited industrial activities, weak infrastructure, and rural underdevelopment exacerbate joblessness. In such environments, political actors easily mobilize idle youths as tools of intimidation during elections, offering temporary income in exchange for loyalty and violence. This cycle perpetuates both political instability and economic marginalization, as the same conditions that breed thuggery also prevent sustainable development.

The weakness of electoral institutions and law enforcement agencies contributes significantly to the persistence of political thuggery. In many cases, electoral laws are not strictly enforced, allowing perpetrators of electoral violence to evade justice (Ibrahim & Igbuzor, 2019). Additionally, corruption within law enforcement agencies means that political thugs are often protected by powerful political figures, further entrenching the culture of impunity.

Nigeria's political landscape is characterized by a culture of violence and 'godfatherism', a system where influential political figures act as kingmakers, determining who holds political office (Omotosho, 2019). Political godfathers often maintain private armies of thugs to secure their interests, suppress opposition, and maintain control over political structures. The high stakes associated with political offices in Nigeria also drive political thuggery. Public office is often seen as a lucrative venture due to the access it provides to wealth and power (Akinola, 2020). Consequently, politicians go to extreme lengths, including sponsoring violence, to secure electoral victory (Victor, 2022).

Ethnic and religious divisions have historically played a role in electoral violence in Nigeria. Politicians often exploit these sentiments to mobilize thugs and justify acts of political violence against opponents from different ethnic or religious backgrounds (Adekunle, 2021). These divisions create an environment where political thuggery thrives, as seen in various electoral conflicts across the country.

The failure of law enforcement agencies to prosecute individuals involved in electoral violence has contributed to the persistence of political thuggery. When offenders are not held accountable, it emboldens future perpetrators and normalizes electoral violence as a political strategy (Nwolise, 2012). The pre-election period was characterized by heightened tensions, with reports of political thuggery, intimidation, and violent clashes between supporters of different political parties. Various reports indicated that political thugs were used to disrupt opposition campaigns and suppress voter turnout in certain areas (Hassan, 2023).

On election day, several incidents of electoral violence were recorded. There were allegations of ballot box snatching, voter suppression, and intimidation of electoral officials. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) faced challenges in ensuring a free and fair election, as various polling units reported cases of vote buying and thuggery-related disruptions (Micheal, 2024).

Following the announcement of election results, there were widespread allegations of electoral malpractice and violence. The opposition parties rejected the results, citing cases of political thuggery, vote rigging, and electoral fraud. Several petitions were filed with election tribunals challenging the outcome of the election (Abdulkadir, 2024).

Political thuggery undermines democratic principles by eroding public trust in the electoral process. When elections are marred by violence, voter apathy increases, and the legitimacy of elected officials is questioned (Ojo, 2017). Additionally, the normalization of political violence discourages competent individuals from participating in politics, further weakening democratic institutions.

### **Empirical Review**

Ejiga and Victor (2025), examined the possible effects of political thuggery on socio economic development of Kogi-Eastern region in the election of 2023 gubernatorial election in Kogi State. The study points out the prevalence, effect and possible solution of political thuggery on socio-economic development of Kogi-East Senatorial District. The study employed elite theory as its theoretical framework and used secondary sources of data from journals, books, newspapers magazines and articles. The study found out that there was high prevalence of political thuggery before, during and after the 2023 gubernatorial election in Kogi state. In addition it also revealed that killing of individuals, destruction of properties, kidnapping, armed robbery, corruption, ritual killings were all the effects of political thuggery. The study concluded that political thuggery has adversely affected Kogi-East socio-economic development since investors are not interested in investing or establishing any business outlet in the region despite the presence of economic resource. This study reviewed the prevalence, effects and solutions to political thuggery but the current paper analytically reviewed the instances and causes of political thuggery in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State Nigeria.

Bununu et al. (2025), examined the community policing strategies their usefulness and the challenges faced in combating Sara-Suka (Thuggery) in the study area. The study adopted multi-stage cluster sampling, purposive sampling and availability sampling techniques to collect data questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to collect primary data. The study involved 384 individual aged 18 and above accross five of the twelve electoral wards in Bauchi LGA. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentage were used to analyze quantitative data using SPSS version 22, while content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. The broken windows theory and the Routine activity theory were adopted as the theoretical frame of reference. The study discovered that the police and other security agencies in Bauchi LGA are collaborating with members of various communities to combat Sara-Suka (Thuggery). They have mitigated their threat by implementing strategies such as community partnerships and sharing critical information about Sara-Suka (Thuggery) and neighbourhood watch programmes. However, corruption within and outside law enforcement undermines trust and credibility, making effective community policing challenging. The study recommended improving relationships with the public by law enforcement agencies to gain trust and information sharing among others.

The study pointed out distrust between law enforcement and the public, corruption in the government agencies are very high that the public can no longer trust the enforcement agencies

because top government functionaries are involved. As any insurgency that last more than 24 hours the government of the day is involved (Sani Abacha). It is in line with the current paper however, the study was carried or done at Bauchi state hence the need a review in Kogi State.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper was anchored Marxian Political Economy Theory as reviewed below:

#### **Marxian Political Economy Theory**

Though this theory initially was meant to explain the relationship between economic substructure and other human existence. The super structure of the economy is rested on the substructure of the economy. The substructure are material gains and the capitals entailment of the economy. This capital is obtained in two ways, the legitimate and the Illegitimate means. Since the government had closed the legitimate means owing to lack of employment opportunities and lack of small-scale loans for entrepreneurship. Some persons took to illegitimate means in an attempt to survive by involving themselves in political thuggery aiding violence during electoral process. Hence the adoption of this theory to explain prevailing causes of political thuggery.

The theory examines prevalence and causes of political thuggery in Nigeria since it could be analyzed from different theoretical frameworks because various factors account for political thuggery. Political thuggery is a major factor that has serious effect on Nigeria electoral system owing to material benefit attached to political offices. The act itself does not reward but is used as a means to attain the material/symbolic gain. Such benefits become a motivator. Thus, for this study, the Marxian Political Economy Theory was adopted, using the Dialectical Materialism method, which was propounded by Karl Marx in 1859. To Marx, economic gains, among other reasons, are the causes of crisis. It, therefore, means that people struggle and even use whatever means available to clinch to the power for economic gain as this will enable them to determine how resources are shared.

To further justify the suitability of this theory for this paper, dialectic materialism exposed intrinsic motivations by man for economic gains and benefits. Electoral violence happens not because elections cannot be free and fair, but the material gains attached to such positions. These gains do not allow participants to play by the rules of the game. Because these actors see politics as a business that yields huge returns within a short while, and since no other venture can create such wealth, they thus engage in electoral fraud as a quick route. In other words, power in Nigeria has become a means to self-enrichment. The struggle to achieve this material gains has often resulted in the loss of life, destruction of properties. This happens because, in the process of the struggle, violence takes place to eliminate the perceived or imagined to be an obstacle on their path to power. Where a capitalist elite dominates both economic resources and political institutions, one significant strength of the Marxian perspective is its capacity to critically expose the underlying class-based structures of political violence and economic inequality. In Nigeria, the ruling class uses state power not for national development but for the accumulation of wealth and maintenance of power, often through violent means such as political thuggery. Thus, the Marxian lens helps unpack how elites exploit economically vulnerable youths during elections, creating conditions that sustain both political violence and socio-economic stagnation.

The weakness of Marxian theory lies in its economic reductionism. Critics like Weber (1946) and Althusser (1971) have pointed out that political and ideological institutions may have relative autonomy from the economic base. In the Nigerian context, ethnic, religious, and regional affiliations often play more immediate roles in political mobilization than class alone. As Diamond (1988) noted, identity politics, patronage networks, and regionalism are key drivers of political

behavior in Nigeria, which Marxism may overlook. Furthermore, the assumption of a revolutionary class consciousness arising from oppression has not always materialized in practice, making the theory less predictive in contemporary, pluralistic societies.

Marxian theory is useful in explaining how capitalist systems and resource control contribute to political violence. It argues that those who control economic resources also influence political power, and this struggle for control can lead to violence. In resource-rich regions, for example, competition over wealth often leads to the formation of militant groups and political thugs who are used to protect elite economic interests. Research on regions like the Niger Delta shows that inequality and capitalist exploitation can lead to the rise of armed groups and political violence, including thuggery (Amadi et al., 2016). This shows that political thuggery is not just a political issue, but also an economic one rooted in the structure of capitalism.

The Marxian theory is useful in showing how political thuggery creates a cycle of violence and underdevelopment. Economic inequality leads to frustration and social tension, which can result in violence. This violence then weakens the economy and political institutions, leading to even more inequality and poverty. Thus, Marxian political economy provides a strong and relevant framework for understanding both the causes and effects of political thuggery on socio-economic development.

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopted analytical literature review approach to examine existing scholarly arguments, empirical findings, and theoretical positions relating to prevalence of political thuggery and socio-economic development in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State. An analytical literature review goes beyond the mere description of previous studies by critically examining the arguments, methods, findings, and gaps within existing literature in order to establish relationships, contradictions, and areas requiring further investigation (Snyder, 2019).

The analytical review adopted in this paper focused on evaluating scholarly works on the causes, manifestations, and effects of political thuggery in Nigeria, particularly within the context of electoral violence and democratic governance. Relevant materials were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, government publications, newspaper reports, conference papers, and institutional reports relating to political violence, youth unemployment, electoral malpractice, godfatherism, and socio-economic development. The review critically examined how different scholars interpreted the relationship between political thuggery and democratic instability, especially in developing societies such as Nigeria.

The major criterion for selecting literature in this study was relevance to the objectives of the research. Only studies directly related to political thuggery, electoral violence, youth involvement in political conflict, democratic governance, and socio-economic development were considered. Priority was given to recent scholarly works, official reports, and verifiable publications that addressed political violence within Nigeria and Africa. The paper also considered the methodological strength, credibility, and reliability of sources used in the review process. This ensured that the reviewed literature provided valid evidence for understanding the prevalence and effects of political thuggery in Kogi East Senatorial District.

Another criterion adopted was contextual relevance. Studies that reflected realities within Nigeria's political environment were prioritized because of their direct connection to the socio-political conditions in Kogi State. The review also examined areas of agreement and disagreement among scholars regarding the causes of political violence, the role of poverty and unemployment, weak

institutions, electoral corruption, and the influence of political elites in sponsoring thuggery. Through this analytical process, the study identified important gaps relating to the socio-economic implications of political thuggery at the grassroots level, particularly in Kogi East Senatorial District.

The analytical literature review further enabled the study to connect the empirical findings with the Marxian Political Economy Theory adopted for the research. Existing studies showed that economic inequality, unemployment, and the struggle for political power contribute significantly to electoral violence and political thuggery. This supported the theoretical position that political and economic structures in society often favour elite interests at the expense of vulnerable populations.

## **6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The findings of this paper revealed that political thuggery has remained a persistent feature of electoral politics in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State. The paper established that incidents of intimidation, ballot box snatching, destruction of electoral materials, physical assault, voter suppression, and politically motivated killings have continued to characterize elections in the area. These support the argument of Ojo (2023) that political thuggery in Nigeria is often orchestrated by political actors who recruit and sponsor thugs to intimidate opponents and manipulate electoral outcomes. The experiences recorded in Dekina, Anyigba, Idah, Ankpa, and other parts of Kogi East during the 2023 elections further confirm the growing normalization of violence within the electoral process.

The paper also found that poverty and unemployment constitute major causes of political thuggery in Kogi East Senatorial District. The paper showed that many unemployed youths are easily recruited by politicians because of economic hardship, lack of employment opportunities, and poor living conditions. This finding agrees with Alemika (2022), who argued that economic deprivation and weak social welfare systems expose youths to manipulation by political elites. Similarly, Agbibo (2021) maintained that unemployed youths often perceive political violence as a means of economic survival and social relevance. In Kogi East, where rural poverty, low industrial development, and inadequate infrastructure remain widespread, politicians take advantage of the vulnerability of young people by providing temporary financial incentives in exchange for political violence. This situation has contributed to the growth of criminality, insecurity, and social instability in the district.

Another important finding of the paper is the weakness of electoral institutions and law enforcement agencies in addressing electoral violence. The study observed that political thugs often operate with little fear of arrest or prosecution because influential political actors provide them protection. This finding corroborates Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2019), who argued that weak enforcement of electoral laws and corruption within security agencies encourage impunity during elections. The inability of security institutions to prosecute offenders has created a culture where political violence is viewed as a normal strategy for winning elections. This was evident during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Kogi State, where allegations of intimidation, vote buying, ballot box snatching, and attacks on electoral officials were widely reported across Kogi East.

The paper further showed that godfatherism and the struggle for political power significantly contribute to political thuggery in the district. Omotosho (2019) observed that political godfathers maintain networks of loyal thugs to protect their political interests and influence electoral outcomes. This position aligns with the findings of the present paper, which revealed that political office in Nigeria is often perceived as a source of wealth, influence, and access to public resources.

Consequently, politicians employ violent means to secure electoral victory. Akinola (2020) and Victor (2022) similarly argued that the high economic benefits attached to political office encourage politicians to sponsor violence and electoral manipulation. In Kogi East, the desperation to control political structures and state resources has intensified electoral competition and contributed to recurring violence during elections.

The paper equally established that ethnic and political divisions contribute to political violence in Kogi East Senatorial District. Political actors often manipulate communal loyalties and group identities to mobilize support and justify violence against perceived opponents. This finding agrees with Adekunle (2021), who noted that ethnic and sectional sentiments are frequently exploited during elections in Nigeria. Such divisions create distrust among communities and weaken peaceful political participation.

The implications of political thuggery on the socio-economic development of Kogi East Senatorial District are significant. The paper found that electoral violence discourages investment, disrupts business activities, damages infrastructure, and weakens community relations. Markets and commercial activities are often disrupted during violent political conflicts, while fear and insecurity discourage both local and external investors. This situation contributes to unemployment, poverty, and slow economic growth in the region. Socially, political violence undermines trust, weakens social cohesion, and promotes fear among citizens, thereby reducing collective efforts toward community development.

The findings of this paper strongly support the Marxian Political Economy Theory adopted for the study. The theory explains that the struggle for economic and political power within society often produces exploitation, inequality, and conflict. In the context of Kogi East Senatorial District, political thuggery reflects the struggle among political elites for control of state power and economic resources. The political class exploits unemployed and economically disadvantaged youths as instruments of violence to secure political dominance. This supports the Marxian argument that the ruling class often manipulates vulnerable groups to protect its economic and political interests.

Furthermore, the theory helps to explain how poverty, unemployment, and unequal distribution of resources create conditions that encourage political violence. Many youths involved in political thuggery are victims of structural economic hardship and social exclusion. Their participation in electoral violence is therefore linked to broader issues of economic inequality and limited access to opportunities. The findings demonstrate that political thuggery in Kogi East is not only a political problem but also a reflection of deeper socio-economic contradictions within the Nigerian state.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

The paper therefore concluded that political thuggery poses a serious threat to democratic governance and socio-economic development in Kogi East Senatorial District. Unless deliberate efforts are made to address poverty, unemployment, weak institutions, corruption, and political impunity, electoral violence will continue to undermine political stability and development in the region.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the above conclusions, the paper suggested the following recommendations:

- i. The government of Kogi State, in collaboration with private organizations and development agencies, should establish sustainable youth empowerment and employment programmes

across Kogi East Senatorial District. These programmes should focus on vocational training, agricultural support schemes, entrepreneurship development, and access to soft loans for young people. Addressing unemployment and poverty will reduce the vulnerability of youths to political manipulation and recruitment by politicians for violent activities during elections. In addition, community-based civic education programmes should be intensified to educate youths on the dangers of political thuggery and the importance of peaceful political participation.

- ii. Electoral and security institutions should strengthen the enforcement of electoral laws by ensuring the prompt arrest, investigation, and prosecution of individuals involved in political violence and electoral malpractice. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigeria Police Force, and other security agencies should establish special election monitoring and response units in politically sensitive areas within Kogi East Senatorial District before, during, and after elections. Political office holders and sponsors of thuggery should also be held accountable irrespective of their political status. Effective enforcement of electoral laws and the elimination of political impunity will discourage electoral violence, restore public confidence in the democratic process, and promote political stability and socio-economic development in the region.

## 9. LIMITATIONS

Despite its relevance, the analytical literature review method adopted in this paper has certain limitations. One limitation is that some studies on political thuggery in Nigeria relied heavily on secondary data and media reports, which may contain political bias or incomplete information. Another limitation is the scarcity of empirical studies specifically focused on Kogi East Senatorial District, making it necessary to rely on broader national studies and reports on electoral violence in Nigeria. In addition, differences in research methods, time frames, and geographical coverage among reviewed studies made direct comparison difficult in some instances.

Furthermore, the dynamic nature of political violence means that some reviewed studies may not fully capture recent developments in electoral thuggery and political conflict in Kogi State. Nevertheless, the analytical literature review provided a solid foundation for understanding the causes, manifestations, and socio-economic implications of political thuggery in Kogi East Senatorial District and helped to establish the research gap addressed by the study.

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## **Authors' contributions**

All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## **Data availability**

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

## **Declarations**

### **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Not applicable. This study did not involve human or animal subjects.

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### **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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