



Electoral Violence Risks in the 2015 Gubernatorial Elections A Policy Brief

Key Risk States:

- North Central: Benue, Nasarawa, Niger Plateau
- North East: Adamawa, Borno, Yobe, Taraba, Bauchi, Gombe
- North West: Kaduna, Kano, Katsina
- South South: Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta
- South West: Lagos, Ekiti, Oyo
- South East: Abia and Ebonyi

Recommendations:

- Systematic deployment of security apparatuses in all hotspot areas to forestall violence and to ensure rapid response to distress calls.
- Prioritize the safety and security of INEC staff must be prioritized particularly ad-hoc staff and members of the NYSC.
- INEC and security agencies should improve on deployment logistics.
- Challenges recorded with the card readers should be urgently corrected and polling units should have access to back up card readers to ensure smooth accreditation.

Introduction

The build-up to the 2015 General Election in Nigeria has been marred by some violence. The CLEEN Foundation Security Threat Assessment published in March 2015 found 15 states to be on the red threat level. On the other hand, in its Pre-Election Report and Advisory on Violence in Nigeria's 2015 General Elections NHRC documented that at least 58 persons have been killed in elections and politically related violence in Nigeria. More so, nearly 2 million people have been displaced in the North Eastern part of Nigeria as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency.

The March 28th Presidential Election has been hailed in many quarters as being largely peaceful and free of post-election violence. Some attribute this relative peace to the laudable decision of President Jonathan to concede the election even before the official final results were announced, while others attribute the outcome to the public commitment made by the key contenders to accept the outcome of the elections and their charge to their supporters to eschew violence.

Ahead of the Gubernatorial Elections however, key concerns remain for public safety and security in Nigeria. The gubernatorial elections present security challenges considering a number of factors namely: a) the likelihood of political parties to cling to, or win new states after consideration of the outcome of the presidential polls; b) the presence of local dynamics which might not have been in play in the presidential elections –including zoning of candidacy, power of incumbency as well as pressures to install a preferred candidate. This policy brief summarizes the risk of electoral violence ahead of the gubernatorial elections and presents recommendations.

Violence in the 2015 Election

From the recent Security Threat Assessment, 15 states are at risk of electoral violence in Nigeria. The NHRC advisory further emphasized the conflict risk potential of 3 states out of the 15 identified in the STA. During and following the presidential polls however, localized conflicts have been reported in some states of the federation including Rivers, Imo, Edo and states in the North Eastern part of the country. Boko Haram terrorists are suspected to have detonated a bomb killing about 20 in Gombe state as well as a number of election-day attacks.

In Benue State, violence was reported also on election-day. Series of attacks were also reported in Rivers state on election-day. In Rivers, the situation is thought to have escalated with continued attacks and violence being reported in the state. According to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Rivers, 55 of its supporters have been killed in electoral violence in the state. At least 124 cases of electoral violence are currently being investigated by the Nigeria Police Force with some perpetrators already charged to court.

Elections are often surrounded by some degree of tension and risk of violence in Nigeria. The following states have been identified as high risk states for electoral violence as we get closer to the gubernatorial elections coming up on the 11th April, 2015 are Benue, Nasarawa, Niger Plateau, Adamawa, Borno, Yobe, Taraba, Bauchi, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Lagos, Ekiti, Oyo, Abia and Ebonyi

- **Rivers**

Rivers state has been a hotbed of violence in the pre-election period. By February, 2015, the All Progressive Congress (APC) claimed that it has lost 30 members to political violence in the state. This included party supporters attacked on their way to a campaign rally as well as gun attacks during a campaign rally in the state. Violence has continued in the state in protest over alleged shortcomings of the presidential polls. The APC now claim that it has lost 55 members in post-election violence in Rivers State. The political and electoral violence in Rivers State arising from the presidential election and the protest on the 29th March, 2015 led to the imposition of a curfew on the state. It is pertinent to state that more is needed to protect lives and property ahead of the gubernatorial state.

Key Issues for consideration in Rivers include the outcome of the presidential election in the state; the suspected militant activities; the strength and desperate politics by politicians in the state; the visible presence of the military in the state as well as the agitations over zoning of political office by political parties in the state. On the other hand, Obio/Akpor, Okrika, Tai are among the LGAs to watch in the state.

- **Imo**

The killing of Hon. Toby Onyekele, a commissioner, on 26th January, 2015 in Owerri North, drew attention to the conflict risk in Imo State. It indicated that the earlier killing of Mr. Laz Anyanwu, a protocol officer of the deputy Governor of the Imo was not the last in the state. Also the recent killing of Mr. Andrew Ugwu of the Labour Party (LP) on Tuesday, 31st March, 2015 along Sam Mbakwe Airport Road after his political rally confirmed the consistent red ranking of the state in the Security Threat Assessment that Imo State was in red in seven (7) out of the ten (10) editions would have be early warning to the security agencies and relevant agencies to put mechanism in place to prevent some of these killings.

The issues for consideration which could generate tension in the state include the candidacy of Governor Rochas Okorocha of the APC. Prior to the Presidential elections, the APC was considered to be influential in the state, however the sweeping victory of PDP in the state point to a stiff competition and risk for violence.

- **Ekiti**

In Ekiti State, there have been attacks on the homes of some politicians, while billboards and posters of many candidates have been vandalized by suspected thugs. There were various incidences of violence and ballot box snatching recorded during the presidential and NASS elections in the State. A House of Representatives member, Oyetunde Ojo, narrowly escaped being killed by hooded gunmen who attacked him at Erijiyan-Ekiti in Ekiti West Local Government Area during the election. An All Progressives Congress (APC) member Jide Owolabi was allegedly shot by security agents at Ereja Polling Unit in Odo-Oja quarter.

Leading to the presidential polls, Governor Fayose of Ekiti had been a strong campaigner for the PDP. Since the election however, there are attempts by 19 members of the House of Assembly in the State to impeach him. Although the Governor is not up for election on 11th April, the PDP is likely to compete fiercely to ensure majority control of the state assembly while the APC would want to maintain a firm grip on the state.

- **Gombe**

Gunmen suspected to be Boko Haram terrorists reportedly opened fire on voters in Gombe state on 28th March 2015. 14 people, including Gombe state legislator Umaru Ali, were said to have died in attacks on the towns of Biri and Dukku. Residents of the town of Miringa were reported to have seen armed men torch homes before polls opened and then shot at residents as they tried to escape. A total of 39 persons – including an APC candidate for the state assembly election were said to have been killed in the state. This was perhaps in response to the earlier threat allegedly from Boko Haram promising to disrupt the polls – the same threat hangs over the state ahead of the gubernatorial polls.

On April 2nd 2015, between seven and 20 persons were reportedly killed while a further 15 were injured after an improvised explosive device (IED), was set off at a busy motor park along Bauchi road, in Gombe state. The violence recorded in the recent weeks could dampen the mood of voters in Gombe state.

- **Taraba**

During the just concluded Presidential and National assembly elections in Taraba State, some residents of Wukari, Takum and Ibi Local Government Areas alleged that soldiers deployed during the March 28 elections frightened and intimidated voters and allowed room for malpractices. They alleged the army, rather than help make the elections smooth and fraud-free, were used to rig the elections in favour of the People's Democratic Party. Consequently, it is worthy to note that Taraba state has been flagged red in the STAs and specifically, Wukari and Ibi LGAs were mapped out as hotspots. The role of the military in the gubernatorial elections, underlying ethnic and communal tensions as well as the fierce competition among the leading parties could heighten the risk of violence.

- **Kaduna**

Kaduna state is crucial to both the PDP and the APC in the state. Although the state is presently controlled by the PDP, the victory of the APC in the presidential polls in the state raises the competition and stakes in the gubernatorial polls. In recent years, Kaduna has been the hotbed of both ethnic and religious conflicts with the faultlines often blurring. Additionally, the Boko Haram has carried out repeated attacks in the states while many displaced persons have sought refuge in the state. Ahead of the elections, the Governor of the state and his main challenger Mal. Nasir el-Rufai have been engaged in several campaign disputes. The victory of the APC would further embolden the party to remove the incumbent governor Ramalan Yero who will on his own part seek to cling to power and give the PDP an important foothold in northern Nigeria. Conflict in Kaduna could be inter-party, intra-party, religious, ethnic – or a combination. Southern Kaduna and Kaduna city likely to be major flashpoints

- **Lagos**

Lagos state has the largest number of eligible voters in Nigeria, as such it became the epicentre of campaigns for both the PDP and the APC. Before the presidential polls, series of violent conflicts have been recorded in different parts of the state. Conflicts in Oshodi-Isolo axis of the state led to loss of lives and destruction of property. Although the presidential polls was largely without incidents and the post-election period also calm, there are underlying tensions in the state. Although the APC emerged victorious in the presidential polls in Lagos, the resurgence of the PDP including its victory in some federal constituencies as well as the number of votes scored in the presidential polls is reportedly unsettling some persons in the state. Also, the visibility of the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) in the campaign period has led to fear and apprehension in some quarters. Recently, the Oba of Lagos, Oba Rilwan Akiolu is reported to have made comments purportedly urging violence against members of the Igbo ethnic group in Lagos should they fail to vote a particular candidate. This does not only signify the rivalry between political parties but also point to the risk of inter-ethnic conflicts as well as violence and retribution after the gubernatorial polls in the State.

- **Benue**

Following the Presidential and National Assembly elections in which APC won in Benue State, members of the PDP have been defecting in droves to the APC. State Governor, Gabriel Suswan, also lost his bid to the Senate seat. The governorship candidate of the APC, Samuel Ortom, said he had so far received over 8,000 PDP supporters. With Gemade's victory over Governor Suswan, the APC now has two Senators in the state – George Akume – while PDP has only one, David Mark. The House of Reps now stands at six seats for APC against five for the PDP

The recent decamping by politicians may not be well received and could increase the stake in the elections. More so, the state has had a history of violence linked to farmers and pastoralists as well as communal and boundary disputes. Going into the Gubernatorial/State Assembly election in a cloudy atmosphere of perceived violence in addition to the state being the red zone consistently in the STA's, security agents should be at alert for possible break down of law and order across the state.

- **Borno**

In Borno State, the Boko Haram sect has wreaked havoc on lives and livelihood in the recent years. Over 39 persons were said to have been killed on the eve of the elections. Although the presidential elections was conducted with significant success in the state, there is risk for the escalation of violence in the Gubernatorial Polls in the state. Significantly, the continued closeness between the Civilian JTF (CJTF) and the APC led government in the state has raised concern over their likelihood to be used as thugs in the elections. Furthermore, there are concerns over the ability of INEC to conduct elections in all parts of the state – this concern is significant considering that failure to hold elections could lead to some elections becoming inconclusive or leading to the feeling of disenfranchisement. The inability of displaced persons to vote may further increase tensions in the state. Already, the campaign period was marked by series of attacks and vandalism of campaign posters. Maiduguri Municipal Council, Jere, Biu, Hawul, Kwaya-Kusar are likely to be major flashpoints in the elections.

Recommendations

- Urgent security review and briefing should be conducted by all Commissioners of Police at the State level. Electoral and Security officials working in states and localities with visible threats of violence must adequately be briefed to ensure vigilance and prompt action.
- There need for systematic deployment of security apparatuses in all hotspot areas to forestall violence and to ensure rapid response to distress calls.
- The safety and security of INEC staff must be prioritized particularly ad-hoc staff and members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) both individually and the corpsers lodges.
- INEC and Security officials should improve on deployment logistics to ensure that polling stations open for accreditation promptly thus minimizing the risk of counting votes late at night.
- Challenges recorded with the card readers should be urgently corrected and polling units should have access to back up card readers to ensure smooth accreditation.
- Traditional rulers and community leaders should intensify efforts to speak to constituents to ensure free, fair and cordial elections. The tendency of politicians to monitor outcome of elections in different communities and thereafter challenge members of the community must be discouraged.
- Citizens and civil society organisations should pay keen attention to the elections and report their observations to appropriate authorities using the published election helplines. Furthermore, accurate and responsible reports sent to observing CSOs can help to improve understanding of trends in the elections.

Conclusion

As Nigeria prepares for the 2015 Gubernatorial Elections on 11th April 2015, the risk of electoral violence is significant especially in the states highlighted above. However, violence is not altogether unavoidable. The recommendations outlined above are meant to guide the public and assist INEC and the security officials to ensure improved elections security management and reduced risk of electoral violence.