



Security Threat Assessment: Towards 2015 Elections

Key Risk Factors:

- Insurgency in the North East
- Communal, ethnic or religious contentions in the country
- Increasing poverty, unemployment and youth exclusion
- Merger of opposition parties and possible violent disagreement over leadership and candidates
- Activities of militant youth groups
- Contention over candidates including zoning of presidential or gubernatorial candidates

Key Mitigating Factors:

- Coordinated activities of election security stakeholders;
- Disbandment/Regulation of cults, militia and vigilante groups
- Training for journalists on conflict sensitive reporting:
- Prosecuting of Electoral Offenders

Political Context

The merger between the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and other smaller parties, has provided an opportunity for opposition parties to align and challenge the dominance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). This however will also provide the backdrop for a keenly contested election in 2015. The zoning arrangement for the presidency is also a key issue that will define the face of the 2015 elections and possible security consequences.

Across the six geopolitical zones, other factors will define the elections. These include the persisting state of insecurity from the insurgency and activities of militants and vigilante groups, the high stakes of election as a result of the availability of derivation revenues, the ethnic heterogeneity that makes elite consensus more difficult to attain, as well as the difficult environmental terrain that makes policing of elections a herculean task.

Preparations for the Elections

The political temperature across the country is heating up in preparation for the 2015 elections. While some state governors are up for re-election, most others are serving out their second terms. The implication is that most of the states are open for grab by either of the major parties and will therefore make the electoral contest fiercer in 2015 both within the political parties and in the general election. With the coalescing of the major opposition parties into APC discussions, scheming and permutations are going on in all the states. Despite the increasing political activities, there is no indication that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other relevant agencies are doing much at the regional level in preparation for the 2015 elections. The voters register is yet to be updated, the relevant amendment to the electoral laws are yet to be carried out and there seem not to be election specific security plan and strategy for the region despite its history of electoral violence.

Gender Dimension

Gender dimension with respect to access to political power is a recurring challenge as women political representation remains very marginal. Because of the diversities of the six zones, there is no uniformity in women's political space and public attitude to women politicians. Therefore, while some states have done relatively well in women representation, others have not. For instance, Adamawa, Yobe, Taraba have elected women into the National Assembly, Gombe and Bauchi are yet to do so. Most of the states Assemblies have no women representation. Across board, we are yet to achieve gender parity in political representation, which makes the realization of the target of 35% affirmative action as set in the National Gender Policy (NGP) far from been attained. However, the number of women candidates for elective positions have increased in the last few years, and we expect more of these candidates to emerge for the 2015 election, but there may not be any appreciable progress unless the socio-economic and political obstacles are addressed.

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Presence and Activities of Non-State Actors

There are several non-state actors involved in security related activities and therefore lots of vigilante groups in all the states. In North central zone, the spate of violence and the rise and dominance of armed non-state actors that are increasingly challenging state capacity have become serious threat to security. For instance, the emergence of a group- the *Ombatse* (meaning time has come), which was responsible for the massacre of over 60 security personnel in Nasarawa state are clear reflections of the fact that the Nigerian state is increasingly failing in its responsibility to protect, thereby, ceding its monopoly over the instruments of coercion to some armed non-state actors. Conflicts between pastoralists and nomads in Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau States have led to deaths and huge displacements of persons in these states, with little or nothing to show for, as it relates to the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators of these heinous crimes.

In the North West, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina have a history of youth militancy, particularly the *yan'daba*, thus electoral politics is always an opportunity to perpetrate violence on behalf of their principals. Sokoto, a hitherto quiet state has in the last 8 years been experiencing a rise of political violence due to the growing notoriety of Area Boys (a militant youth group in Sokoto). With the level of violence in the region in the last three years, the north east has one of the worst cases of small arms and light weapons. There may also be huge presence of military assault weapons in the hands of the militant groups. The zone has in the last 10 years produced militant youth groups – the Boko Haram and Ansaru being the extreme ones. Others are ECOMOG in Borno state, *Yan'Kalare* and *Sara-suka* in Gombe and Bauchi state respectively.

The activities of various violent political gangs, disguised as security outfit across the South West states also call for concern. The Odua People's Congress (OPC), especially in Lagos state, Operation Burst in Oyo state, among others, constitute serious security threats. Although many of the vigilante groups, like the Bakassi Boys in the South east, have been dismantled officially, many of them exist informally and have been implicated in cases of assassination, robbery, kidnapping and communal violence. The high level of youth unemployment also creates a ready pool of youths that politicians can mobilise to use violence to achieve political power. In the South South, militias and cults were implicated in electoral fraud and voter intimidation in the 2003 and 2007 elections. Some of the militias and cults transmogrified to the militant groups that were involved in the insurgency in the region.

Violent Hot Spots

Identification of violence hotspots by states showing places to keep under close security watch for possible outbreak of violence before, during and after the elections. We categorized them using traffic light signals (green, amber and red) to indicate levels of threat; green indicating stability/lowest threat states and red indicating the highest threat level/ most volatile states. Key influencing factors here are whether the governor is up for re-election, degree of control by incumbent and relationship with the federal government, stability of internal state party politics, questions of zoning, whether the ruling party or opposition controls the state, history of violence, and lastly activities of vigilante/militants/cultists/insurgents.

- **RED:** NC – Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue; NE – Yobe, Borno, Adamawa, Bauchi; NW – Kaduna, Sokoto; SS – Rivers, Delta; (None for SE and SW)
- **AMBER:** NC – Kogi, Niger; NE – Gombe, Taraba; NW – Kano, Kastina; SE – Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo; SS – Edo, Bayelsa; SW – Lagos, Oyo, Ogun
- **GREEN:** NC – Kwara; NW – Jigawa, Zamfara, Kebbi; SE - Abia; SS – Cross River, Akwa Ibom; SW – Ondo, Ekiti, Osun; (None for NE)

Synthesis of security threats

- I. Insurgency: The NE region is currently faced with violent extremism and three of the states are under emergency rule. If the situation is not properly managed, this can be a huge threat to the 2015 election in that region. The other challenge is if the federal government tries to use the military presence in these states to rig or manipulate the electoral process, this can generate violent reaction.

- II. Communal Violence: A number of states in the region are faced with communal violence. The violence is often associated with politics. It is therefore important to respond quickly to communal, ethnic or religious contentions before they get further entangled in electoral politics.
- III. Electoral manipulation: Any attempt to rig the election in most states can generate huge violent reaction. The 2011 violence in some northern states were associated with perceived vote rigging.
- IV. Increasing poverty, unemployment and youth exclusion is a major risk. Many of these youth are exposed to drug, small and light weapons and are susceptible to manipulation and used as party thugs.
- V. Activities of the militant youth groups: There is a proliferation of militant groups and vigilantes across the country. Though there have been efforts to regulate or demobilise some of the groups in some states, there is however no guarantee that they will not bounce back during the election when politician will become desperate for their services. The process of demobilisation should therefore be comprehensive, in a way that the young people can be empowered through gainful and sustainable socio-economic activities.
- VI. Merger of opposition parties and possible violent disagreement over leadership and candidates: With the merger of the three major opposition parties, there is definitely going to be a huge contention over positions, leadership or candidates, some of the contentions could spiral into violence.
- VII. Contention over candidates including zoning of presidential or gubernatorial candidates: There are emerging contentions over where the president of the country should come from. This is a continuation of the controversy that preceded the 2015 election and has continued to shape the national politics since then. Like what happen in 2011, if the ruling elite do not manage the situation properly, it could escalate into a huge national crisis.
- VIII. Already, the emerging signs have pointed to the possibility of pre-election, election-day and post-election violence. The deployment of federal might to factionalise the NGF is an example of such tendencies. With the merger of opposition parties, the contest will possibly be stiffer and the likelihood of violence higher.

Mitigating factors and Recommendations

- i. Election related stakeholders – including security agencies, INEC, political parties and civil society groups must commence preparation for the 2015 election and mainstream conflict management in their plans. Governments at all levels should pay special attention to the violence hotspots with a view to empowering and equipping the agencies for effectiveness.
- ii. Disbandment/Regulation of cults, militia and vigilante groups: The state governments and security agencies should work to disband cults and militias and regulate non violent vigilante groups that are often hired to intimidate voters and opposing party supporters. The mobilisational capacity of political parties and elites as they engage the services of youths as political thugs and vigilantes will be a key defining element of the general elections in the run up to 2015. This must be checkmated more proactively by the INEC and the relevant security agencies.
- iii. Training for journalists on conflict sensitive reporting: The manner the media has been reporting and is likely to report political conflicts has implications for violence. A cursory examination of newspapers reveals high levels of sensationalism which if left un-moderated will contribute to violence. Media practitioners should be exposed to training on reporting of political conflicts to mitigate risk of their reports becoming triggers for violence.
- iv. Sustained engagement among key stakeholders such as INEC, security agencies, civil societies, religious and community leaders is central to re-instilling confidence in the people of the electoral process, coupled with political will on the part of governments at all levels in supporting peaceful and credible elections remains a key priority.
- v. The government needs to respond to the socio-economic vulnerability of young people.
- vi. There is need to overhaul the weak criminal justice system in the country, with specific reference to prosecuting perpetrators of violence and checkmate the proliferation of weapons and emergence of armed-non state actors. This is the only way that the entrenched culture of impunity in the country can be reversed.
- vii. All existing ethnic, religious and communal contentions should be properly managed to avoid escalation during election. All political parties should be persuaded to sign a peace memorandum, stating their commitment to eschew violence and work peacefully before, during and after the election