



Nigeria 2015 elections: Electoral Risk and Hot Spot Mapping

Introduction

Elections are a crucial part of any democratic government and enable citizens to periodically determine who should lead them at every level of government. Several elections in Nigeria have been marred by violent activities either during or post elections. Examples of this include the 2011 Presidential Elections. Many political sociologists, both locally and internationally, have argued that the greatest obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is electoral violence which could take many forms; inter-party, intra-party, ethno-religious, etc.

To better understand the mindset of Nigerians in relation to the 2015 General Elections, the CLEEN Foundation in collaboration with the NOI Polls and with funding support from the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) conducted the 2015 Election Perception Survey. The project surveyed 5000 Nigerians across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory as well as representing the 109 Senatorial Districts in Nigeria. The survey provided a very useful opportunity for Nigerians to reflect on their intention to participate in the 2015 elections and to outline their perceptions on elections security as well as the level of preparedness for the election.

Key findings:

1. Perception of violence and intimidation in the build up to the election was relatively low; Nigerians believe current levels of insecurity would not have direct implications on the elections.
2. Nigerians are oblivious of the growing challenge posed to their safety by the election.
3. 15% of Nigerians sampled were concerned about violence and intimidation during the 2015 general elections.
4. Some senatorial districts recorded perception of violence which were significantly higher than the neighbouring districts, suggesting that some threats are so localized in some communities and does not affect the other areas.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen the early warning and response capability of the security agencies and review of election security management after the general elections.
2. Properly regulate gangs, vigilantes and other non-formal security organisations operating outside of the formal security framework.
3. INEC should collaborate with security agencies especially members of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) to provide adequate security for the elections.
4. Reported cases of vote and PVC buying, thuggery, hate speech and other election offences should be adequately investigated and perpetrators prosecuted in accordance with the provision of section 124 of the Electoral Act 2010, as amended.

The Election viability Poll showed that the perception of violence and intimidation in the build up to the election was relatively low. This shows that Nigerians are of the opinion that general and current levels of insecurity would not have direct implications on the elections.

Although there is a general low perception of violence and intimidation in the country, 15% of Nigerians sampled were concerned about violence and intimidation during the 2015 general elections. 21 out of 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory recorded intimidation and violence threats that is equal to, or greater than the national average; only 16 states were below the national average.

Key Risk Factors

There are key risk factors requiring keen attention and action from security agencies as identified from the Security Threat Assessments (STAs). In some zones that have been prone to violence such as the North West, North Central and the North East, it could take only a small trigger for violence to erupt, especially in Kaduna and Kano state. Some states such as Ebonyi, Benue, Plateau, and Nassarawa have underlying ethno-religious tensions that could be triggered by political wrangling during the elections.

- I. **Perceived partisanship of security institutions:** There have been recurring allegations of partisan control and use of security institutions in the country. The Police, Military and the DSS have allegedly been deployed and used in a partisan manner by the Federal Government and this could be major threat to security. As we get close to elections, the feeling of political repression and exclusion from the mainstream security cover of the State could be major risk factors. Opposition parties are already reacting to this situation, some state governments have instituted their own security outfits which could serve as counterforce to the federal security agencies. On the other hand, some groups are vehemently protesting the use of the military for any role in the elections.
- II. **Electoral manipulation and vote rigging:** Vote rigging or perceived rigging will be the major trigger of violence in the region especially the gubernatorial and Presidential elections. INEC has sought to forestall the likelihood of rigging through biometric verification and use of card readers; however, the challenges recorded in the recent field pre-test must urgently be rectified to ensure that the process is efficient and does not result in disenfranchisement as this could be negatively received by prospective voters.
- III. **Boko Haram insurgency:** The military remains active in its campaign against the Boko Haram in the North East. The recent declaration of Adamawa State to be free from insurgents is gladdening, however, it is doubtful that such a declaration would be made about Borno and Yobe before the polls on March 28. In the neighbouring North West, Kano, Jigawa and Kaduna remain at the risk of Boko Haram attacks as in the last three years, different parts of these states have been attacked by Boko Haram. Until the situation in the whole of the North East is addressed the possibility of more attacks could not effectively be ruled out. This is especially important now that the Boko Haram is being vigorously routed and considering the leaflets allegedly circulated by Boko Haram promising to disrupt the general elections.

In addition to the foregoing elections security risk factors; other risks identified include: the tensions emanating from the distribution of permanent voters' cards (PVC); campaign and hate speech; response by security agencies to identified threats to election, protection of the franchise of internally displaced persons, and the emergence of alternate security arrangements.

Recommendations

1. The early warning and response capability of the security agencies should be strengthened ahead of the polls and subsequently, a review of election security management be conducted after the general elections to ensure that areas of lapses are identified and remedial measures taken for future elections;
2. The role of vigilantes and other non-formal security organisations operating outside of the formal security framework should be properly defined and regulated to ensure that they complement rather than compete with, or oppose the police and other formal security agencies that have the constitutional mandate of providing security before and during the elections;
3. INEC, the National Orientation Agency and the civil society should as a matter of urgency intensify efforts on voter education and civic education programmes that fully educate the citizens as to why and how they must vote with the PVC;

4. INEC should collaborate with security agencies especially members of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) to provide adequate security for the commission before, during and after the polls.
5. Reported cases of politicians and others engaged in vote and PVC buying, thuggery, hate speech and other election offences should be adequately investigated and perpetrators prosecuted in accordance with the provision of section 124 of the Electoral Act 2010, as amended.
6. The Abuja Accord on violence-free elections should be complied with by all political parties and candidates; while this publicly and voluntarily signed accord could serve as a deterrent, the full force of the law should be brought to bear on all offenders.
7. Civil society organisations should intensify their voter sensitisations against electoral violence, upscale their peace education and violence tracking. The use of the biometric verification and card readers means that unprecedented levels of sensitization are required as voters cannot rely on previous voting experience in 2015.