NIGERIA'S 2023 ELECTION SECURITY LANDSCAPE

Drivers, Actors and Emerging Challenges

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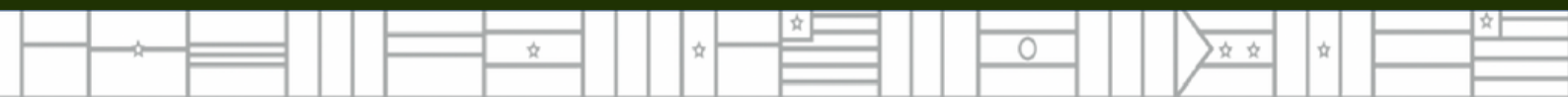DECEMBER 2023

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Introduction

The year 2023 in Nigeria was marked by a series of elections. In February, there were presidential and legislative elections, followed by gubernatorial contests in March, supplementary contests in April, and three off-cycle governorship elections in November. These electoral events were influenced by various factors, ranging from identity politics to the challenges faced by electoral and security institutions.

In the aftermath of the fiercely contested elections, both local and foreign stakeholders remain concerned about the country's security and political landscape.[1] The challenges anticipated for the new administration are considerable, and this report aims to shed light on the intricate interplay between insecurity and electoral processes, providing insights for stakeholders to navigate the complex issues at hand.

Security challenges are pervasive across the entire country. In the North-Central, conflicts between pastoralists and farmers over resources have been prominent. In the South-South zone, persistent oil-related militancy remains a significant concern. Secessionist movements in the South-East continue to cause challenges to the state, while the North-West and North-East have continued to grapple with militant jihadist groups and the proliferation of communal militias and other non-state armed groups. Finally, the South-West has witnessed increased clashes between the regional community militia and other groups, ranging from pastoralists to other security outfits. Despite former President Muhammadu Buhari's administration (2015 – 2023) having been elected largely on the promise of addressing insecurity, these challenges persist under his successor.

In ensuring Nigeria's peace and stability, this report identifies three emerging post-election challenges that underscore the critical need to address the drivers of political violence, indicative of state-society relations and their impact on elections. First, in response to security and legitimacy concerns in the lead-up to and the immediate aftermath of the 2023 elections, the Nigerian government must prioritise addressing concerns related to marginalisation and identity. These concerns have been prominent factors contributing to electoral violence observed in all four elections this year, posing a substantial risk of further unrest. Second, considering the enduring influence and political power wielded by incumbent leaders, it is imperative for the Nigerian government to adopt a comprehensive strategy to address and mitigate the risks associated with the abuse of power manifested in leaders' involvement in politics. Finally, the government must address citizens' concerns that politicians exploit judicial actions to secure office through the courts, which has continued to exacerbate conflict, especially in areas where elections are keenly contested.

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[1] Andrea Carboni and Ladd Serwat, 'Political Violence and the 2023 Nigerian Election,' ACLED, 22 February 2023

Methodology

This section offers an overview of the comprehensive methodology utilised in the development of this policy report, a collaborative effort between the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). Our analysis examines the patterns of political violence surrounding the 2023 Nigerian general election and assesses its far-reaching implications for Nigeria's precarious political stability and security.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding, this report draws upon a diverse range of primary and secondary sources. A fundamental component of our research involved the collection of primary data during the 2023 general election, where dedicated field teams of nearly 5,000 observers gathered data at polling units across all 36 Nigerian states. This first-hand data collection yielded invaluable insights into localised events and trends.

In addition to primary data, our research encompasses a comprehensive review of secondary sources, entailing a thorough examination of grey literature, academic publications, and media reports. At the core of this research effort lies the extraction and rigorous analysis of data from ACLED and the Nigeria Election Violence Tracker, a dedicated platform that mapped election-related violence and evaluated the impact of electoral competition on the numerous concurrent crises facing the nation in the lead-up and immediate aftermath of the February 2023 elections.

In this analysis, electoral violence encompasses the increasing violence targeting party supporters and electoral officials, as well as the activities of regional and criminal groups with the objective of interfering with the electoral process and benefiting political elites.[2] The number of electoral violent events in this study refers to specific election-related incidents reported in ACLED data notes and categorised under the following sub-event type: Armed Clash, Disrupted weapons use, Excessive force against protesters, Explosion/Remote Violence, Grenades, Looting/Property Destruction, Mob Violence, Violence Against Civilians, and Violent Demonstrations.[3]

Moreover, our report relies significantly on ACLED's ongoing monitoring endeavours, which include the analysis of violence trends in each of Nigeria's six geopolitical regions. In addition to this, we incorporated research findings derived from the CDD repository. This holistic approach to data collection and analysis forms the foundation of our policy report, aimed at providing robust and valuable insights to policymakers and stakeholders deeply concerned with Nigeria's political stability and security in the post-2023 general election landscape.

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[2] ibid.

[3] Specific ACLED data notes on electoral violence may be partial and only provide limited information.

Pre-Election Security Assessment

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the nature of election-related violence in the country has undergone substantial transformation. Electoral violence has evolved, modernised, and has become institutionalised in the country's political environment. This transformation has led to the increased deployment of state security agencies, including the military, becoming an integral part of the electoral logistic process.

While Nigeria's 2023 elections represent an important democratic milestone, as the country has never experienced a longer period of uninterrupted democratic governance, they unfolded against the backdrop of a faltering state and exacerbated fragility. This fragility was characterised by the presence of under-governed spaces across the country, resulting from ongoing localised and regionalized conflicts, including jihadist insurgencies, rural banditry, communal conflicts, and separatist campaigns.[4] These conflicts posed a significant threat to security and cast doubt on the prospects of a free and fair election. Notably, large swathes of the country, particularly in the North-West and South-East, were rendered inaccessible for election logistics and the transportation of materials. This presented a challenge for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), making it appear nearly impossible to conduct elections safely and securely in these areas.

Responding to the intricate and multidimensional nature of insecurity, various community-based self-help armed groups and state-level or regional security outfits have emerged, adding to the complexities of the security landscape and posing additional threats to the electoral process.[5] The resulting fragility led to the internal displacement of over 3 million in the country, creating fertile ground for non-state actors to be easily mobilised by political figures to engage in electoral violence. In the months leading up to the elections, violence escalated, with INEC offices, government properties, and security installations becoming major targets.[6]

Consequently, the paramount task for security agencies was to safeguard areas prone to violence and ensure that the millions of internally displaced Nigerians could exercise their right to vote. The Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) was entrusted with four critical objectives. First, it was charged with reducing violence in the pre-election period to bolster public confidence, encourage voter turnout, and secure the willingness of INEC staff to participate. Second, the committee aimed to ensure an adequate deployment of security personnel on election day, addressing concerns related to the understaffed nature of the country's security architecture. Third, the committee endeavoured to mitigate the negative repercussions of a heavily militarised election, particularly with regard to potential human rights abuses and the misuse of security agents

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[4] Dengiyefa Angalapu and Nichole Grossman, 'Turbulent Region: An Analysis of Trends and Actors of Conflict in West Africa,' Centre for Democracy and Development, 9 June 2023
[5] Centre for Democracy and Development, 'Multiple Nodes, Common Causes: National Stocktake of Contemporary Insecurity and State Responses in Nigeria,' 1 April 2022
[6] Andrea Carboni and Ladd Serwat, 'Political Violence and the 2023 Nigerian Election,' ACLED, 22 February 2023

for political purposes. Lastly, the security architecture was prepared to respond to any last-minute developments and post-election violence.

State Security Operations and Threats by Established Non-state Armed Groups

To ensure the smooth execution of the planned election, the Nigerian military conducted airstrikes and special clearance operations, specifically targeting bandits, militant jihadist, and secessionist groups in the North-East, North-West and South-East, respectively. These operations commenced notably in October 2022 and peaked in December of the same year, with air drone strike events accounting for almost a quarter of all fatalities in the fourth quarter of 2022. The primary objective behind these operations was to establish a sense of security, enabling voters to engage safely in the democratic process.

A substantial deployment of security officials, totalling over 425,000 security officials was organised for the presidential and national legislative elections. This included an estimated 300,000 police officers, 51,000 Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps officers, 21,000 Federal Road Safety Corps officers, 11,000 Nigerian Correctional Service officers, 9,500 personnel from the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 21,000 Nigeria Immigration Service officials, and 350 members of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission.[7] Notably, this count does not encompass the military officers deployed, the details of which were not disclosed for national security reasons. The purpose of this deployment was to ensure that each of the over 176,600 polling units had at least two security officials.

In the off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi, the Inspector-General of Police, Olukayode Egbetokun, ordered the distribution of an additional 220 operational vehicles, including water cannons and Armoured Personnel Carriers to the three affected states to intensify security arrangements for the elections. The police mobilised a total of 92,565 personnel, including 27,000 in Bayelsa, 25,565 in Imo, and 40,000 in Kogi, along with several assets such as five helicopters and 15 gunboats to ensure a secure environment for electoral conduct. The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) also deployed its operatives to monitor the elections and prevent vote buying and other electoral malpractices at the various polling units during the electoral exercise.

This strategy appeared to yield positive results, as the election was held as scheduled with minimal disruptions from known non-state violent actors. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that airstrikes and military responses were not the sole contributing factors to this outcome. Research conducted by the Centre for Democracy and Development had previously uncovered the willingness

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[7] Ignatius Igwe '425,106 Security Operatives Deployed for Polls - IGP,' Channels, 24 February 2023

of communal militias in the North-West and North-Central to participate in the electoral process.[8] This willingness was, in part, attributed to their desire to address the feelings of alienation and deprivation that had motivated their past actions. The elections proved an avenue for them to address their grievances and potentially find a resolution.

Security and Election Implications of Naira Redesign Policy and Fuel Scarcity

Beyond the heightened security operations and the willingness of non-state armed groups to participate in the election, the cash shortage resulting from the introduction of naira redesign policy on 26 October 2022 by former Central Bank Governor Godwin Emefiele had significant implications for the electoral cycle. The highest denominations of the Naira, the N200, N500, and N1000 notes, were scheduled for a redesign, with a deadline of 31 January 2023 set for the exchange of old notes for new ones at banks. This policy was presented as a plan to combat corruption, vote-trading, address the escalating menace of kidnapping for ransom, reduce inflation, and manage excessive currency circulation. Yet, it emerged as another pivotal factor influencing the movement of non-state armed groups in the lead-up to the elections.[9]

Securing ransom payments became increasingly challenging, worsened by fuel scarcity due to recurrent supply disruptions, and further exacerbated by cross-border smuggler activities (stemming from fuel prices higher in neighbouring countries than in Nigeria). These financial constraints obstructed not only ransom payments but also severely restricted the mobility of militia groups and other non-state armed actors, who heavily relied on motorbikes for transportation. ACLED data records an almost 50% decrease in abduction events in Nigeria between October 2022 and March 2023, and in the North-West region of the country, a 69% reduction in abduction events during this same period.

Despite the policy's intended objectives, INEC issued warnings that fuel and cash scarcity could disrupt the payment of logistics staff and the transportation of materials required for polling.[10] Additionally, it did not take long for politicians to recognize that the cash redesign policy might impede their plans for 'cash politics,' a practice wherein political parties seek to induce voters, often by offering cash, food, branded souvenirs, and clothing before or during an election to garner support.[11] Nevertheless, the naira redesign policy improved security in areas with high incidences of abduction events, allowing the electoral process to go on with minimal disruptions. However, it also significantly hindered voter turnout, resulting in a historic low for Nigeria's presidential election, with fewer than three out of 10 registered voters who had collected voting cards participating.[12]

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[8] Centre for Democracy and Development, 'Multiple Nodes, Common Causes: National Stocktake of Contemporary Insecurity and State Responses in Nigeria,' 1 April 2022

[9] Dengiyefa Angalapu, 'The Lull in Violence during the 2023 Elections and Lessons for Nigeria's new President,' Centre for Democracy and Development, 17 July 2023

[10] Friday Olokor et al., 'Naira crisis may disrupt polls, INEC warns Emefiele, NSA,' Punch (Nigeria), 8 February 2023

[11] Ayodele Awi, 'Cash politics: the impact of the currency redesign policy on Nigeria's 2023 General Election,' Voices, 23 February 2023

[12] William Clowes, 'Only 3 in 10 People Turned Out to Vote in Nigeria's Elections,' Bloomberg, 2 March 2023

Electoral Violence and the 2023 Elections

The preceding section has highlighted the successes of security agencies in addressing pre-existing threats to the conduct of the 2023 elections. However, a notable gap emerged in addressing election violence, primarily perpetuated by political thugs, party agents, and supporters. Despite the deployment of state security forces to polling units, the 2023 elections were significantly impacted by a high level of violent incidents. The figure below illustrates a surge in electoral violence following the official start of the 2023 electoral campaign cycle on 28 September 2022, with the presidential and gubernatorial elections on 25 February and 18 March, respectively, witnessing the highest number of reported violent incidents.
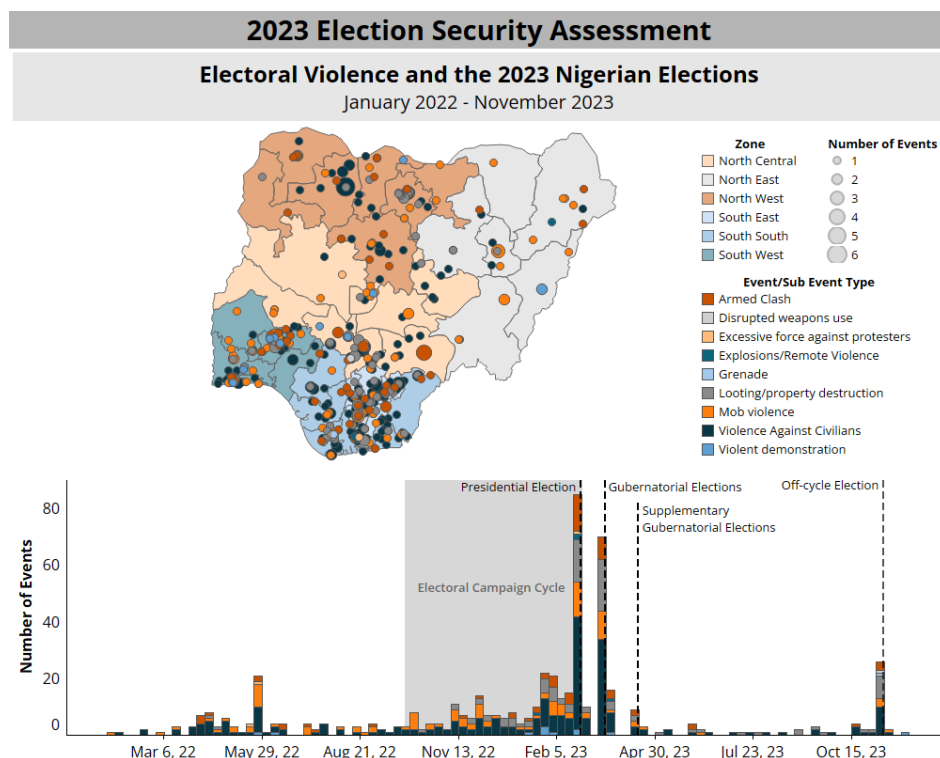

Fig 1 – Electoral Violence and the 2023 Nigerian Elections (Jan 2022 – Nov 2023)

CDD observers reported instances of voter intimidation and suppression linked to identity politics primarily carried out by political party thugs or loosely affiliated individuals in contested or battleground states. ACLED data supports these observations, with the majority of electoral violent events involving violence against civilians, totalling 114 incidents in all four election days (*see Figure 1*). Furthermore, each election day witnessed heightened levels of incidents such as looting, intra-party confrontation, and armed clashes between state security forces and unidentified armed groups attempting to seize electoral materials. Vandalism and the destruction of electoral materials accounted for 25% of electoral violence incidents in approximately 2,000 polling units. Additionally, there were at least 38 election-related fatalities reported across Abia, Rivers, Kano, Kaduna, Ondo, Kogi, Ebonyi and Delta states, with the southern region of the country experiencing over 60% of all electoral violence incidents (*see Figure 1*).

The widespread occurrence of violence has primarily been attributed to the uneven deployment of security personnel, despite a significant number of them being dispatched to polling units. Considering the vast geographic expanse of the country, and the understanding that election security in Nigeria necessitates more than just stationing security officials at polling units but also employing tactical and roving teams, the over 450,000 personnel was deemed insufficient. If the promised two security officials were indeed stationed at each polling unit, units would consume more than three-fourths of the personnel, leaving less than a quarter for roving teams. Consequently, CDD observers in certain polling units, particularly in the South-East, reported a complete absence of security personnel. Moreover, security officials often displayed reluctance to intervene and prevent violent incidents, resulting in repeated skirmishes and altercations between voters, party agents and party officials.

As a result, the presence of security agencies did not serve as a deterrent to political violence or voter manipulation. Videos obtained from CDD observers captured voter trading occurring openly, including in the presence of security agents assigned to polling units in Bauchi, Enugu, Bayelsa, Imo and Lagos. In some cases, citizens took it upon themselves to safeguard their ballots, with youths establishing barricades polling units in Ekiti to counter attempts by political thugs to disrupt the process.

Despite the security breaches that characterised the election, there were notable instances where actions taken by security agencies successfully prevented malpractices. These instances included the interception of 32.4m naira meant for vote-buying by agents from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Lagos,[13] the apprehension of youths armed with knives by state security agents in Ondo, and the thwarting of an effort to snatch ballot boxes in Abia by mobilised security agents.[14] Additionally, in Bayelsa, 13 gunmen who impersonated security personnel were apprehended by the Operation Delta Safe Joint Task Force Command in Nembe Local Government Area.[15] Moreover, during the off-cycle elections conducted in November, security operatives reportedly thwarted an attempt by political thugs to abduct officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Imo state.

According to reports by the Inspector-General of Police, at least 795 arrests were made during the election period.[16] This figure comprises 203 individuals apprehended during the presidential election, an additional 578 during the Governorship and State Assembly polls, and 14 individuals during the off-cycle elections for various violations of electoral laws. However, to date, the ultimate outcomes of the prosecution of these cases are yet to be determined.

[13] Kunle Sanni, 'EFCC intercepts N32.4m allegedly meant for vote buying,' Premium Times, 24 February 2023
[14] Vanguard (Nigeria), 'Abia: Police foil attempt to snatch ballot boxes at Osisioma,' 18 March 2023
[15] Akam James, 'Tension in Bayelsa community over invasion by unidentified policemen,' Daily Post (Nigeria), 13 August 2023
[16] Mohammed Babangida, '2023 Elections: Nigeria police apprehend 781 suspected electoral offenders,' Premium Times, 27 March 2023;
Makua Ubanagu, 'EFCC arrests 14 for alleged vote buying in Bayelsa, Imo, Kogi,' Punch Newspaper, 11 November 2023

Post-Election Security Assessment

<u>State-Society Relations</u>

The Nigeria 2023 elections were characterised by issues of identity and marginalisation, abuse of power by incumbents, and judicial interference, all of which persistently influence state-society relations and contribute to citizen disillusionment with the democratic process and democratic ways of conflict resolution. Indeed, citizens are less likely to engage with elections perceived to be unduly influenced, leading to increased voter apathy. Additionally, citizen disillusionment with the electoral process often results in participants seeking alternate means to ensure the electoral success of their preferred candidate. The result is then a sense that electoral violence, either proactively carried out or reciprocated, is the best way to mitigate against being 'cheated' out of an election result.

Identity and Marginalisation

Identity has emerged as a significant concern in the context of 2023 elections, particularly due to the concentration of power that elected officials hold at both national and state levels. Presidents and governors wield substantial authority in making appointments, ranging from cabinet members to heads of different departments and agencies. Concerns about being marginalised or not favourably considered have prompted certain groups to advocate for seeking the election of candidates perceived to represent their interests.

As a driver of electoral violence, this has significant implications. First, communities seeking representation at the federal and state levels are likely to perceive electoral malpractice as an intentional act to further marginalise and reduce their ability to win elections, potentially leading to attacks and reprisal attacks from armed personnel and rival groups. For instance, during the February elections, Peter Obi's candidacy played a pivotal role in altering the expected electoral dynamics in the South-East. The prospect of having the first president from the South-East since the era of the largely ceremonial Nnamdi Azikiwe (1960 – 66) garnered significant attention from citizens, leading to substantial voter registration drives in support of his candidacy.

In an election characterised by identity-related discourse and campaigns, efforts were made to link Obi's popularity to an implied tacit endorsement by the secessionist Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) group and his potential support for their cause. Although he neither claimed nor supported such an assertion, it was evident that the campaign tapped into a reservoir of support in the region that IPOB had previously monopolised. Obi secured victory in the presidential vote in all five states of the region, with the lowest margin being 77% in Imo and the highest being 95% in his home state of Anambra.

However, in a national election with various contests, opposition parties sought to establish their own successes despite Obi's popularity. This resulted in reported clashes in states like Ebonyi, where the APC secured the governorship and senate seats, and in Enugu, where a closely contested race led to the PDP retaining the governor seat. Although Obi has called for calm following the disputed February election results, there is a growing concern that the South-East region could become more insecure if the current administration fails to address marginalisation concerns.

Incumbency and the Abuse of Power

Closely tied to concerns about ethnic groups being marginalised is the fear of incumbent politicians and parties abusing control of power. While legislators are more susceptible to high turnovers in office, few executive office holders have been defeated in bids for re-election. This is attributed to incumbents' ability to control access and patronage within their states, and there is awareness among most parties that control of a state, as well as the governorship, provides the needed and necessary funding for future campaigns.

Throughout the 2023 election period, several instances of incumbents abusing power were reported. In Imo and Kogi, there were reports of governors buying out hotels to prevent opposition party members from staying in rooms during campaigns. Well-documented instances also exist of governors denying access to large state-owned grounds, such as stadiums and large halls, in an effort to frustrate and minimise crowds during opposition campaign rallies. These issues have led to deep-seated frustration and created an inflated sense of urgency during elections, fostering a 'do-or-die' environment to maintain these powers.

Such control can serve as motivation for groups to conduct violent attacks during elections, aiming to enhance their prospects of seizing power. Additionally, in certain instances, influential politicians and local chieftains personally engage in actions to garner favour with the winning candidate. Indeed, a politician's effectiveness is often measured by their ability to secure votes in their respective spheres of influence, driving an intensified effort to prove their efficacy and utilise the powers of the state to achieve these goals.

Judicial Involvement

The increasingly outsized influence of the judiciary in determining electoral outcomes is another major driver of conflicts related to elections. Citizens have expressed concerns that politicians exploit these judicial actions to secure office through the courts.

The 2022 amendment to the electoral act, for instance, included key provisions aimed at detailing processes for parties to replace candidates and address pre-election grievances, with the goal of reducing post-election litigation. However, the 2023 elections alone witnessed judicial decisions overturning several election results. Notably, the electoral tribunal and the Appeal Court upheld

decisions to remove Abba Yusuf as governor of populous Kano State after the defeat of the ruling party by Kwankwaso's NNPP. In Plateau State, the entire delegation to the National Assembly was removed by the courts, followed by a similar announcement to remove Governor Caleb Muftwang. Both Yusuf and Muftwang have indicated a desire to appeal to the Supreme Court, where, if the court upholds the decisions of the lower courts, they will both be removed. In Zamfara, while the court ruling did not remove the governor, it demanded a rerun of the election in several areas of the state, potentially leading to a change in the electoral outcome. It is also worth noting that the initial tribunal ruling removing the governor of Nasarawa, Abdullahi Sule, was overturned by the higher Appeal Court.

The perception of an outsized influence by the judiciary is often fueled by concerns that politicians, especially those in ruling parties, can abuse the power of appointing judges to ensure favourable rulings. This leads to more politically heightened environments and conflict, especially in elections that are keenly contested, as supporters of an aggrieved party seek to make clear statements against perceived injustice in being removed from power.

Emerging Security Trends

As noted above, the 2023 election holds significant implications for Nigeria's security. The new government inherited a range of challenges from the previous Buhari administration, including high unemployment, inflation, record debt, widespread insecurity, and massive oil theft draining the country's national reserves and revenue. ACLED data also reveal that following a lull in violent activity when the administration took office in May 2023, violence increased in the following months through to November, remaining at heightened levels in October.

Assessing Nigeria's Security Landscape

Proportions of Political Violence by Zone
May - November 2023

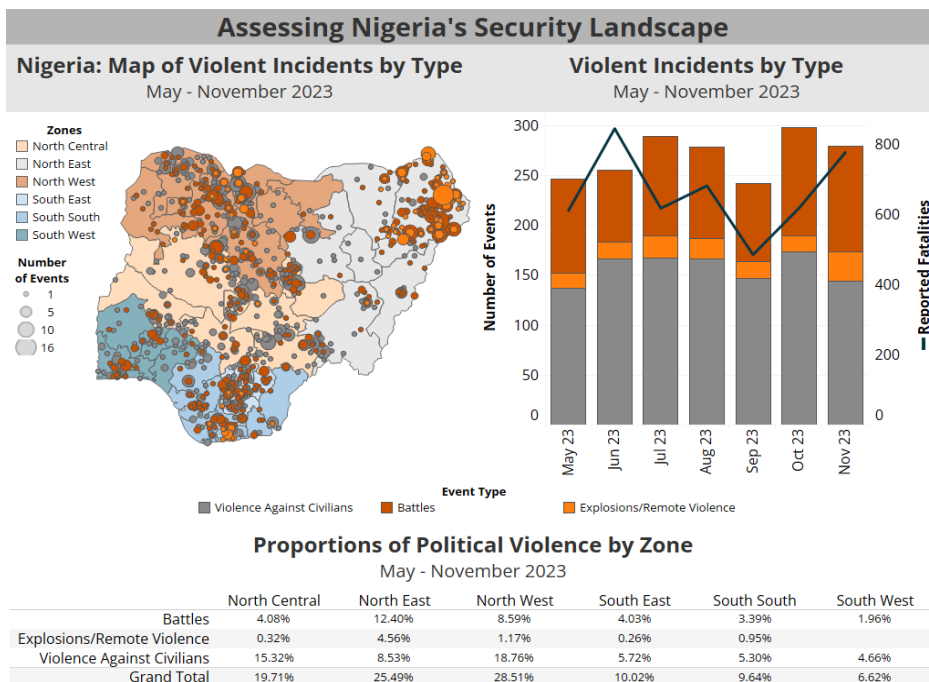|	North Central	North East	North West	South East	South South	South West
Battles	4.08%	12.40%	8.59%	4.03%	3.39%	1.96%
Explosions/Remote Violence	0.32%	4.56%	1.17%	0.26%	0.95%	
Violence Against Civilians	15.32%	8.53%	18.76%	5.72%	5.30%	4.66%
Grand Total	19.71%	25.49%	28.51%	10.02%	9.64%	6.62%

Fig 2 – Nigeria Map of Violent Incidents by Type (May 2023 – Nov 2023)

Much of this violence continues to be centred in the north of the country. While the North-East remains the most vulnerable region, reporting the highest number of fatalities resulting from the Boko Haram insurgency since May 2023, the North-West region leads in the number of violent events during the same period. This is primarily due to the prevalence of armed banditry in the region, with the violence reported in these areas further intensifying tensions in neighbouring regions, including North-Central, South-South, and South-East (*see Figure 2*). Moreover, the arming and mobilisation of non-state actors by political figures for election purposes could exacerbate the state of insecurity in the country. Evidence from previous elections shows that armed groups utilise the financial and military resources acquired during the electoral cycle to perpetuate various forms of political violence, including kidnapping, banditry, and militant insurgency in the post-election era.[17] Trendlines in Figure 2 indicate a steady increase in the number of violent incidents and fatalities since May 2023, despite the military's sustained campaigns in the North-East, coupled with the government's proposed amnesty programs aimed at addressing the banditry issue in the North-West and North-Central regions.[18] Furthermore, Nigeria continues to grapple with a significant upsurge in incidents involving violence against civilians. Among the three reported categories since May, when the new administration took power, violence against civilians constituted nearly 60% of the total number of recorded violent events.

The legality of the disputed February presidential elections may also continue to have implications for the political stability of the country. ACLED data records 17 demonstration events related to electoral malpractice and the presidential election results, with demonstrators claiming irregularities and accusing INEC of violating the law by not using electronic machines to upload results from polling stations. Although the country's Supreme Court affirmed Tinubu's election win on 26 October, revelations concerning the forgery of a university certificate that Tinubu submitted to INEC ahead of the elections only intensified opposition and calls for his resignation.

Governance Risks

The electoral violence in the 2023 elections in Nigeria has further eroded the fabric of social cohesion among the multitude of ethnic and religious groups in the country, posing the risk of rekindling dormant ethno-religious conflicts. Particularly in states where specific communities feel marginalised due to unequal access to political power and violence deployed against them, the resultant effect is that many of the political leaders elected will face legitimacy crises. The deployment of violence in elections has also created a ready army of people drawing inspiration from political thugs, especially those rewarded with appointments in the government. The sense of disenchantment among citizens has the potential to foster an environment where extremist groups can easily recruit disaffected individuals. In all geopolitical zones in the country, non-state armed groups have become intertwined with political instability.

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[17] Human Rights Watch 'Politics as War: The Human Rights Impact and Causes of Post-Election Violence in Rivers State, Nigeria' 27 2008
[18] Nkechi Onyedika-Ugoeze, 'Insecurity: Niger proposes amnesty to bandits,' The Guardian (Nigeria), 30 August 2023; Leadership (Nigeria), 'After Suffering Casualties, Bandit Kingpins Beg For Amnesty In North-West, August 2023

Studies have documented that the proliferation of arms in Nigeria is linked to electoral violence.[19] During elections, arms and weapons have become the principal driving force, with politicians providing arms, weapons, and military gear to privately funded militias who use them to intimidate rival politicians and supporters. The irony of arms and weapon proliferation during Nigerian elections is that a significant portion remains in the hands of private militias, contributing to new security threats and aggravating existing ones.[20]

Furthermore, Nigeria's political landscape continues to be characterised by intricate networks of patronage, where loyalty to a political patron is rewarded with political appointments, access to state resources, and other privileges. This relationship creates a system where a successful candidate owes their political ascension to their patrons, fostering a deep sense of indebtedness. Once in power, elected officials may use state resources to reciprocate the favour bestowed upon them by their patrons. This often results in a diversion of public funds and resources toward projects and initiatives that serve the interests of the patron rather than those of the broader populace. Infrastructure development, social programs, and other initiatives take a back seat to political considerations, hindering overall socio-economic progress. When elected candidates refuse to carry out the bidding of their patrons after assuming power, political crises often ensue. The withdrawal of support can lead to internal party conflicts, policy reversals, and a breakdown in governance. In extreme cases, these tensions escalate into political violence, diverting attention from essential issues of governance and exacerbating social instability.

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[19] Frank-Collins N. Okafor & Agu Chinonyelum F, 2021. "Arms Proliferation and Electoral Violence in West African sub-region: A Study of 2019 General Elections in Nigeria," International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS), vol. 5(10), pages 686-691, October.
[20] According to the Small Arms Survey in 2020, Nigeria had an estimated 6.2 million arms in the hands of civilians, excluding those of the military and law enforcement agencies. This means that 3.21 per 100 persons in Nigeria possess firearms, whereas only 224,200 and 362,400 guns were in the possession of the military and other law enforcement agencies, respectively. Small Arms Survey 'Nigeria: National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey' August 2 021

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2023 Nigerian general election marked a critical juncture in the nation's history, carrying significant implications for its political stability and security landscape. This report examined the election process, security measures implemented and post-election security trends.

Leading up to, and during, the election, the security situation was complex, with distinct challenges in various regions. To maintain order during the election, the government deployed a substantial number of security personnel which helped avert major disruptions by known non-state violent actors. However, electoral violence still occurred, notably featuring voter intimidation, identity politics, and clashes between security forces and unidentified armed groups being notable issues. The post-election security review additionally reveals emerging trends that policymakers and stakeholders must address to mitigate potential violence and improve state-society relations.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

- Comprehensive electoral reform be carried out to address issues of voter intimidation, identity politics, and violence in future elections. The Nigerian government should especially promote the use of technology, such as electronic voting, to enhance transparency and reduce electoral violence.

- Where applicable, necessary amendments to existing legislation should be made well in advance of the 2027 elections. This will help address the major charges levelled by opposition parties at the tribunals and mitigate the potential divisive rhetoric and activities during the proceedings.

- Similar to the approaches taken in the North-West and North-Central, initiatives aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation in regions, such as the South-East, should be prioritised. The South–East region has exhibited a strong desire for political representation at the national level as demonstrated by Peter Obi's popularity in the 2023 election. Dialogue and efforts to address the root causes of unrest should therefore be pursued to prevent potential unrest and violence in the upcoming off-cycle elections.

- Efforts should be made to improve synergy between federal and state governments in addressing insecurity. This is because both levels of government have important roles to play in resolving conflicts and building the resilience of affected communities.

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About CDD

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit, research training, advocacy and capacity building organisation. The Centre was established to mobilize global opinion and resources for democratic development and provide an independent space to reflect critically on the challenges posed to democratization and development processes in West Africa, and to provide alternatives and best practices to the sustenance of democracy and development in the region. CDD envisions a West Africa that is democratically governed, economically integrated – promoting human security and people-centered development. The mission of the Centre is to be the prime catalyst and facilitator for strategic analysis and capacity-building for sustainable democracy and development in the West African sub-region.

About ACLED

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is a disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping project. ACLED collects information on the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events around the world. The ACLED team conducts analysis to describe, explore, and test conflict scenarios, and makes both data and analysis open for free use by the public. ACLED is the leading source of real-time data on political violence and protest activity around the world. It regularly provides the media with the latest figures on conflict events and fatalities, commentary on trends and dynamics, insight into ACLED data collection methodology, and more.

This report follows a partnership between CDD-West Africa and ACLED on monitoring the state of security in the 2023 Nigerian elections. Both organisations partnered on the Nigeria Election Violence Tracker, which was a platform developed by ACLED and CDD to monitor patterns of political violence around the 2023 Nigerian general election. The project resulted in seven fortnightly situation summaries in the lead-up to the elections and an interactive dashboard accessible on the ACLED site.

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