



RULE OF LAW AND EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE
also known as **PARTNERS** WEST AFRICA NIGERIA



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Gender-Based Pre-2023 Election Security Threat Assessment In Nigeria

Editors:

Maurice Ogbonnaya & 'Kemi Okenyodo

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The Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative also known as Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN) has since inception been involved in the advocacy for gender mainstreaming across the criminal justice and governance sectors in Nigeria. Since 2018, PWAN has specifically been engaging in the discourse for increased participation and representation of women in governance. Over the years, PWAN has observed that targeted violence against women and insecurity are deliberate towards undermining their role and significance in the political process. This is among the greatest factors that impede their participation, as all other factors can be categorised as elements that contribute to the insecurity of women.

Given Nigeria's commitment to several international frameworks for the achievement of gender equality, the upcoming 2023 general elections provide another opportunity to focus on addressing the underlying issues and ensuring that women's voices are heard.

It is based on this that PWAN seeks to provide capacity building for security agencies on the effective management of security and integration of gender-sensitive protection strategies in the elections. The first step in achieving this is the production of this report which is a pre-election gender-based security threat assessment in Nigeria. It aims to highlight likely security threats undermining the participation of women in events leading up to the elections. This is with the view of promoting accountability among state and non-state actors in the electoral process before the elections.

The development of this report would not have been possible without the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). PWAN seeks to express its gratitude to the institution for its continuous support for democratic reforms in Nigeria. The six geopolitical zones of the country were assessed alongside a thematic assessment of threats to women who will be deployed for election duties. The report was made possible by a team of researchers, working in collaboration with PWAN. They are Prof. Freedom Onuoha, Mr Solomon Akpanufot, Ms Tolu Ojeshina, Dr Chris Kwaja, Dr Chukwuma Okoli, and Mr Peter Sesan. We would also like to appreciate Dr Maurice Ogbonnaya for the thematic assessment and for providing the expertise.

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CHAPTER 1

GENDER-BASED PRE-2023 ELECTION SECURITY THREAT ASSESSMENT IN NIGERIA BY MAURICE OGBONNAYA

Introduction

Despite the experience of having six successive elected governments since the return to democracy in May 1999, Nigeria's democratic experience has not expanded opportunities for meaningful participation and representation of women in politics and governance. In the 2019 general elections, for instance, out of the 109 Senatorial seats, women occupied seven and out of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives, women occupied only 11 seats. This is against the background of women accounting for about 47.14 per cent (39,598,645 million) of the 84,004,084 million registered voters nationwide in 2019.

Violence and insecurity, among other factors, contribute to the low level of women's participation in politics and decision-making in Nigeria. Every election in Nigeria presents peculiar security threats and different scenarios, especially for women. In 2019, two political women leaders were killed and some female election officials, as well as security personnel, were raped. The 2023 elections may not be an exception. Highlighting the issues will draw attention to the urgent need to address the threats. This report assesses security threats that women in Nigeria are likely to face before the 2023 general elections. The assessment focused on general security threats that women face as voters, candidates, election observers, election officials, and election security officers, among others. Conducted across the six geopolitical zones, the assessment covered March to October 2022, which is the period that the political parties held their party primaries and subsequently bagged off their official political campaigns.

Shortly after the 2011 general elections, The Economics, in a feature piece asserted that results in Nigerian elections come in two separate columns. One records the votes cast at polling stations; the other, the number of people killed around the time of the election. The import of the assertion is that elections in Nigeria precipitate violence, which includes any act perpetrated to disrupt political activities during the pre, during and post-election periods. The violence is indicated by acts of political thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings and voting at polling stations, use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral actors, as well as the cause of bodily harm or injury to any person or persons connected with the electoral process. Election violence also includes violent clashes between political party supporters that take place at campaign events, attacks on or assassination of existing

or aspiring Politicians, and burning and destruction of political structures, and campaign posters, among others.

The Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (NCSSR) which has its secretariat in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) has identified factors that give rise to and sustain election violence including.

- The wider insecurity across the country and the tendency for causal social forces to exploit political processes in pursuit of their interests, have continued to negatively impact the electoral process.
- The dependency of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) on security agencies to provide security during elections could lead to such agencies being overstretched, particularly in a large country like Nigeria with 155,000 voting points and 9,000 collation centres: and
- Ignorance of electoral personnel about security issues like crowd management, dealing with suspicious persons, risk management, recognition of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) etc.

Other factors also that may give rise to and sustain electoral violence are,

- Irregularities from INEC (such as operational and logistical issues, political parties, and citizens in the voting process
- ii. Inadequate training of ad-hoc staff on the election process which sometimes may result in irregularities.

Sustained insecurity that precipitates violence hinders the effective participation of women in the electoral process as voters, candidates, election observers, election officials, and election security officers, among others. They undermine the legitimacy of electoral processes and the acceptability of outcomes. Thus, a major challenge to elections in Nigeria, has since the return to constitutional order in 1999, remained the conduct of violence-free elections. Against this background, security agencies and government institutions, collaborate with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to deploy individuals, including women for elections as election observers, election officials and election security officers to manage and monitor the process.

Agencies and Institutions Deploying for Observation and Election Duties
 In the 2023 general elections, security agencies, under the aegis of Inter-Agency Consultative Election Security (ICCES), will deploy their personnel on election security. Structurally, 19 agencies constitute the ICCES, as shown in the table below.

Composition of the Inter-Agency Consultative Election Security

Security Agencies			Non-Security Agencies
Intelligence Community	Armed Forces and Police	Para-Military	
Office of National Security Adviser (ONSA)	Nigeria Army	Nigeria Immigration Service	Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)
Department of State Service (DSS)	Nigerian Navy	Nigeria Correctional Service	Police Service Commission
National Intelligence Agency (NIA)	Nigeria Air force	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency	Ministry of Interior
	Nigeria Police Force (NPF)	Nigeria Customs Service	Ministry of Police Affairs
		Federal Road Safety Corps	National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)
		Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)	
		Federal Fire Service	

Source: Author's Compilation

According to the NCSSR, the general essence of the ICCES is to review past elections, towards lessons learnt, discussion forthcoming elections, to prepare a general plan for all the security challenges anticipated at such elections. All security issues are deliberated upon and strategies for combating security challenges are formulated towards having a violence-free election. Security agencies would before each election, provide the ICCES with a security assessment, the location of hot spots, as well as steps taken to deal with identified hotspots. Furthermore, each security agency provides an operational plan, which is jointly reviewed by ICCES and sometimes amended to ensure the best results are achieved.

Geopolitical Contexts

The Southeast zone is made up of Five States: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. According to the 2006 census, the population of the region is 16,395,555. The zone, however, has the highest population density compared to other zones in Nigeria and is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo-speaking ethnic group.

Since the agitation for a Sovereign State of Biafra began in 2015 and degenerated in 2017 to the prescription of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a terrorist organization. The region recently become an epicentre of security crisis with a spike in assassinations, kidnapping for ransom (K4R), drug abuse, rape, cultism, violent separatist agitations, farmer-herder clashes, and more recently violence by a group commonly referred to as "Unknown Gunmen" (UGM). In response to insecurity, state governors in the Southeast zone floated a regional security framework, the *Ebubeagu*. However, loosely structured, and poorly regulated elements of Ebubeagu, which is largely operative in Ebonyi and Imo States, have been accused of engaging in incessant harassment, intimidation, and extra-judicial killings.

There are six states in the South-South zone: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers, and is known for ethnic diversities. It has a population of about 26 million people and encloses most of Nigeria's Niger Delta. Conflict in the zone is largely induced by the unwillingness of foreign oil corporations and successive Nigerian governments to sustainably address the concerns of the people as regards the impact of oil exploration and exploitation in the region. Thus, it is important to state that the struggle for resource control, environmental justice, and sustainable development has fuelled violence and birthed ethnic militia groups in the region. Consequently, it has also largely defined the politics of the region and elections are usually high stakes. Recently, the zone has been devastated by floods which displaced hundreds of households and brought untold hardship to the people. As a result, most women and girls were moved to IDP camps where they are being subjected to hunger and starvation and experienced all forms of violence including rape. Again, sporadic violence has brought about increased tension and insecurity in some States in the zone. On 1st November 2022, an unidentified group killed an estimated 10 people in Akoko Edo, Edo State. In an election-related event, 120 people have been killed and kidnapped in election violence in the zone between 2014 to 2022. Of these, 10 occurred in Akwa Ibom, 20 in Bayelsa, 11 in Cross River, 20 in Delta, 3 in Edo, and 56 in Rivers States, respectively.

Leading to 2023, the zone is witnessing a series of pre-election violence. Five such attacks have been recorded in Akwa Ibom State while four occurred in Cross River State. Sources of those threats are militant/cult groups, Political parties, politicians, candidates, political thugs, disorderly party rallies, processions, and campaigns. It is significant to note that every election period in the region under review, militant groups often perfect plans to deploy their members to polling units across the zone.

The presence of such militant groups weakens the deployment and threatens the willingness of women as election observers, officials, or election security officials. More men are deployed because it is assumed that they are physically stronger and capable of resisting threats.

The Southwest region is made up of six states: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo States primarily inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group. According to the 2006 population census, the population of the region is 27,722,432; Lagos is the economic hub of the country, and most populous with a population of 9,113,605, and Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo state, is the country's largest city by geographical area. The region has been impacted by security challenges such as robbery attacks, cultist activities, ritual killings, and kidnappings over the years. The death of no fewer than 11 people was recorded at Igangan town, Oyo State in June 2021. Also in 2021, 88ve people lost their lives while many sustained injuries in clashes that happened in Imeko, Afon Local Government Area (LGA) of Ogun State.

Based on the security challenges, in 2020, the Southwest Governors forum established a security network known as "*Operation Amotekun*" to strengthen security in the region. On June 5th, 2022, unknown gunmen invaded St. Francis Catholic Church, Owo, Ondo state opening 88re on the congregation, and detonating explosives as worshippers scampered for safety. According to reports, the total casualty 88gures from the attack was 127, including 40 dead. This attack changed the dynamic of the security situation in the region, with many suggesting that the attack was perpetuated by the terrorist group Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). For the most part, the growing violence has strained social cohesion and threatened regional security and stability leading to heightened calls for secession and the creation of the Yoruba nation. A group called the Yoruba Self-Determined Movement (YSDM) has also recently written to President Muhammadu Buhari, seeking a "peaceful break away" of Yorubas from Nigeria.

The North Central comprises six States namely Kogi, Kwara, Benue, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau. These states are largely heterogeneous in terms of religion and ethnicity. Leading to 2023, more political parties are increasingly engaging, unlike the previous elections where states are dominated predominantly by a party or two.

Nigeria's Northeast zone has, over the last decade, been embroiled in an insurgency associated with Boko Haram, which has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis.

According to a 2017 report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 14 million people across the six states in the zone were estimated to have been affected by the conflict. Recent statistics also estimate the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance at 7.1 million. Thousands of lives have been lost and about 2 million people are internally displaced. Since 2013, women and girls in communities attacked by Boko Haram subjected to abduction, imprisonment, rape, 'forced marriage' and forced religious conversion. Many men have also been kidnapped or killed. Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) states have been mostly affected by the conflicts. Other sources of violence in the states include conflict over natural resources between pastoralists and farmers. In addition, there have been significant incidences of rural banditry (especially cattle theft), other forms of violent crime, and gender-based violence. Taraba, Bauchi and Gombe States are also not immune to the conflicts in the region.

The most prominent case of women's bold attempt at engaging the electoral process was the elected election of Aishatu Binani as the flag bearer of the APC in the gubernatorial election in Adamawa State. Unfortunately, after a series of controversies within the APC, Binani's candidature was nullified by a high court in Adamawa State. The APC has resorted to an appeal of the judgement, which might either reverse or sustain the judgement of the high court. There is a sense in which the high costs associated with the sale of expression of interest and nomination forms might have been a primary cause of women women's disempowerment in the electoral process.

The northwest comprises seven states, namely: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara. The region is the epicentre of Nigeria's Islamic culture, with a preponderance of Muslims that subscribe to the conservative Salafist Salafist precepts of unequal gender relations. In northern Islamic Nigeria, prevailing traditions order society so power is unequally distributed between sexes. Almost all institutions and social processes in the region reproduce and exert the dominance of men over women, with existing dominance in Nigeria rooted in Salafism. This is a version of Islam that rejects religious novelty and perpetuates unequal distribution of power between men and women. Given the conservative Islamic tradition, socio-cultural, socio-economic and political indices hold critical implications for gender-political relations. A relevant report published in 2013 indicates that the region hosts five of the eight states in Nigeria with the worst records of girl-child education. The situation has been worsened by the combined threat of banditry and terrorism, which has escalated

the social vulnerabilities of women and girls in the region. This is indicated in the incessant abduction of schoolgirls by bandits, posing a particular threat to safe schooling, driving many girls out of school and premature marriage. Again, regarding women's stake as candidates, INEC's records show that only 118 female candidates out of 3,204 in the region have been elected as candidates of their various political parties to run for different elective positions in 2023.

Key highlights of the major threats to women's participation in the 2023 elections

There is currently no information on the deployment of officials or the number and disaggregation of personnel to be deployed from the security and government agencies across the country. However, given the above contexts, there is a tendency for the minimal deployment of women, especially female security officers, for the 2023 elections. This is due to the existing male-female composition and recruitment of officers in security institutions in Nigeria which has a low number of women. The following are key pre-election threats to women's participation as security officers, voters, candidates, and election officials in 2023.

S/N	THREAT CATEGORIES	RISK ASSESSMENTS	GEOPOLITICAL ZONES ASSESSMENT					
			NORTHEAST	NORTH CENTRAL	NORTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	SOUTH-SOUTH	SOUTHWEST
		NATIONWIDE HIGH (H), MEDIUM (M), LOW (L)						
1.	Fear of violence	High	H	H	H	H	H	H
2.	Excessive presence and/or use of force by security agencies.	High	H	H	H	H	H	H
3.	Drug abuse	Low	L	L	L	H	H	L
4.	Attacks by armed groups	High	H	H	H	H	H	H
5.	Political bullying, intimidation, and harassment of women	High	H	H	H	M	M	H
6.	Discrimination and alienation of women	Medium	H	M	H	M	M	H
7.	Sexual violence	High	H	H	H	H	H	H
8.	Ritual killings	Low	L	L	L	H	S	H
9.	Abductions/kidnappings	Medium	M	M	M	H	M	M
10.	Disenfranchisement and uneven contests (largely caused by irregularities in the electoral process).	Medium	M	M	M	M	M	M
11.	Restricting political parties from campaigning in public places	Low	L	L	L	L	H	M
12.	Physical violence	High	H	H	H Some men are sexists	H	H	H
13.	Cultural norms and social prejudice.	High	H	H	H	M	M	M

Recommendations

Based on all the findings, the following are key recommendations that should be implemented to alleviate the security threats to women and encourage their participation in the 2023 elections.

- The Federal Government should overhaul Nigeria's security architecture to ensure the inclusion of more women both in the security institutions and in the process of designing and implementing security responses to current and emerging threats in the region.

- INEC should conduct a thorough clean-up of the national voters' register and post it in due time before the elections to enable voters to clarify their voting statuses. This will prevent disenfranchisement of intending voters in the elections, especially in regions where women constitute the higher population of registered voters.
- INEC should ensure the inclusion of more women in the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) at the federal, state and local government levels. It should also develop and disseminate the implementation plan and framework for the revised INEC Gender Policy, which provides concrete guidelines for promoting effective and safe participation of women in the elections.
- Implementation of the INEC Updated Gender Policy: While the gender policy provides concrete guidelines for promoting the effective and safe participation of women in the elections, an implementation plan is necessary. INEC is urged to produce and disseminate the implementation plan/framework referenced in the updated gender policy to ensure adequate representation of women deployed as election officials for the 2023 general elections.
- Capacity Building for Election Security Officials On Gender Issues: It is important that efforts to upskill security officials towards deployment during the 2023 general elections, should include gender perspectives, and how to ensure women voters are kept safe during the election period.
- National Assembly should enact legislation to establish an Electoral Offences Commission to deal with the rising incidence of election violence, especially against women and other electoral offences.

- Security agencies should investigate pre-election violence, especially gender-based ones, and bring perpetrators to book. This will go a long way to improve participation in the elections.
- INEC should
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), including the media should mount pressure on security agencies to be more accountable and gender-sensitive in security provisioning. They should also partner with development partners and security experts to design and deliver bespoke security awareness training packages for female candidates to prepare them to effectively anticipate, respond and manage the risk of violence. They should also conduct sensitization campaigns for the public on electoral offences and penalties as outlined in the Electoral Act, 2022.
- CSOs, political parties and security agencies should collaborate to ensure a proper gender disaggregation of election observers, election officials and election security personnel to be deployed on election duty.
- Political Parties Code of Conduct: Political parties must caution their members from verbally abusing, bullying, and intimidating female politicians. The campaign process need not malign political counterparts, especially female politicians who are already often underestimated and disregarded. Parties must be compelled to abide by the provisions of the Electoral Act, 2022.

Conclusion

Despite considerable progress over the last decade to promote the participation of women in politics in Nigeria, there are evident gaps related to their roles in decision-making within political parties and the electoral process. The electoral process in Nigeria has, therefore, not been sufficiently gender friendly. Across the various zones, it is characterized by conditions and occurrences that impede safe and effective women's participation as voters, contestants, or on-duty personnel. The factors that undermine the electoral participation of women derive from a variety of socio-economic, socio-cultural, political, and socio-biological systems of society.

From across the zones in the country, this assessment, which explored the context, nature, patterns and implications of the prevailing threats to women's participation in the electoral process ahead of the 2023 polls, suggests that having women in key and strategic leadership roles has a positive effect on their ability and capacity to influence

and the process and outcome of the electoral process in the run-up to the 2023 elections. Considering the manifestations of such threats vis-à-vis the various roles played by women in the electoral process, it is posited in this report that women in such contexts are exposed to multiple gender-based vulnerabilities, which impede their safe and effective involvement. There is a need for a reform of the electoral process to guarantee women's participation without fear or hindrance, the prospect of democratic participation and inclusion in Nigeria in the coming 2023 general elections will remain wishful thinking.

Contact Us

 (123) 456 7890

 info@partnersnigeria.org

 www.partnersnigeria.org

 46b, Mike Akhigbe, Jabi, Abuja

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