



RULE OF LAW AND EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE
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FACT SHEET NINE

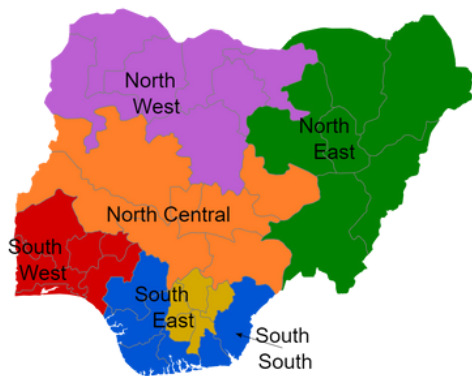
GENDER-BASED SECURITY THREAT ASSESSMENT OF 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA: VOLUME III

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INTRODUCTION

Every election in Nigeria brings unique security challenges and circumstances, particularly for women, and the 2023 polls were no exception. Women faced violence which manifested in various forms, scales, and dimensions; physical attacks, suppression, and intimidation across the country particularly in the South-South, Northwest, Northcentral, Southwest, and Southeast geographical zones.



At least 39 persons were reported to have lost their lives in different parts of the country during the polls. Those who lost their lives during the elections include voters, party agents, policemen, politicians, hired thugs, and ad hoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC.

PWAN conducted a gender-based assessment that examined the threats to women's participation in the 2023 general elections with a focus on the pre, during, post elections as well as the election petition tribunals. The study covered the six geopolitical zones of the country.

Highlighting the findings from the assessment will draw attention to the urgent need to address possible security challenges that could affect women's participation in the off-cycle elections scheduled to take place in Imo, Bayelsa, and Kogi states on Saturday, 11th November 2023.

Below are some of the findings from the assessment with a focus on the North-Central, South-East, and South-South which are the major geographical zones where the off-cycle elections will take place.

➤➤➤ South-East

Findings from the assessment show that women in the region are threatened by security challenges such as kidnapping for ransom, rape, attacks by unknown gunmen, ritual killing, and attacks by herdsmen, among others. Post-election security challenges to women in the region will likely impact negatively on the perception of women and girls who aspire to participate in politics and women's participation in future elections in the region.

Between 4-27 March 2023, UGM attacked police and civil defence corps personnel, killing at least six in Anambra, Enugu and Imo States.[1] On 6 and 21 April 2023, the group killed at least six policemen in Aboh Mbaise and Ngor Okpala areas, Imo state. On 4 May 2023, UGM also killed three policemen during an attack at a military checkpoint in Umunze, Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State, and on 24 May, gunmen killed three police officers on a stop and search duty at Oshiri Divisional Police Headquarters in Ebonyi State. The attacks indicate the severity of the challenge to the region, especially for women. Women who are development and social workers are also vulnerable to attacks by gunmen in the region.

On 16 May 2023, a convoy of United States Embassy staff on a humanitarian mission was attacked in Atani, Anambra State, killing two civilians and two police officers. The gunmen also kidnapped three others, a driver and two other police officers, during the attack.

Although the gender of those killed or kidnapped was not specified, the attack no doubt had serious security implications for residents of the region irrespective of gender.

Another security threat women faced in the Southeast was ritual killing. Ritual killing in the region is perpetrated for various reasons, including the quest for protection, political power, and wealth, as well as organ harvesting and cultural influence. In particular, women in Anambra State, have been victims of ritual killing since the 2023 elections.

In mid-March 2023, commercial activities in the Umunze Community, Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State, were shut down when women numbering over 3000 took to the streets to protest the murder of a 72-year-old woman, by three suspected ritualists believed to be from Abakiliki in Ebonyi State.

The old woman was reportedly raped before her vital organs were harvested. There are reports of similar cases in some other parts of the State.

Most worryingly, women have also not been adequately represented in appointments into political positions since the inauguration of new governments in the region. Appointment of women into political positions across the region still falls short of the 35 percent affirmative agenda.

With the exception of Ebonyi State where a woman was elected Deputy Governor, and another appointed as Secretary to Government, women in the region have not been appointed outside the traditional gender-based agencies by State Governors.

➤➤➤ South-South

Elections in the South-South region are high stakes, often characterized by violence and tension, which take varied dimensions, including sexual, physical, psychological, threats, and coercion, with implications for the participation of women in the process. Across the region, the 2023 general elections witnessed different forms of violence, especially shootings in elections by armed political thugs, coercion and intimidation of voters, forceful disruption of the electoral process, and vandalization of electoral materials, as well as kidnapping, hate speech, and vote buying.

On the evening of the Presidential and National Assembly elections, violence erupted at the Igwuruta axis of Ikwerre Local Government Area, Rivers State, as angry youths took to the streets to protest an alleged attempt to tamper with the presidential election results. The protesting youths fired sporadic shots and vandalized vehicles traveling along the Igwuruta-Elele-Airport Road. Two persons were reportedly killed in Ward 12, Ubimini community, in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State. Members of the local vigilante group also fired gunshots, which led to the death of a woman.

In Delta State, the State Resident Electoral Commissioner, Monday Tom, confirmed that an INEC staff on duty was killed and corps members injured while returning to Asaba to deliver election results. In Akwa Ibom State, two persons were shot dead while two others sustained injuries in Etim Ekpo Local Government Area during the Presidential and National Assembly elections.

There were gunshots as early as 8 am in the area which scared away the INEC staff, observers, and other officials. Elections did not hold in Wards 5, 6 and 7 in the LGA.

➤➤➤ North Central

In the region, several factors are identified as sources of threat to the participation of women in political processes. While some are created by the presence of Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs), others are structural in nature. The inability of the government to address the issues of security holistically led to physical threat where armed groups such as bandits and kidnapers use small and light weapons to carry out their nefarious activities. This has become a potent threat that made women participation in politics a dreadful one. The other part that is structural in nature has to do with the level of finances of women to favourably compete with men in the current dispensation. Most women have no financial capacity to buy electoral forms and run campaign alongside their male counterparts in the political spheres.

The implication of the threat to women participation is that it has deprived women to actively participate as a result of fear and potential intimidation from electoral processes. The vulnerable nature of women has made it difficult for women to cope in the face of violence, insecurity and suppression.

For instance, in Katsina State, on 6 February, the APC cancelled its presidential road show after an armed group attacked villages in Bakori local government area, killing more than 100 people in the various communities.

Similarly in Kogi state, four major roads leading to the community of a female Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) senatorial candidate for Kogi Central, Natasha Akpoti, were destroyed to prevent INEC officials from getting to the communities which could have resulted her to losing the elections.

This made women to restrain themselves during the general elections because of the fear that such situation may not repeat itself in one form or another. Again, in the face of political uncertainty, families cautioned their female family members from involving in the electoral process because of the fear of the unknown. The threat recorded during the presidential elections was seen on the part of INEC's inability to upload results to the IREV and this became the major reason why there was low turnout during the State's elections.

➤➤➤ Conclusion

Elections are essential to the democratic process as they serve as a gauge of the strength or weakness of democracy in society. As a result, free, fair, credible, and universally acknowledged elections in which all eligible members of the society participate actively are critical to the democratic process.

Although women participated in the 2023 general elections in different capacities, the outcome, on all indicators, fell below expectations of improving the level of women's participation in politics as candidates, election security officials, election observers, and election officials.

Security threats such as physical attacks, violence, suppression, and intimidation

impeded the safe and effective participation of women during the elections and thus resulted in the low participation of women in the process.

Given the above and considering the upcoming off-cycle elections in Imo, Kogi, and Bayelsa states, there is a need for urgent interventions by all stakeholders in the electoral process that will guarantee the adequate participation of women in the political and governance processes.

➤➤➤ Way Forward

In order to mitigate the various security threats that affect the adequate participation of women in the electoral process in Nigeria, the following recommendations should be considered.

- Election security in Nigeria should be gender-focused and sensitive in orientation.
- Security agencies should take preventive efforts to mitigate existing election-related security dangers that discourage women from participating in the political process.
- Electoral administration and security strategies in Nigeria should be retooled to incorporate concrete and actionable measures to mitigate the vulnerabilities of women in the electoral process.
- Security agencies should curtail the proliferation and use of firearms and other weapons, as well as ensure appropriate sanctions for those implicated in thuggery and election violence.

- Non-governmental agencies that engage in election-related interventions should invest in programmes geared towards protecting vulnerable groups, especially women, from the inhibiting impact of electoral violence.
- Concerns of election security should be mainstreamed into the post-election activities of relevant stakeholders of the electoral process.
- Citizens should work with security agencies by reporting incidents/threats of violence, or perpetrators of violence.
- Effective policing in both urban and rural areas as a way of addressing impunity arising from criminality and banditry.
- Security agencies should take proactive measures to increase both the level of cooperation and the speed with which they respond to violence and insecurity. To do this, security agencies should work with key stakeholders such as religious and community leaders.