

Security and Nigeria's National Elections: A Civil Society View

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Introduction

Elections are as critical to the success of any democracy just as security is an essential ingredient of all successfully organized elections. Of the many challenges to the electoral process, security has become one element on which organisers of elections, contenders for political offices and the electorate are in agreement to be the pre-condition for a successful electoral process; given that it is practically impossible to hold credible elections in an insecure state.

However, the trajectory of Nigeria's democratic history is that elections have been a source of incessant violence and insecurity since the colonial era. Rather than improve for the better, the contemporary sense of the negative image elections bring has remained frightening as Nigeria approaches the February 2015 general elections. All over the country, the threats to elections are legion. The very latest of such threats are:

- The climate of insecurity in Nigeria leads to suspicion among communities.
- Attempts by a group of youth to seize a radio station and take over government in the South East;
- Indigenes-settlers' and farmers-herdsmen's conflicts in North-central Nasarawa, Plateau and Benue state; as well as in the North-eastern state of Taraba.
- The burgeoning terrorism defined by Boko Haram.
- Increasing corruption through which monies are siphoned from the public treasure to fund electoral campaigns that have become very monetised.
- The continuing wrangling and disputes within political parties leading to cross-carpeting and political disputes.

Deriving from Nigeria's experience with post-election violence in April 2011, the increased spate of insecurity across the country—compounded by Boko Haram insurgency in North-eastern states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe—has heightened the fears about the possibility of violence in the general elections. Added to that is the likelihood of some elements hiding under the prevailing insecurity caused by Boko Haram to unleash havocs.

This brief highlights a few of the key threats to security in Nigeria ahead of the 2015 general elections with a view to identifying innovative strategies to anticipate and advocate for a violence free in Nigeria.

Main Threats to Security ahead of 2015 Elections

- a. **Insurgency/Terrorism in the North:** Terrorism defined by the activities of Boko Haram in the North is Nigeria's single biggest security challenge ahead of 2015 elections. Already, INEC has said it may not organize elections in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states currently under emergency rule. That these worst affected states are under the All Progressives Congress (APC) already politicizes the issue and whatever analysis that will follow therefrom, besides creating the impression that the terrorists are winning the war. Going ahead with the elections in the three states in defiance of the threats posed by activities of Boko Haram has its implications for not only voters' turn-out and security of the elections, but also the credibility of

the exercise and the sanctity of the results that will be produced from it. It will remain a catch 22.

- b. **Contention for Presidency:** One huge national issue that has refused to go away is the inability of the political class and the different sections of the country to reach a consensus on modality for sharing power in the event of the death of a sitting president. The inconclusive tenure of late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua threw the country into a state in which some elements from the North have expressed political marginalisation. This has evidently divided the country, resulting in unguarded and inflammatory statements by members of the political class across the various geopolitical regions. To this extent, many politicians have fanned the embers of ethnicity and sectionalism, including open expression of threats to the electoral processes if their interests are not served. At the state level, the pressure to “zone” political offices to different communities and ethnic groups risks reducing the elections to a mere contest of ethnic groups.
- c. **Abuse of State Power and Resources:** There has been less use of Federal might during election since the exit of President Olusegun Obasanjo. However, the emergence of the APC as an alternative big party to the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) is gradually forcing a return to the old bad days, especially in opposition states. There are thus possibilities that the security risk of such actions will be high. Ongoing developments in Rivers States and a few others in the North will be heavy hit for this. And this will be tougher if Boko Haram becomes the launching pad for such actions.
- d. **Succession Politics at State Level:** Nigeria is a country where elections are keenly contested. This is premised on the general understanding that access to state power is synonymous with access to public resources, which many elected governors spend with little or no regard for fiscal discipline. Elections confer enormous powers on the state Chief Executive that ONLY politicians with senses of self-restraint are given to play by the rule. As vicious as the contest for governorship elections may seem in Nigeria, the stakes are higher and the contention for the elective office fiercer, when the incumbents have concluded their maximum terms of eight years and are thus bound to transfer power to successors. Incidentally, that is what the 2015 elections portend. A lot of issues and permutations often come up for redress, the greatest of which is the challenge of balancing ethnicity and geography (senatorial district, federal constituency and state constituency) to reach an acceptable mechanism for power rotation. This is opened to varied interpretations, depending on who is telling the story of ‘broken promises.’ Notwithstanding, what is evident either way is its capacity to hype desperation and precipitate violence could deepen insecurity throughout the electoral cycle.
- e. **Absence of Level Playing Field/Imposition of Candidates:** Democracy thrives on absolute respect for the will of the people. The experience with politics since the return of Nigeria to democracy in 1999 is that there is little respect for internal democracy across the parties. The bulk of the pre-election court cases, many of which have even subsisted years after the elections, are largely the result of this undemocratic practice. This delay, beyond undermining the process for justice, has provided the lever for people to seek self-help, including abduction, campaign disruption and political assassination.
- f. **Disempowerment by Poverty, Youth Unemployment & Ignorance:** The political class has manipulated the people, using deepening poverty, unemployment and ignorance which are the direct products of corruption and failure of governance in the first instance. Except for this, no other reason explains why many people have been used to stoke the fire of election violence in Nigeria. While all sections of the country share in this deficit, the North East is

particularly the most discounted as evident in the records of National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The degree of insecurity in the region has produced far-reaching impacts for the rest of the country.

- g. **Militarisation of Elections:** In the recent elections, we have seen undue reliance on the police and other security agencies to ensure peaceful elections. In the recently concluded Ekiti elections, many Nigerians believe that violence was only averted due to the heavy presence of security agents. The risk of this development is that increased dependence on security services could mean that some voters would be scared away from participating in the elections. Also, as we go into the General Elections, we may not have enough security forces to police the elections at the level we saw in Ekiti. The shortfall in the provision of security could provide an opening for some groups to perpetrate mischief.

Key Interventions by CISLAC

- Collaboration with Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) on a *National Security Forum* with relevant stakeholders to build effective synergy with security institutions on conflict management, peacebuilding and security in Nigeria.
- Media monitoring of the activities of Nigerian troops in the North East and occasional release of press statements on the need for proper vetting of arrested persons and respect for human rights and dignity of life.

CISLAC's Proposals for Strategic Intervention

- **Early Warning/Early Response mechanism:** This will require collaboration between security agencies and civil society to create and sustain a Community Intelligence Gathering System (CIGS) that will interface with a multi-stakeholder kind of *National Security Forum* (NSF) comprising government, business and civil society as central coordinating unit. The CIGS must NOT be a one-size-fits-all platform; rather it should be tailored to accommodate specificities of the different community milieus that it is deployed. It should also be allowed space to operate and not suffocated or subsumed in the National Security Forum.
- **Network (or sub-network) of civil society for electoral security:** The body will be charged with the responsibility of distilling the information on electoral security challenges and shadow-reviewing security operatives' actions and inactions. Highpoints of such analyses will be used to engage security institutions and the government necessary redress, including demand for accountability where excesses have been committed.
- **Democratic Oversight of the Security through Accountability Mechanism:** Insecurity has the potential of creating and sustaining rights violation and disregard for rule of engagement. The experience around the world—including Nigeria—is that right violators in conflict zones get away with their actions easily, banking on the common knowledge that they are less likely to be called to account for their excesses in the face of the bigger security challenge at hand. The possibility of this is high among political office contenders and overzealous security operatives ahead of the 2015 elections in Nigeria, hence the urgent need to facilitate a platform that will help guarantee the integrity of the actions of security operatives, while not undermining the dignity of the people they are meant to protect. All perpetrators of heinous crimes—irrespective of their political leanings and social placement in the society—must be made to account for their actions under this arrangement. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is a good institution to be involved in this regard.

- **Media Mainstreaming for Effective Education, Advocacy and Reporting:** As much as it is useful to consider the different shades of both traditional and social media, particular attention needs to be given to radio broadcasting; being the widest medium for reaching the greater majority of people directly. This will also aid voter education, especially in the North East where the emergency rule (if still in place then) MAY restrict time for movement.
- **Good governance:** While all the above strategies may serve the purpose of palliatives, the best antidote to insecurity in Nigeria is good governance. Indeed, contemporary security deficit in Nigeria is the result of the absence of good governance and effective service delivery. Governance has not only been personalized by public office holders, the struggle for the control of political power has also been fierce with every aspect of the electoral process abused and wrested of civility and legitimacy. The civil society must not rest in its responsibility to get the political office holders to deliver the dividend of democracy to the people. This should continue to be the medium to long term goal of our engagement.