

Policyweekly

2023 Elections: Potential Flashpoints in the Northeast



(Photo credit: [Punchng.com](#))

Policy Recommendations

- 1** Government should prioritise the protection of violent flashpoints
- 2** The government and its apparatuses of state protection should take early warnings such as those given by Nextier SPD and intelligence services more seriously.
- 3** The blanket relocation of IDPs to their rebuilt homes in Borno when terrorist attacks are still rife in such areas should be stopped.
- 4** The Nigerian government should do everything within the law to end terrorist violence, possibly seeking external support.

Ahead of Nigeria's general elections in February 2023, Nextier SPD Policy Weekly has focused its analyses on the potential flashpoints and mitigation measures across the most vulnerable geopolitical zones in the last five weeks. As stated at the beginning of the series, the analyses aimed to draw the attention of the security apparatuses, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), international observers and other stakeholders to the potential threats and foreground Early Warning Action/mechanisms in response. Despite Nextier SPD's advisory, threats to the forthcoming polls remain significant. The [attack and destruction](#) of election materials at the INEC office at Oru West Local Government Area in Imo State on Sunday, December 4, 2022, marked the seventh of such premeditated attacks on INEC offices in five states across the country in the last four months. Attacks on innocent civilians continue unabated across the North-East, as exemplified by the attacks in Chibok in May 2022, in which [seven persons were killed](#). The trend of violent attacks and inadequate arrests and prosecution of culprits show that the security agencies have not risen to the systematic threats to the forthcoming 2023 elections. In this concluding Weekly on the series,

Nextier SPD examines the potential flashpoints in the North-East to the 2023 elections. It also highlights the policy measures needed to address potential security breaches.

Terrorised Region

Even though violent insecurity has escalated across Nigeria in the last two decades, the Northeast has been the worst hit in the last decade. Since 2009, Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States, in particular, have been under the siege of Boko Haram terrorist activities. Over time, the jihadist onslaught had [extended beyond](#) the epicentre states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, even to the broader Lake Chad Basin. Counterterrorist efforts by Nigeria and neighbouring Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Benin have yielded only moderate results (Albert, 2017). Despite the infighting between Boko Haram and its breakaway factions (Islamic State in West Africa Province, {ISWAP} and Ansaru), the terrorist violence has remained intractable since 2009. By some accounts, over [350,000](#) have been killed, and nearly [three million](#) people have been forced to flee their homes. Between May 2011 and February 2021, over [76,000 deaths](#) were reported by the press and tracked by the Nigeria Security Tracker. Borno State has remained the worst-hit state. Since May 2021, eight Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps have been shut in the state, and many more are planned to be

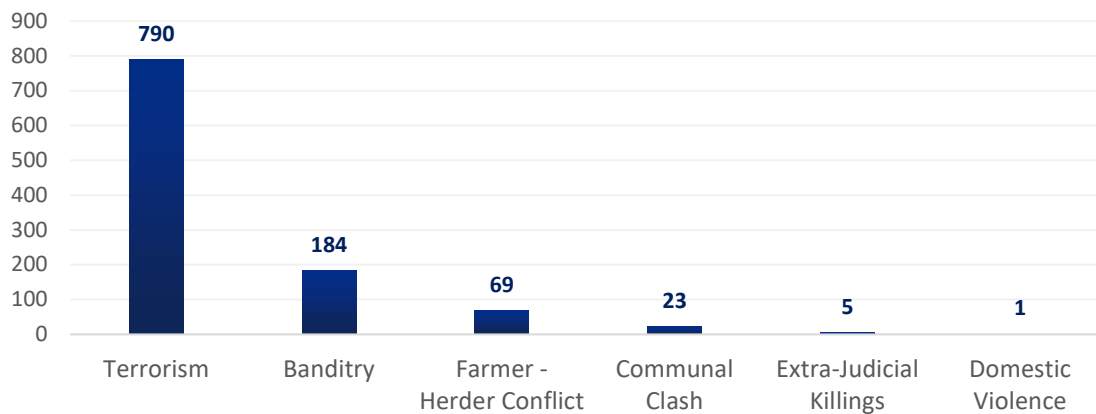
disbanded later in 2022. This has forcibly removed over [140,000 persons](#) from the camps. The shutting of IDP camps when their communities remain unsafe contravenes the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of IDP in Africa (“Kampala Convention”), which builds on the 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Enforced Displacement that Nigeria signed.

Potential Flashpoints

Despite the relocation of the operational base of Ansaru to the North-West, terrorist activities and other forms of violent conflicts remain across the North-East, posing a potential threat to the forthcoming 2023 elections in the region. As shown graphically below, the Northeast is plagued not just by terrorism alone but by other low-intensity violent conflicts such as farmer-herder clashes, banditry, extra-judicial killings, and domestic violence. In addition, many violent non-state actors threaten to disrupt the conduct of the 2023 elections in the areas. This is not a mere threat because, in 2015, Boko Haram threatened and executed attacks on two polling stations in Gombe State, killing five voters. According to one electoral officer, [“after the Birin Bolawa and Birin Fulani attacks, we could hear the gunmen shouting, ‘Didn’t we warn you about staying away from \(the\) election?’”](#).

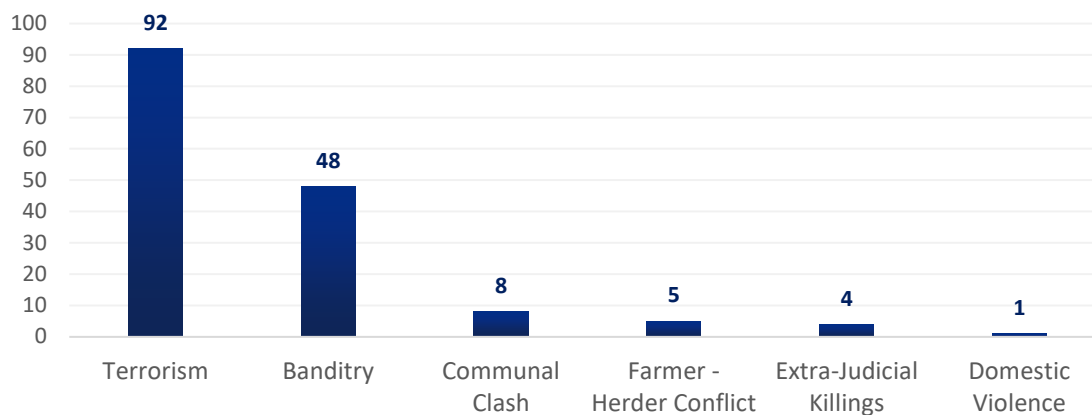
Northeast: Deaths by Crisis Type

Jan. 2022 - Nov 2022



Northeast: Incidents by Crisis Type

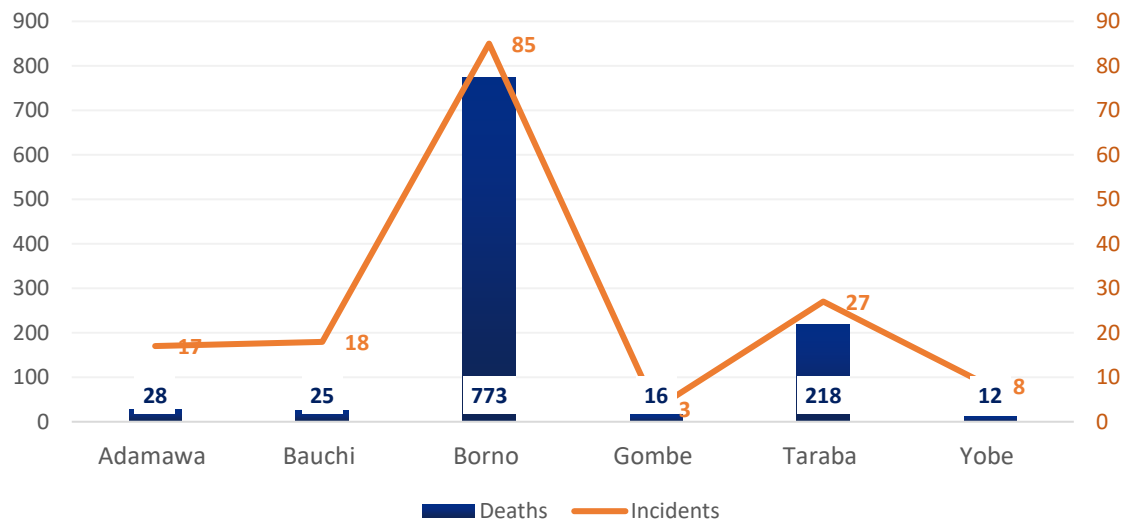
Jan. 2022 - Nov 2022



Apart from the violent incidences from past elections, the increasing rate of fatal attacks in recent months (see below the curve), especially in Borno and Taraba states, is worrisome. A resident in Bama in Borno State said, “if the cases of violent attacks continue, I will not go out to vote. Why should I go and risk my life because of the election?” (Personal Communication).

Northeast: Violent Incidents and Deaths Trend

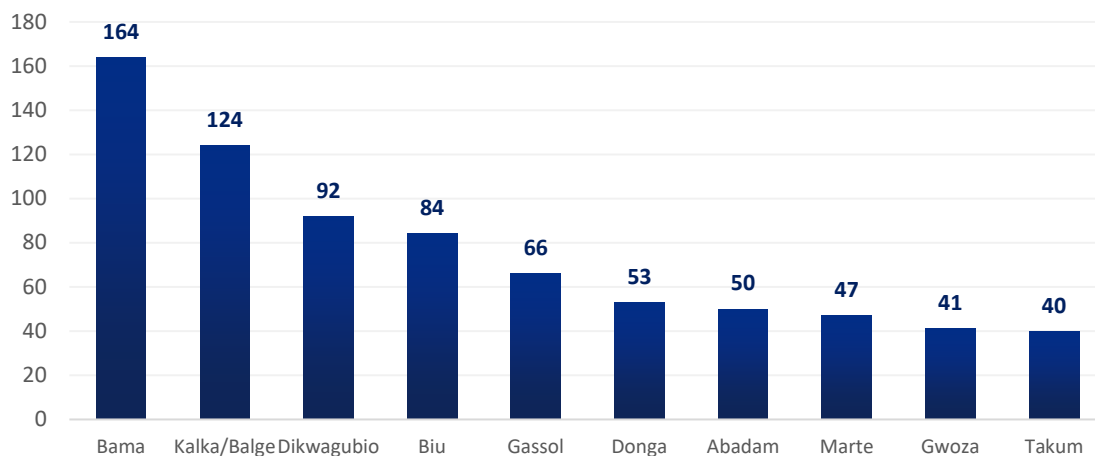
Jan. 2022 - Nov. 2022



In 2022, ISWAP [claimed responsibility](#) for several attacks in Taraba, including the one on a Catholic church in Mutum Biyu in January and [two targeted bombings](#) in April on local bars in Iware and the Nukkai area of Jalingo. In May, ISWAP also admitted another attack on Nigerian military forces in Jalingo. However, despite the recent increasing [violent incidences](#) in Taraba State, most flashpoints remain in Borno State, as shown graphically below by the positions of Bama, Kalka/Balge, Dikwagubio and Biu. Apart from Gassol, Donga and Takum, which are in Taraba State, all other flashpoints local government areas shown in the graph below are in Borno State.

Northeast: Top 10 LGAs with Highest Deaths

Jan. 2022 - Nov. 2022



Following the escalating incidences of violence in the Northeast ahead of the 2023 elections, there is a growing concern locally and internationally. The [UK warns](#), "Nigeria faces significant peace and security challenges. There is an active insurgency in the North East; farmer-herder conflicts are extending across the country; resource conflicts in the Delta; tension in the South-East; and banditry in the North West. The rise in conflict risks destabilising Nigeria's democracy in the run-up to the 2023 elections".

Mitigation Strategies

The [threat posed](#) to the forthcoming 2023 elections by non-state violent actors in the troubled Northeast is enormous. Therefore, some policy measures are

needed to mitigate the violence to ensure free, fair, credible and peaceful polls. Some of the measures are discussed below.

- 1. Protection of flashpoints:** To maintain the social contract between the citizens and the state, every responsible government strives to protect the lives, livelihoods and property of all citizens and residents. The Nigerian government should guarantee this. This should start in the most vulnerable areas, especially the ungoverned spaces of Borno and Taraba states, such as Bama, Kalka/Balge, Dikwagubio, and Biu (Borno) and Gassol, Donga and Takum (Taraba). Urgent clearance of rebels and terrorists in these areas should be done because of the forthcoming elections and to protect the lives and property of troubled

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

Nextier SPD (www.nextierspd.com) is an international development consulting firm that uses evidence-based research to develop and build knowledge and skills to enhance human security, peace, and sustainable development as means to achieving stability and prosperity in Nigeria, and in the African region.

populations. Besides, the longer the government fails to protect the people, the easier it is for them to get recruited by rebels and terrorists.

2. **Heeding early warning:** The government and its apparatuses of state protection should take early warnings such as those given by Nextier SPD and intelligence services more seriously. For example, flashpoints identified by Nextier SPD in several reports remain vulnerable to attacks by non-state actors. The government should collaborate with credible civil society organisations rather than perceiving them as mere critics. Shreds of evidence and policies emanating from civil society organisations should be eyeballed by appropriate government agencies and deployed in policy implementation if deemed fit.
3. **Relocation of IDPs to protected areas:** The blanket relocation of IDPs to their rebuilt homes in Borno when terrorist attacks are still rife in such areas should be stopped. No doubt, Governor Babagana Zulum is massively pro-people. He has demonstrated credible leadership and governance in recent years. Thus, the disbandment of IDP camps in Borno State should be done with utmost caution not to return IDPs to vulnerable areas of active terrorism.
4. **Seeking a permanent solution to terrorism:** Boko Haram terrorism has raged for over 12 years. It is scandalous that a rebel organisation can hold an independent state to ransom for this long without an effective repressive strategy. Thus, the Nigerian

government should do everything within the law to end terrorist violence, possibly seeking external support.

Conclusion

The threat posed to lives, properties and the forthcoming 2023 elections in the North-East of Nigeria is significant. To mitigate the violence, identified flashpoints need to be effectively protected; early warning signals and advisories such as those given by Nextier SPD heeded; IDPs relocated only to safe areas to avoid re-invasion of their homes, and a permanent solution to end terrorism in Nigeria.

Reference

Albert, Isaac O. (2017). "Rethinking the Functionality of the Multinational Joint Task Force in Managing the Boko Haram Crisis in the Lake Chad Basin", Africa Development XL11 No2, pp 119-135.

Authors

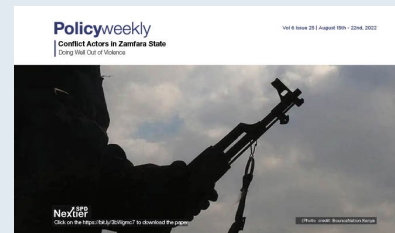
Dr Iro Aghedo is an Associate Consultant at Nextier SPD and a Senior Lecturer Department of Political Science at the University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria.

Dr Ndubuisi Nwokolo is a Partner and Chief Executive at Nextier SPD and an Honorary Fellow School of Government and Society, University of Birmingham, UK.

Nextier Sample Publications



Strengthening Civilian Autonomy for Conflict De-escalation: Reflections on Anambra State, Nigeria
South-East Nigeria is experiencing unprecedented and alarming violence occasioned by the activities of Non-State...



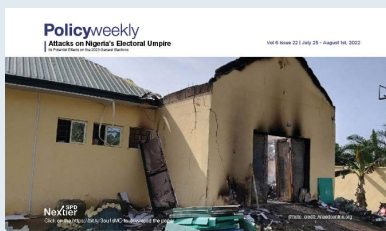
Conflict Actors in Zamfara State: Doing Well Out of Violence
Zamfara State has been on the edge of a precipice in the last couple of years because of escalated banditry.



Rising National Security Flaws: Its Implications for Nigeria's 2023 General Elections
A fair democratic election is held in an atmosphere free of mortal dangers and ideally free from vote rigging.



Bringing History into the Resolution of Banditry in Zamfara State
Protracted banditry has undermined human and livelihood security in Zamfara State in recent years.



Attacks on Nigeria's Electoral Empire: Its Potential Effects on the 2023 General Elections
General elections in Nigeria will take place on February 2023, which is seven months away.



Deepening Non-Conflict Interventions for De-Escalation of Violent Conflict: Exploring other Steps to Peace in Anambra State, Nigeria
There has been a rise in violent incidents and deaths arising from non-state armed groups (NSAGs) activities in the South-East and...



Zamfara Residents: To Bear or Not to Bear Firearms?
Gun violence has become a terrible source of security threat across the world. However, nations respond to the threat posed by firearms abuse differently.



Ambush as Terrorist Weapon: Living in the Mind of the Enemy
Ambush has been a regular feature in Nigeria's terrorism and banditry landscape.