

# Policyweekly

## Voter Suppression and Flashpoints of Violence in the Forthcoming 2023 General Elections in Nigeria



### Policy Recommendations

- 1** Another two weeks window to quickly cover as many omitted qualified voters as possible would address the challenges of excluding this massive number of voters.
- 2** All the cases of disruption of voters' registration and even the reported, targeted disruption of 2019 presidential elections in Lagos State should be adequately investigated.
- 3** The points of targeted attacks in the 2019 presidential election and settlements with similarly vulnerable populations should be regarded as flashpoints requiring security attention.
- 4** The reported incidences of massive destruction of voters' cards and purchase of voters' cards must be investigated and treated according to the law.
- 5** NEC should enhance its voters cards distribution system to include other stakeholders.
- 6** The State Security Services, through various channels, should continue to reassure voters of their safety before, during and after the elections.

### Introduction

Voter suppression is a quiet but potent threat that is increasingly gaining momentum in Nigeria, especially as the 2023 general elections approach. With a combination of subtle and rough methods, voter-suppressive behaviours gradually erode the progress that has been made under the elective civil rule. [Operational challenges of the election management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission \(INEC\)](#), especially the lack of adequate manpower and machines to register the teeming number of persons who want to enlist as voters, are one of the conditions that suppress the intention to register and vote. Secondly, there is a new trend in which violence is either threatened or unleashed on voter registration centres to drive away intending registrants, as recently reported in parts of Lagos State and Abuja. Thirdly, massive quantities of manufactured Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) have been discovered where they were deliberately buried away or discarded with an obvious intention to

prevent them from being used for voting. Fourthly, the episode of the 2019 presidential election in which ethnically targeted violence to prevent free and fair elections in areas with particular ethnic concentration appears to have a likelihood of recurrence in the forthcoming 2023 presidential election as the previous episode is not known to have been investigated and punished. Fifthly, the Ansaru terrorist group has ordered the suspension of political activities in parts of Kaduna State, with obvious consequences for the preparation of the presidential elections and even the voting proper. Finally, the violent actions of Unknown Gunmen (UGM) and utterances of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South East region. These developments require remedial or preventive actions before the elections take place in order to meaningfully eliminate threats to free and fair elections. In this edition of Nextier Policy Weekly, we look at how these developments suppress voters and create areas of security concern with a view to drawing policy attention to them and providing options for meaningfully preventing them from undermining the forthcoming presidential election.

### **Acts of Voter Suppression and Potential Flashpoints in the Forthcoming Presidential Elections**

Some of the challenges of the election management body, especially the inability to anticipate and plan for the surge in demands for voter registration, are inadvertently creating voter-suppression effects. According to [INEC](#), Only 3,444,378 Nigerians completed the physical registration for the PVC after commencing the registration process online. This number is only 32% of the entire 10,487,972 who started the registration process online. This implies that [7,043,594](#) persons, which account for over 67 % of online applicants for PVC registration, were not registered and would not vote. The above figures account only for applicants who commenced the registration process online. A lot more persons physically went to INEC offices to register and underwent different degrees of difficulty without being successfully registered due to high demands that INEC facilities and staff could not handle. At the end of the voter registration exercise, a total of 12.2 million new voters were captured, raising the number of eligible voters in Nigeria to 99.2 million. In spite of this progress, it is rather disturbing that more than 7 million persons, based on our conservative estimates, were unable to register, not out of their own choice but on electoral management inadequacies.

The second development bothering voter suppression is pre-election thuggery and violence. Traders at the [Alaba International Market Ojo](#), Lagos State, shut their businesses on Thursday, June 9, 2022, to go for the voter registration exercise, but were reported to have been attacked by thugs. There were other tales of nepotism against the staff of the INEC regarding the lack of fair and equal treatment to persons of different ethnicities in terms of being offered the opportunity to register. Similarly, it was reported

on July 29 2022, that [thugs invaded St Brigids Catholic Church in Ijesha](#), Lagos State and carted away PVC registration machines based on the assumption that those who came to vote would not vote for the thugs' candidate. [A contrary report](#), however, suggests that INEC debunked the claims that their PVC registration machine was taken away, but they did acknowledge that there was disorder in the registration centre which made them relocate the registration centre to a nearby polling unit around the church. Still, on PVC registration, a video that went viral on social media reported a disruption of voter registration activities in the Lugbe area of Abuja. But the [Police](#) are reported to have dismissed the video as false. However, in Ako Estate on the airport road Abuja, an interview respondent reported disruption of the voter registration by hoodlums (Personal Communication, 2022). In the South East town of [Ihite Uboma in Imo State](#), an INEC official was killed by secessionist agitators who also disrupted voter registration in the area. Put together, these incidents are a gradual build-up to a climate of fear that would characterise the election proper in February 2023.

Successfully preventing people from registering as voters is likely to provide a psychological impetus for hooligans to disrupt the 2023 presidential election. Recalling a few incidents in the 2019 presidential elections, some polling units in parts of Ijesha and Okota in Lagos State were attacked, ostensibly to prevent them from turning out a large number of votes against the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party. This act of voter suppression is not known to have been investigated and punished and therefore provides the third source of impetus for voter suppression in the forthcoming election. Consequently, the kind of population that was targeted for that violence and their residential areas would be important flashpoints for possible electoral violence.

The act of disrupting voter registration and the voting process constitutes a lower order of challenge to the forthcoming presidential election compared to the fourth source of voter suppression which not only suppresses potential voters but also suspends all political activities over a large swathe of area. Precisely, [the Ansaru](#) terrorist group have taken control of the Birnin Gwari Emirate of Kaduna State and suspended all political activities. Armed violence is highly likely in such an area should electoral activities, including voting, take place in such an area, especially without substantial security preparation. Inevitably, the terror-ridden areas are important flash points to be wary of as the election approaches.

The fifth source of voter suppression as the country prepares for presidential elections in the next few months is the deliberate [destruction of a large number of PVCs](#), as has been discovered lately in at least two major episodes in different parts of the country. PVCs were found being discarded in massive quantity in one incident, while a stack of them was found buried in a sack under a closed drainage. In 2019, it was reported that some [politicians were buying up voters' cards](#) apparently to weaken their opponents' support

base. Secondly, INEC reported in June 2022 that [20 million voters' cards are yet to be collected](#). No one is sure about which of these cards are being destroyed at the moment. But the point is that the owners of the affected PVCs have been disenfranchised and probably, some of them are still expecting to receive their voters' cards.

### What is to be Done

Considering the above developments, which suppress votes on the one hand and create flashpoints of security concerns, on the other hand, the following steps may be taken to prevent or substantially mitigate the emerging voter suppressors before the 2023 presidential election:

1. Above 7 million voting population is too significant to be omitted, especially if they are qualified. The closure of voter registration in July 2022 could have waited since the 2022 Electoral Act provides that registration should not take place from 90 days prior to elections covered by the Act. Since there are still more than five months to the presidential election, another two weeks' window to quickly cover as many omitted qualified voters as possible would address the challenges of excluding this massive number of voters.
2. All the cases of disruption of voters' registration and even the reported, targeted disruption of 2019 presidential elections in Lagos State should be adequately investigated, and any instance in which culpability is established against any person(s) should be punished in line with the provisions of the relevant laws.
3. The points of targeted attacks in the 2019 presidential election and settlements with similarly vulnerable populations should be regarded as flashpoints requiring security attention. Similarly, the Federal Government should sincerely engage the terrorists in parts of Kaduna State and flush them out to restore order as well as make necessary provisions for the security of such areas during the election. Investment in security for the purpose of peaceful elections should consider the option of using miniaturised close-circuit television cameras in the polling centres.
4. The reported incidences of massive destruction of voters' cards and purchase of voters' cards must be investigated and treated according to the law.
5. INEC should enhance its voters cards distribution system. Possibly, the owners of

such cards should be sent SMS to go and pick up their cards in designated distribution centres. In addition, INEC, political parties, civil society organisations and other stakeholders should be involved in educating registered voters to go and collect their cards.

6. The State Security Services, through various channels, should continue to reassure voters of their safety before, during and after the elections. These assurances will help to build voters' confidence, especially in regions where Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) are threatening the civil population into withdrawal from voters registering or voting on election days.

### Conclusion

Often when election rigging is discussed, pre-election voter suppression is not fully taken into account apart from ones that take the form of overt violence during elections. Yet, it amounts to vote-rigging that happens at both pre-election and election stages of the electoral process and delivers electoral fraud with little notice. It applies subtle or violent techniques to frighten, frustrate and disrupt different levels of the electoral process. As the 2023 presidential election approaches, millions of interested and qualified voters cannot be registered through deficient management of that level of the electoral process. Violence and threats had been used on intending registrants for voters' cards in some locations; printed voters' cards have been destroyed in large numbers and prevented from being used for voting. Terrorists have suspended political activities in their occupied areas. The anxieties occasioned by these suppressors of genuine voters can only be eased by taking remedial and preventive steps that would curb them and lead to a free and fair presidential election in 2023.

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**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](http://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.



# Weekly Update

## Nigeria's Security Situation Analysis: January 2021 to June 2022

Nextier

Source : Nextier Violent Conflict Database

Tuesday, 30th Aug. 2022  
2:00 PM - 5:00 PM (WAT)

Zoom Link <https://bit.ly/NigeriaSecurityAnalysis>

### Moderators:

**Ndidi Anyanwu**  
Policy Research  
Consultant, Nextier

**Kenn Maduagwu**  
Senior Policy Research  
Analyst, Nextier

### Panel Topics:

1. Banditry and Terrorism: What are we Missing?
2. Achieving Security Stability and Secure Public Spaces in Nigeria

### Panelists:



**Mr. Chris Ngwodo**  
Director General,  
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**Dr. Hussaini Abdu**  
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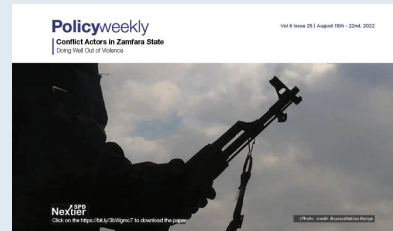
**Dr. Joseph Ochogwu**  
Director,  
Research and Policy  
Analysis, Institute for Peace  
and Conflict Resolution

## 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.



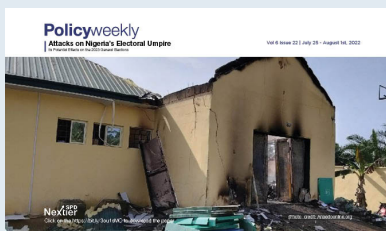
### Rising National Security Flaws: Its Implications for Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

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.