

Policyweekly

2023 Elections

Potential Flashpoints in Zamfara and Kaduna States



Credit: Samuel Aranda NYT

Policy Recommendations

- 1 Security agencies operating in the areas should collaborate with the people and get intelligence from them on arresting the terrorists.
- 2 Security should be beefed up around the flashpoints identified above and other rural communities.
- 3 Deployment of a clear-and-hold strategy in the terrorist hotbeds
- 4 Politicians who violate the people's and the press's rights and repress opposition should be sanctioned.

Nigeria is witnessing unprecedented [mobilisation for the 2023 elections](#). As electioneering has kicked off, campaigns have inundated physical spaces and social platforms. Indeed, Nigeria and her allies have enormous stakes in the 2023 elections because, in recent years, [the economy has dwindled, infrastructure depleted](#), and public [security has diminished](#). Amid the despair, many Nigerians, especially the youth, have developed participant attitudes and political efficacy, as reflected in their increased mobilisation for the 2023 elections. However, as commendable as increased political participation is, there are several hurdles on the way. As the last two editions of the Nextier SPD Policy Weekly have unravelled in [Lagos State](#) and the [South-East](#), the 2023 elections face palpable security threats. In continuation, this Nextier SPD Policy Weekly examines the potential flashpoints in Zamfara and Kaduna States. In foregrounding these threats, we hope that the security establishment, the Independent National Electoral



Commission (INEC) and other local and international stakeholders will deploy proactive measures to mitigate electoral violence.

Bandits and Ballots

In the last decade, rural communities in the North-West, especially Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina and Sokoto states, have been in the [throes of banditry](#). The terrorists locally referred to as bandits, constantly invade rural communities, killing, maiming, and kidnapping innocent civilians for huge ransoms. These terrorist activities have led to mass displacement and food insecurity across the region that used to be reputed for crop farming and animal husbandry. The inability of the government to arrest the violent situation has led to a terrible escalation. In Zamfara State, [local people complain that](#) “there are communities that pay levies to these bandits just to enable them to go to their farms without getting kidnapped, but unfortunately, after paying to one set, another set comes to say they were not part of the agreement”.

The wave of violent insecurity is allegedly fuelling media and opposition clampdown by politicians. Recently, the All Progressives Congress-led government in [Zamfara State ordered](#) the closure of five media outlets (Pride FM Radio Gusau, NTA Gusau, Amji TV Gusau, Gamji TV Gusau and Alumma TV Gusau) for covering a political rally organised by the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Also, Governor Bello Matawalle recently [signed](#) Executive Order No.10, sus-

pending 2023 political activities in the State and locking down three local government areas. While the state government said these measures were taken to protect the people against bandits, the opposition [alleged](#) that they were unduly targeted since the APC continues with its electioneering activities. In Kaduna State, the wave of violence has also led to allegations of politicisation. A few weeks ago, unknown hoodlums unleashed violence and disrupted the presidential campaign of the PDP in Ranchers Bees Stadium in the State. The PDP allegedly accused the APC of masterminding the [“sponsored thugs”](#), calling on President Muhammadu Buhari to investigate the attack.

Potential Flashpoints

Terrorist activities and the growing politicisation of violence in Zamfara and Kaduna States portend nefarious implications for the 2023 elections in many states. The local government areas worst hit by banditry in Zamfara State include Maru, Tsafe, Bakura, Anka, Maradun, Gusau, Bukkuyum, Shinkafi and Bungudu. According to a Maru Local Government Area resident, “the few persons who have not run away from their homes cannot exercise their franchise in the 2023 elections because of the fear of bandits” (Personal Communications). Expressing the same fear, a youth leader in the area, [Salis Sambo](#), said a few people in IDP camps might be able to vote, but those in the communities controlled by bandits cannot vote.

Similarly, conducting the 2023 elections in several areas of Kaduna State will be challenging, particularly in communities in the eastern part of Birnin-Gwari, where the Ansaru terrorist group controls [40%](#) of the Council. According to a [community leader](#) in the area, “In just one day, bandits killed over 70 residents, and the killing spree has continued unabated. How can an election take place when nobody can access the area? How will INEC officials come in to conduct elections in 2023? It’s practically not feasible”. In confirmation, the Chairman of the Birnin-Gwari Emirate Progressives Union, [Ishaq Kasai](#), said that the last local government election in the State could not hold in the area because of violent insecurity. Indeed, Kaduna State Governor El-Rufai had revealed in a [leaked](#) memo to President Buhari that terrorists had formed a parallel government in the State. Also, the Southern Kaduna Peoples Union (SOKAPU), whose area has been incessantly attacked for several years, has [called](#) on the federal and State governments to beef up security so that they can participate in the forthcoming 2023 elections.

Mitigation Strategies

Some measures are needed to arrest the worsening phenomenon of banditry in the North-West, particularly in Zamfara and Kaduna states and make the region conducive for those who live there and for the conduct of the 2023 elections.

1. Effective intelligence is needed on the activities of terrorists: The identity and antics of many criminals terrorising Zamfara and Kaduna states are known to some residents. Therefore, the security agencies operating in the areas should collaborate with the people and get intelligence from them on how to arrest the terrorists. Also, such security officers should be trained and equipped with State of the art gadgets for intelligence gathering.
2. Target hardening: Security should be beefed up around the flashpoints identified above and other rural communities. The current practice of mounting several security checkpoints in urban areas such as Gusau and Kaduna city while rural communities are abandoned is condemnable. Instead, more counterinsurgents should be deployed to vulnerable rural communities.
3. Clear-and-hold strategy: As noted by Kydd and Barbara (2006), the clear-and-hold strategy is one of the best responses to terrorists who rely on the intimidation of innocent civilians. It involves decisively holding on to territories which have been reclaimed from terrorists. Using this strategy, Nigerian counterinsurgents will reduce ambiguity about who is in control in such areas, thereby establishing government presence and winning the hearts and minds of the local people.
4. Sanctioning repressive politicians: Obviously, many politicians in Zamfara and Kaduna states muzzle opposition parties and gag the media to prevent violent insecurity. Henceforth, politicians who

violate the people's and the press's rights and repress opposition should be sanctioned. Furthermore, in line with their watchdog roles, the media and civil society organisations should expose the undemocratic activities of politicians before, during and after elections. This will not only bring the erring politicians to book but will also serve as a deterrence to others.

Conclusion

The upcoming 2023 elections in Nigeria are under significant threats in some states, especially Zamfara and Kaduna in the North-West. In these two states, terrorists subject some rural communities to frequent violent attacks, including killing, kidnapping, rape, and arson. These activities will significantly undermine the capacity of rural dwellers to participate in the 2023 elections. Thus, effective intelligence gathering, target hardening, clear-and-hold strategy and sanctioning of repressive politicians should be deployed to make the affected areas conducive for the residents and conducive for the upcoming elections.

References

Kydd, Andrew and Barbara Walter (2006), "The Strategies of Terrorism", *International Security* 31:1(49-79)

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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.

For further discussion of pragmatic implementation of the recommendations, please contact

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Weekly Update



Power Dialogue

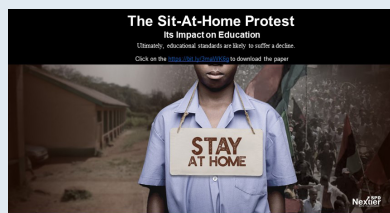
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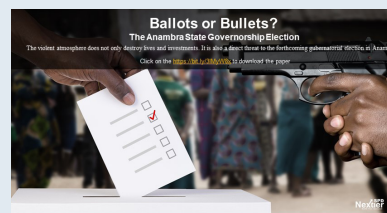
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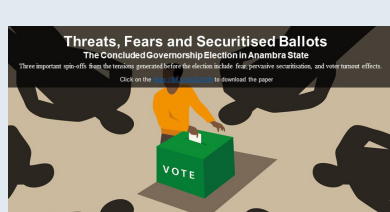
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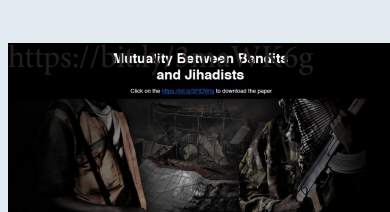
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