

# Policyweekly

## 2023 Nigeria Elections:

Potential Flashpoints in the South East Region



(Photo credit: Smbintel.com)

### Policy Recommendations

- 1 It would be more fruitful to quietly partner with communities and gather useful intelligence for actions to arrest the gangs.
- 2 There is a need for government agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to be involved in driving the communication component of security interventions.
- 3 Security deployments and vigilance in the flashpoint communities should not be limited to voting periods.
- 4 National Peace Committee should take note of these potential flashpoints and work with the political parties and civil society organisations on ways to avoid or mitigate the violence.

### Introduction

In about one hundred and seven days from today (7th November 2022), Nigerians will be going to the ballot to choose the next managers of state power. Unfortunately, one challenge that has been constant to Nigeria's election is violence targeted at compromising its cleanliness or ensuring that it does not occur. With a doubtful ability to curtail violence to the barest minimum during general voting, we can hardly speak about [clean elections](#) in which every qualified person participates or at least has an unencumbered chance of participating. Recent reports show that [1,149 persons, including employees of the Independent National Electoral Commission \(INEC\) and security officers, were killed in three elections held in 2011, 2015 and 2019](#). Also, in over [forty-two attacks](#) within a space of two years (2019 to 2021), INEC

has lost 9,836 smart card readers, 345 ballot boxes, and 135 voting cubicles, among other assets. The attacks in INEC offices have occurred in 14 states across Nigeria, and South East has about 33 per cent of these attacks. Besides, there have been [disruptions of political party activities](#) and voter registration by groups who purport to be pro-Biafran movements in the South East.

In most cases, they warn that no Nigerian election or any aspect of its process should be conducted in their Biafraland. As the elections draw nearer, electoral anxieties and fears rise about how and where violence will affect it. Thus, it becomes needful to analyse the flashpoints of violence across the country. The last edition of our policy Weekly discussed Lagos State as a major flashpoint in the South West. This edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly analyses the flashpoints of potential electoral violence in South East Nigeria during the forthcoming 2023 general elections.

### **Potential Flashpoints of Electoral Violence and Rationale for Anxieties about them**

Birch and Mulchinski's (2017) typologies of electoral violence would be useful for developing our briefing on flashpoints of violence. In classifying the types of electoral violence, they isolated: 1) the state-on-non-state typology, such as the government using force against protesters, 2) the Non-state-on-state variant, like a terrorist threat to bomb polling stations or attack voters, 3) the Non-state-on-non-state electoral violence which includes ethnic groups threatening attacks or mutual threats of such attacks or even political parties threatening or attacking one another 4) International actor-on-a.ny actor such as a neighbouring state increasing military threat on the border or exchanging fire with the state military 5) Any actor on non-state including where the government threatens to send international election observers away or ethnic attack on international observers. These typologies help isolate who does what in Nigerian elections in terms of violence. Local experience shows that the first three types of violence are the commonest in Nigeria.

In the case of the forthcoming presidential election, electoral conflict trends in the South East suggest that the typology of non-state-on-state electoral violence is likely to play out in some parts of the region. It is possible that pro-Biafran separatist groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and

others who insist on rejecting elections in the South East or part of it may agitate during the period. One of their grounds which was also why they threatened to agitate over the November 2021 governorship election in Anambra State, is the continuing detention of IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu despite being discharged by a court. Similarly, there are armed criminal gangs that have cells or camps in different rural communities and operate under the false cover of Biafran agitation. Also, they will likely be part of the threats to clean elections in 2023. So far, the electoral process has recorded incidences of [murder and arson on infrastructure and logistics](#) of the election management body in the South East.

In specific places of serious concern, Imo State is a hot zone of non-state-on-state electoral violence. The flashpoints that have been featured for a while in the news include [Orlu, Orsu, Ideato North and South, Okigwe, Oru East and West, Oguta-Izombe, and Njaba](#). Imo state has a number of security challenges, including kidnapping, banditry, assassination and many more. Besides, there is a recent history of electoral violence where an INEC worker was shot on duty to disrupt a voter registration exercise. Because of this murder, the voter registration exercise was restricted in some local governments like [Oru East, Oru West, Orlu and Ohaji-Egbema](#) to only INEC offices. As the elections draw nearer, the elements undermining law and order may explore opportunities to unleash further mayhem on the state by attacking materials related to the election. It is also correct to anticipate rivalries between political parties as a source of clashes in Imo state. While the All Progressives Congress (APC) ruling party acquired political power in the state through a process that many observers find questionable, the coming election presents an opportunity to test the acceptability of the sitting government and party to the people of Imo State. Expectedly, the government would like to deliver victory for its party at the national level by every means possible, while opposition parties, especially the People's Democratic Party (PDP), are likely to resist. Already, there is an allegation by the Coalition of United Political Parties (CUPP) that the voting population of the [Imo State Governor's Omuma constituency was inflated from 6,500 voters to 45,000 voters](#) in anticipation of rigging the 2023 elections. Besides, the by-election for [the Ngor Okpala House](#) of Assembly seat in the same Imo State was alleged to have been rigged by the sitting APC government in Imo State. These factors are important

sources of tension in the forthcoming general elections in Imo State. When added to the threat of secessionists' rejection of elections, kidnapping and banditry, Imo state presents a case for maximum security alertness for the forthcoming election.

In Anambra State, suspected members of the Indigenous People of Biafra had engaged the police in several hours of a gun battle [in the Ihiala Local Government Area](#) during the supplementary governorship election in November 2021. Prior to the engagement, there was no election in the entire local government before the supplementary election was organised for them. During the last six months, there was a flurry of successful arson attacks in local government secretariats in the state. The headquarters of [Nnewi South](#), [Aguata](#), [Idemili North](#) LGAs and a Magistrate Court were burnt by unknown gunmen around May 2022. Some of the communities identified in the past three years by the police high command as flashpoints, such as Ogidi, Obosi, Nnewi, Onitsha, Ajali and Ihiala, fall within the attacked local government headquarters. Should the relative peace in the state at the moment be taken for granted and preparations for the presidential elections fail to consider the high possibilities of disruption in Anambra State, it would be a major preparation error for the 2023 elections.

There are emerging indicators of the non-state on the non-state form of electoral violence in Enugu State. Records of attack on political party meetings prior to the 2023 election shows that meetings of the PDP were violently disrupted in both [Nsukka and Aninri Local Government Areas](#) of Enugu State in April 2022. Similarly, the [Labour Party](#) has experienced separate armed attacks and arson during their meetings at Aninri, Awgu, Oji River and Igboeze North Local Government areas of Enugu State. Labour Party has accused the PDP of being responsible for the attack. So far, no investigation reports have been issued regarding the attacks.

### What is to be Done?

There may be no one final solution to the problem of electoral violence, but measures could be taken to curtail its impact in areas that have shown high indicators for violent disruption of the elections. On that note, we recommend as follows:

1. The organised non-state attackers of the state usually have camps in quiet rural communities. It would be more fruitful to quietly partner with communities and gather useful intelligence for actions to arrest the gangs, recover their arms and eliminate the threats they pose to both community peace and the forthcoming elections.
2. Partnering with flashpoint communities would require that while security agencies engage in the job of intelligence gathering, government agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should be involved in driving the communication component of the security interventions. This is by encouraging communities to have a system of transmitting important security information without compromising their safety. Accordingly, this would require some confidence-building and training of community members.
3. Security deployments and vigilance in the flashpoint communities should not be limited to voting periods. Such communities are equally prone to pre and post-election violence, for which deployments in manpower and adequate operational logistics are necessary for maintaining peace, law and order.
4. National Peace Committee should take note of these potential flashpoints and work with the political parties and civil society organisations on ways to avoid or mitigate the violence, especially the state on non-state and the non-state on non-state violence.

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## Conclusion

One major source of anxiety about the forthcoming presidential elections in 2023 is the anticipation that there could be violence due to the prevailing security environment. Such a mindset is supported by the existence of groups with a high potential to inflict violence in several parts of the country. In the South East, separatist groups, robbers, bandits and political thugs stand out as sources of potential disruption to the election. Besides, political parties have been accused of applying intimidation on others in a bid to intimidate. These incidences tend to occur more within some parts of the South East, so they are marked out as flashpoints. In particular, parts of Imo, Anambra and Enugu States listed in order of the seriousness of threat potential constitute the flashpoints to be wary of in the South East as the 2023 elections approach.

## References

Birch, Sarah & Mulchinski, D. (2017). Dataset of countries at risk of electoral violence. Terrorism and Political Violence. DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2017.1364636

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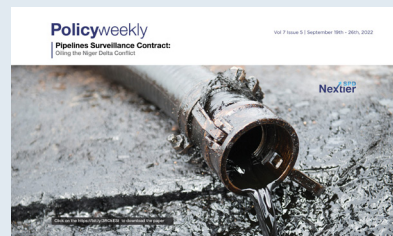
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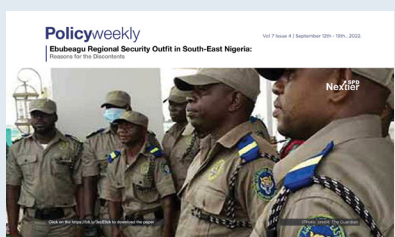
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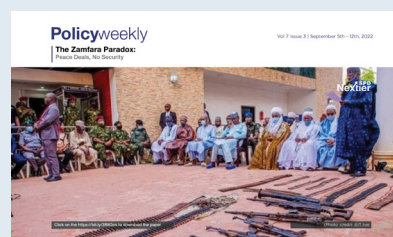
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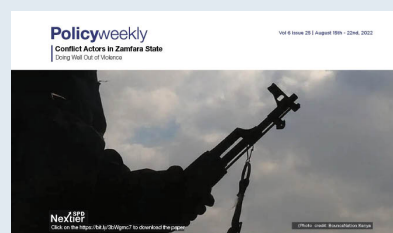
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