

MONTHLY TRACKING OF HATE SPEECH & ELECTION ATROCITIES IN NIGERIA



.....a Monthly tracking of hate speech & election atrocities in Nigeria

This report documents incidents of hate speech, malicious propagation of fake news, violence and other forms of elections-related atrocities for the month of January 2023.



JANUARY, 2023



Preamble

The month of January was marred by an increased election-related atrocities, including politically-motivated abductions and killings of candidates and politically exposed individuals, particularly in the Southeast region. Facilities belonging to INEC and Police were also attacked and vandalized by gunmen. The growing trend of violent crimes ahead of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria is eroding the civic space and represents the largest threat to the peaceful conduct of the elections. Some of the political actors are blaming these incidents on their political opponents while security agencies are attributing the carnage against INEC and some politicians in the southeast to separatist groups such as IPOB. Nonetheless, these attacks have the tendency to significantly impact the election process and could disrupt election activities both during and after the 2023 general elections.

War of Words

As the 2023 elections approach, political tensions are rising and leading to verbal confrontations and violence. The spokespersons of the Presidential Candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and that of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) were engaged in a heated exchange, and their followers and supporters took the verbal war to social media.

There were accusations and counter-accusations between the Governorship candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Senator Magnus Abe and the Governor of Rivers State, Mr Nyesome Wike.

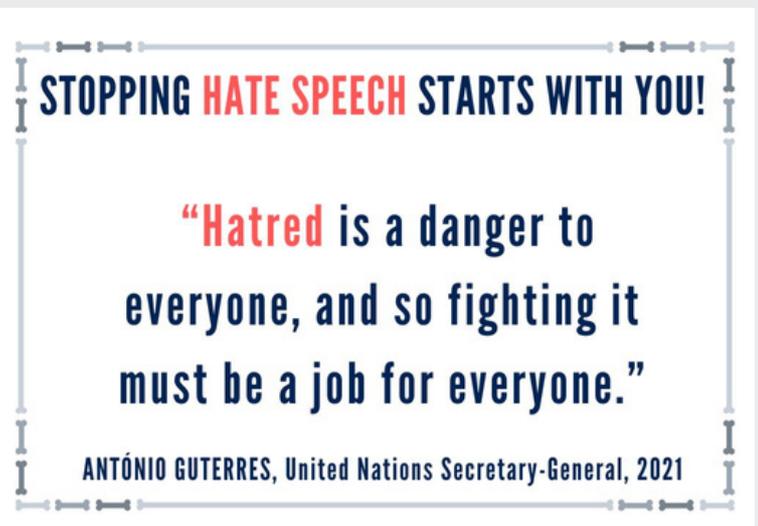
Furthermore, supporters of two political leaders, Hon Ferdinand Dozie Nwankwo of APGA and Senator Uche Ekwunife of PDP, were involved in a physical altercation on January 7, 2023, which highlights how the heated language of the political elites is inciting violence between their supporters.

Voter Intimidation/Suppression

In the southeast region, a group of ten gunmen destroyed campaign materials and announced that there would be no election in Biafra land at Orié Mbah Market Akpugo, Nkanu West LGA, Enugu State, on January 28, 2023. This incident is causing fear among citizens who may have to risk their lives to participate in the election.

Election Atrocities Impact on Nigeria's Civic Space

The growing election violence and hate speech in the weeks leading up to the elections is further shrinking the civic space in Nigeria. Desperate politicians are suppressing opposing voices, restricting the rights to freedom of association and expression. This is causing a further decline in trust in the Nigerian democratic process and could result in a larger number of citizens being disenfranchised due to fear of violence.





Hate Speech

Politicians in some parts of the country have resorted to the use of inflammatory hate speech in their campaigns. One such instance was the derogatory remarks made by the current Speaker of Abia State House of Assembly during a campaign at Ohokobe Ibeku Umuahia North, Abia state where he referred to the candidate of the Labour Party as a son of nobody who could be easily dealt with by his supporters. A few days later, the convoy of the Labour Party candidate was attacked.

The APC Presidential Candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, claimed the Labour Party Presidential Candidate is the Biblical Peter that denied Jesus Christ three times before the cock crowed. The statement was made at the APC Presidential Campaign rally at Awka, Anambra state on January 31, 2023. A day earlier, in his campaigns in Akwa Ibom, Tinubu had called out the Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Udom Emmanuel for supporting the Presidential candidate of his party, the PDP, and referred to him as “that boy”. Such statements have the potential of instigating reprisals and uncontrolled use of hate speech.

A political rally in Ahiaba primary school field, Abia State was disrupted on January 13, 2023 after the Abia State Governor and a member of the State House of Assembly representing Obingwa West made offensive remarks about a current Senator. In response, Youths from the community massed and caused destruction, leading to police shooting.

Again, on January 30, 2023, in Enugu State, a group of youths invited to Arthur Eze residence for a rally, turned hostile and insulted the presidential candidate of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), burning the campaign materials given to them.

Additionally, there have been instances of disinformation and fake news spreading, including a reported but unverified attack on a man wearing the Labour Party campaign shirt and claims of a doctored video.

While slanderous comments, hate speech, politically motivated violence and the use of thugs are tactics that have been employed by Nigerian politicians in past elections to intimidate and harass voters and political opponents, the use of these antics has been magnified by the aid of social media where politicians and their sympathizers generate and share fake news and hate speech against opponents and their supporters at little to no cost.

Politically Motivated Attacks on INEC, Police & Military Personnel / Facilities

The violence against INEC resources, personnel and facilities continued in January 2023, with the arson attack on INEC facilities in Enugu South LGA, Enugu State, on January 15th. In addition to the attack on the INEC facility, there were two cases of destruction of Police stations. They include:

1. The bombing of Afor Atta Divisional Police Headquarters in the Njaba Local Government Area of Imo State on January 2, 2023, resulting in the complete destruction of the Police Station.
2. The attack on the Ndiegoro Police Station in Abia state on January 17, 2023, resulting in the death of one Police Inspector.
3. The attack on the Oguta Police Station, Oguta LGA in Imo state on January 21, 2023, resulting in the death of one Police Officer.

Other security personnel were also not spared in these politically motivated attacks in the month of January. These include:

1. The abduction of the Divisional Police Officer in charge of Pankshin Division, Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State on January 12, 2023.
2. The killing of one female Police Officer attached to the highway patrol team of the Imo State Police Command on January 25, 2023, in the Ngor Okpala Local Government Area of Imo state.
3. The killing of two soldiers at the military checkpoint at Idodo in Enugu state on January 28, 2023.
4. The killing of three Police Officers at Ebonyi State border checkpoint along the Enugu/Abakaliki highway on January 28, 2023.

The incessant attacks on police formations by gunmen wielding assault rifles pose a threat to a peaceful election in the country.



Attacks on Politicians and other Politically Exposed Persons

The month of January saw numerous attacks on politically exposed individuals, with **at least 15 abductions** (including 1 Police Officer) and **at least 30 killings** (including 11 security personnel) excluding security agents. There were also **at least 6 attacks** at political campaign rallies.

1. A bomb hit the convoy of a former Governor of Imo State, Ikedi Ohakim on January 2, causing the death of three police officers and a paramilitary official.
2. on January 8, 2023, Hon. Sunkanmi Obisesan, the Chief of Staff to the Osun State Speaker was attacked by gunmen in Ifofin, Ilesa
3. The same January 8, gunmen attacked the APC Presidential Campaign office in Ilesa, Osun.
4. A former Edo State House of Assembly member, Festus Edughele was abducted in Edo State on January 9, 2023.
5. Gunmen bombed Ihiala Local Government Headquarters in Anambra State which housed the administrative block of the council, INEC office, Health Office department, NYSC, Education department and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Office on January 12, 2023 resulting in the death of three people.
6. Gunmen attacked the residence of the spokesperson of the Coalition of United Political Parties (CUPP) in Imo State on January 14, 2023, killing four people.
7. A wife and 6 children of the District Head of Mutumbiyu, Sani Muhammad, a second-class chief in Jalingo, Taraba state were abducted at their home on January 19, 2023.
8. Mr. Sale Yakubu, a Councilor in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State was killed on January 19, 2023, by a yet-to-be-identified gunman.

9. A Catholic Priest, the Catechist of St. Monica Catholic Church, Ikulu-Pari, Kefas Ishaya in Chawai Chieftdom of Kauru, Kaduna was abducted on January 19, 2023, in an attempted attack on Rev Fr Joseph Shekari, who was not in his residence at the time of the attack.

10. There was a twin explosion that rocked the campaign rally of the APC at the Rumuwoji Playground in Port Harcourt, Rivers State on January 19, 2023.

11. One person was killed and many others injured when gunmen invaded a rally organized by the PDP at Ward 7 Ewu community in Esan Central LGA, Edo on January 20, 2023.

12. A Plateau State First class traditional ruler, the Agwom Izere, His Royal Highness Dr. Isaac Azi Wakili was abducted when heavily armed gunmen reportedly invaded his Palace situated in the Shere District of Jos East on January 20, 2023.

13. The Sole Administrator of Ideato North Local Government Area of Imo State, Mr Christopher Ohizu was abducted in his residence on January 20, 2023, and subsequently beheaded on January 22, 2023, after his abductors allegedly collected N6 million ransom.



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Politically Motivated Killings



Attacks on Political Parties Rallies



Politically Motivated Abductions



Attacks on Politicians & Politically Exposed Persons



Attacks on Govt. Facilities & Police Stations



14. The campaign team of the Presidential candidate of Labour Party, Mr Peter Obi was attacked on his way to the airport in Katsina state after a rally at Muhammad Dikko Stadium on January 23, 2023.

15. Gunmen attacked and killed Christian Ihim, the Okwe Ward Chairman and member of APC in Okwe, a community in Onuimo Local Government of Imo State and abducted five other chieftains of APC in the community on January 23, 2023.

16. Thugs attacked members of the APC, in Kaura Namoda LGA, Zamfara State destroying vehicles and motorcycles on January 23, 2023.

17. Lagos State PDP Deputy Governorship Candidate, Funke Akindele was harassed and chased out of the Ketu Fruit Market in Lagos State on January 24, 2023.

18. Akilu Kuta, the Chairman of Shiroro Local Government Area together with the Niger State APC Assistant Youth Leader, Suleiman Galkogo were attacked during a raid on Kuta town by alleged bandits on January 24, 2023. Three persons were abducted during that incident.

19. One person was killed and others injured as gunmen attacked the campaign rally of the People's Democratic Party in Rivers State on January 24, 2023.

20. The District Head of Chawai in Kauru Local Government of Kaduna State, Chief Joshua Ahmadu was abducted by gunmen who invaded his house at Zambina on January 25, 2023.

21. Thugs and hoodlums attacked the convoy of the PDP Deputy Governorship Candidate of Ogun State, Adekunle Akinlade, in Ogun State on January 26, 2023.

22. Three people were killed during an attack involving the convoy of Abdul-Azeez Adediran (Jandor), a governorship candidate of the PDP in Lagos State in the Coker area of Aguda, Surulere Local Government Area of the state on January 27, 2023.

23. Gunmen attacked the constituency office of the member representing Bende Federal Constituency, Abia State and the spokesperson of the House of Representatives who is also the Chairman, House Committee on Media and Public Affairs. Barr. Benjamin Kalu on January 27, 2023.

24. Political thugs raided and set fire to the residence of the APC National Assembly candidate for Ikwerre-Emuoha Federal Constituency, Ezemonye Ezekiel-Amadi in Omerelu, Ikwerre LGA, Rivers State on January 28, 2023.

25. At least 11 people were injured as thugs disrupted the APC rally at a primary school field in Onicha Ohaozara Local Government in Ebonyi State, on January 28, 2023.

26. The Umuogudu Akpu Ngbo office of Ebubeagu Security was attacked by heavily armed men on January 30, 2023, leaving many of the security agents with bullet wounds while the office, vehicles and motorcycle were set ablaze.

27. The APC Campaign Director in Opobo/Nkoro, Opobo Local Government Area in River State was abducted at the venue of a scheduled rally on January 31, 2023.

The continued occurrence of these attacks without intervention is a cause for concern as it affects the security situation during the elections. The fear of further attacks and dissatisfaction with the government's response to the security situation could trigger a higher voter apathy.

Conclusion

Despite being largely under-reported, the political violence in the Southeast and other parts of the country is a cause for concern. Though the southeast region is the smallest in land mass, it is home to a part of the citizenry that has felt disconnected, left out and maltreated by successive administrations in Nigeria since the civil war. This has led to a general lack of engagement in past elections.

In Conclusion, the political violence in Nigeria, particularly in the southeast, is a cause for concern and is largely under-reported. The Pre-election incidents, such as the destruction of INEC facilities, are likely deliberate attempts by desperate politicians to instil fear and disrupt the elections. The government needs to take steps to address the increasing wave of insecurity, protect the public and ensure the integrity of the 2023 general elections.