



Election Atrocities Update

a monthly tracking of hate speech & election atrocities in Nigeria

OCTOBER 2023 TRACKING REPORT

This report documents incidents of hate speech, malicious propagation of fake news, violence and other forms of elections-related atrocities linked to the elections to be held in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo states for the month of October 2023.

Preamble

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has concluded plans to conduct the gubernatorial elections in Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi states on November 11, 2023, with a combined electorate of 5.41 million voters across the three states. These elections come amidst concerns about insecurity and election-related violence which has characterized Nigeria elections including the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly elections that took place earlier in February and March this year.

Historically, off-cycle elections in these states have been triggered by legal challenges and court orders, adding complexity to the electoral landscape. The broader issue of violence and malpractices in Nigerias elections persists, driven by factors such as governance weaknesses, security inefficiencies, and economic disparities.

Each state faces its unique security challenges, and there are indications of armed violence in the upcoming elections. The effectiveness of security measures, the actions of political actors, and the commitment of stakeholders will be critical in ensuring peaceful and credible elections.

This report explores the security challenges and potential strategies for mitigating risks in Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi as they approach the governorship elections on November 11, 2023.

Attacks on politically exposed persons

1. October 18, 2023: Gunmen attack the convoy of the Kogi state SDP governorship candidate, Murtala Yakubu - Ajaka, at Ogori Mangogo, Kogi state.

2. October 18, 2023: Thugs disrupted a Social Democratic Party (SDP) campaign at Ejule, Ofu L.G.A, Kogi state.

3. October 27, 2023: While sharing bags of rice amongst supporters, a fight broke out between an APC youth leader and an APC supporter at Gwaris quarters Koton Karfe, Kogi State.

Attacks on political party supporters.

1. October 24, 2023: Chalito James (an SDP supporter) was brutally attacked by Rufai Mohammed, lookman Haruna, Arab Musa, Friday Agbo and eleven other opposition party members who had earlier threatened him to decamp to their party APC or leave the town. This attack took place at Dekina L.G.A Kogi state.

2. October 30th, 2023: A man wearing an APC campaign CAP was brutally injured by PDP supporters at Osiris road, Bayelsa State.

ELECTION ATROCITIES TRACKER

As the gubernatorial elections in Kogi, Bayelsa, and Imo states approach, over the previous week, our trackers documented two confrontations between supporters of political parties.



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Incidents of Hate Speech & Fake News

Members of the APC and community members from the hometown of the Governorship candidate of the APC, Timipre Sylva, threatened political violence in the event that Sylva is disqualified from contesting the November 11 Bayelsa State gubernatorial election. This came after news spread in some quarters that Sylva has been disqualified from contesting in the election, and the use of inflammatory language targeted at Sylva during the electioneering campaign by the PDP.

On October 22, 2023, news reports covered an alleged attack on a convoy belonging to Yahaya Bello, the governor of Kogi State. The news stated that men dressed in military uniforms sporadically shot at his convoy at 4 pm, a few kilometers away from Abuja. However, the governor refuted the claims, stating that there was no such attack on him or anyone in his convoy.

Conclusion

The security situation in Kogi, Imo and Bayelsa is increasingly raising concerns with a history of election-related violence, threats, and tensions that have characterized elections in these states in the past. In Bayelsa, the involvement of armed thugs and a looming sense of politically orchestrated violence are matters of grave concern. Especially in Nembe, Brass, Ekeremor, and Southern Ijaw areas of the states where thugs have been known to operate in the past. The exchange of accusations of sponsoring violence and the use of inflammatory language between political actors especially the governorship candidate of the APC, Timipre Sylva and the Governor, Douye Diri further exacerbates the situation. Imo faces a different but equally alarming challenge, with armed groups associated with the proscribed separatist terror group IPOB posing a serious threat to the election environment. The persistence of violence and insecurity in the state, including attacks on security personnel and political figures, raises substantial fears about the fairness and equality of the electoral process especially in the Okigwe axis of the state where there is heavy military presence and resulting violent activities displacing people from their homes in a bid to destroy suspected IPOB hideouts.

Kogi, a hotspot state for electoral violence, has seen abductions and attacks on INEC staff and political candidates in the just concluded general elections. The violent incidents and political rivalries especially between the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Senator Dino Melaye, Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidate, Alhaji Murtala Yakubu Ajaka (Muri), APC's candidate Ahmed Ododo and the current governor Yahaya Bello which not only sips down to their supporters who physically attack each other but may lead to apathy among residents especially in Ofu and Dekina L.G.A's of the state identified as points of possible violence, compromising the democratic process. The recurring pattern of violence and the potential for chaos in the upcoming elections are crucial issues that must be addressed. Ensuring safe, free, and fair elections is essential to prevent fear from negatively impacting voter turnout. As such, immediate measures are necessary to ensure the safety of elections and encourage public participation.