

# Parties adopt extra-security measures as gunmen attacks rise

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**SOME** political parties have adopted special security measures in a move to better protect their officials and supporters as the campaigns intensify ahead of the elections.

While the Labour Party and the New Nigeria Peoples Party disclosed that they have taken extra-security measures as they cannot rely on police protection alone, the Peoples Democratic Party said it was the responsibility of the All Progressives Congress regime to protect Nigerians.

This is happening against the backdrop of attacks on party members on campaigns by suspected thugs in Borno, Zamfara, Kaduna and other states.

The PDP had its rally disrupted in Kaduna last year while spokesman of the campaign council, Senator Dino Melaye, claimed that over 100 vehicles were vandalized in Borno state when the party went on a campaign tour of the North-East.

Both the PDP and the ruling APC also claimed that their campaign convoys were attacked last year in Lagos by men suspected to be hired thugs.

However, findings by *The PUNCH* indicate that no fewer than 30 politicians have been killed between 2020 and 2022 across the country.

Also, 31 other politicians were also kidnapped during the review period. The figures were obtained from a tally conducted by our correspondent.

Checks revealed that a party ward chairman was abducted in Ondo state on January 5, 2020. Also, thugs killed a suspended Imo councillor on January 6.

Similarly, gunmen killed the PDP chairman in Delta on January 8, 2020 while a Bauchi lawmaker was abducted on January 14, 2021.

On January 24, gunmen kidnapped and killed a Taraba local government boss and his nephew.

In Cross River, suspected hoodlums abducted an All Progressives Congress chieftain on March 25 and on May 1, unknown men abducted a Kogi LG chairman and also killed a commissioner in the state.

In 2022, an Akwa Ibom APC chieftain was shot dead on New Year's Day.

Also, gunmen abducted a former Imo state assembly speaker and four others in Imo on January 8.

Similarly, armed men murdered two APC chieftains and abducted one other in Enugu on January 18.

Two weeks later, an APC chieftain and another person were kidnapped in Ekiti on January 31.

Tragically, an abducted APC woman leader was killed in Kwara on March 19 just as gunmen beheaded an Anambra lawmaker days after he

was abducted on May 21.

The attack on politicians was also recorded in Niger state as three PDP delegates were killed by gunmen on May 25.

Gunmen also reportedly killed an Adamawa lawmaker and shot his son on July 23.

A serving commissioner in Nasarawa was abducted on August 15 while two APC chieftains were kidnapped in Imo four days later.

Speaking on the extra-security measures adopted by the party, Spokesperson of the Obi-Datti campaign council, Mr. Akin Osuntokun stated that every citizen deserved to be protected and not only the politicians.

He disclosed that the Labour Party has a private security arrangement to protect its members during campaigns.

"Yes, the police are giving us security; of course, we have contracted private security (guards) to complement the Nigeria Police," he explained.

## Labour Party laments

Corroborating Osuntokun, the LP Presidential Campaign Council Spokesman, Tanko Yunusa, said, "We have our own security arrangements too to make sure that we are not caught in the web. Basically, we will work with the Nigeria Police and other security agencies but have people who have volunteered to assist with our security privately. So, we are having a mix of the two."

The All Progressives Congress said there was nothing wrong in adopting extra-security arrangements provided such an arrangement did not breach the provisions of the law.

Speaking with our correspondent on the issue on Sunday, the Director of Publicity of the APC, Bala Ibrahim said, "Whatever security arrangement that will not conflict with the provision of the law, is something that will be in the contemplation of the APC."

"As a law-abiding party, APC will not object to any arrangement provided it is not in conflict with established laws. Whatever will be done to supplement by way of intelligence sharing, proper crowd control measures, and adequately protecting not only the candidates but everyone at the campaign grounds, and everywhere, before, during and after any rally, the party will always support it."

But the Peoples Democratic Party said it is the responsibility of the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (ret'd)-led government to provide adequate security for all political parties before, during and after the elections.

While ruling out setting up an internal security arrangement, the National Publicity Secretary of the party, Debo Ologunagba urged Nigerians to prevail on the federal government to make the country secure for everyone including the

political parties.

He stated, "It is not for parties to provide security. If they have to do that, it is an admission that the APC-led government has failed to deliver its promise on securing Nigerians. What variant of security arrangement do you want political parties to come up with that will not violate the provisions of the constitution? Militia or what should the parties form to protect themselves and their supporters?"

"If a government that has promised to conduct free and fair elections wants political parties to protect themselves; it is an admission that they cannot win unless they unleash violence. Nigerians must be on their guard because the elections must be free, fair and credible."

"We have been saying it but some people thought we were raising false alarms. They claimed they have defeated Boko Haram. If that is the case, the PDP does not see any reason they cannot provide security at campaign venues, rallies and throughout the duration of the elections."

"Like I said, the PDP is a law-abiding party and we will not do anything against the provisions of the law," the publicity secretary noted.

For the All Progressives Grand Alliance National Chairman, Chief Victor Oye, the party has no plan to delve into the security realm, stressing that it would rely on God in the course of its outings and activities.

"We have no such arrangement (internal security measures). We place all our hope and trust in God," he said.

Taking a slightly different stand, the presidential candidate and National Chairman of the African Action Alliance, Omoyele Sowore, noted that whatever the party would do is not for public consumption.

"We won't discuss security publicly because we know the Nigerian state too well," he said.

Meanwhile, police authorities have vowed to prosecute anyone found guilty of instigating violence, before, during and after the election in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and the Electoral Act, 2023.

Also speaking, the former National Chairman of the African Democratic Congress, Mr. Ralph Nwosu said, "The party from the onset has a very dynamic youth vanguard but it is not equipped like the police. But private security arrangements? No. They (youth vanguard) work with us when we are on campaigns and other places."

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## PDP spokesman

The Deputy National Publicity Secretary of the PDP, Ibrahim Abdullahi decried the poor security architecture in the country, noting that the Federal Government has not demonstrated the required commitment to protection of lives and properties of Nigerians.

Abdullahi said, "Nigerians have been told since 2015 of the dangers of insecurity; the present government has not shown commitment to the value of human lives unlike during the reigns of the PDP. Lives are being lost, people slaughtered."

"We are admonishing Nigerians to wake up to the realization that you don't keep late nights no visiting unnecessary places where you believe is volatile."

On his part, the National Chairman of the Africa Democratic Party, Yabagi Sani, observed that there could be anarchy if every party adopted a private security arrangement.

Meanwhile, the National President, Association of Licensed Private Security Practitioners of Nigeria, Mr. Chris Adigwu has said there was a need for citizens, politicians, and the government to engage licensed private security guards for improved security.

Speaking with *The PUNCH* on Sunday, Adigwu said there was a vacuum in the country's security architecture which should be filled.

He called on the government to licence the private security firms to bear arms, adding that over 4 million

private guards were not engaged by clients because they were not licensed to bear firearms.

He said, "Based on the level of security faced by politicians, they usually require people who carry arms. Hence, our personnel don't usually stand a chance, as they don't bear arms."

"Also, it'll be great if the government allow licensed private security guards companies to carry arms. Owners of licensed PGCs are usually profiled by the Department of State Security Service and our personnel are well-trained."

"We have over 4m personnel and we have a large number of personnel in every villages, towns, and cities of the 774 local government areas, yet they're underutilized by Nigerians, including politicians."

"However, if our personnel are being employed as escorts, it will reduce the pressure on the police and other internal security outfits."

To achieve a secure environment, Adigwu called for proper security management "where private security guards would have proper roles to play just as others."

## Accidents claim supporters

In a related incident, no fewer than 51 various political parties' officials and supporters have lost their lives and 107 in injured road crashes.

Findings by *The PUNCH* revealed that 12 officials and supporters died in 2020; 13 died in 2022.

On Saturday, 16 persons died and 83 sustained various degrees of injury in a truck accident involving PDP supporters in Plateau.

The truck was conveying 99 party members when it crashed on Saturday evening at Jwak, Panyam District of Mangu Local Government Area of the state.

Meanwhile, the All Progressives Congress in Plateau has suspended its campaign tour for three days, to honour some supporters of the PDP supporters who died in an auto accident.

In a statement, APC governorship candidate in Plateau State, Nentawe Yilwatda said the suspension of the campaign tour was to allow him and members of his party join the PDP in mourning the victims.

In a related development, PDP governorship candidate in the state, Caleb Mutwang, has also suspended the party's campaign activities to mourn the deceased.

The Presidential candidate of the PDP, Atiku Abubakar, and the party's National Chairman, Iyorchia Ayu, on Sunday paid condolence visits on the former Governor of Plateau state, Jonah Jang in Jos over Saturday's accident which claimed the lives of 16 party supporters and left 83 others injured.

The former Vice President commended Jang for the leadership of the PDP in Plateau and assured him that "nobody body makes sacrifices without the sacrifice being acknowledged and appreciated."