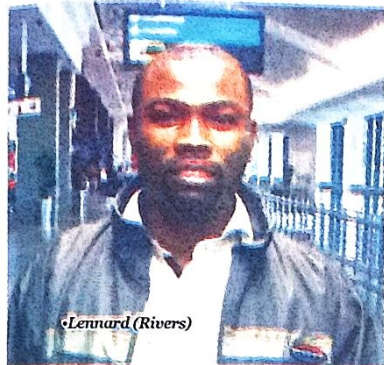


to election violence – Families



•Lennard (Rivers)



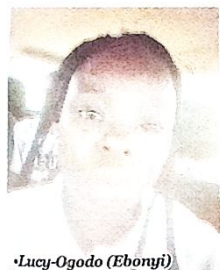
•Akot (Rivers)



•Madueke (Lagos)



•Victim (Lagos)



•Lucy-Ogodo (Ebonyi)



•Victim (Lagos)



•Victim (Lagos)

an estimated 800 lives following the election of President Goodluck Jonathan.4 Likewise, hundreds were reported to have died during the following elections in 2015 and 2019.

In the 12 months preceding the 2023 elections, ACLED recorded over 200 violent events involving party members and supporters of politicians, resulting in nearly 100 fatalities.

These numbers are largely in line with the run-ups to the previous two election years, with over 150 events and more than 100 reported fatalities between 2018 and 2019, and an estimated 115 events and over 90 fatalities between 2014 and 2015.

The South-East (46 events) and the South-West (45) registered the highest number of violent events involving party supporters before the 2023 elections, followed by the South-South (38) and North Central (32) areas. Nearly one in 10 events took place in the battleground state of Osun, where both the PDP and APC have traded allegations over inciting violence against their rivals.

"Half of the violence involving party supporters in the 12 months before the 2023 election involves direct, organised attacks against civilians, followed by mob violence and abductions," the report stated.

Unarmed civilians were the target of violence in around 80 per cent of the events recorded by ACLED, accounting for approximately 75 of the nearly 100 reported fatalities arising from events between February 2022 and February 2023.

Another report by a geopolitical research firm, SB Morgen, revealed that 27 Nigerians were killed in 57 politically-motivated violent incidents between January and December 2022.

The report, titled, 'Insecurity and the 2023 Elections,' added that elections in Nigeria were a hotly-contested affair, with vested interests from the politicking to the aspirants.

'109 deaths in three months linked to 2023 elections'

A total of 109 election-related deaths were recorded across Nigeria in the build-up to the 2023 general elections, a pro-democracy think-tank, Centre for Democracy and Development, said.

The organisation noted that its tracker recorded the deaths between January 1 and March 10, 2023.

"Osun, Imo and Ebonyi have also seen a number of incidents in the past three months that could disrupt state house of assembly polls taking place in the state.

"In total, 109 deaths linked to political violence have been recorded from the start of the year to March 10, 2023, according to the tracker," it stated in a statement by its director, Idayat Hassan.

27 killed in governorship poll – Report

No fewer than 27 people were killed during the March 18 governorship and House of Assembly elections held across the country, SB Morgen Intelligence stated.

The organisation, in its report titled, 'NigeriaDecides2023: State of Violence,' released on Monday, listed states where people were killed to include Rivers, Delta, Benue, Akwa Ibom, Ebonyi, Niger, Kebbi, Katsina, Cross River, and Lagos.

According to the report, the South-South region led in the number of casualties with 24 cases of violence. The North-Central recorded seven deaths in eight cases of violence.

In the South-West, 30 cases of violence were recorded, which resulted in three deaths, while in the North-West, 11 cases of violence resulted in two deaths.

The South-East had 12 cases of violence, which resulted in one death, while in the North-East, five cases of violence were recorded with no death.

In all, 10 states were spotlighted for the extreme violence that led to the death of many Nigerians.

The organisation also said the casualties might be more, as it was still monitoring unfolding developments.

"The March 18 governorship and House of Assembly elections, held after the presidential and National Assembly elections, were characterised by poor turnout; but many had hoped that the 2023 elections would be better, given the initial widespread enthusiasm," the report read in part.

"Our research shows that logistics issues and violence resurfaced and Nigeria's elections risk normalising ethnic-based voter suppression.

"Thugs hijacked and burnt election materials in Ogbia, Bayelsa, making the Independent National Electoral Commission officials flee to Yenagoa for safety. 'Iceland' members were accused of threatening non-PDP voters in Rivers, where some thugs forcefully demanded access to election materials in Akwa-Ibom.

"The most striking examples of violence are from Lagos and other states where a long-standing ruling party wants to stay in power forcefully," the report added.

Other cases

A party agent with the Labour Party in the Trade Fair area of Lagos State, Onyeka Abali, was among those killed.

He was the party's polling unit agent in the area. Abali was reportedly shot by thugs on Saturday and left to bleed to death.

His brother, who did not want to be named, confirmed the incident and said his brother's remains had been taken to his home state for burial.

In the Ikorodu area of the state, some political thugs beat up party agents at the 013 Thomas Polling Unit by Association Avenue, Owode/Ajegunle, off Ikorodu Road.

One of the victims, who also claimed to be an LP party agent, Princess Ann-Ezeh, in an interview with *Saturday PUNCH*, said someone else signed the result sheet with the pseudonym, 'Tessy', adding that it was not her name.

She also alleged that she was beaten and pushed away from the polling unit.

An electoral officer in the Ifjigbo PU 041, Dablin Jessica, lamented how she was forced to mutilate election results to favour a particular party.

She said, "The thugs got angry when I did not do their bidding even after offering me money. I was ambushed on my way home and my phone was smashed to pieces.

They took everything I had on me, slapped me and told me they would come for me later."

In PU 004, Sinclair Close, Ajangbadi, a voter, who did not want his name in print, said he was harassed and beaten multiple times by suspected political thugs because he refused to do the bidding of hoodlums.

He said, "They hit me multiple times, made away with my phone, ATM, PVC and the ear pod I just bought. Now, they've transferred all the money in my account to my phone number."

Further attempts to get more details about the incident were unsuccessful as the source stopped responding to *Saturday PUNCH*'s message.

However, videos sent to *Saturday PUNCH* showed a young man soaked in blood and saying some inaudible words in Yoruba.

Violence and intimidation also marred the electoral process in Desa Polling Unit, Ibeju-Lekki, Lagos.

Eyewitnesses, who sent the video evidence to our correspondent, confirmed that some stick-wielding thugs chased away voters who refused to vote for their preferred candidates.

Stabbed for voting

A yet-to-be-identified man in Sangotedo was said to have been stabbed by suspected political thugs for voting for a candidate the thugs did not approve.

In a video making the round on social media, the victim, who was soaked in blood, narrated how the thugs stabbed him multiple times.

An eyewitness, who spoke to our correspondent on *Twitter* and wanted to be anonymous, said the incident happened at Ward 6, Eti Osa, Sangotedo.

"Soldiers rescued him. It was not just the one you saw in the video. There were two of them who were stabbed by these thugs.

"Two of them were taken to Safeway Hospital. We didn't vote in our polling units. Even the police were helpless. They couldn't do much to help us," the source lamented.

In Ebonyi State, a resident, Uzodimma Lucy-Ogodo, told our correspondent she was stabbed in the left eye for voting against the will of some political thugs.

"I went to my polling unit to perform my civic duty. The thugs followed me to my polling booth, insisting I vote their will. Of course, I refused and voted my preferred candidate.

"After much struggle to tear my ballot paper, in front of the security men and INEC officials, they began to beat me up, tore my clothes and pushed me out. "I am lucky to be alive. They even threatened to kill me if they see me anywhere in town. I won't let anyone bully me into supporting evil," she added.

Civil societies lament bloodbath

A human rights lawyer, Mr Festus Ogun, said Nigeria had a long history of electoral violence.

He noted that the impunity continued because there were no consequences for perpetrators of mayhem and violence.

"Those who profit from the violence during elections are the same people we continue to recycle in power over the years.

"Because violence works for them, they have continued to weaponise it to steal the true mandates of our people," he added.

The legal practitioner added that with the new Electoral Act (2022) the era (of political violence) was gone.

He said, "Cases in which politicians deliberately unleash violence on their opponents' stronghold, leading to the total cancellation of votes in those areas, are long over.

Section 24 of the Electoral Act (2022) has now made it clear that deliberately unleashing violence in the stronghold of one's opponents in such a way and manner that voters would be disenfranchised does not automatically mean that the votes in those places where the violence occurred will amount to nothing.

"The new position of the law is that voting in those areas will be suspended. INEC has a duty under Section 24, Sub-section three to fix another date for the conduct of elections in those areas."

The Chairman of the Centre for Anti-Corruption and Open Leadership, Debo Adeniran, noted that Nigerians were generally too emotional about election outcomes.

"That is the extent to which they have been indoctrinated by politicians about the ethnic and social attachments to whoever is contesting and is supposed to win.

"Ordinarily, citizens of different communities will want to defend whoever they consider their genuine representative.

"In certain societies, their political leaders are worshipped. This is because they have been impoverished by these politicians so they know that without these politicians their sustenance would be gone," he said.

According to him, politicians make elections a do-or-die affair because it is their means to amass wealth.

"They (politicians) know that they can only sustain the lavish lifestyle they have adopted for themselves over the years as long as they remain in politics," he added.

Also commenting, the Executive Director, Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre, Anwal Musa Rafsanjani, said the law was too weak in dealing with electoral offences.

Rafsanjani, who is also the head of the Transition Monitoring Group, said, "That is why CISLAC and TMG have been pushing for the establishment of the Electoral Offences Commission because INEC's hands are tied.

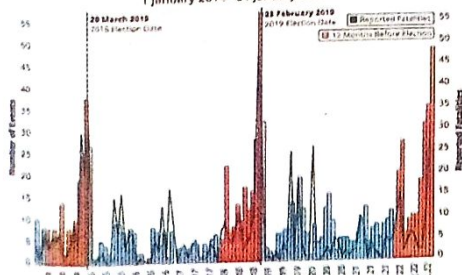
They cannot be conducting elections and, at the same time, taking up electoral offences."

For him, politicians cannot prosecute electoral offenders because they are largely the ones behind the thugs.

"How then will they prosecute those that are arrested? The arrests that the government, through the police, is doing have limitations. If the attorney general of the state is not ready to prosecute them, the cases will die. That is why no one has been dealt with for electoral violence," he added.

Violence Involving Political Parties in Nigeria

1 January 2014 - 31 January 2023



Source: ACLED



•Suspected thug (Lagos)