



## **ROLES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT OF NON STATE ACTORS IN ELECTION SECURITY**

### **Key Findings:**

- The management of elections is increasingly becoming less of a technical affair to be left exclusively to the election management bodies (EMBs) and other statutory bodies and their officials.
- Development of platforms for partnership, networking and collaboration is very imperative.
- Real or imagined partisanship of security agencies could inspire politicians to seek avenues of countering the influence of state security institutions.
- There is a room for the conduct of periodic exercises to assess security risk relating to electoral process at all levels of elections and across different geographical areas.
- Understanding of the political actors' incentives to resort to the use of violence during electoral processes by non-state actors, can inform the planning of appropriate security responses, at the grass roots.

### **Recommendations:**

- Map organizations and individuals with an agenda or capacity to promote peace and conflict resolution during elections at a national, state and local government levels.
- Establishment and continue to support joint coordination bodies such as task forces or joint election operation centres.
- Join or initiate discussion forums for participatory dialogues between EMBs, security sector agencies and non-state actors in all phases of the electoral processes.
- Formalize the coordination between state and non-state actors during elections, and mobilize sufficient financial and human resources for joint action.
- Consult with traditional and religious leaders in order to understand their interest and potential to assist in mediating electoral conflict.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Nigeria, and generally in Africa, participatory democracy can be imperilled and crippled by election insecurity. To buttress this, CLEEN Foundation's seventh Security Threat Assessment (STA) noted, there were a few concerns about the capacity and neutrality of state security agencies going into the 2015 elections. The desperate acts of some politicians in collaboration with mostly young persons have continued to endanger the electoral process in Nigeria; which ordinarily should bring them to power based on the decisions of the electorates. The 2015 Election Viability Polls conducted by the CLEEN Foundation had found that the polling units and the result collation centres were likely hotspots for violence and suggested that collaborations between security agencies would produce the best results for elections security management in Nigeria.

Building up to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, there were insinuations of partisan control of state security institutions by some politicians, particularly, members of the ruling party. Real or imagined harassment of opposition officials and facilities could have triggered or inspired the opposition to seek avenues of countering the influence of state security institutions. There were also concerns about the levels of preparedness and resources available to the state security institutions to deal with the myriad of challenges around the concluded 2015 elections across the country, particularly, in view of its stretched resources in providing for the logistics on mobilising state security actors to all the nooks and crannies of the country, and adequately providing for the welfare of officers and men that would be deployed for election duties. Consequently, it is opined that electoral security is most effective when adapted to the local security context as the local security context in most parts of the country, often involves multiple layers of stake holders; thus, an improved implementation of electoral security strategy for the country

would require the establishment and continued support of joint coordination bodies such as task forces or joint election operation centres.

Such security forums will maintain and enhance coordination between agencies throughout the electoral cycle, taken into account a wider range of actors including political parties, other ministries and civil society groups. The existence and prevalence in our urban and rural spaces of non-state actors such as vigilantes, civil society organizations, and community based organizations – including traditional and religious institutions in supporting, and maintaining safety and security across the country underscores the need for a larger and enhanced collaboration between the state and non-state peace and security actors in providing election security. This policy brief explored recent trends of non-state actors observed in the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria and draw attention to factors which could affect election security management in Nigeria.

#### **KEY FINDINGS:**

- i. In many democracies across the world, the management of elections is increasingly becoming less of a technical affair to be left exclusively to the election management bodies (EMBs) and other statutory bodies and their officials. Instead, it is becoming more of a terrain of broad civic engagement, involving volunteer poll workers, election observers, CSOs, citizen groups, the media and opinion moulders. This wide-ranging citizen involvement in elections, both as individuals and as organizations, expands the role of stakeholders in the electoral process.
- ii. Conscious and deliberate efforts are needed to identify and map organizations or institution with agenda or capacity to promote peace and security during election; particularly, the differences between armed and un-armed non-state actors should be clearly noted. Un-armed non state actors play different roles in peace building, safety and security in our communities. Yet, there is proliferation of militant groups and vigilantes across the country. Many members of these groups are exposed to drug, small and light weapons and are susceptible to manipulations and used as party thugs.
- iii. Politicians have continued to seek the support of some organised non-state actors while campaigning for political offices due to their population, spread, youthfulness, and diversity. Unfortunately, there are no guidelines and codes of conduct for identified, organised, and un-armed non state actors such as NURTW, CSOs etc on issues such membership, training, accountability remains critical in ensuring election safety and security.
- iv. Development of platforms for partnership, networking and collaboration is very imperative. This realization led to the establishment of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) by INEC in 2011 to ensure coordinated engagement of all the security agencies during election periods.
- v. There is a room for the conduct of periodic exercises to assess security risk relating to electoral process at all levels of elections and across different geographical areas. To the greatest extent possible, consultations should involve all relevant stakeholders including EMBs, relevant ministries (for example, interior, defence, police, justice, health and transport), local governments, political parties and civil society organizations.

- vi. Understanding of the political actors' incentives to resort to the use of violence during electoral processes by non-state actors, can inform the planning of appropriate security responses, at the grassroots.
- vii. There is need for the continuous development of curriculum for training of non-state actors on the specifics of security engagement during the electoral processes. Such training should include human rights and gender awareness. In terms of the development of training methodologies and deciding on training timelines, the non-state actors will benefit from close collaboration with the EMB and security agencies.
- viii. Civil society organizations, including women's and youth groups, religious networks and interest groups, may play an important role in promoting peace during the campaigning period. Peace campaigning strategies should clearly define the target audience (e.g. young people) and the communication mechanisms (e.g. the media, roadshows), messages and symbols used. Strategies implemented at the community level, such as the use of community-based radio stations, will have the potential to reach all citizens, including vulnerable groups, and to bridge language barriers. Peace campaigning should promote tolerant political debates and seek public commitments by politicians in support of peaceful elections.

#### KEY RISK FACTORS

There are key risk factors requiring keen attention and action to improve and coordinate the role of non-state actors in elections security provisioning; these include:

- i. **Legal framework:** There is an apparent lack of a legal framework that identifies, categorizes, and assigns clear electoral security responsibilities to non-state actors. This creates room for overlapping functions and lack of coordination and manipulations by politicians. This in turn questions the legitimacy of the engagements and actions.
- ii. **Rules of Engagement:** There is no clear and standard definition of the rules of engagement for non-state actors in election security. The loose nature of membership, control, management and leadership amongst non-state actors makes them prone to political manipulations and hijack by politicians and open to the highest bidder, ethnicity, nepotism and religious undertone.
- iii. **Functional Partnership:** No formalized collaboration mechanisms for coordination and information exchange exist between non-state actors and electoral management bodies, other relevant agencies. Similarly, no mechanisms for partnership, coordination and information exchange exist between the security sector agencies and non-state actors on the one hand and between the non-state actors on the other.
- iv. **Proliferation of Small and Light weapons:** There is poor regulation and control of the proliferations of small and light weapons in the hands of many youths ranging from ethnic militia, cultural and self-determinations groups, state sponsored vigilantes, to youth wings of political parties. Rather than supporting election safety and security, this might become an avenue for test of superiority or tuft protection.
- v. **Funding:** Dearth of funding and support will affect the participation and engagement of non-state actors in election security management. There is usually no budgetary allocation; hence, funding may become a bait to swing the direction of activities of non-state actors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. There is need to map organizations and individuals with an agenda or capacity to promote peace and conflict resolution during elections at a national, state and local government levels.
- ii. There is need for forums for participatory dialogues between EMBs, security sector agencies and non-state actors in all phases of electoral processes.
- iii. The coordination between state and non-state actors during elections need to be formalised and sufficient financial and human resources mobilized for joint action.
- iv. Consultations with traditional and religious leaders are needed in order to understand their interest and potential to assist in mediating electoral conflict.
- v. A coalition or network of non-state actors could mobilize organizational expertise to carry out a comprehensive electoral risk assessment early on in the electoral processes. This assessment must look into the historical and current electoral conflict dynamics in different geographical regions.
- vi. There is need to ensure that all non-state actors which form an integral part of the national infrastructure for peace are familiarized with electoral processes, including timelines, procedures and operational details.
- vii. Training for non-state actors in election security is needed to enhance their understanding of the electoral process, the roles and rights of electoral actors, and electoral offences. In addition, non-state actors need to be aware of the roles and mandates of other election security stakeholders.
- viii. Non-state actors should intensify and sustain voters' education and sensitisations against electoral violence, upscale their peace education and conflict monitoring skills even beyond the elections.
- ix. There is need to promote the understanding of the role of non-state actors in contributing to peaceful elections, and advocate for the integration of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms into the electoral legal framework. These may include national mediation panels, peace councils, traditional and religious leaders, and reputable institutions and individuals, including women's organizations and activists that work to promote gender equality and participation.
- x. There is need for INEC to continue to engage and expand the room for participation of all stakeholders in election security management as synergy in election security management remains very pivotal. INEC must continue to prioritize security as it continues the struggle to navigate the complex electoral landscape of Nigeria.
- xi. Peace activism at the national and sub-national levels must be prioritised to deflate tensions and conflicts arising from inflammatory campaigning. They can engage in activism and involve political representatives, state officials and traditional leaders in addressing anxieties that emerge from provocative party campaigning.