

Bullets Before Ballots: Insecurity threatens 2027 polls -5,272 killed in 5 months

Barely seven months to the 2027 general elections, a reign of insecurity is casting a shadow over preparations for what should be a watershed democratic exercise, 33 years after the June 12, 1993, historic free and fair election. Between January and May 2026 alone, no fewer than 5,272 Nigerians, according to media reports, have been killed in violence-related incidents. According to the 15th Report on Violence in Nigeria, released by Nigeria Watch and compiled by Dr Vitus Nwankwo Ukoji, with support from Dr Abiola Victoria Ayodokun, 222,137 Nigerians were killed in 46,182 violent incidents across the 36 states and the FCT between 2006 and 2025. With this background, the 2026 death toll has prompted the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, rights activists and senior lawyers to warn that the polls scheduled for January 16 and February 6, 2027, could be conducted under the cloud of an unprecedented security crisis. Continued terrorist attacks, banditry, kidnappings and other violent crimes in most zones of the country, especially in the North-East, North-West, North-Central and now creeping into the South-West, have caused tension and fear in the polity. As the 2027 polls countdown intensifies, the consensus emerging from multiple fronts, INEC's leadership, the police high command, the human rights community and civil society, is unambiguous: Nigeria cannot afford to treat security and elections as separate conversations. The two, as INEC Chairman, Professor Joash Amupitan, put it, are "two sides of the same coin of national stability." However, leading opposition parties, such as Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, African Democratic Congress, ADC, and Nigeria Democratic Congress, NDC, last week, warned against postponing the elections, saying doing so would amount to surrendering the nation's democracy to terror groups. INEC Chairman, Professor

Amupitan, raised the alarm on two separate occasions in recent days, each time deepening the sense of urgency around the 2027 timetable. First, during a courtesy visit to the Inspector-General of Police, IGP, Olatunji Disu, Amupitan formally sought the support and collaboration of the Nigeria Police, ahead of the general election.

In a statement by the commission's Director of Publicity and Voter Education, Mrs. Victoria Eta-Messi, the INEC chairman identified electoral malpractices, vote-trading, and threats of violence as factors capable of undermining public confidence and posing risks to national security. He stressed the need for proactive security measures, including comprehensive risk assessments, to identify potential flashpoints and deploy appropriate mitigation strategies ahead of time, rather than waiting for trouble to erupt. "The scale of insecurity across various parts of the country presents a threat to the conduct of free and fair elections. It is essential that we carry out thorough security risk analyses, ahead of the elections," Amupitan stated. He singled out the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security, ICCES, as the linchpin of the entire security architecture for the polls, describing it as the "heartbeat" of operational safety during elections. According to him, the commission's success hinges on ICCES shifting its posture entirely. "Our success depends on ICCES moving from reactive policing to proactive intelligence coordination," Amupitan said, adding that all stakeholders, including security agencies, INEC, political parties and communities, must adopt a unified, multi-agency approach to protecting electoral personnel, materials and voters. Despite the grim picture, Amupitan reaffirmed INEC's commitment to working closely with the police and other security agencies to deliver elections that were



peaceful, credible, transparent and genuinely reflective of the will of Nigerian people.

Responding, IGP Disu assured the commission of the Nigeria Police's preparedness to provide a secure environment for the 2027 general election, with a pointed promise: there would be no preferential treatment for anyone or any party. He said the force would discharge its responsibilities with professionalism, impartiality and strict adherence to the 1999 Constitution, the Electoral Act and other extant laws. Crucially, Disu disclosed that the force had already begun strategic threat assessments and intelligence mapping nationwide to identify flash-points and emerging security risks well ahead of the election dates. "Issues such as political violence, the proliferation of illegal arms, voter intimidation, cyber manipulation, misinformation, and attacks on electoral infrastructure had been identified as priority concerns requiring proactive attention," the IGP stated, adding that intelligence-led deployments and preventive policing strategies would be deployed to neutralise threats before they escalate. He further assured INEC of adequate security cover for electoral officials, sensitive materials, collation centres and other critical electoral infrastructure throughout the process.

Sophisticated triad of threats Days later, at the 2nd Annual Lecture of the Alumni Association of the National Institute for Security Studies, AANISS, Amupitan returned to the theme, this time, with even sharper language, calling attention to emerging threats to Nigeria's electoral process.

He declared that Nigeria was entering a "critical phase" following the release of the 2027 election timetable, noting that the scheduled presidential and National Assembly elections on January 16, 2027, and governorship polls on February 6, 2027, now represented not just political milestones but "a security trigger." Amupitan identified what he called a "sophisticated triad" of threats facing Nigeria's elections: social media volatility, AI-driven disinformation, and Foreign Information Manipulation, FIMI, all compounded by more conventional logistical and security challenges such as insurgency and communal conflicts. "Without a secure environment, the sovereign will of the people is not just threatened; it is silenced," he warned. At the Annual June 12 Commemoration Lecture held in Abuja in honour of the late electoral umpire, Professor Humphrey Nwosu, an event that also featured the unveiling of the Humphrey Nwosu Centre for Democracy and Human Rights, leading lawyer and Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Femi Falana, delivered one of the most pointed warnings yet. Falana used the occasion to recount behind-the-scenes efforts that led to the historic June 12, 1993 presidential election, widely regarded as Nigeria's freest and fairest, before pivoting to a sobering assessment of the present. He warned that the country risked conducting yet another flawed electoral cycle in 2027 unless worsening insecurity, poverty, kidnapping and democratic deficits were urgently addressed. "As we are gathered here today, many children are in the custody of criminals. People are being abducted daily. Can



we honestly say we are ready for elections under these conditions?" Falana queried. He stressed that no meaningful electoral process could take place while terrorism, kidnappings and violent crimes continued to spread unchecked across the country, a position that places the burden squarely on government to demonstrate, through action rather than rhetoric, that the environment for 2027 will be fundamentally different from what obtained today.

Taking a slightly different angle, rights activist and President of the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, CDHR, Mr Debo Adeniran, warned in an interview in Lagos that Nigeria's persistent security challenges could significantly influence voter decisions in 2027. Adeniran, who doubles as chairman of the Centre for Anti-Corruption and Open Leadership, CACOL, said many Nigerians remained deeply concerned about insecurity nationwide, despite ongoing government and security agencies' efforts to curb criminal activities. According to him, public perception of government performance on security can play a decisive role in determining electoral outcomes in 2027.

He noted that citizens generally assessed governments based on their ability to guarantee safety and create an environment conducive to economic and social activities. Adeniran

explained that insecurity had continued to affect livelihoods, disrupt businesses, and limit movement in several communities across the country, consequences voters carried with them into the polling booth, whether or not security dominates campaign rhetoric. He insisted that authorities at all levels needed to convince Nigerians that every possible step was being taken to tackle threats posed by criminals and violent groups, while expressing cautious optimism that visible progress on insecurity could restore public confidence before the next general elections. "If the government demonstrates greater commitment and delivers visible results, public confidence will improve ahead of the 2027 elections," he said, warning that public expectations would continue to rise the closer the country got to election day. He maintained that effective security reforms would not only protect citizens but also strengthen democratic participation and national stability.

According to the 15th Report on Violence in Nigeria, released by Nigeria Watch and compiled by Dr Vitus Nwankwo Ukoji with support from Dr Abiola Victoria Ayodokun, a total of 222,137 Nigerians have been killed in 46,182 violent incidents across the 36 states and the FCT between 2006 and 2025. The report identified insurgency, rural banditry, kidnapping, farmers-herders clashes and counter-operations by security agencies as the leading drivers of violence across the country in 2025. Perhaps the most alarming single data point in the Nigeria Watch report is the trajectory of rural banditry. Deaths linked to bandit attacks and counter-operations rose to 3,974 in 2025, up sharply from 1,452 in 2024, nearly a threefold increase in a single year, and a trend that, if sustained, could place enormous strain on security deployment for the 2027 polls.