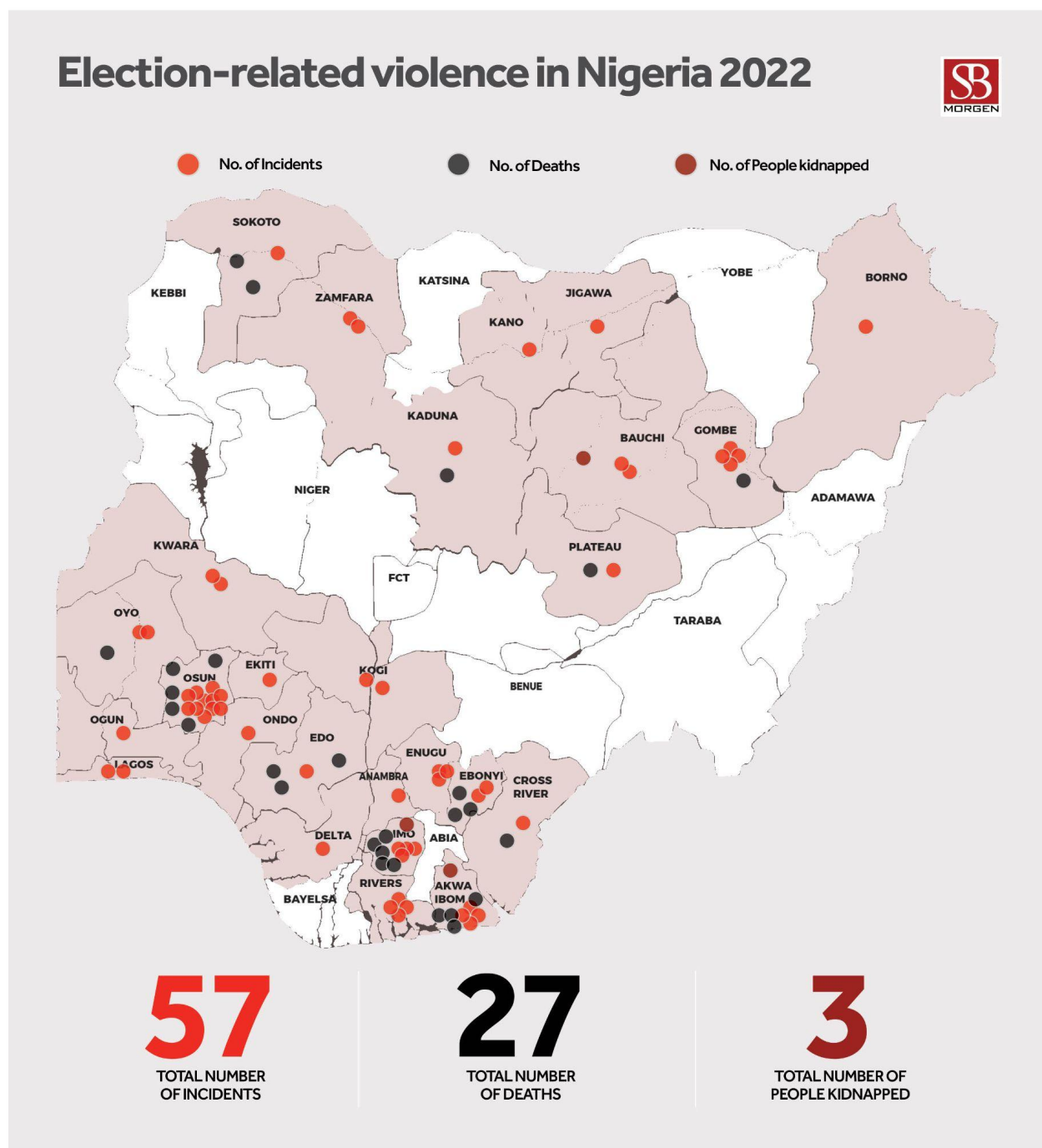


Insecurity and the 2023 elections

Between January and December 2022, at least 57 incidents of politically-motivated violence in the country have left about 27 people dead.



Correction: An earlier version of this map stated that 54 people were killed in political campaign-related incidents in 2022. The number is 27. The error is regretted.

Elections in Nigeria are a hotly-contested affair, with vested interests from the politicking to the aspirants. A lot goes into what makes or mars the conduct of an election. Historically, Nigeria has hardly had it good. The 1993 presidential election was judged the freest and fairest in the country's history. However, violence followed the military's decision to annul the polls. Six years later, a successful presidential election was conducted for the first time in 20 years. The 1999 polls were expected to usher in a new era of politics, but the successors have not lived up to the billing. The closest thing to free and fair elections in the current democratic dispensation was the 2011 elections which international observers judged credible. Still, the process was marred by violence which left over 800 people dead in at least three days of violence in many parts of Northern Nigeria.

The 2023 general elections take place in about seven weeks. Early signs have shown that the violence that has characterised previous elections is set to beset it, especially because of the current security climate. Nigeria faces a plethora of different and sometimes strikingly similar security crises. In the North East, the Boko Haram insurgency rages on, with bigger problems for the military as it now fights a more formidable enemy—the factional Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) whose recent attacks in Taraba tell of a strong presence beyond the fringes of the Lake Chad.

In the North West, it's the second year of the military's counterterrorism campaign against bandits. Its most notable success is the dislodgement of Boko Haram's first breakaway group, Ansaru, from its traditional operational base in the Birnin Gwari area of Kaduna. Bandits have continued to successfully stage attacks in Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi and sometimes in Jigawa. Similarly, in the North Central, the country continues to deal with multiple threats from militant Fulani groups, bandits and an ever-expanding ISWAP who have staged successful attacks in the FCT, Kogi and Niger States the past year.

Down South, the problems of youth gangs have never been solved, and the activities of the secessionist Indigenous Peoples of Biafra in the East stand as the biggest southern headache. The group's activities have targeted not only the state but every symbol associated with it, including INEC. Towards the end of 2022, attacks against INEC offices were launched in states like Osun, Ogun, Imo and several other parts of the South East.

It is amid these challenges that the elections will hold in February and March. The federal elections lead the way to be held on 25th February, and for the first time in Nigeria's history, it is likely to be headed for a run-off. The uncertainty that has trailed this possibility has made

political actors and proxies battle it out, sometimes taking advantage of the decrepit state of security in the country to stage attacks on perceived enemies. In July 2022, the deputy governorship candidate of the All Progressives Congress in Rivers State, Dr Innocent Barikor, escaped death¹ in Port Harcourt. In mid-December, gunmen allegedly killed the 2023 Labour Party candidate for Onuimo Local Government Area state constituency in Imo, Christopher Elehu.² A month earlier, the campaign convoy of Atiku Abubakar, the Peoples Democratic Party presidential candidate, was allegedly attacked³ in Maiduguri. In October, the campaign train of the Lagos Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidates, including governorship candidate Dr Olajide Adediran and his deputy, Funke Akindele, were attacked⁴ by suspected political thugs. Speaking about political violence escaping scrutiny under the air of general insecurity, three delegates of the PDP governorship primary election in Minna, Niger State, and one other person were killed by gunmen⁵ in late May.

The security landscape presents worrying challenges to the political stakeholders and the country. Under the present circumstances, it is nearly impossible to conduct a hitch-free election in every part of the country. As a result, INEC is preparing itself for supplementary elections in areas where voting might not hold due to violence. Such a solution is within the realms of acceptance for thinly-stretched security services already battling insecurity on multiple fronts. The 2015 general elections were postponed for six weeks because of the military's operation to liberate territories held by Boko Haram to enable the conduct of elections. In 2023, the momentum has shifted, with more armed groups holding territories in a menace of the proliferation of vast ungoverned spaces. The 2023 elections taking place in the country's deeply insecure terrain will surely have a profound impact on the credibility of the polls and the legal proceedings that may arise under the present circumstances.

¹ [Rivers APC Deputy gov. candidate Barikor escapes gun attack, policeman shot dead - P.M. News](#)

² [2023: Gunmen kill Labour Party house of assembly candidate](#)

³ [Controversy surrounds Atiku convoy attack in Borno](#)

⁴ [2023 campaign: Miscreants attack Lagos PDP guber candidate, Jandor, deputy, Akindele in Badagry - Vanguard News](#)

⁵ [Bandits Kill Three PDP Delegates in Niger – THISDAYLIVE](#)