

# BEYOND #HASHTAGS:

## LEVERAGING NETWORKS FOR THE PREVENTION OF ELECTION VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Election violence in Nigeria dates back over a hundred years, from days of indirect rule under Great Britain to post-independence and a series of military regimes and civilian republics. The Fourth Republic, from 1999 to present day, has demonstrated the durability of democracy in Nigeria, although this era too has seen its share of election violence as sectarian, ethnic, and partisan tensions have surfaced during federal, state, and local government contests.

In the last decade, social networks and information technology have developed in such a way as to contribute to the proliferation of both spontaneous and coordinated violence. However, at the same time, a robust network of peace actors has emerged to prevent and manage election violence. Over the past several years, the Fund for Peace (FFP), supported by a grant from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), has been developing a handbook that looks at the history of election violence in Nigeria and examines the power of networks in both the perpetration and prevention of violence, with a focus on the role of youth.

FFP's research set out to test the premise that a deeper sociopolitical system drives election violence, and therefore effective prevention must also take a systemic approach; a series of randomly distributed, one-off programs, projects, and activities will not solve the problem. To do this, FFP utilized research methods and tools that look at the issue from a systems perspective, such as Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) platforms and Social Network Analysis (SNA). The ready availability of such tools and data provides an unprecedented opportunity to optimize prevention strategies. Specifically, if stakeholders know the wider patterns of hotspots and trends, and the characteristics and centrality of peace and security networks, they can proactively leverage and catalyze social capital to efficiently

disseminate early warning signals, amplify messages, improve joint analyses, and organize conflict management efforts. All concerned stakeholders, from donors to security agents, community leaders, and civil society can work together more effectively to achieve their common goal. Rather than a top-down prescription by a central actor, the goal of coordination is for each peace and security actor to be aware of the wider system. This approach allows actors to enhance social capital and spheres of influence where and when they are most needed during the identification of grantees, partners, beneficiaries, and participants.

Election violence is complex. Sometimes it is characterized by public unrest (for example, in Plateau State in 2010 and in Kaduna State in 2011), but it is more often the result of orchestrated violence where youth are manipulated, coerced, or coopted by powerbrokers. Findings also demonstrate that risks and vulnerabilities differ from the federal level to the state level, and change depending on the peculiarities of a given election cycle. However, data and platforms are no longer prohibitive and are much more accessible to stakeholders than at any time in the past. What follows below is a brief summary of the main findings from each chapter in the Handbook, which will be released in late 2018, and ends with a guidance note for how tools such as GIS platforms and SNA can be utilized by peace actors for effective programming in the prevention and mitigation of youth violence during elections.

## HISTORY OF ELECTION VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Election violence in Nigeria is neither new nor novel. Although it has evolved and taken on different manifestations, it has remained a persistent factor during Nigerian election seasons for over one hundred years. The examination of the history of election violence in Nigeria is crucial for understanding many of the contextual factors contributing to its present manifestations. For example, indirect rule by the British during Nigeria's colonial period from 1914 to 1960 hardened divisions along religious, ethnic, and regional lines and reinforced identity-based politics throughout the country. During Nigeria's First Republic, from 1963-1966, political parties were built upon colonial era cleavages and stoked fears of domination by ethnic groups to harness support. The Biafran War also deepened ethnic and geographical divides that persist to the present day. The Second Republic, from 1979-1983, was crippled by economic instability, conflict in the Niger Delta, and increasing corruption, all of which undermined elections. It was also during this period that the foundational concept of "zoning" established an expectation of power rotation between regional zones. While originally designed to provide more equitable representation, negotiating the terms of these expectations has often been fraught with grievance and controversy.

Despite the transition to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria's Fourth Republic was marked by varying levels of election violence during federal, gubernatorial, and local government-level contests. The 2003 election is notable, as it marked the first election which saw political actors overtly arming youth as a tool of political muscle, protection, and intimidation. This contributed to the proliferation of small arms and the growth of militant groups, which would lead to greater violence in subsequent elections.

While much of the election violence over the last century in Nigeria was orchestrated through the vehicles of thuggery, militancy, ethno-nationalist groups, and cultism, there have also been periods of spontaneous outbursts of popular unrest. Perhaps the most notable example of this paroxysm is the post-election riots that occurred in Kaduna in 2011, killing hundreds. This distinction between orchestrated violence (bombings, targeted assassinations, attacks on polling stations and rallies) and spontaneous violence is important, because not only does popular unrest have the potential to balloon into a situation of mass casualties, but also because the mitigating options are very different. Most governance and democratization programs approach election violence mitigation with peace messaging and civic education cast widely to the general public. This can be used to prevent spontaneous violence. Looking at the history of election violence in Nigeria, however, suggests that the majority of election violence is not of this spontaneous variant. In such cases, hashtag activism and radio jingles are unlikely to be effective. Orchestrated violence requires a more delicate, layered, and systemic approach.

## THE ROLE OF NIGERIAN YOUTH IN ELECTION VIOLENCE & PEACE PROMOTION

Weaving through the complex and often violent history of Nigeria's trajectory from colonialism through decades of military-led governments to the institution of civilian rule and the current Fourth Republic, the role of youth cannot be overlooked or underestimated. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, and also one of its youngest. With an average fertility rate of 5.6 children per woman as of 2015<sup>1</sup>, youth, 15 to 35 years of age, account for approximately half

of Nigeria's population.<sup>2</sup> As the population of youth has grown, so has youth unemployment, especially in rural areas. This, in some cases, has contributed to a growing sense of disaffection and popular frustration among the country's youngest citizens. At the same time, youth are also increasingly engaged in the political sphere, with major political parties having highly active youth wings. The combination of these factors creates an environment in which youth may be manipulated by violent groups and political leaders to engage in political and electoral violence.

In all cases of political/election violence over the years, whether that be Operation Wetie in Ibadan during the First Republic, post-election violence in Kaduna State in 2011, or "political thuggery" in Rivers State in 2015, youth tend to be the main victims as well as perpetrators. This is in part due to the demographics of age distribution, the spread of criminal networks and militant groups, and the general susceptibility of disaffected and unemployed youth to being recruited as "thugs" by political agents. Overall, youth in Nigeria are mobilized in a variety of ways to participate in political violence including militant groups, cults or gangs, direct employment as political thugs, and general criminality.

Though Nigerian youth are often perpetrators of political violence, they also have the capacity to promote peace through their growing influence as leaders within the electoral system and as activists outside of it. Youth have been at the forefront of some of Nigeria's earliest movements for peace. Networks of young people have the potential to prevent and mitigate violence as much as they do to propagate it. Youth groups, civil society organizations (CSOs) and peace actors, using appropriate tools and methods, can harness their networks and have a substantial

impact on peace-building in Nigeria. The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can help facilitate these efforts.

Youth in Nigeria have a growing political influence as their political engagement increases. Many young Nigerians have rallied around the idea of "Naija", a new, youth-led Nigeria. With increased political engagement, youth are becoming leaders and activists within the electoral system and have been at the forefront of calls for transparency. They have also played key roles in peace-building initiatives with the desire to affect change. Through networks of politically engaged young people, youth leaders can empower others to avoid political violence and participate in politics. In building a community, these networks have the potential to prevent youth from joining militant or cult groups and therefore less likely to commit acts of violence. In using their networks to promote democracy and peace-building through engagement, ICT, and mobilization, youth can have a wide-spread and effective reach in preventing election violence.

Overall, FFP's research findings underscore that youth have a critical role to play in catalyzing and leveraging social capital for the prevention and mitigation of violence through networks. Indeed, without networking, by which to multiply and scale their efforts, no single individual or organization can expect to have any meaningful impact, no matter how many resources or capacities they possess as a unitary entity. A critical enabling factor that has emerged over the last hundred years for organizing, coordinating, and mobilizing, is the flourishing of ICT and data analytics.

<sup>1</sup>World Development Indicators. World Bank. <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>.

<sup>2</sup>"Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: A Situation Analysis." Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2014/09/23/youth-unemployment-in-nigeria-a-situation-analysis/>.

## THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN PROMOTING AND PREVENTING ELECTION VIOLENCE

ICT can facilitate efforts to prevent violence through ease of communication, as well as expansion of reach, and responsiveness. Informal hashtag coalitions have grown networks and increased mobilization to promote election transparency and violence mitigation. These coalitions did so by increasing geographical reach and facilitating coordination. Hashtags especially influence Nigerian youth, allowing them to see other youth around the country discussing issues that resonate with them collectively. The use of informal hashtag coalitions promotes positive youth political engagement and peace messaging, therefore facilitating networks of like-minded youth in the prevention of violence. Formal coalitions also utilize ICT to work towards the prevention of election violence, especially when linked to an early warning system. They spread their messages to a wider audience, raise awareness, and encourage collective action. Formal coalitions then translate online messages into real life action, such as civic engagement, stakeholder forums, and targeted conflict management activities in cases where political violence may be escalating between communities, criminal, or partisan groups.

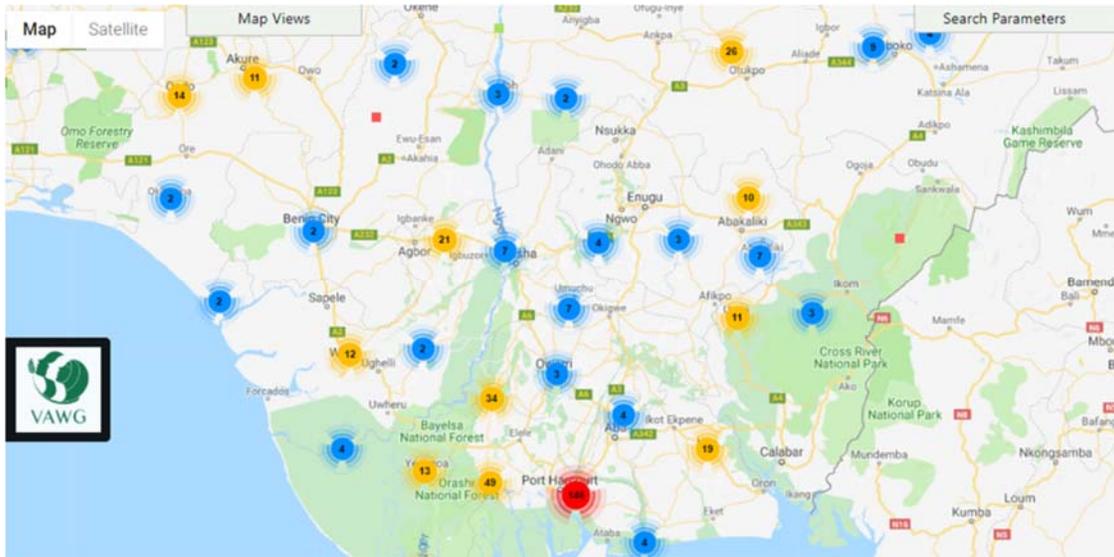
In addition to the success that youth and youth-led organizations have had with ICT, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which ICT can also be exploited for destructive ends. These include the rapid and wide

distribution of hate speech, inflammatory ideas, images, and video, as well as the coordination of malicious actors and organizations. Finally, despite the rise of ICT, electoral transparency, and confidence, youth mobilization and electoral violence mitigation will always require empowered citizens to show up and work together on election day to ensure the process is free, fair, and credible.

## QUANTITATIVE/ QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Using GIS, FFP tracked the patterns and trends of election violence from 2009-2018, to better understand the issues and dynamics for prognosis and strategic planning going forward. The Foundation for Partnership Initiative (PIND) has built a tool that aggregates data from multiple sources and is available to the public. Findings from this analysis suggest that gubernatorial elections are often more violent than federal elections, and that most incidents are not the result of spontaneous unrest, but rather cases in which youth have been manipulated, coopted, or coerced by power brokers.

Having identified the hotspots, FFP then conducted a Stakeholder Network Analysis (SNA) of over 400 organizations to estimate the degree to which peace and security actors are organizing around the areas of greatest risk. This research was premised on the idea that there needs to be a strong network of peace and security actors in violence-prone states for effective mitigation. For the network to be strong, there must be a robust representation of organizations well positioned as conveners (as measured by “betweenness”), communicators (as measured by “reach”), and implementers (as measured by “eigenvector”). A regression analysis of the SNA findings

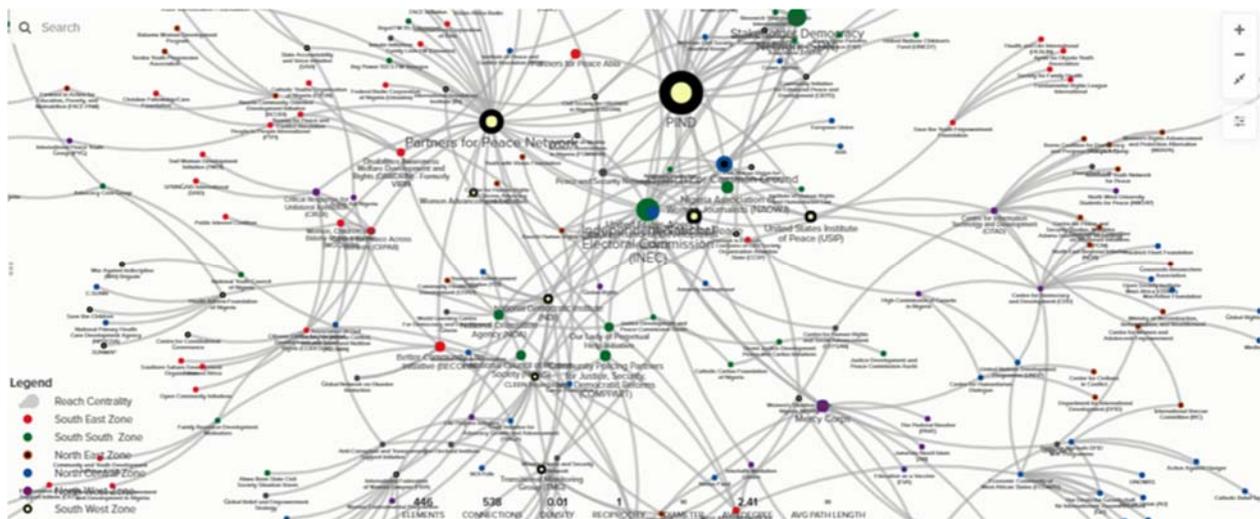


Screenshot of PIND Peace Map showing election violence fatalities from 2015-2018

against the levels of violence in 2015 showed that in fact there was a rich representation of communicators and implementers in violence-prone states. The relative gap was in conveners.

election-violence mitigation, but that issues of trust and capacity sometimes hamper such platforms.

To contextualize and qualify these quantitative findings, FFP then conducted a series of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with over a dozen organizations to better understand the dynamics and constraints on networks. Respondents confirmed that convening power is vital to the success of



Screenshot of SNA Map of over 400 peace and security actors in Nigeria

## BEST PRACTICES FOR DONORS AND IMPLEMENTERS

For donors and implementers to have the most sustainable and effective impact in preventing and mitigating election violence in Nigeria, they must utilize the diverse set of available tools. Using both the quantitative tools of GIS and SNA and the qualitative tools of KIIs and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), strengths and weaknesses can be highlighted to identify the most effective solutions within the system. For optimal impact, coordination and communication among and between networks or organizations is crucial. Program activities will likely be most successful if they are designed to leverage the relative strengths of different organizations in their roles as communicators, implementors, or conveners, depending on how they are positioned and oriented within the network. Coordination and communication can ensure that these relative strengths are leveraged in a way that will have the most effective overall impact. It is also critical to start program activities early and be proactive. Using early warning tools and communication among organizations can ensure that the appropriate organization can be strategically prepositioned to mitigate and prevent election violence.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Planning for and investment in Election Violence Prevention needs to occur earlier and be sustained later (this applies to both local organizations as well as international partners, implementers and donors).
- Early identification and capacity building of conveners is critical to foster more trust, collaboration and communication. SNA and other ICT tools can be critical in identifying those individuals and organizations.
- More focus needs to be paid to gubernatorial and local-level elections, as they are normally higher stakes affairs and more violent than federal contests.
- Investing in/building conflict early warning and conflict management skills by civil society and community leaders is crucial in addressing orchestrated election violence. This must go beyond hashtags, jingles, and civic education campaigns, which tend to be more effective in the prevention of spontaneous violence.