

REVIEW OF
SITUATION
ROOM



GENERAL ELECTION
STATEMENTS SINCE 2011



NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY
SITUATIONROOM

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Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room

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INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room is a forum of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to support the conduct of credible elections and good governance in Nigeria. The forum serves as a platform for information sharing, real-time analyses of field reports by election observers, rapid response to election risks, and constructive engagement between civil society groups and other election stakeholders. The Situation Room has been an active stakeholder in the Nigerian electoral process since it was established in 2010.

A major component of the work of the Situation Room are the regular statements issued to convey its observations, perspectives and recommendations on variety of electoral and governance issues. Situation Room Statements are issued to highlight the concerns of the group, make recommendations based on the group's observations, hold duty bearers accountable, and call for relevant actions to address the issues raised. Over the years, the Situation Room has released several statements in the build-up to elections as well as during and after the conduct of elections.

The year 2023 will make it well over 12 years since the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room was established. Similarly, the 2023 general election will be the fourth general election which the Situation Room will observe. It is therefore good practice to reflect on the past in order to situate the present and to then frame the future. This means that it is valuable to reflect on past experiences of the Situation Room in order to better structure its future work. One way of appraising the work of the Situation Room would be to review the statements issued by the group in the past 12 years, especially the ones relating to the past three election cycles. The review will provide an understanding of the priorities of the Situation Room and the trend of issues emerging from past general elections. Importantly, it will identify gaps in the work of the Situation Room and provide the basis to refocus the group's activities to be more effective during and after the 2023 general elections.

This study reviews the Situation Room statements issued between 2011 and 2022, with particular emphasis on those relating to the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections.

The review seeks to, among other things:

1. Identify the key challenges that have emerged in the conduct of elections in Nigeria since 2011 as underlined in the Situation Room Statements.
2. Categorise the recommendations contained in Situation Room Statements based on issues and task duty bearers as well as determine the frequency of mention of recommendations on specific issues.
3. Assess the level of progress that has been made in Nigeria's electoral process since 2011.

Overall, the outcome of this study will enable members of the Situation Room and the public to understand political and electoral trends in Nigeria, in terms of what has changed and what has remained the same, the performance of various election stakeholders as well as the extent of progress in Nigeria's electoral environment. In addition to enhancing learning, the study will serve as a basis for scenario planning ahead of the 2023 general elections and a tool for advocacy and engagement with relevant stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

The goals of this study were accomplished following four main steps. The first step was to develop a comprehensive list of Situation Room Statements issued in the period under review. The listing was accomplished using information that was readily available in the Situation Room secretariat. A total of 69 Statements issued between 2011 and 2022 in relation to general elections were identified and retrieved. It is important to note that the Situation Room issues other statement in response to the emerging socio-political environment all year round.

The next step involved categorisation and compilation of the Situation Room Statements according to the month and year they were issued, and type of Statement (whether final or interim Statements, media briefs, meeting reports, or communiques).

The third research step involved analysing the Statements collected using content analysis method. Content analysis is a method of examining written, verbal or visual communication messages. It is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use. It entails capturing the key words and phrases that are most important to the issue being analysed and using those key words and phrases to build categories and make conclusion.

Through a close reading of the Statements, 55 words that appeared frequently in the Statements were identified. These words were then adopted as the keywords. The keywords were categorised into 5 themes based on the issues or subject of their reference. The themes identified include:

- a) Electoral operations and processes.
- b) Election security.
- c) Election administration.
- d) Election stakeholders.
- e) Other issues.

Among other things, this analysis looked out for trends – continuities and change within the period of analysis as well as commonalities and divergences among different general elections. The analysis also devoted special attention to tracking of trends in the comments and recommendations of the Situation Room.

The last research step identified recommendations and follow-up measures that are required on the one hand to improve the work of the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room and on the other hand to enhance the electoral process and governance in Nigeria. The analysis at this step involved reflecting on the outcome of the content analysis and considering the implications of the findings to the current and future political and electoral dynamics in Nigeria.

Brief History of the Situation Room

The inauguration of civil rule in Nigeria, after one and half decade of military rule, was accompanied by the regular conduct of elections. Since 1999, Nigeria has consistently conducted general elections at the intervals of four years intervals. However, most of these elections are adjudged to have fallen short of meeting internationally accepted standards. Nigerian elections are usually marked by organizational flaws, allegations of fraud, and disputes over results. Besides the risk of operational lapses and irregularities, elections in Nigeria are imperilled by violence and threats of violence. The 2003 and 2007 general elections, in particular, were widely adjudged as generally flawed. The widespread condemnation that followed the 2007 general elections forced the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the government, civil society groups and Nigeria's development partners to seek measures that would help improve the conduct of future elections and restore the credibility of the country's electoral process.

Before the 2011 general elections, CSOs in Nigeria could not properly coordinate and apply their resources to achieve effective intervention in the country's electoral process. Civil society groups would be individually involved in traditional election observation but this did not have much impact on the quality of elections in the country. As election observers, these groups often watched helplessly as the preferences of the voters are thwarted and the popular mandate brazenly stolen. Although the groups would observe and document irregularities in the country's electoral process, their reports always came in retrospect, when all harm had already been done and the offenders had had their way.

In the build-up to the 2011 general elections, there was a decision by key actors in the Nigerian civil society to adopt a new and more effective approach to address the challenge of election failure in Nigeria. This decision gave rise to the establishment of the Nigeria Civil Society Election Situation Room. The Situation Room was envisioned as a market place of ideas, where different civil society groups can bring their observations and ideas to share with others, so that each group will understand what is happening and can discuss with the others how best to deal with the emerging challenges. This way, it was possible to converge programmes that were hitherto running unilaterally and get them to work within a shared platform, with none losing its independence or traction as a consequence. Each of the participating organisations in the Situation Room brought their specific skills, insights and networks into use, helping develop a critical mass that have become hard to ignore by all who wanted to gauge the progress of Nigeria's electoral process.

The greatest strength of the Situation Room lies in its diversity. In the Room are groups with wide grassroots coverage spanning several local government areas across the country, and a long track record of engagement with election stakeholders such as INEC and the security agencies. It was possible for Situation Room members to request a meeting with the leadership of national institutions such as INEC and get an appointment within hours. The significance of the Situation Room lies in the fact that civic groups were able to move from their erstwhile passive role to a more active one, where they could observe a problem, analyse it, and get something done about it, in real-time.

At its inception, the Situation Room defined observing the critical role of the security agencies in tackling electoral violence and election offences as a key priority. Under the broad platform of Situation Room, civil society groups in Nigeria collaborated to provide a more effective response to electoral fraud and violence – which were considered the two biggest threats to the country's electoral process as at that time.

The Nigeria Civil Society Election Situation Room was to later evolve and become the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (the Situation Room). The word "Election" was dropped from its name to reflect a wider focus extending to other governance issues and concerns. The Situation Room, currently composed of 75 civil society groups, is hosted by the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC). The support of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has been critical in the

establishment and sustenance of the work of the Situation Room. DFID, now known as the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) has continued to support the Situation Room till date. Situation Room has also received support from the Open Society for Initiative in West Africa (OSIWA) and Ford Foundation for various aspects of its work.

The establishment of the Situation Room is a response by civic groups and development partners to progressive decline in the quality of elections and democratic governance in Nigeria. In general, the goal of the Situation Room is to improve the integrity of elections and strengthen the democratic governance in Nigeria. Specifically, the group seeks to:

1. Strengthen mechanisms to coordinate the activities of the civil society to engage on Nigeria's elections;
2. Undertake regular analysis and dissemination of information on major developments and events in the preparations and conduct of elections;
3. Facilitate civil society engagement with key government actors and agencies on major findings and observations from its analysis;
4. Enhance communication by civil society groups through regular meetings and publication; and
5. Foster collective action by civil society to promote accountability throughout the electoral process.

The relevance and effectiveness of the work of the Situation Room is based on its relationship with INEC and other election stakeholders. In the past, INEC and other national institutions have been cautious in their relationship with CSOs due to their perception of CSOs as being overly critical and confrontational. With this in mind, the Situation Room ensured that it placed its focus on achieving credible elections, and not just to criticize the election management agencies. Consequently, the Situation Room was able to cultivate a constructive relationship with INEC and other national institutions that have roles to play in the electoral process. Since the 2011 elections, the Situation Room has established a tradition of meeting with INEC on a regular basis to ascertain and review issues affecting the work of the Commission. In particular, members of INEC's technical advisory team are sometimes invited to participate in the Situation Room's deliberations. In this way, they help clarify important points or bring necessary information to help members of the Situation Room in their analysis. This approach has provided an opportunity for very constructive and fruitful exchanges between the Situation Room and the Commission.

Analysis of Situation Room Statements since 2011

This section will present an appraisal of the Situation Room Statements in relation to the general election issued since 2011. The analysis will evaluate the timing of the release of the Statements in terms of years and phases of the election cycle, the issues addressed by the Statements, the key challenges to elections in Nigeria, the major recommendations of the Situation Room, and address the question of whether there have been real progress in Nigeria's electoral process since 2011.

The Situation Room issued a total of 69 Statements relating to general elections between 2011 and 2022. The table below presents a listing of the Statements issued by the Situation Room since 2011.

Table 1: List of Situation Room Statements since 2011

SN	Date	Title of Statement	Type of Statement
1	28-Mar-11	Situation Room Worried Violence May Threaten Election	Press Release
2	03-Apr-11	Report of Situation Room Meeting with Prof. Attahiru Jega	Meeting Report
3	09-Apr-11	Situation Room Interim Statement on the April 9 2011 National Assembly Elections	Interim Statement
4	14-Apr-11	Civil Society Statement ahead of 2011 Presidential Election	Statement
5	16-Apr-11	Presidential Elections: Interim Report from the Situation Room	Interim Report
6	16-Apr-11	CSO Situation Room: Second Interim Report on the April 16 Presidential Election	Interim Report
7	19-Apr-11	Civil Society Election Situation Room: Final Statement on the Presidential Election	Final Statement
8	27-Apr-11	Civil Society Election Situation Room Statement on April 26 Elections	Statement
9	29-Apr-11	Civil Society Election Situation Room Statement on Kaduna and Bauchi Elections	Statement
10	29-Apr-11	Civil Society Election Situation Room Statement on the April 2011 Elections	Statement
11	04-May-11	Statement by Civil Society Situation Room ahead of 6 May 2011 Supplementary Elections in Mbaitoli, Ngor-Okpala, Orji, & Oguta in Imo State	Statement

12	25-Feb-14	Press Briefing of the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Held at Abuja on 25 February 2014	Press Briefing
13	08-May-14	Media Briefing of the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Held at Abuja on 8 May 2014	Press Briefing
14	29-Jan-15	Situation Room Intensifies Election Preparations, Calls on Security Agencies, INEC to do Same	Press Briefing
15	03-Feb-15	Civil Society Situation Room Raises Alarm on Threats to the Elections Using the Courts	Press Briefing
16	07-Feb-15	Situation Room Calls On INEC to Resist Military's Pressure to Postpone Elections	Press Briefing
17	12 Feb 2015	Situation Room: Nigeria's Democracy Imperiled! Postponement of Elections	Press Briefing
18	24-Feb-15	Statement Made by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room at a Meeting with the Inspector General of Police, Suleiman Abba, at Police Headquarters, Abuja	Statement
19	26-Feb-15	Joint Communiqué Issued at the end of Meeting between the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room	Joint Communiqué
20	3 Mar 2015	Situation Room Condemns Calls for Removal of INEC Chairman or any Plans to	Press Briefing
21	9 Mar 2015	Statement by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on the Mock Accreditation/Card Reader Demonstration held on 7 March 2015	Statement
22	25-Mar-15	Statement by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on Preparations for Nigeria's General Elections holding on 28 March and 11 April 2015	Statement
23	26 Mar 2015	Statement by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on the Conduct of Security Agencies during Elections	Statement
24	27-Mar-15	Situation Room Endorses Accord for Peaceful Polls	Statement
25	30-Mar-15	Situation Room Warns Against Fiddling with Collation	Statement
26	28-Mar-15	Statement by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on the Commencement of the 2015 Presidential and National Assembly Elections	Statement
27	29-Mar-15	Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Preliminary Statement on the Conduct of the 2015 Presidential and National Assembly Elections on 28 March 2015	Preliminary Statement
28	31-Mar-15	Grave Concerns about Jega's Safety	Statement
29		Situation Room Congratulates Nigerians, Buhari on Presidential Elections	Statement
30		Situation Room Condemns Oba of Lagos's Hate Speech	Statement
31	13-Apr-15	Situation Room Final Statement on the Gubernatorial and State Houses of Assembly Elections	Final Statement
32	26-Apr-15	Statement by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on the Supplementary Gubernatorial Elections held on 25 April 2015	Statement
33	10-Aug-15	Situation Room Calls for Urgent Action on INEC	Statement

34	19-Dec-16	Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Statement on the Stakeholders Forum on Elections 19 December 2016 at Abuja	Statement
35	03-May-17	Situation Room Calls for Quick Confirmation of INEC RECs	Statement
36	24-Jan-18	Situation Room's Concerns on the State of the Nation!	Statement
37	13-Jan-19	Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Condemns Arraignment of CJN Onnoghen	Statement
38	22-Jan-19	Situation Room sets Threshold for Credible 2019 Elections	Statement
39	25-Jan-19	Situation Room Condemns President Buhari's Purported Suspension of Chief Justice Onnoghen	Statement
40	16-Feb-19	Situation Room Expresses Concern over INEC's Election Logistics	Statement
41	16-Feb-19	Situation Room's Statement On INEC's Postponement of Elections	Statement
42	22-Feb-19	Situation Room's Preliminary Statement on the 2019 General Elections	Preliminary Statement
43	25 Feb 2019	Third Interim Statement by Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on the Conduct of the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections on 23 February 2019	Interim Statement
44	26-Feb-19	Fourth Interim Statement by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on the Collation and Announcement of the 2019 Presidential Election Results	Interim Statement
45	27-Feb-19	Fifth Interim Statement by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on Declaration of the 2019 Presidential Election Results	Interim Statement
46	07-Mar-19	Situation Room's Preliminary Statement on the Governorship, State Assembly and FCT Area Council Elections	Preliminary Statement
47	08-Mar-19	Second Preliminary Statement on the 9 March 2019 Governorship, State Assembly and FCT Area Council Elections	Preliminary Statement
48	09-Mar-19	Interim Statement by Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on the Conduct of the 2019 Governorship, State Assembly and FCT Area Council Elections on 9 March 2019	Interim Statement
49	10-Mar-19	Second Interim Statement by Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on its Observation of the Governorship, State Houses Of Assembly and FCT Area Council Elections	Interim Statement
50	22-Mar-19	Preliminary Statement by Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room in Respect of Supplementary Elections Scheduled for 23 March 2019	Preliminary Statement
51	23-Mar-19	Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room Statement on the Kano State Supplementary Elections	Statement
52	24 Mar 2019	Statement by Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room on its Observation of the Supplementary Elections	Statement
53	30-Jul-19	Press Statement on the 2019 Elections Report of the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room	Press Statement
54	13-Oct-20	Situation Room's Statement on President Buhari's Appointment of INEC National Commissioners	Statement

55	28-Oct-20	Situation Room's Statement on the National Broadcasting Commission's Sanction of Media Houses	Statement
56	28-Oct-20	Situation Room's Statement on the Nomination of Professor Mahmood Yakubu for a Second Tenure as INEC Chairman	Statement
57	24-Mar-21	Situation Room's Statement on State of the Nation	Statement
58	10-Jun-21	Statement on Submission of the Name of Ms. Laretta Onochie to the Nigerian Senate for Confirmation as INEC National Commissioner	Statement
59	8 June 2021	Situation Room Condemns Federal Government's Twitter Ban	Statement
60	27-May-21	Situation Room Condemns Attacks on INEC's Offices and Police Formations	Statement
61	14 July 2021	Situation Room Commends the Senate for Declining the Confirmation of Laretta Onochie as INEC National Commissioner	Statement
62	06-Jul-21	Press Statement on the Electoral Bill, 2021	Press Statement
63	17 Dec 2021	Situation Room Calls on President Buhari to Assent to Electoral Bill	Statement
64	03-Feb-22	Situation Room Calls on President Buhari to Assent to the Electoral Act Amendment Bill 2022 to Consolidate on Improvements to the Electoral Process	Statement
65	10-Jun-22	Situation Room Calls for the Extension of Continuous Voter Registration	Statement
66	12-May-22	Situation Room Expresses Concern Over the State of the Nation and Election Outlook ahead of the 2023 General Elections	Statement
67	02-Aug-22	Situation Room Expresses Concern over the State of the Nation and Rising Insecurity	Statement
68	30-Aug-22	Situation Room's Statement on the Nomination of Persons with Political Affiliations for Confirmation as INEC Resident Electoral Commissioners	Statement
69	05-Sep-22	Situation Room Calls on INEC to Display Voters' Register in line with the Provision of the Electoral Act 2022	Statement

Timing of the Release of Statements

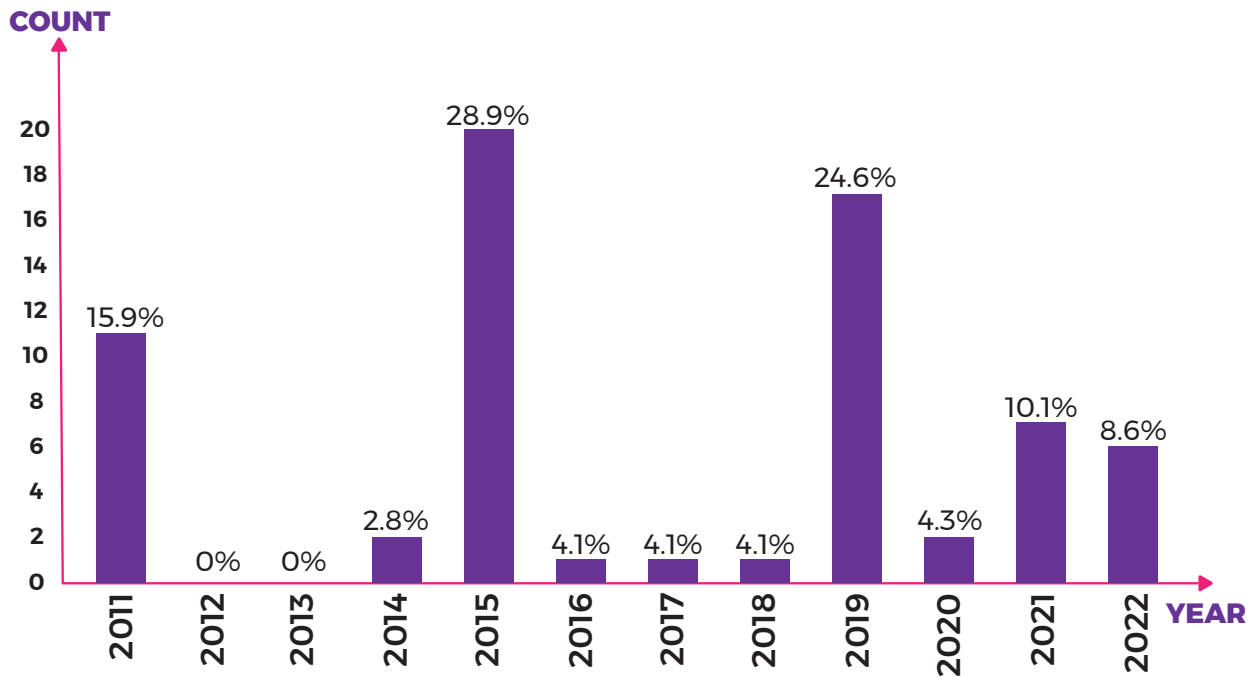
The 69 Statements issued by the Situation Room covers a period of 12 years as shown in the table below. The highest number of Statements were issued in 2015 while the lowest number of Statements were released in 2016, 2017 and 2018. As one would expect, the election years (that is, 2011, 2015, and 2019) recorded the highest number of Statements. In all, 48 out of the 69 Statements or nearly 70 percent of all the Statements were issued in those years. The years immediately after the general elections (that is, 2012, 2016 and 2020) had the least number of Statements – 4 out of 69 Statements issued or 6 percent of the Statements. The data on the years before the general elections in 2010 was isolated from the analysis due to incomplete

information – there was no information for 2010 considering that the Situation Room was established later in that year. But the available information shows that in 2014 and 2018, the Situation Room issued only 3 Statements constituting just 4 percent of the entire Statements issued. It is also worthy to note that those years also have 2 major off-cycle Governorship elections in Ekiti and Osun States which were the focus of the Situation Room.

Table 2: Yearly Distribution of Situation Room Statements

SN	YEAR	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
1	2011	11	15.9
2	2012	0	0
3	2013	0	0
4	2014	2	2.8
5	2015	20	28.9
6	2016	1	1.4
7	2017	1	1.4
8	2018	1	1.4
9	2019	17	24.6
10	2020	3	4.3
11	2021	7	10.1
12	2022	6	8.6
	TOTAL	69	100

Bar chart of Keywords based on Election Cycle



What the above analysis demonstrates is that most of the Statements were released in the election years. As has been noted by many observers, it is indeed true that elections do not have much meaning unless they lead to good governance and development. This is why the vigilance and engagement of the Situation Room are extremely essential before and after elections. In the pre and post general election periods, the Situation Room's engagement is focused on the off-cycle governorship elections and other governance issues termed State of the Nation, issues relating to insecurity etc. The Situation Room can also be used, for example, to ensure implementation of government policies and laws, such as the Electoral Act and Freedom of Information Act. Furthermore, work around ensuring that governance is targeted at improving the lot of the people and, by extension, consolidating democracy should be intensified. In the post-election period, in particular, there will be several election and non-election related issues identified in the Situation Room recommendations that would require follow-up. The fact that the Situation Room has demonstrated its willingness to go beyond election by dropping "elections" in its name is a significant symbolic gesture and efforts must be made to keep Situation Room alive beyond the election years

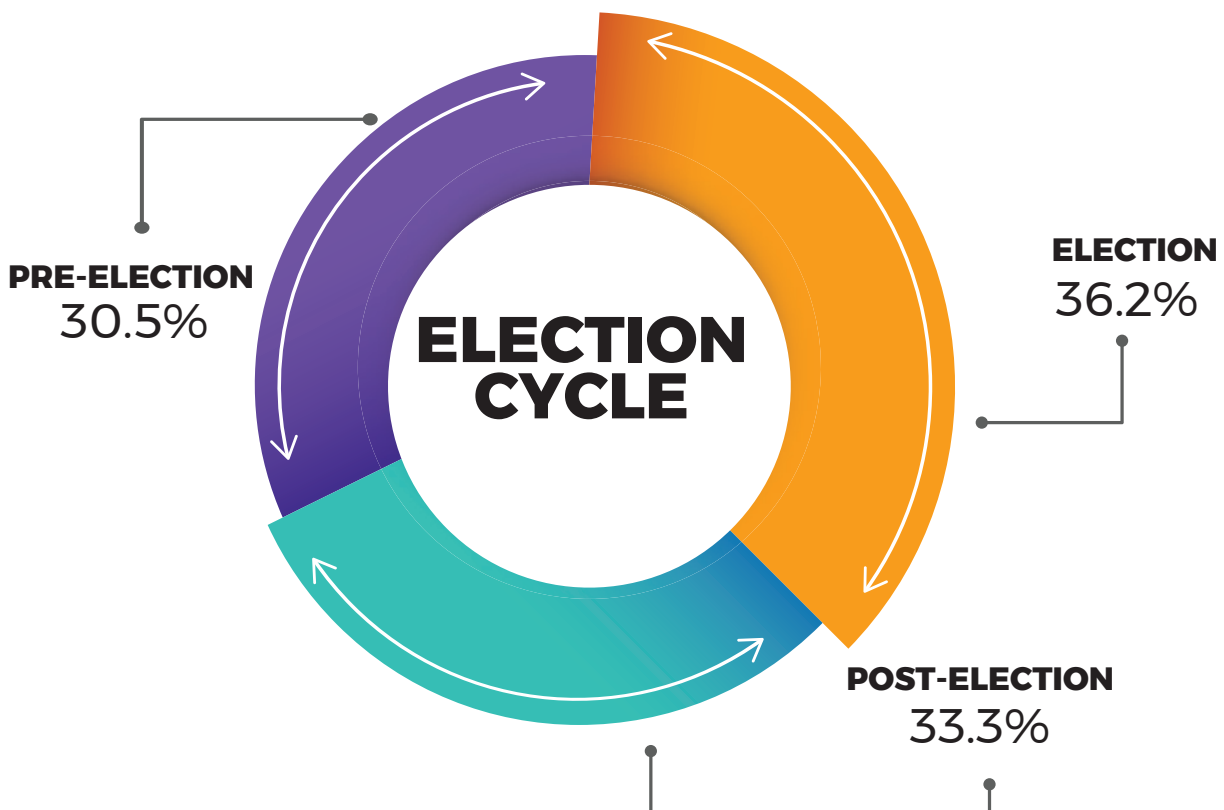
To further examine the timing of the release of the Situation Room Statements, the Statements were analysed based on the three phases of the election cycle in order to determine the phase of the election cycle in which they were issued. The

analysis presented in table 4 shows that although the activities of the Situation Room were concentrated on the election-year, the Statements issued by the group focused almost evenly on issues in the three phases of the electoral cycle. Of the 69 Statements, 21 Statements were issued before the commencement of voting to address pre-election issues, 25 Statements were issued after the commencement of voting till few days after the announcement of results to address election issues, while 23 Statements were issued several days after the announcement of results to address post-election issues. What the above analysis then suggests is that although the Situation Room activities are concentrated on the election-year, the focus of the group is somewhat extended to cover the three phases of the election cycle.

Table 4: Counting and Coding of Keywords based on Election Cycle

SN	ELECTION CYCLE	COUNT	
1	Pre-election	21	
2	Election	25	
3	Post-election	23	
	TOTAL	69	

Pie chart of Keywords based on Election Cycle



Issues addressed in the Statements

Experts suggest that in engaging the electoral process, issues relating to the following stages of an election require particular attention:

- a) Election logistics;
- b) Collation Process;
- c) Electoral violence, and
- d) Runoffs.

However, with regards to the work of the Situation Room, we observed that the issues addressed in the groups Statements go well beyond the above areas, touching on things like: a) Electoral operations and processes, b) Election security, c) Election administration, and d) Election stakeholders.

To identify issues of interest to the Situation Room, a close reading of the statements was done highlighting words and phrases that appear frequently and, subsequently, grouping the keywords under specific categorisation. The result of the counting and coding of the keywords is presented in table below. As the table shows, we identified a total of 55 keywords which were grouped into 5 broad categories.

The first category comprises of keywords that point to issues relating to electoral operations and process. The most recurrent words and issues under this category are late arrival of materials and officials, late opening and closing of poll as well as late commencement of accreditation. The Smart Card Reader, Permanent Voters Card, logistical lapses, voter turnout, and access to polling units and collation centres were also issues of major interest to the Situation Room. Furthermore, issues such as vote buying, election malpractices, irregularities, voter apathy, and manipulation appeared frequently in the Statements of the Situation Room.

The second category of keywords point to issues relating to election security. This category is captured by keywords like violence, threat, insecurity, intimidation, and thugs. Election administration is the third category of keywords. The keywords in this category include: polling unit, Electoral Act, reforms, nomination, voters register, election preparation, campaign, and social media. In addition, the Situation Room Statements contain keywords connected to issues concerning election stakeholders. The keywords that appeared most frequently include political parties, the National Assembly, women, party agents, youths, and the Judiciary.

A look at the keywords shows that the Situation Room is still deeply focused on its traditional areas of interest, which are election operations and election security.

There should be more emphasis on emerging issues such as:

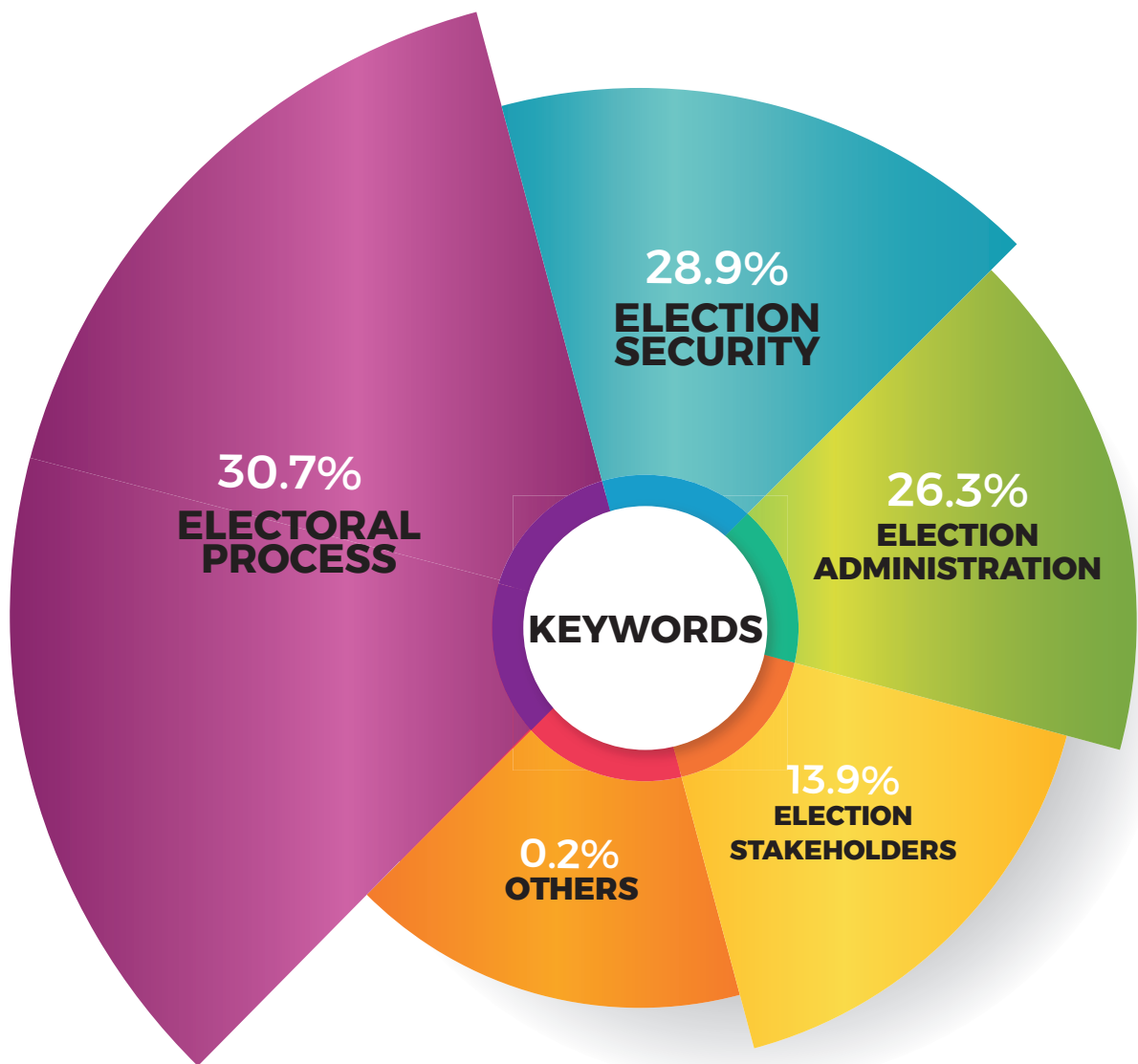
1. Inclusivity, of especially, women, youths and other vulnerable groups.
2. Management of petitions and complaints processes.
3. The use and/or abuse of state apparatus in politics.
4. Election expenses and use of money in politics.
5. Candidate selection processes and internal party democracy.
6. Management of electoral offences and accountability by election stakeholders.
7. The role of state institutions, particularly, the Judiciary and the National Assembly in the electoral process.
8. Voter education and awareness process.

Table 3: Counting and Coding of Keywords based on Issues

ELECTORAL PROCESS		COUNT
1	Late (arrival of materials, officials, opening & closing of polls)	102
2	Collation	79
3	Smart Card Reader (Card Reader, SCR)	63
4	Accreditation	31
5	PVC (permanent voters card)	30
6	Logistics (lapses)	26
7	Turnout (voter)	19
8	Access (to PUs, Collation Centre, etc.)	14
9	Vote buying	13
10	Procedure	12
11	Underage (voting, registration, etc.)	9
12	Participation	8
13	Malpractices	8
14	Irregularity(ies)	8
15	Apathy	7
16	Manipulation	6
17	Misconduct	5
18	Fraud	4
ELECTION SECURITY		COUNT
1	Security (arrangement, agencies, agents, personnel, forces)	221
2	Violence	105
3	Threat	36
4	Insecurity	23
5	Intimidation	17
6	Thugs	16

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION		COUNT
1	Polling unit	55
2	Electoral Act (reform, implementation, etc.)	51
3	Reform (legal, electoral)	49
4	Nomination	34
5	Register (voters, registration, etc.)	33
6	Preparation	23
7	Campaign	22
8	Hate (speech, campaign)	13
9	Complaints	13
10	Technology	13
11	Social media	12
12	Offences	12
13	Voter education	10
14	Training	9
15	Communication (policy, internal, process)	9
16	Primaries (Party)	8
17	Audit (Election)	6
18	Inclusive (inclusivity)	5
19	Tribunal	4
20	Petition	0
ELECTORAL PROCESS		COUNT
1	Political parties	76
2	National Assembly	60
3	Women	18
4	Party agents	16
5	Youths	7
6	Judiciary	7
7	Men	6
8	IDP (internally displaced persons)	6
9	PWD (people with disability)	4
10	Legislature	1
OTHERS		COUNT
1	Corruption	4

Pie chart Counting and Coding of Keywords based on Issues



Key challenges to the conduct of elections in Nigeria

Looking at the Statements of the Situation Room in relation to general elections since 2011, one can easily identify the key challenges to the conduct of elections in Nigeria. We coded the keywords relating the challenges mentioned in the Situation Room Statements and conducted a word count to determine the frequency of appearance of particular words. The keywords were then group under three headings, namely electoral process, election security and election administration depending on the nature of the problem.

As the pie chart above shows, challenges relating to the electoral process had the most frequent mentions in the Situation Room Statements suggesting that they are of

great concern to the group. The issues of concern here include late arrival of election officials and materials, late opening and closing of polls, and late commencement of accreditation. Other issues of interest include problems with collation of result, the Smart Card Reader, the accreditation process, collection and use of PVCs, logistical lapses, vote buying, underaged voting, and various forms of breach of process like malpractices, irregularities, manipulation of the process and fraud.

The next set of challenges relates to election security, and are captured with such keywords as violence, threat to peace, insecurity, intimidation and the activities of thugs. The tone of most Situation Room Statements is that of grave concern when it comes to the issue of election security. For instance, the very first Statement of the group issued on Monday, 28 March 2011, was titled: "Situation Room Worried Violence May Threaten Election." Undeniably, election security has remained a major concern of the Situation Room till date. The Situation Room Statements have highlighted the role of security agencies in elections, especially as it relates to their interference in the electoral process and their failure to contain electoral violence and irregularities. For example, in 2015, the Situation Room issued a Statement titled: "Nigeria's Democracy Imperilled! Postponement of Elections," after it appeared that the security agencies were capitalizing on insecurity in the country to manipulate the electoral process.

Thirdly, the Situation Room Statements identified challenges relating to election administration. Here, the focus is on issues such as adequacy and setting up of polling units, reform and implementation of the Electoral Act, voters' registration and the voter register, general preparation for elections, and campaigns especially with regards to the use of hate speech. Other issues that relate to election administration, but which have been mentioned in less frequency are problems with election technology, handling of complaints and petitions process, use of social media, handling of electoral offences, voter education, and training of election officials.

Analysis of recommendations contained in Statements

Situation Room Statements are typically structured to capture observations, analysis and recommendations. An analysis of the recommendations contained in the Statements issued during the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections identifies issues involved, task bearers and the repeated mention of specific recommendations on particular issues. Table 4 below presents a summary of the recommendations contained in the Situation Room Statements. As shown in the table, a total of 30 recommendations in the Statements were identified– 10 recommendations were

made with regard to the 2011 general elections, 8 recommendations relate to the 2015 general elections, while 12 recommendations were made in relation to the 2019 general elections. Issues relating to election security were the main focus of these recommendations – 12 out of 30 recommendations addressed issues of election security. The Statements also made recommendations regarding electoral reforms, electoral logistics, and electoral audit – 7 recommendations in all. The remaining 11 recommendations addressed a range of issues including the voter register, electoral misconduct, Smart Card Readers, training, collation, voter education, and electoral offences. It is not surprising that INEC which is the election management body was tasked the most in the recommendations. A total of 15 recommendations assigned responsibility to and/or called for action by INEC. The security agencies were the next in line – 7 recommendations demanded action by the security agencies, while 3 recommendations assigned responsibility to the federal government. The remaining 5 recommendations called on various stakeholders including the international community to take specific measure to address the challenges with elections in Nigeria.

Table 4: Summary of Recommendations contained in Statements

SN	Recommendation	Year	Issue
1	INEC must ensure that its directive to the RECs concerning missing names in the voters' register has been adequately addressed, and erring INEC staff should be prosecuted.	2011	Voter Register
2	INEC should keep to its pledge of releasing results within 48 hours of the conclusion of the election and ensure that only genuine victors are announced.		Announcement of Result
3	INEC should respond to any complaints arising from the electoral process.		Complaints
4	INEC should enhance the integrity of the collation process		Collation
5	INEC should ensure the safety and security of youth corps members		Election Security
6	INEC should investigate all allegations of serious misconduct and, if those are validated, to void the elections affected and organise a re-run.		Electoral misconduct
7	INEC should audit the entire 2011 electoral process with a view to plugging the gaps observed.		Election Audit

8	INEC should rectify all operational and logistics lapses identified, and where elections have been postponed, these lapses should not be allowed to recur.	2015	Logistics - lapses
9	INEC should review its logistics management and explore the possibility of partnership with logistics management companies to manage deployment of human and material resources during elections.		Logistics - management
10	INEC should address the lingering technical challenges with the Card Readers.		Smart Card Reader
11	INEC should canvass for review of the appointment, control and oversight over the activities of RECs including their relationship with the national headquarters to find a right balance that enhances oversight without undermining state effectiveness. The provisions of the Constitution and the Electoral Act in this regard should be reviewed.		Electoral reform - appointment & oversight of RECs
12	INEC should improve the capacity of returning and collation officers to understand and implement the provisions of the Electoral Act, including the rules on the collation and cancellation of elections.		Training - Returning & Collation Officers
13	INEC should establish an independent inquiry into the poor management of the electoral process	2019	Election management
14	INEC and security agencies should ensure accountability for acts inimical to the integrity and credibility of the polls especially individuals complicit in the burning of INEC offices, election materials, snatching of ballot boxes and other electoral offences.		Electoral offences
15	INEC should push for reforms in the electoral process and call out publicly institutions, individuals and events that may have undermined its ability to carry out its mandate. It is also important that INEC is honest in admitting its own failures.		Electoral reform
16	Law enforcement officials should conduct themselves in a professional, non-partisan and impartial manner.	2011	Election security
17	Security agencies should ensure that the electoral process proceed smoothly, and to do this with restraint.	2015	Election security
18	The armed forces should develop election protocols and training for military personnel involved in elections.		Election security
19	Law enforcement agencies should investigate particular instances of voter suppression due to violence and perpetrators and their sponsors punished.	2019	Election security
20	The Inspector General of Police should investigate allegations into Police overreach in identified locations. The IGP should also investigate all political actors who have instigated or perpetrated violence.		Election security/ offences
21	Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security should deploy security personnel in line with security risk findings taking into consideration major flashpoints in future elections.		Election security
22	Law enforcement agencies should ensure that there is individual accountability for violence and manipulating of the election process.		Election security/ offences

23	The federal government should institute an independent Inquiry into the conduct of the 2019 Nigeria general elections to address issues of procurement, logistics management, role of the military, and abuse of process by INEC officials.	2019	Election audit
24	The federal government should offer reasonably packaged compensation to families who have lost lives in these elections. INEC officials and security agents who have suffered physical and psychological injuries must be supported and rehabilitated.		Election security
25	The federal government should strengthen the framework for electoral accountability by ensuring that the National Assembly fast tracks the passing of the Electoral Offences Commission Bill.		Electoral reform/ offences
26	Citizens, political parties, institutions, and political, civic and community leaders should respect the sanctity of human life, the sanctity of the electoral process and the sanctity of the Nigerian Federation.	2011	Election security
27	Political leaders should heal the wounds arising out of the political process.		Election security
28	All stakeholders should invest in civic education as a recurrent process rather than ad hoc event around elections.	2015	Voter education
29	Politicians should commit to respecting the rules of the election and ensure that their followers do not act outside of the law.	2019	Electoral law
30	The international community should lend their voices in defence of the integrity of the result. The United States and the United Kingdom should follow through on their earlier statement that they will sanction individuals whose actions undermine the election or have led to the death of citizens.		Election security

Measuring progress in Nigeria's electoral process

A review of the Statements of the Situation Room suggests that not much progress has been made with regards to the conduct of elections in Nigeria since 2011. Although this review does not look at off-cycle governorship elections and in those intervening years several processes were introduced. Looking at the Situation Room Statements, it is clear that the basic issues that prompted the establishment and interventions of the Situation Room are yet to be fully addressed and they tend to recur. For instance, in its Interim Statement on the National Assembly Elections issued on 9 April 2011, the Situation Room was worried by the failure of INEC to address basic issues such as late arrival of election officials and materials, incomplete voters register leading to disenfranchisement of many voters, malpractices involving INEC officials, the problem of underaged voting which was widely observed in some states, lack of transparency at some collation centres, and widespread violence leading to the death of several people. The Situation Room called on the Commission to adopt measures aimed at ensuring that these challenges did not occur in future elections.

However, in the 2015 general elections that took place four years later, the challenges that affected the 2011 general elections recurred. In a Statement by the Situation Room on 28 March 2015, the group identified four major areas of challenge with the general elections, namely: 1) late arrival of officials and election materials, 2) problems with the accreditation process, 3) logistical lapses, and 4) security incidents. According to the Statement, logistical lapses in several places led to relative late arrival of officials and election materials, which in turn caused delayed and slow commencement of the accreditation process. The specific challenge encountered with the accreditation process relates to difficulties in verification of voters using the card readers. The Statement indicated that serious logistical lapses led to the postponement of elections into all the 11 Federal Constituencies in Jigawa State and one Federal Constituency in Edo State, as well as rescheduling of elections already in progress in one local government area in Imo State. The Statement noted that there were reports of numerous incidents of security breaches some of which involved a measure of violence leading to deaths. Considering the 2015 Situation Room Statement, it appears that the challenges with the electoral process got worse rather than improve.

The Statements issued by the Situation Room with regards to the 2019 general elections conveys an even grimmer picture of elections in Nigeria. In its Third and Fourth Interim Statements on the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections, the Situation Room catalogued the lapses observed during the elections. In the "Third Interim Statement" issued on Monday, 25 February 2019, the Situation Room expressed disappointment over "the serious lapses observed with the conduct of the Presidential and National Assembly elections held on Saturday 23 February 2019." In the Statement, the group lamented that "despite the elections being conducted against a background of an earlier postponement on 16 February 2019, on grounds of logistics challenges, it still suffered from major logistic lapses. Additionally, the election was marred by violence, security lapses and instances of overreach. Other challenges include compromised INEC officials as well as partisan security operatives. Conduct of major political parties was disappointing." Some of the specific lapses identified in the Statement include:

- Late commencement of polls.
- Challenges relating to procurement, deployment and adequacy of electoral materials.
- Widespread electoral violence.

- Overreach by security agents, especially the military, deployed during the elections.
- Issues with Smart Card Readers, which affected the accreditation process.

In the "Fourth Interim Statement," the Situation Room addressed challenges relating to collation of results. In particular, the group expressed concern over discrepancies in vote tallies, lack of clarity in the rationale for cancellation of results, allegations of intimidation and harassment of election officials during the collation process and undue pressure in the announcement of results, lack of transparency at some Ward Collation Centres, and breach of procedure at others.

One common thread in the Statements issued by the Situation Room during the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections is the recurrence of certain lapses like breach of security leading to electoral violence, and logistical failures which most times result to late arrival of election officials and materials. Late arrival of election officials and materials in turn triggers a chain of effects that tend to mar the elections. In many cases, delays in the opening of polls might result to delays in commencement of accreditation and voting; and this process tends to snowball into late closing of polls, late commencement of collation, and then, delayed announcement of result. The entire situation is made worse by allegations of involvement of election officials in malpractices and overreach by security agents. Generally, these challenges strip the electoral process in Nigeria of the much-needed credibility and slow down democratic development in the country. In all, analysing the Situation Room Statements conveys the feelings that election observers in Nigeria have not seen much improvement in the country's electoral process since 2011. From the Statements, one can contend that Nigerian election officials have been dealing with the same or similar challenges to the electoral process since 2011 - an indication that not much progress has been made during the general elections.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reviewed the Statements issued by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room from 2011 to 2022, with particular focus on the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections. It seeks to provide an understanding of the priorities of the Situation Room and the trend of issues emerging from successive general elections, in order to highlight the gaps in the work of the Situation Room and provide the basis for refocusing of the work of the group ahead of the 2023 general elections.

In the main, this study found that the observations of the Situation Room is weighed overwhelmingly towards electoral operations and processes, election security and election administration. This is not surprising since addressing the challenges and issues emerging from the conduct of elections was the fundamental reason why the Situation Room was established in the first place. So, in real sense, the Situation Room is living up to its mandate. However, considering that the political and electoral environment is rapidly evolving, it is expected that the Situation Room would continue the process of self-reinvention to be able to address and respond to its changing environment.

From the perspective of the Situation Room Statements, problems relating to election operations and processes as well as election security constitute the greatest challenge to elections in Nigeria. In its Statements, the Situation Room expressed disappointment that shoddy preparations, which reflected in, among other things, postponement of elections and late arrival of election officials and materials, as well as high level of electoral violence are becoming a defining feature of elections in Nigeria. In one of its Statements on the 2019 general elections, the Situation Room maintained that "Some of the flaws observed are recurrent in Nigeria's elections." Although new challenges such as the question of inclusivity, use of money in politics, and the issue of internal party democracy, are emerging, in the eyes of the Situation Room, electoral operations and election security constitutes the fundamental issues which the election management body and stakeholders have to work assiduously to resolve.

Because its perception of the electoral process is framed mainly in terms of electoral operations and security, an assessment of the level of progress made in Nigeria's

electoral process since 2011 based on analysis of Situation Room Statements produced a negative outlook. Looking at Situation Room Statements, it would appear that not much progress has been made in Nigeria's electoral process. However, the innovations and reforms introduced by INEC and the National Assembly since 2011 show some improvements in the electoral process. For example, the Electoral Act Amendment Bill signed into law on 25 February 2022 by President Muhammadu Buhari contains innovative provisions that could potentially introduced significant changes in Nigeria's electoral process. Although the enactment of the Electoral Act 2022 represents a significant breakthrough in the governance of elections in Nigeria, the real gains of the reform would depend on the extent to which the law is implemented. It would seem that most of the new innovations in recent years and would be used for the 2023 general election were introduced in the off-cycle governorship elections except for the Smart Card Reader and Permanent Voters Card that were introduced in the 2015 general election.

This study is essentially a desk review of the Situation Room Statements, we are not able to conduct rigorous analyses of many of the issues arising from this study. This we will look at in a more wholistic study of Nigeria's elections. For instance, the recommendations of the Situation Room during the last three general elections have been discussed, but we are unable to determine the extent to which the various task bearers identified in the recommendations have responded to the responsibilities assigned to them. In other words, we are not able to determine how and to what extent stakeholders like INEC and the security agencies have addressed issues identified by the Situation Room. The limitations of this particular study notwithstanding, we believe that this study has made substantial efforts to achieve the critical objective of provoking Situation Room members and other election stakeholders to reflect on the dynamics of the electoral and political environment in Nigeria since 2011.

Drawing from its analyses, this study offers the following recommendations:

1. The Situation Room should continue to make conscious efforts of continuous engagement of the electoral process, especially at programme planning and initiation stages, to ensure that the group is active at all phases of election – that is, before, during and after elections.
2. The Situation Room should also extend its focus on more interventions and

engagements beyond elections and position itself to address and respond to critical emerging issues in politics, the economy, and the society.

3. In addition to maintaining its focus on electoral operations and security, the Situation Room should deliberately identify and address emerging issues and challenges in Nigeria's electoral process.
4. The Situation Room should develop a mechanism which will enable it to constantly assess the electoral environment and follow up with election stakeholders to ensure that its observations and recommendations are given the attention they require.
5. The Situation Room should ensure that it applies the criteria it set out in its Threshold Document in conducting assessment and producing Statements during the 2023 general elections.
6. INEC should ensure that the observations and recommendations of the Situation Room are given the attention they deserve. In particular, the challenges to election operations and security should be fully addressed ahead of the 2023 general elections to ensure that several negative trends in Nigerian elections do not become permanent feature of general elections in the country.
7. INEC should commission an independent audit of operational and logistical lapses experienced in past elections in order to entirely eliminate them.
8. CSOs should work with security agencies to establish a benchmark for security operations during elections. This would define the minimum performance standards expected during an election. Collaboratively, CSOs and security agencies should initiate measures to ensure progressive improvement in the performance of security agencies during elections.
9. INEC and security agencies should intensify efforts to ensure that electoral offences are identified and prosecuted including in supporting the establishment of an Electoral Offences Commission. The role of who prosecutes electoral offences has been an issue of contention. These are some the issues if settled will address the growing impunity during elections, deter election offenders, and restore order and justice in the electoral process.

ABOUT SITUATION ROOM

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room provides a co-ordinating platform for civil society engagement on governance issues. It is also a platform for information sharing among civil society groups working on elections and topical national issues. It intervenes in the electoral process by promoting collaboration, proactive advocacy and rapid response to crisis in the electoral process.

The Situation Room provides a forum of advance planning, scenario building, evidence based analysis, constructive engagement with various stakeholders in the electoral process and observation of elections. PLAC hosts the secretariat of the Situation Room and is a member of its steering committee.



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