

Nigerian journalists attacked and threatened

Nigerian journalists attacked and threatened while covering Bayelsa and Kogi state elections in November.



Police officers are seen near Lagos, Nigeria, on September 3, 2019. Journalists in Kogi and Bayelsa states reported being harassed and threatened during recent elections. Credit: CPJ/Reuters/Temilade Adelaja.

Nigerian authorities should investigate and hold accountable those responsible for the harassment of journalists working to cover the November 16 gubernatorial and federal assembly elections in Kogi and Bayelsa states, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.

Armed men threatened and harassed reporters, security forces barred journalists from entering electoral buildings, and demonstrators threw stones at reporters trying to cover the elections, according to [news reports](#) and journalists who spoke to CPJ.

The elections in these two states followed nationwide elections in February, which were also marred by violence against journalists, as [CPJ reported](#) at the time.

"Journalists play an indispensable role in the conduct of credible elections and should never be the subject of threats, violence, or harassment," said Angela Quintal, CPJ's Africa program coordinator, from Washington, D.C. "Nigerian authorities must investigate all allegations made by journalists about interference in their work covering the November 16 elections in Kogi and Bayelsa states."

In Kogi state, Chinedu Asadu, a reporter with the privately owned *The Cable* online newspaper, told CPJ in a phone call that police officers seized his cell phone for 15 minutes when he attempted to take photos of a politician giving money to women waiting to cast their votes. After police returned his phone, Asadu said another officer made threatening comments, and he feared the officer would harm him, so he left the polling place.

Lolafunke Ogunlolu, a journalist with the privately owned Africa Independent Television broadcaster, told CPJ in a phone call that a group of armed men threatened to beat her after they saw her film them assaulting a woman at a polling station in Aiyetorogbede, Kogi state.

Ogunlolu said the men, whose identities she could not determine, demanded she delete all the pictures and videos she took of them. Ogunlolu said one man was about to hit her and take her phone when another stopped him after recognizing Ogunlolu as a reporter with the station.

Two journalists with the privately owned Splash FM radio station, Tobi Kusimo and David Bello, told CPJ in phone conversations that a group of demonstrators in Aiyetoro Gbede, a town in Kogi state, threw stones at their van when they tried to interview a polling officer. The journalists said they fled after demonstrators broke their rear windshield and otherwise damaged their vehicle, and appeared angry enough to kill them.

"If we had waited for two additional seconds, only God knows what would have happened," Bello told CPJ.

In a separate case, Sam Egwu, a journalist with the privately owned newspaper *The Nation*, and Sunday Amachi, a reporter with the government-owned Kogi State Radio broadcaster, told CPJ via phone that a group of demonstrators in Anyigba, in Kogi state, surrounded their car while they drove to a polling place and threw stones at their vehicle.

"In fact, they destroyed our vehicle. It was a miracle we left that place unhurt," said Egwu.

Egwu and Amachi told CPJ that protesters alleging election interference barricaded all exit routes and surrounded their car. Protesters climbed on their car in an attempt to force the journalists out, but the demonstrators dispersed after security forces fired their weapons, Egwu said.

In Bayelsa state, four unidentified individuals wielding canes and bottles intercepted Adejumor Kabir, a reporter with the *Premium Times* newspaper, while he was traveling to the main office of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission, he told CPJ via phone. The individuals forced his driver to leave, and drove Kabir to an isolated area in Opolo, in Yenagoa, the state capital, where they interrogated him for two hours, he told CPJ. Kabir said his abductors had mistaken him for a government official and, after questioning and accusing him of manipulating election results, they released him.

Kabir then traveled to the Independent National Electoral Commission office to cover the collation of the results, but police blocked him and other reporters from entering the building, even though they identified themselves as journalists, Kabir said. He said the officers told the journalists that they were working on orders from above not to admit members of the press.

CPJ's calls and text messages to Oluwole Ozassi-Uzi, the Independent National Electoral Commission spokesperson, went unanswered. The head of voter education in Bayelsa State, Wilfred Ifogah, told journalists that security officials "misunderstood INEC instructions" when they barred reporters from entering the commission's office, according to a report by [Premium Times](#).

In a text message to CPJ, Nigerian police spokesperson Frank Mba said he was not aware of any assaults on journalists and said, "The safety and wellbeing of journalists and media practitioners generally was of paramount importance to the Nigeria Police Force."

Mba said that the force would "take extra measures to ensure [journalists'] safety."

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