



## **BAYELSA STATE: Election Security Threat Assessment**

### **Key Risk Factors:**

- Undiminished status of ex-militants and their continuing access to lethal weapons.
- Virtual absence of the police in the creeks.
- Challenging transportation system, sea piracy and cultism.
- High stakes for controlling the state government and commonwealth of the people.

### **Key Mitigating Factors:**

- None of the candidate has the advantage of incumbency.
- Disbandment of *Famou Tangbe*, the dreaded security outfit of the Sylva administration.
- Contest of unequal parties, PDP and the rest.
- Training of all Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) in Bayelsa State on election security by DFID's J4A.

### **Introduction**

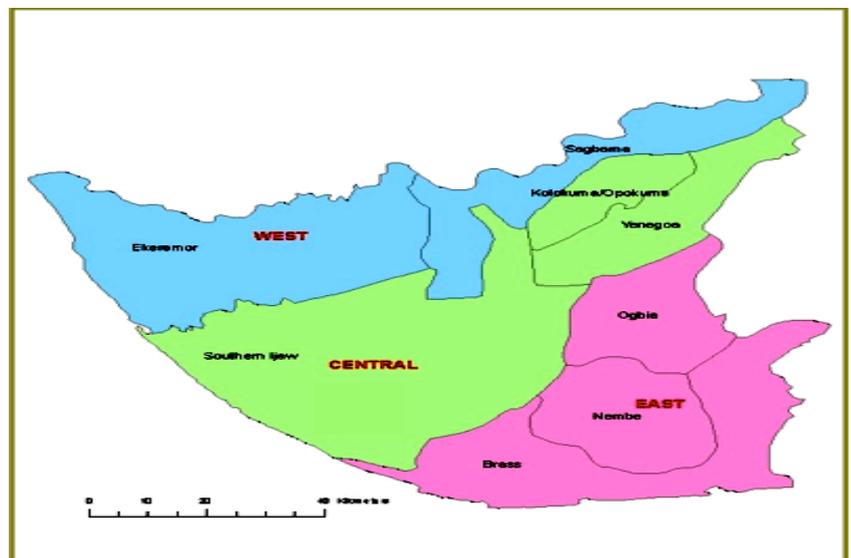
The Governorship election in Bayelsa State scheduled for February 11, 2011 has been marred by controversies following the disqualification of the incumbent Governor by his party. This has raised tensions in the state and across the Niger Delta region and fears about election related violence. These fears are not unfounded as several developments suggest threats to security. Barely one month to the election, unknown persons invaded the country home of a key ex-militant leader and killed a policeman in the process. There was also a reported attempt to blow up a bridge linking two major towns in the state some days to the national campaign rally of the candidate of the ruling party. During this period also, security agencies reportedly defused an explosive device in the office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The fears are heightened by the history of political violence in the state especially the upsurge of militancy since 2005.

### **Brief History of Bayelsa State**

Bayelsa State was created on October 1 1996. The name is derived from the acronym of three local government areas (LGA) of old Rivers State that were carved out to create the state. These were Brass LGA (BALGA), Yenagoa LGA (YELGA) and Sagbama LGA (SALGA). Members of the creation movement who hailed from the three LGAs had adopted the name in their state creation agitations.

The state creation exercise also saw the division of BALGA into Brass LGA, Nembe LGA and Ogbia LGA; YELGA into Yenagoa LGA, Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA and Southern Ijaw LGA; and SALGA into Sagbama LGA and Ekeremor LGA. These make up the state's only eight 8 LGAs. Attempts by the first civilian administration in the state to create 24 additional LGAs failed as the Federal Government did not recognize the new LGAs. The 8 LGAs are grouped into three Senatorial Districts (see map). The state also has 5

Federal Constituencies, 24 State Constituencies and 105 Electoral Wards.



### **Ethnic and Religious Factors in Bayelsa Politics**

The main unifying factor of the elites that agitated for the creation of the state was the common Ijaw ethnic identity. However, since its creation other identities based on dialectical differences have assumed political salience. These are Izon, Nembe, Ogbia and Epie-Atissa. The geographical concentration of the language

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groups has contributed to the politicization of the identities. The Izon, which are demographically dominant, make up Bayelsa Central and Bayelsa West Senatorial Districts and 5 of their constituent LGAs. The Nembe with 2 LGAs and the Ogbia with 1 LGA make up Bayelsa East Senatorial District. The Epie-Atissa and some Izon clans make up Yenagoa LGA of Bayelsa Central Senatorial District. Sub-Ijaw identities have also flourished as a result of claims of minority status by non-Izon elements notably the Nembe and Ogbia. Many Izon people believe that the minority discourse has influenced the alleged anti-Izon discriminatory policy in political appointments and location of projects of 2 Governors from the Ogbia and Nembe (Goodluck Jonathan and Timipre Sylva). This perception has in turn fuelled revival of Izon identity in the run-up to the 2012 gubernatorial elections.

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The natural resource endowments of the state and new business opportunities have attracted immigrants to both rural and urban areas of the state. Immigrants are mostly from the Igbo, Ibibio, Urhobo and Yoruba ethnic groups. The dialectical differences among indigenous groups and influx of non-indigenes has made Pidgin English the de facto lingua franca in the state.

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Most residents of the state profess Christianity and the religion is spreading in many rural areas. The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) is historically the dominant Christian denomination in the state. However, the state has witnessed the growth of Pentecostal churches with charismatic ministers in recent years. Despite the inroads of Christianity, traditional African religion continues to retain adherents especially in the rural and riverine areas. In fact, the late 1990s witnessed the revival of African traditional religion as militant youths turned to the Egbesu deity for protection against security agents deployed to contain militancy in the state.

### Politics and Political Parties

Politics is the main business in Bayelsa State due to lack of other economic opportunities. The position of government as the main source of economic opportunities has created disincentives for opposition politics. This political economy sets the ground for the evolution of a one dominant party system in the state. The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) has produced all governors in the state since the return to civil rule and the ascendancy of the ruling PDP is evidenced by eclipse of opposition parties in the State House of Assembly. In the first Assembly (1999-2003), there were 6 All Peoples Party (APP) members, 3 Alliance for Democracy (AD) members and 15 PDP members. In the Second House (2003-2007), the PDP took 23 seats and lost 1 seat to AD after the ruling of the election tribunal. The Assembly later became an all PDP affair because the lone opposition member subsequently decamped from AD to the PDP. The hold of the PDP on the state is evidenced by the fact that despite the internal factionalization on the eve of the 2011 elections, which led to some decamping from the ruling party, it still retained 22 seats. The remaining two seats went to Labour Party and KOWA Party. The PDP has also produced all senators and virtually all House Representatives members from the state since 1999. The PDP's dominance is only surpassed by male dominance of politics in the state. The state at the best of times has had only one female representative at the state legislature. This is remarkable in a state that has produced well-educated women that have excelled in the professions, public service and the organized private sector.

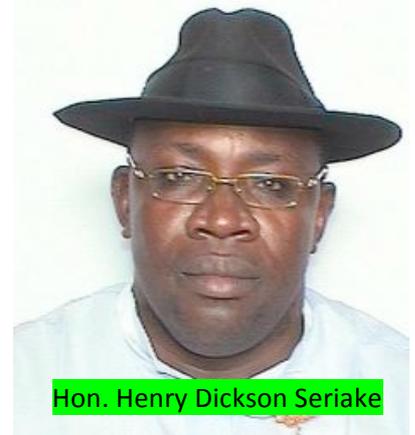
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With decision of the Supreme Court to sack Timipre Sylva and four other beneficiaries of the tenure elongation judgement on January 27, 2012, Sylva's chances of returning to the Creek Haven (Bayelsa Government House) hangs on the balance. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has obeyed a High Court ruling and listed Hon. Henry Seriake Dickson winner of the December 2011 PDP governorship primaries among the 36 contestants for the February 11 2012 governorship election.

## The main contenders for the gubernatorial elections

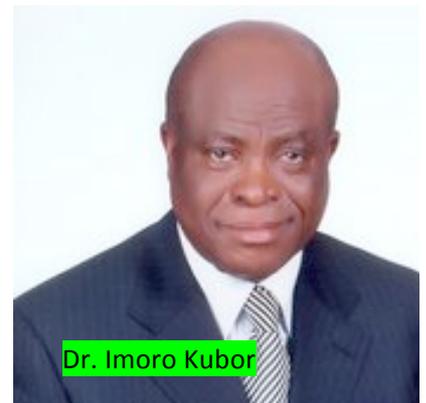
82 candidates were accredited by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to contest the February 11, gubernatorial elections. 10 of them are women. Out of this rather motley crowd, only two candidates are considered serious contenders by political pundits in the state. These are Henry Seriake Dickson of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Dr. Imoro Kubor of the Change Advocacy party (CAP). The general belief is that the number of aspirants is a reflection of political opportunism. Many of the candidates are believed to have joined the race to take advantage of the possible disqualification of one or both of the PDP aspirants. Some of the candidates lent credence to this suggestion when they held a press conference to support INEC initial for omitting the PDP in the provisional list of candidates cleared for the elections because of a court injunction. The aspirants under the aegis of the Forum of Bayelsa Governorship Candidates subsequently expressed disappointment over the court ruling that compelled INEC to list Dickson as PDP flag-bearer. The chances of the two major contenders are examined.

**Hon. Henry Seriake Dickson:** A serving member of the House of Representatives. Dickson is a lawyer and former police officer. He came into political limelight when he served as Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice under the Jonathan administration in the state (2005-2007). As a stalwart of the Green Movement that worked for Goodluck Jonathan, Dickson is deemed to have support at the national headquarters and grassroots of the party. His main backer and political Godfather is King Amalate J. Turner, a close associate of President Jonathan. President Jonathan has also openly endorsed Seriake's candidacy at the belated flag off of campaigns on February 3, 2012. Dickson's chances at the polls are enhanced by the fact that most of the political leaders of the state have endorsed his candidacy. This includes notable leaders such as Chief DSP Alameiyeseigha, former state governor (1999-2005), Timi Alaibe, former managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Chief Peremobowei Ebebi, former speaker and former deputy governor. Similarly, all political opponents of Sylva appear to have mobilized around the candidacy of Dickson. The *'Restoration 2012'* campaign slogan of Dickson also appeals to the people of the Bayelsa West Senatorial District that have never produced a governor of the state and the Izon at large who are peeved by Sylva's alleged discriminatory ethnic politics. The support of Jonathan and Turner who are both from Ogbia LGA and Rear Admiral John Jonah (rtd), Dickson's running mate, who is from Nembe LGA, is expected to mitigate any protest vote from the Bayelsa East Senatorial District.



Hon. Henry Dickson Seriake

**Dr. Imoro Kubor:** An aeronautics engineer, Kubor retired from the federal civil service as permanent secretary, Ecological Fund, Office of the Secretary to the Federal Government. He is deemed to be very experienced in public administration having served in various capacities at the Federal and old Rivers State governments level. He enhanced his image of experience by selecting Rev. Obegha Julius Oworibo, the immediate past Head of Service in the state as his running mate. Kubor who is flying the flag of the relatively unknown Change Advocacy Party (CAP) has hinged his campaign on experience and merit. He has chosen *Total Transformation* as his campaign slogan to buttress his purported agenda to change political culture in the state. Brushing aside commentaries that he stood no chance because his party has no structure in the state, Kubor has been asking the people to vote for individuals on merit and not for party if they want total transformation they supposedly crave for to materialize. Dr. Kubor has also had to deal with allegations of being sponsored by the incumbent governor.



Dr. Imoro Kubor

## Economy of Bayelsa State

Bayelsa State is one of the major oil producing states in the country. Its contribution to the national oil output has fluctuated between 15 per cent and 30 per cent since 1999. The state, which hosts the country's first commercially viable oil well at Oloibiri, is also a major source of natural gas, which is transported to the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas complex in Bonny, Rivers State. There is a general belief that the multiplier effect of oil and gas on the state has been limited. This is because none of the multinational oil corporations has established a major office in the state. Shell, Chevron Texaco and Agip that explore oil in the state are based in neighbouring Rivers and Delta states. The Brass LNG, Nigeria's second liquefied natural gas complex, currently under construction is expected to mitigate this sense of economic marginalization.

Against the foregoing background, it is not surprising that Bayelsa State has been at the centre of the agitations of oil producing Niger Delta states for more benefits from oil generally known as the campaign for resource control. The Kaiama Declaration of December 1998 where Ijaw youths asked oil companies to stop exploration took place in the state. The state's delegation to the National Political Reform Conference, which held in 2005, was among the most vocal advocates for the increase of revenue allocated on the basis of derivation principle from 13 per cent to 50 per cent. Failure of the Federation to accede to this request contributed to the militancy that cost the country millions of dollars in lost oil revenue. Ironically, militancy also robbed the state of statutory revenues from the derivation funds following slump in oil output. Consequently, the state government enticed key militant leaders with huge sums of monthly payments to allow resumption and non-disruption of oil production in the state. This and similar initiatives by equally cash-strapped Niger Delta States' Governors set the stage for the Presidential Amnesty programme for militants by late President Umaru Yar'Adua in 2009.

While most Bayelsans support the clamour for increase of derivation revenues, they blame poor governance regime for the economic woes of the state. Between 2000 and 2008, about N600 billion accrued to the state from transfers from the Federation Account, making the state one of the richest in per capita income. Ironically, the state is blighted by high incidence of poverty. In 2008 assessment, poverty rate for the state was 26 per cent and 61 per cent respectively for income and self-assessment. Similarly, the rate of unemployment in Bayelsa is 38 per cent, which is higher than the national average of 20 per cent by double digits in 2008.

The reality is that the state has a mono-cultural economy. Dependence on oil revenues has adversely affected investment in agriculture and fishing, which are the main sources of livelihood for majority of the state's population. The state's tourism potential also suffers from lack of investment and the unfriendly security environment. The Forest resources as well as clay, stones and sand deposits are not being harnessed and remain in the hands of operators of the parallel economy.

## Synthesis of Security Threats

- *The unlikely return of Sylva and Alaibe, as contesters would lead to the overheating of the political temperature in the state.* In fact, the deferment of the elections in 2011 was considered an act of God to spare the state more bloodshed as clashes between their supporters had led to loss of lives. Fears of prospects of a Sylva-Alaibe contest stems from their alleged control of militant groups in the state. Sylva is alleged to have used his position as Governor to patronise and woo key militant leaders into his fold. In the same vein, some of the ex-militant leaders allegedly remain loyal to Alaibe who dispensed patronage to them during his stint at the NDDC and Amnesty Implementation Office.
- *The undiminished status of ex-militants and their access to weapons remain a key security threat to the upcoming elections.* Although the Amnesty Programme was expected to demobilize the militants, some of the ex-militants have become even more influential during the post-amnesty period. This stems from resources and political protection they have enjoyed since they accepted amnesty. The fact that some of ex-militant leaders have been awarded surveillance contracts to check vandalism in the oil industry infrastructure means they are still armed and could use their arms to influence electoral outcomes. During the 2011 elections, ex-militants were alleged to have sponsored candidates and rigged elections in favour of their preferred candidates. With the lucrative opportunities offered by the surveillance contracts awarded by the State Government in cahoots with desperate oil companies, the rival militant groups have the incentives to back different candidates.

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- *The strengths of the ex-militants are inversely proportional to the weaknesses of the police in the state. Many rural and riverine communities in the state are vulnerable to rigging and electoral violence because of the virtual absence of security agencies.* In communities where there are police stations, police authorities have taken a tactical decision of providing minimum armoury to avert armed invasion of stations for small arms and light weapons (SALW). Police personnel are expected to send for reinforcements when faced by security threats. There are no adequate logistic arrangements for police deployed for election duty. In the circumstance, ex-militants control the creeks and barter elections for profit and power. Major hotspots are Southern Ijaw LGA, which has the highest concentration of ex-militant leaders, and some communities in Ekeremor, Sagbama, Yenagoa, Nembe and Brass LGAs.
- *The challenging transportation situation is a security threat to elections. Historically, many riverine communities are inaccessible during elections because politicians hire all speedboat operators to service their own electoral operations.* Anxious voters and even officers of election management bodies are hindered access to election polling units and collation centres. Some of the boat operators are paid to divert election officers and materials to unknown destinations where massive thump printing is done for their preferred candidates. Consequently, the pattern is for results to be declared for communities where voting materials never arrived and people did not vote. Since there has been no improvement in the marine transportation system the perception in the state is that the new improved image of INEC would make little difference, if the experience of the 2011 legislative elections were considered.
- *Sea piracy and cultism also pose threats to election security.* The waterways in the state are not safe at the best of times as traders especially women have lost their wares to pirates. To curb the menace of pirates, the state government established Bayelsa Volunteers to police the waterways. Through the agency the state government has sought to stop piracy by employing known pirates to check pirates in their territory. Although the scheme has worked fairly well, it makes the pirate turned water police susceptible to being mobilized to serve individual politicians or parties. Some politicians allegedly pay the pirates to obstruct movement of rivals or election management bodies. While pirates are hired to obstruct movement of material and personnel, cults are hired to terrorise voters and electoral officers in the communities and snatch ballot boxes.
- *Another major election security threat is the high rate of unemployment in the state. The worsening employment situation, aggravated by alleged embargo on employment by the Sylva administration, is likely to be a threat to security in the elections.* There is a perception among unemployed youths in the state that youths who supported politicians to rig previous elections have been empowered through appointments and enlistment for the amnesty programmes. This perception is likely to provide an incentive to other youths to do the bidding of political paymasters in the next elections.
- *Finally, the high stakes for controlling the state government is the greatest threat to election security.* Bayelsa State as earlier indicated receives enormous resources from the Federation Account every month. Without effective accountability institutions, most of the resources are expended on the basis of whims and caprices of the governor. This explains the heavy investment in winning the governorship election by fair or foul means.

### **Threats Mitigation Factors**

The foregoing ominous scenario notwithstanding, it seems unlikely that the forthcoming elections would be marred by violence. This is as a result of a number of mitigating factors linked to the Supreme Court ruling that effectively sacked Sylva from office.

- (1) *None of the candidates has the advantage of incumbency.* This is likely to reduce the negative impact of incumbency on state security agencies and election management bodies.
- (2) *The election is likely to be a contest between unequal parties. None of the candidates has the resources, structures and political backing that Dickson currently has.* The election is therefore likely to be an easy win for the PDP candidate. None of the candidates would have the incentive to

invest in political violence to discredit the elections. On the contrary, it appears that the opposition party candidates are already warming up to Dickson to secure their welfare and relevance in the upcoming dispensation.

- (3) *The likely diminished influence of ex-militants in the elections. Since Sylva and Alaibe are not principal actors in the election, the likelihood of clashes between rival ex-militant groups allegedly loyal to them is greatly reduced.* The likelihood of Sylva instructing ex-militants to disrupt the elections is reduced by the fact that the former Governor knows he is already on the watch list of security agencies for allegedly threatening the president. Having lost his immunity, Sylva would avoid any situation that would lead to lawful arrest and detention.
- (4) *The disbandment of the 'Famou Tangbe' (kill-and-throw-away in Ijaw) the dreaded security outfit implicated for extra-judicial killings has led to improvements in relations between security agencies and the public.* Fears that the outfit was raised to service the re-election campaign of ex-Governor Sylva have been addressed.
- (5) *Interventions to enhance capacity of the police in policing election are also expected to contribute to risk mitigation.* A case in point is the training of all Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) in Bayelsa by the CLEEN Foundation with the support of DFID's Justice for All (J4A) Programme and step-down training of officers on election duty.
- (6) Growing reputation of INEC for conducting credible elections.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The emerging developments in the state that have changed the political equation in favour of the PDP candidate have clearly reduced tension in the state. This is evidenced by celebrations across the state over the Supreme Court ruling. There are less fears of violence than the prospects for free and fair elections. Several actions however need to be taken to secure the peace for free and fair elections. These are:

1. The government agencies, especially the judiciary should avoid undue interference in the conduct of the elections. Any court pronouncement that is seen as undermining the elections as planned by INEC is likely to pose grave security risks to the state.
2. INEC should ahead of the elections make adequate arrangements for early and secure transportation of election materials and personnel. Resources should be made available for INEC to procure its own speedboats rather depending on commercial operators, state and local government boats.
3. Adequate logistic arrangements should be provided for the police on election duty. This should include accommodation for officers deployed and dedicated speedboats and vehicles. In addition, provision should be made for feeding of police officers on election duty.
4. Strategic deployment of security agencies should be made to hotspots identified in the report. However, to order avoid clashes between security agencies and ex-militants and cultists, government and opinion and traditional rulers should reach out to ex-militants, members of cult groups and members of Bayelsa Volunteers to desist from interfering with the electoral process.
5. Civil society, the media and political parties should embark on last-minute strategic non-violence sensitization programmes especially targeting youths.