



BAYELSA STATE: Election Security Threat Assessment

Key Risk Factors:

- Southern Ijaw LGA which has a high concentration of ex-militant leaders poses specific security considerations.
- The riverine communities of Ekeremor and Brass LGAs also present a unique security challenges that would require keen monitoring throughout the election period.
- Sagbama LGA, the home town of the incumbent Governor Dickson is another area to watch as both candidates would be keen to claim victory there.
- Yenagoa LGA which houses the seat of power is an important area to watch security-wise.

Key Mitigating Factors:

- The 20 political parties involved in the election had signed a Peace Accord which observers say is holding in spite of occasional fracas between supporters of the PDP and the APC.
- Different initiatives have been held to sensitize candidates and supporters on the importance of peaceful elections.
- Bayelsa is a small state with only a total of 663,748 registered voters. The efforts of the police led by IGP Solomon Arase along with the support of other security outfits in the state and the region would likely be enough to forestall breakdown of law and order during the election.
- Should there be violence, it could be localised and rapidly quelled to avoid it spreading to other areas

Introduction

The governorship election in Bayelsa State is scheduled for Saturday 5th December, 2015. The atmosphere in the build up to this, has been tense and filled with fear of high level of insecurity. Understandably, the outcome of the 2015 general elections in which the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) which had been in power both at the federal level and in Bayelsa State for the past 16 years was voted out of the presidency, increased the stakes in the staggered governorship election in Bayelsa State as both the PDP and the All Progressives Congress (APC) are working hard to win the election in Bayelsa.

For the PDP, it is a battle to retain one more state in Nigeria to serve as a basis from which the party could attempt to relaunch itself to power in the next general elections. Bayelsa is also the home state of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, PDP's presidential candidate who lost and conceded to President Muhamadu Buhari in the last general elections. Dr. Jonathan has been visible in his campaign for the PDP. Furthermore, although the governorship election held in Kogi State on November 21, 2015 was inconclusive with supplementary election scheduled for December 5, the APC was leading in the polls. The sudden death of the APC candidate, late Abubakar Audu has exposed the elections to multiple legal tussles. Both parties would therefore seek to win convincingly to devoid any post-election challenge in Bayelsa State.

For the APC, this is the first time they would be contesting as an opposition political party in Bayelsa while being in power at the presidential level. The APC's candidate is a former Governor of the State who is now seeking to unseat an incumbent of the PDP thus repeating the feat the APC accomplished at the presidential level last March. The APC is mobilising its resources across Nigeria – with the Vice President headlining one of their campaign rallies. Analysts believe that APC is seeking to win Bayelsa to consolidate it gains into the South South where it presently controls only Edo State.

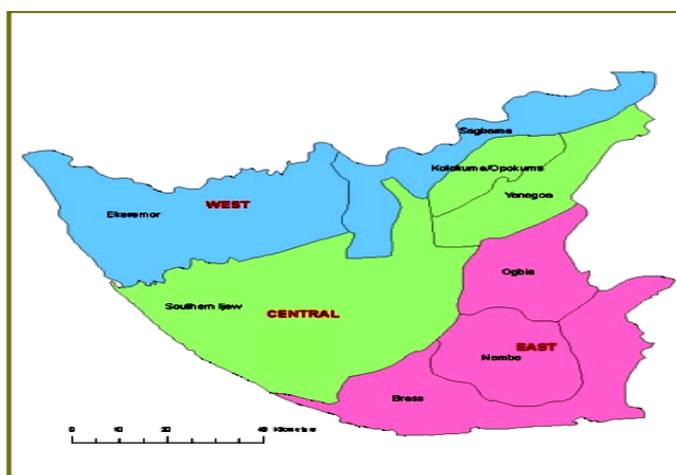
Election security fears in Bayelsa State are presently heightened by the history of violence and youth restiveness in the state especially the upsurge of militancy since 2005. Preparing for an election in such an environment calls for caution as recent events relating to the campaigns, the elections and the political

environment in general call for caution. This analysis attempts to highlight some of the potential threats to the conduct of peaceful, free and fair elections on December 5 in Bayelsa State, and also highlights mitigating factors and makes recommendations on strategic interventions needed to ensure effective election security management. The analysis draws from desk research, interviews and discussions with residents and stakeholders in Bayelsa. The goal of the analysis is to prompt reflections and more nuanced security planning by actors in the elections.

Brief History of the State

Bayelsa State was created on October 1 1996. The name is derived from a blend of the acronym of three local government areas (LGAs) of old Rivers State, Brass LGA (BALGA), Yenagoa LGA (YELGA) and Sagbama LGA (SALGA) which were carved out to create the new state. The state creation exercise 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. Thus, the new state is made up of 8 local government areas (LGAs). Attempts by the first civilian administration in the state to create 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.

With capital at Yenagoa, Bayelsa State is located in the centre of the Niger Delta region. It is bordered by Delta State to the north, Rivers State to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the south and west. It is one of the smallest states in the Nigerian federation, occupying a territory of 10,773 Km² and has a population of 1.7 million. About 70% of the territory of Bayelsa State is covered in water which makes it difficult to navigate and not easily accessible.



The state has a history of political instability due to the high turnover of leadership. Between October 1 1996 when it was created and May 29 1999 when the civilian administration was inaugurated, Bayelsa State had four military administrators. Since May 29, 1999, the state has had 3 governors and 2 acting governors. This high turnover of leadership is also present in the legislative arm of government that has had 6 presiding officers since it came into existence in June 1999.

Ethno Religious Composition

One of the main unifying factors of the elites that agitated for the creation of the state was a 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 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 also 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.

Many residents of the state are professing Christians and 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 riverine areas. In fact, the late 1990s witnessed the revival of African Traditional religion as militants turned to the Egbesu deity for protection against security agents deployed to contain the militancy.

Economy of the 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 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 oil multinational corporations has established a major office in the state. Shell, Chevron, Texaco and Agip that extract 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 this background, it is not surprising that Bayelsa State has been at the centre of agitation 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 was in Bayelsa 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 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. However, although the state has one of the highest rates of per capita income, it also has a high incidence of poverty. In 2008, poverty rate for the state was 26 per cent and 61 per cent respectively for income and self-assessment. The rate of unemployment in the state at 38 per cent dwarfed the national average of 20 per cent in 2008.

Dependence on oil revenues and environmental degradation have 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.

Politics and Political Parties

Like in most parts of the country, politics is big business in Bayelsa State. The position of government as the main source of economic opportunities has created disincentives for opposition politics. This political economy

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sets the ground for the evolution of a one dominant party system in the state. PDP has produced all governors in the state since the return to civil rule. The ascendancy of the ruling PDP at the state level is evidenced by gradual disappearance of opposition parties in the state House of Assembly.

Presently, out of 24 Houses of Assembly members in the state, 23 are members of Peoples Democratic Party while only one person is in KOWA party. There is no APC member in the House of Assembly in the state. This clearly shows that APC as a party is new in the state but are relying on the successes recorded by the party in the 2015 general elections as they head into the Bayelsa governorship election. Although the office of the governor of Bayelsa State is being contested by 20 candidates and political parties, the candidates of the APC and PDP are thought to be frontrunners in the contest.

Given the dominance of the PDP at the state, the primaries of the party in the past appeared to be more contested than the general elections due to the perception that winning the PDP ticket was a guarantee for winning the general elections. In the botched 2011 gubernatorial elections, however, Chief Timi Alaibe, former Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and key leader of the PDP decamped to the Labour Party to challenge then incumbent Governor Timipre Sylva after losing the party primaries. However, the famed clash of the Titans was averted due to the postponement of the election by the court. The governorship election was deferred as a result of a ruling of the Court of Appeal which extended the tenure of 5 governors, including Sylva for another year.

In the build up to this election, the primaries of the APC were as well so contentious to the extent of the National Working Committee of the party cancelling the first primary election which produced the former governor of the state Timipre Sylva. The cancellation was based on allegations of impersonation, and irregularities by the delegates. Sylva's emergence again after the repeat primary election of the party has made him a major contender to the incumbent Governor of the state Seriake Dickson in the December 5 2015 governorship election in Bayelsa State.

APC Candidate: Timipre Sylva



Mr. Timipre Sylva was born in July 1964 (51 years). He was first elected as Governor when he won the election to succeed Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as Governor of Bayelsa in 2007 under the flag of the PDP. However, Mr. Ebitimi Amgbare of the Action Congress (AC) alleged that the election was flawed and the Appeal Court sitting in Port Harcourt nullified Sylva's election on April 15, 2008 in a unanimous judgment. The Speaker Werinipre Seibarugo was sworn in to replace Sylva as acting Governor until fresh election was held on May 24, 2008. Sylva, won and was sworn in again on May 27, 2008 and was Governor until his tenure was terminated by the Supreme Court on January 27, 2012 with an acting governor appointed to oversee the state until the election of February 2012 in which Mr. Seriake Dickson, the incumbent won. Sylva was disqualified from

contesting in the primaries of the PDP in the 2012 election.

Sylva's campaign has been trailed by allegations of corruption and his on-going prosecution by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). On November 26, barely a fortnight before the election, the Federal High Court in Abuja dismissed EFCC's cases against Sylva arguing that the case in itself was "an abuse of judicial process."

Sylva is now seeking re-election buoyed by the recent success of the APC nationally and also the declining fortunes of the PDP. His victory in the court would endear him to some, but there are those who argue that his victory might have been politically influenced to clear him for the election. Sylva's running mate is Wilberforce Titus Igiri.

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PDP Candidate: Seriake Dickson



Seriake Dickson was born in January 1966 (49 years old). He is the incumbent Governor of Bayelsa state since 2012 and previously a member of the House of Representatives between 2007 and 2012. But this election is a keenly contested one in which Dickson and the PDP have had to battle with the decamping of PDP stalwarts in the state to APC after the 2015 general elections and the sudden rise of the APC in the state. Dickson is a lawyer and former police officer who 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 enjoys the support of the former President and PDP supporters across the country. Although the former President has openly endorsed Seriake's candidacy, it is still not enough to coast him to victory at the polls after the general elections which the former President himself lost to the opposition party in the state the APC. There has been endorsement and counter-endorsement of both candidates by the political leaders of the state. Dickson's running mate is Gboribiogha John Jonah, a retired Rear Admiral in the Nigerian Navy.

Security Preparedness for the Election

According to the Nigerian Police Force, security has been strengthened in the state towards ensuring a hitch-free governorship election in the state. This came just as the Inspector-General of Police, Solomon Arase, paid a visit to the state on Tuesday 1st December, 2015 and stated that no fewer than 14,000 additional police officers have been deployed to Bayelsa for the election. Other security agencies are deploying officers and equipment from neighbouring states to bolster security ahead of the election. Scores of Armoured Personnel Carriers were observed moving into Yenagoa, the state capital on between 28 and 29th November, 2015.

Meanwhile, Operation Pulo Shield, the joint military operation deployed to the Niger Delta to secure oil installations, has said that it will be on stand-by to assist the police and other security agencies in providing security during the election. The Media Coordinator of the operation, Lt.-Col. Isa Ado, said the police and the Department of Security Services (DSS) would form the nucleus of the security architecture for the election, while Operation Pulo Shield will be on standby to provide back-up. The Central Naval Command and the Nigerian Air Force will also be mobilised to provide security during the December 5 election.

Synthesis of Security Threat

- Adjudgment of Sylva's eligibility suit till next year: A Federal High Court in Maitama, Abuja has fixed January 12, 2016 for hearing in a suit challenging the eligibility of Timipre Sylva to contest the forthcoming election. The adjournment of the case to be heard after the election would have been concluded would, if not properly handled, undermine safety and security during the elections especially that the outcome of the elections could be rejected by some;
- Cultism and piracy pose threats to election security: Politicians are known for using cultists for ballot box snatching, kidnapping of political opponents and instigating conflict before, during and after elections, this should be carefully watched during the gubernatorial election in Bayelsa State.
- Small Arms and Militancy in the State: One lingering leftover from the Niger Delta militancy is the prevalence of arms in the South South which could be used in the elections. Furthermore, the role of some of ex-militants and their leaders in surveillance of oil industry infrastructure means they are still armed and could use their arms to influence electoral outcomes. Thus, the undiminished status of ex-militants and their access to weapons remain a key security threat to the upcoming elections.

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- Riverine State and Tough Terrain: Even without the menace of ex-militants, the challenging transportation situation is in itself a security threat to elections. Historically, many riverine communities are inaccessible during elections because politicians hire all speed boat 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 were allegedly paid in the past to divert election officers and materials to unknown destinations where massive thump printing is done for their preferred candidates or to refuse to operate so that perceived opponents would not be able to go out and vote. Consequently, there is need for extra vigilance in the remote riverine communities.
- Agitations for the separation of Biafra from Nigeria remains a threat to public safety and security in the election. The preparation for the election has been foreshadowed by protests for the independence of Biafra. Proponents of this view decry the alleged “northernisation” of the Niger Delta through the spread of the APC. This is coupled with cases of youth restiveness and agitation in parts of the region by ex-militants, protesting against non-payment of their allowances.
- The high stakes for controlling the state government and resources is a threat to election security. Both candidates of the APC and PDP have been governors of Bayelsa State and are aware of the vast resources coming into the coffers of the state. Without effective accountability institutions, Governors control these resources. For both political parties, Bayelsa State is too rich to loose and so the stakes are very high in the elections.

Hot-spots for Violence

- Southern Ijaw LGA which has a high concentration of ex-militant leaders poses specific security considerations.
- The riverine communities of Ekeremor and Brass LGAs also present a unique security challenges that would require keen monitoring throughout the election period. Sylva who hails from Brass LGA is thought to be a favourite in that area, but he is keenly match by the strength of Dickson, the incumbent.
- Sagbama LGA, the home town of the incumbent Governor Dickson is another area to watch as both candidates would be keen to claim victory there.
- Yenagoa LGA which houses the seat of power is an important area to watch security-wise. With its population and ease of access, all candidates would seek to win in the town where they intend to govern from.

Mitigating Factors

In spite of foregoing ominous scenario the likelihood of large scale violence in the forthcoming election range between low to medium. This is as a result of a number of mitigating factors.

First, the 20 political parties involved in the election had signed a Peace Accord which observers say is holding in spite of occasional fracas between supporters of the PDP and the APC. On the other hand, different initiatives have been held to sensitize candidates and supporters on the importance of peaceful elections.

Second, Bayelsa is a small state with only a total of 663,748 registered voters. The efforts of the police led by IGP Solomon Arase along with the support of other security outfits in the state and the region would likely be enough to forestall breakdown of law and order during the election. Should there be violence, it could be localised and rapidly quelled to avoid it spreading to other areas.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

As Bayelsans participate in the second staggered elections to be organised under the Muhammadu Buhari led administration and under the current leadership of INEC, there are important lessons for Bayelsans and Nigerians to take away from the process.

- The government agencies, especially the judiciary should be sensitive to the impact of their work on elections. Judgements on on-going criminal prosecution coming on the eve of the elections as well as the adjournment of hearing on eligibility suit of a candidate well ahead of the election date risk being interpreted as politically motivated and calculated to determine the outcome of the election.
- Ahead of the elections, INEC should make adequate arrangements for early and secure transportation of election materials and personnel. While logistics management has traditionally been a challenge in the election cycle, it is particularly crucial in Bayelsa. INEC should conclude the hiring of boats from commercial vendors for transport of election materials and officials. Should there be lapses; security agencies should provide alternative means of transport.
- Timely distribution of electoral materials is pertinent in the Bayelsa governorship election to reduce agitation by electorate at the polling unit that could degenerate to fracas and a breach of the peace.
- 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 leaders 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.
- Welfare of security agents on election duty should be considered and taken care of before the election on December 5 not to make them more vulnerable.
- Civil society, the media and political parties should not relent in strategic non-violence sensitization programmes especially targeting youths. Furthermore, politicians should publicly declare to uphold the outcome of the election or pursue redress peacefully and in the courts.
- Civil society organisations observing the elections should work with networks and groups for enhanced security. Furthermore, the help-lines made available by security agencies, INEC and civil society groups such as the Situation Room should be made public and well utilised for incidence reporting.
- The social media is expected to trend with the Bayelsa election, however, there is need for restrained and responsible usage to avoid inciting comments and hate speech.