



KOGI STATE: Election Security Threat Assessment

Key Risk Factors:

- History of political and electoral violence.
- High level of Youth unemployment.
- Factionalization of motorcyclists by politicians.
- Perceived bias by INEC and Security agencies.
- Division in Kogi PDP, which may weaken their support base and increase their desire to rig.

Key Mitigating Factors:

- The 3 leading candidates are of same ethnicity, which may engender voter apathy.
- Improved police patrol and response capability.
- Deployment of INEC National Commissioners to supervise conduct of the election.
- Civic and voter education by civil society groups.

Introduction

As Kogi state prepares for the gubernatorial election scheduled for December 3, 2011, the political temperature of the state has expectedly risen. Fears have been expressed about possible outbreak of electoral violence during and after the election. The situation is not helped by the inflammatory rhetoric of leading parties and their candidates and further complicated by the history of the state as a hotbed of political and electoral violence in Nigeria. In this analysis, the various factors that may threaten public peace and security during the election are examined as well as factors that may mitigate them.

Brief History of Kogi State

Kogi state was created in 1991 with Lokoja as capital. The state has many ethnic groups but the Igala whose homeland is in the eastern part of the state constitute the majority and have produced all the governors since 1999 when electoral democracy was restored in Nigeria. Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions, although a significant proportion of the population still practice traditional religion.

Kogi state occupies an important place in the history Northern Nigeria. The Protectorate of Northern Nigeria was proclaimed in Lokoja on January 1, 1900, marking the entry of colonial rule in the region. The territory and composition of the state is almost exactly the same as what was known as Kabba Province under the Northern Region.

During the state creation exercise by the military in 1967, Kabba Province and Ilorin Province were merged to form Kwara State. In the subsequent state creation exercise of 1976, people from the old Kabba Province agitated for a state of their own. But instead of doing this, the people were divided in two separate states – Kwara and Benue States.

The agitation for the creation of a state coinciding with the old Kabba Province continued. In 1991, the demand was granted and Kogi State was born. A major consequence of the history of separation and reunion of the different parts is that the Eastern and Western flanks of the Niger River in the State now constitute major line of division along



ethnicity, as will be discussed subsequently. This has had serious consequences, including political violence in the governance of the state.

The state has 21 local government areas, which are divided into three senatorial districts:

1. Kogi Central Senatorial District – Adavi, Ajaokuta, Ogori/Magongo, Okene, Okehi
2. East Senatorial District – Ankpa, Bassa, Dekina, Ibaji, Idah, Igalamela-Odolu, Ofu, Olamaboro and Omala
3. Kogi West Senatorial District - Ijumu, Kabba/Bunu, Kogi, Lokoja, Mopa-Muro, Yagba East, and Yagba West

A major consequence of the history of separation and reunion of the different parts of Kogi State is that the Eastern and Western flanks now constitute major line of division along ethnicity, which has had serious consequences including political violence.

Ethno-religious composition

Kogi state consists of several ethnic groups. The indigenous ethnic groups are: Basa-Nge, Bassa-Komu, Bunu, Epira, Egbura-Koto, Gwari, Igala, Ijumu, Kakanda, Magongo, Nupe, Ogori, Owe, Oworo and Yagba. There are several non-indigenous but long-resident ethnic groups like, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Edo, Urhobo, etc. in different parts of the state, especially in Lokoja.

Ethnicity has become highly politicised in the state. The dominant ethnic group is Igala, located in the Eastern flank and Kogi East Senatorial District. Since the creation of the State it has produced all the governors. In spite of demands by other groups for a rotational framework for the election of a governor, Igalas continue to insist that it should do so because it has the largest population compared to other ethnic groups.

Epira is the second largest ethnic group in the State. The Epiras are located in the Western flank of Niger River and in the Central Senatorial District. The next major group is a cluster of ethnic minorities identified as Okun, following the common usage of the word for greeting. A large subset of the group also identifies itself as Yoruba. They are in the Western Senatorial District. Sandwiched between these three blocks of ethnic groups are several minorities. There has been an unsuccessful attempt in the past for a coalition of ethnic groups in the western part of the state to present a common candidate as a challenge to the ethnic dominance of Igalas in the politics and governance of Kogi state. This has been a festering source of political disaffection in the state.

The two dominant religions in the state are Christianity and Islam. Concentration of the adherents of the two religions can be found in some Local Government Areas. However, overall, both Christians and Muslims are spread over the different parts of the state. So far, there have not been serious violent conflicts attributed to religious differences in the State since its creation due in part to the fact that most communities and families have significant proportion of adherents of both religions.

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Politics and Political Parties

There are three major parties in the state. These are the People's Democratic Party (PDP) that has ruled the state for the past eight years; the All Nigeria People's Progressive Party (ANPP) that governed the State between 1999 and 2003, and the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), that is seeking to make an entry into the state. The 25 elected members of the State House of Assembly belong to the following parties: PDP =21; ANPP = 3; ACN =1.

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It is widely believed that anyone who emerged as the PDP candidate is likely to win the gubernatorial election. As a result, PDP primaries are usually fiercely contested. However, in the most recent primary held in September 2011, the outgoing governor, Ibrahim Idris, who had initially supported a different candidate switched support to Captain Idris Wada, who eventually won. Captain Wada is not only an Igala but also widely reported to be an in-law to the governor. This has created acrimony within the ruling party, which has not been fully reconciled. Therefore, though PDP is going into the election with incumbency advantage, it is suffering from deep division that may result in protest vote.

The emergence of the candidates of the other parties did not attract serious attention due to their presumed slim chances of winning the election. A significant development though is the emergence of Abubakar Audu, a former governor of the State as the candidate of ACN. He abandoned his former party (ANPP) to join forces with ACN. The ANPP candidate is Obolo Okpanachi, a retired federal public servant but little known in the State.

The parties, especially the three major parties (PDP, ANPP, and ANC) are campaigning vigorously across the State. They have been accusing one another of planning to rig the election and engaging in acts of violence. For instance, the candidate of ACN, Abubakar Audu, had alleged that the ruling PDP was acquiring arms and sewing military and police uniforms for use by its thugs to harass and intimidate the opposition supporters so as to perpetuate their rigging plan during the election. Audu also alleged that PDP was planning to recruit 50 youths from each of the 21 local government areas of the state and disguise them as security personnel to carry out their plan. PDP denied all of these and in turn accused ACN of spreading rumor and propaganda because it knew it would lose the election.

Economy of the State

Successive governments have tried to develop the state, especially Lokoja the capital, by investing in public infrastructure, health and education. However, the governments were generally considered corrupt. Consequently, beside Obajana cement factory, a private company owned by the billionaire businessman, Aliko Dangote, the State has no major factories or enterprises that are capable of employing young people graduating from secondary and tertiary education institutions annually. The federal corporations like Ajaokuta Steel Company and the Iron Ore Mining Company in Itakpe were sold by Obasanjo administration and are currently not functioning. The lack of industries and enterprises to absorb the youth in the state has led large number of them to engage in all manner of activities to earn a living and has created a market for the recruitment of political thugs by unscrupulous politicians.

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Similarly, a large number of young people in the state have taken to commercial motorcycle riding, especially in Lokoja, like other capital cities in Nigeria. Most times you are likely to find large numbers of them gathering at corners of major roads in Lokoja looking for passengers. Historically, they have been hired by politicians to be in their convoys during political campaigns. This has given rise to factionalization of their ranks and periodic outbreaks of violence, which may increase during and after the election. The two leading candidates, Idris Wada of PDP and Abubakar Audu of ACN both have factions of motorcyclists in Lokoja working for them.

Synthesis of security threats

From the foregoing background analysis, the following threats to peace and security are identifiable in the build up to December 3 elections in Kogi State:

1. Violence Hotspots

Given the history of electoral violence in Kogi State and its usual concentration in certain areas, security agents and INEC officials should be vigilant in the following local government areas known for violence: Anyigba, Idah, Ankpa in the East Senatorial District; Okene, Okegwen, and Ihima in Central Senatorial District, and Lokoja, Kabba and Kotonkarfi in Western Senatorial District.

2. Movement Commercial Motorcyclists (Ahaba)

Movement of commercial motorcyclists in large numbers during and immediately after the election should be paid attention to by security agents.

3. Igala Factor

The three major candidates are from Igala ethnic group. This may heighten electoral competition and violence in the eastern part of Kogi, homeland of the Igalas. This is more so that Idris Wada, the PDP candidate is supported by the governor of the state, while the ANC candidate, Prince Abubakar Audu was a two-time governor in the state with strong support.

4. Internal Divisions within PDP

Internal division within PDP, which stemmed from the fractious party primaries that produced Idris Wada as PDP's gubernatorial flag bearer in Kogi State, may engender violence as party members may switch allegiance to other parties and 'subvert' the interest of PDP. Already, several court actions have been filed since September when the primary held to protest alleged malpractices that characterised the exercise and to stop the elections from holding.

5. Perception of bias by INEC and Security Agencies

Questions about neutrality of INEC and security agencies in discharging their functions during elections have continued to elections in Nigeria. Even though these agencies were widely perceived to have been reasonably impartial in the conduct of the 2011 elections in many states, there were still question marks in a number of states including Kogi, which may be a source of tension and threat to security on December 3. Concerned opposition parties in the state have called on INEC and the police to be above board in their conduct during the election.

Mitigating Factors

On the positive side, electoral violence may be mitigated by the following developments:

- a. The state government on November 29 donated 53 Toyota Hilux patrol vehicles to the Kogi State Command of the Nigeria Police Force, which may boost the visibility and patrol capability of the Police in the identified violence hotspots and other parts of the state.
- b. The Kogi State Police command has organized briefing sessions on election security for all Area Commanders and Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) in the state and they were expected to brief the personnel they would be deploying election duty.
- c. Prominent civil society groups with support from donor partners have been active in civic and voter education to ensure that the electorate eschew violence during the elections.

- d. All the contestants are from the same ethnic group and senatorial District. Therefore, any instance of serious violence is likely to be contained in parts rather than all over or across the state.
- e. INEC has improved its capability in the conduct of election and this may reduce tension that often leads to violence during elections and the Commission is expected to sustain and improve on its performance.

Conclusion and Recommendation

There are historical, political and economic factors that are capable of causing political and electoral violence before, during and immediately after the gubernatorial election scheduled for 3rd December 2011. However, as highlighted above, there are also countervailing forces that may ensure that political and electoral violence may likely be of manageable magnitude, contained within a part of the state and rapidly curtailed. The overall scenario is that the election may hold with manageable violence, especially if INEC efficiently administers the poll (prompt distribution of materials, accurate voter register, impartial collation and release of result). However INEC and security agencies need to pay attention to the following issues:

- Impartial and firm application of relevant laws and regulations governing the elections as any perception of bias could be exploited by interest groups to foment violence during or immediately after the elections.
- Prompt distribution of elections materials to all polling stations in Kogi ahead of the 8am commencement of polling.
- Accurate collation of results from the various polling units.
- Impartiality and vigilance in the enforcement of laws.
- Application of proactive measures in safeguarding security of electoral personal, materials and voters during the elections through effective patrol and proper deployments.
- Special attention to violence hotspots identified above, before, during and immediately after the elections to forestall violence.
- Observance of electoral laws and regulations by politicians
- Orderly conduct by voters and compliance with appropriate laws and regulations governing the elections.
- The government in the state should avoid the temptation of undue interference in the conduct of the elections.