



## 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 challenge that would require keen monitoring throughout the election period.
- Southern Ijaw, the home town of the incumbent Governor Douye Diri is another area to watch as candidates would be keen to claim victory there.
- Yenagoa LGA which houses the seat of power is an important area to watch security-wise.
- Court orders and Election Ballots

### Key Mitigating Factors:

- INEC should ensure that the elections are conducted in a transparent manner according to the electoral Act 2022.
- The security agencies should ensure professionalism in the conduct of their personnel on election duty through adequate training.
- The politicians and their supporters must commit to peaceful elections.

### Introduction

The Bayelsa 2023 Governorship Election is one of the off-cycle elections in Nigeria and a critical event in Nigeria's democratic process. The Independent National Electoral Commission fixed Saturday, 11th November 2023, for the conduct of 2023 Bayelsa Governorship Elections. To this end, various stakeholders have commenced planning towards participation in the coming Bayelsa governorship elections, including the security agencies that will secure the elections for peaceful participation of all the stakeholders.

### Brief History of the State

Bayelsa State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, is known for its oil reserves. The state was created in 1992, with Yenegoa as its capital, and has a history of election violence due to political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. These factors include intense political contests for control of the state's resources and power, ethnic diversity and identity-based voting patterns, and the presence of militant groups with political affiliations. Addressing this issue requires political reform, economic empowerment, strengthened institutions, and enhanced security measures.

### Ethno Religious Composition

The elites that pushed for the creation of the Bayelsa state had a common Ijaw identity, but since then, other identities have gained political importance based on dialectical differences. These identities include Izon, Nembe, Ogbia, and Epie-Atissa. The state's rich natural resources have attracted immigrants from other ethnic groups like Igbo, Ibibio, Urhobo, and Yoruba.

### Economy of the state

Bayelsa State, a major oil-producing state in Nigeria, has contributed between 15% and 30% of the country's oil output since 1999. Despite hosting the first commercially viable oil well in Nigeria, none of the multinational oil companies have established a significant office in the state, leading to a general belief that the multiplier effect of oil and gas on the state has been limited. Bayelsa State has been at the centre of resource control agitation, with most Bayelsans blaming poor governance regimes for the state's economic woes. Dependence on oil revenues and environmental degradation have adversely affected investment in agriculture and fishing, which are the main sources of livelihood for the majority of the state's population.

### Political Landscape

The November 11<sup>th</sup> Bayelsa 2023 governorship election has been described as a three-horse<sup>1</sup> race between the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), which happens to be the incumbent at the state level, the All Progressive

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/08/bayelsa-decides-2023-diri-sylva-eradiri-in-three-horse-race/>

Party (APC), which is the incumbent at the federal level and the Labour Party that is the third force in Nigeria’s political landscape after the Labour Party performance in the February 2023 presidential election. There have been several developments ahead of the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2023 governorship elections in Bayelsa state that are shaping the outlook of the elections and increasing the tension in the state as the election date draws near. Some of the developments with the potential to impact the election are highlighted below:

### INEC Preparation

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced the date for the conduct of the Bayelsa 2023 governorship election on 14 November 2022, which is a year to the conduct of the election as required by the Electoral Act 2022. The Commission went further to publish critical dates for the electoral process covering the period for the conduct of party primaries between 27<sup>th</sup> March – 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023, submission of nomination forms to INEC between 24<sup>th</sup> April - 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023, publication of final list of nominees by INEC on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2023 and official campaign period between 14<sup>th</sup> June – 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023 which is two days to the election day. The Commission further announced that the resumption of permanent Voters Card (PVC)<sup>2</sup> collection is between 11<sup>th</sup> September to 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023. These timelines indicated by INEC show a thorough plan by the Commission to deliver transparent and credible elections. The Commission has called on security agencies to take action against violence during the elections.<sup>3</sup>

### Endorsements

There have been different endorsements by different groups in Bayelsa state to the contestants ahead of the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2023 governorship election in Bayelsa state. The groups cut across social, political and ethnic<sup>4</sup> groups, including some traditional rulers endorsing candidates for the Bayelsa governorship election. All these endorsements combined have contributed to increased interest and tension in the state.

### Defections

Bayelsa state has witnessed members and supporters of major political parties defecting<sup>5</sup> to another political party ahead of the governorship election in the state for various reasons as political parties intensify efforts to win support from the people to enable them to win the governorship election come November 11<sup>th</sup> 2023. APC supporters<sup>6</sup> defected to the PDP on an alleged fall-off with the APC flag bearer. Similarly, PDP supporters<sup>7</sup> defected to APC as the state looked forward to the election day.

### Electoral Risk Factors

The past Bayelsa governorship elections have been characterised by violence such as thuggery, political killings, ballot box snatching, electoral manipulation, etc. Several factors are responsible for the scale of electoral

Bayelsa State		
Factors identified and most likely to cause electoral violence in the state	Actors identified that constitute threat and most likely to cause election violence in the state	Three Critical electoral risk factors that generate tension in the state
❖ Partiality of INEC officials, partiality of security agencies, availability and use of hard drugs, undue influence of money and godfathers	❖ Party thugs, ❖ Armed groups, ❖ Political parties	❖ Godfatherism activities, ❖ Vote-buying, ❖ Politicians and ❖ Hard drugs,

violence in Bayelsa state governorship elections. According to the CLEEN Foundation Security Threat Assessment in 2019, some of the factors that cause electoral violence include Godfatherism, vote buying, activities of politicians, political thuggery, cultism, etc. These ugly developments have impacted negatively electoral processes in Nigeria and contributed significantly

<sup>2</sup> <https://inecnews.com/pvc-collection-resumes-in-bayelsa-imo-kogi-sept-11-ends-oct-9/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://inecnews.com/nov-gov-elections-yakubu-urges-security-agencies-to-move-against-purveyors-of-violence/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/10/ijaw-bayelsa-elders-back-diris-re-election-bid/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/south-south-regional/618942-bayelsa-2023-peter-obis-campaign-coordinator-in-bayelsa-rejects-labour-party-candidate.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://dailytrust.com/bayelsa-govship-sylvas-allies-dump-apc-for-pdp/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://blueprint.ng/bayelsa-guber-50000-pdp-lp-other-members-join-apc-declare-for-sylva/>

to voter apathy during elections. The electoral risk factors observed in Bayelsa state over the years have remained prominent ahead of the November 2023 governorship election in the state. The difference will be the mitigation approaches the security agencies, INEC, and other stakeholders will deploy. CLEEN Foundation has documented the following electoral risk factors of violence in Bayelsa state.

### Power of incumbency<sup>8</sup>

Political parties have intensified preparations to win the governorship elections in Bayelsa state. The Peoples Democratic Party holds the power of the incumbent at the state level, while the main challenger, the All-Progressives Congress,<sup>9</sup> holds the incumbent power at the federal level. Past elections in Nigeria have shown that in states where the party at the federal is in opposition at the state level, the elections are usually violent, especially in the Niger Delta.

### Difficult Terrain

Bayelsa state is located in the Niger Delta and is almost surrounded by water. Some local governments can only be accessed through water, making it difficult for INEC to distribute election materials and respond to any emergency during the election.

### Hot spots for election violence

Given the analysis of electoral risk factors and developments from the state ahead of the governorship elections, the local government areas in Bayelsa are classified into three categories based on the perceived threat levels in the state:

S/No	Threat level by LGA
1.	Brass
2.	Ekeremor
3.	Kolokuma/Opokuma
4.	Nembe
5.	Ogbia
6.	Sagbama
7.	Southern Ijaw
8.	Yenagoa

### Mitigating Factors

Despite the preceding ominous scenario, the likelihood of large-scale violence in the forthcoming election ranges between low and medium. This is a result of several mitigating factors. First, the 20 political parties involved in the election had signed a Peace Accord, which observers say is holding despite occasional altercations between supporters of the PDP and the APC. On the other hand, different initiatives have been held to sensitise 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 Kayode Egbetokun, along with the support of other security outfits in the state and the region, would likely be enough to forestall the 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.

<sup>8</sup> <https://businessday.ng/news/article/pdp-to-apc-federal-might-wont-work-in-bayelsa-election/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://tribuneonlineng.com/bayelsa-2023-apc-nwc-announces-wike-as-member-campaign-committee/>

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Promoting peaceful elections in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, requires a multi-pronged approach involving various stakeholders, including political parties, government institutions, civil society organisations, security agencies, and the electorate. Here are some recommendations for ensuring peaceful elections in Bayelsa State.

### For the Federal government and Security Agencies

- The federal government must ensure fair play and avoid interference in the election process.
- Deploy a robust security presence before, during, and after elections to deter violence and ensure the safety of voters, candidates, and election officials.
- Implement proactive measures to identify and address potential security threats, such as monitoring and addressing the activities of political thugs.
- Ensure that security agencies act professionally, impartially, and by the law. Provide them with adequate training on election security and human rights.
- Implement youth empowerment programs, skill development initiatives, and job creation schemes to reduce youth unemployment and discourage involvement in violence as political thugs.
- Establish and activate early warning systems to detect and respond to potential election-related violence before it escalates.

### For INEC

- Strengthen the independence and capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct free, fair, and transparent elections.
- Enhance voter registration and ensure the accuracy of voter rolls to minimise disputes.
- Encourage political parties and candidates to engage in pre-election dialogue and sign peace accords committing to non-violence and adherence to electoral rules.
- Conduct more voter education campaigns to inform citizens about their rights, the electoral process, and the importance of peaceful participation.
- Encourage civic engagement and voter registration to increase citizen involvement in the electoral process.
- Hold perpetrators of electoral violence accountable through swift and fair legal processes. Impunity for election-related violence should not be tolerated.
- Encourage community leaders, religious leaders, and traditional rulers to actively promote peace and mediate conflicts during elections.

### Traditional and Religious Leaders

- Strengthen and promote community-based conflict resolution mechanisms to address disputes at the grassroots level before they escalate.

### For Media:

- Promote responsible journalism and ethical reporting during elections to avoid incendiary content that could incite violence.
- Encourage fact-checking and the dissemination of accurate information.

### For Political Parties

- Encourage political parties to conduct issue-based campaigns, refrain from hate speech and incitement, abide by the INEC code of conduct for political parties and adhere to campaign finance regulations.
- Discourage the use of thugs and violence as political tools.

#### **For Civil Society**

- Strengthen civil society organisations' role in monitoring elections and reporting irregularities or incidents of violence.
  - Conduct independent election observation to ensure transparency.
  - Promote post-election peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives to heal divisions and foster unity among communities and political actors.
- By implementing these recommendations, Bayelsa State can work towards conducting peaceful elections that reflect the people's will and contribute to the democratic stability and development of the state and the nation.

#### **Conclusion**

Ensuring the security of the Bayelsa Governorship Election is paramount to maintaining the integrity of the electoral process and upholding democratic values. There is a need to keep voters' confidence and ensure a free and fair election through robust security measures, which are imperative for the prosperous and peaceful conduct of the Bayelsa state 2023 governorship election.