



KOGI STATE: Election Security Threat Assessment

Key Risk Factors:

- Ethnic Arrangements
- Lack of party internal Democracy, transparency and Legitimacy
- Insecurity and Economic Crisi
- Excessive use of Executive Powers.

Key Mitigating Factors:

- The State and Federal Government must exhibit neutrality and avoid interference in the election process.
- The deployment of a high number of security personnel to high-risk polling units, against low-risk polling units should be a priority.
- INEC should intensify its inter-agency collaborations at all levels in the state.

Introduction

The upcoming off-cycle elections in Kogi state on November 11th, 2023, will be a test of Nigeria's democratic credentials amidst a lack of trust in the electoral process and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The state has 3,508 polling units, 1,932,591 registered voters, and 18 candidates. Among the candidates are Usman Ododo of the APC, Senator Dino Melaye of the PDP, and Murtala Ajaka of the SDP, among others..

Brief History of the State

Kogi State is located in the North Central region of Nigeria, bordering ten other states. It was formed on August 27, 1991, and is known as the "Confluence State" due to the confluence of River Niger and River Benue at its capital, Lokoja. The state has a population of about 4.5 million and is home to many ethnic groups. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, with crops like coffee, cocoa, palm oil, and minerals like coal, limestone, and iron being produced. The kogi people's primary occupations are farming, industrial activities, and mining.

Violence History and Pattern

- **Ethnic Tension**

The 2023 governorship elections in Kogi state promises to be direct confrontation between the three major ethnic nationalities in the state. This is novel, though not totally new to Kogi politics. Since the creation of the state in 1991, there have always been ethnic contests between two major tribes while the third tribe and minorities become beautiful brides.

In the highly divisive governorship contest, the biggest issues dominating the campaigns loudly are ethnic leaning. Which the campaigns clearly show up to be a tribal contest, a three-horse race among the Ebira, Okun, and Igala ethnic nationalities. In the primaries held for the 2023 guber elections for the state, we witnessed a deviation from the usual pattern of two major tribes facing each other and using the third tribe as bargaining chip. PDP produced Dino Melaye from Okun tribe, APC produced Usman Ododo from Ebira tribe while the SDP held up Murtala Ajaka, an Igala, as its candidate. This is the first time since the state was created that the three major tribes and highly influential personalities will engage in battle for the no one seat in the state (The Lugard House).

However, all three major ethnic groups must rely on the minority for vote to be able to come out victorious in November 11, 2023.

- **Election Violence and Lack of Issue Based Campaigns**

Kogi's growing infamy for political violence is another key issue that may shape the November 11 election. Since 2003, incidences of violence have become one of the characteristics of elections in the state. In 2019, the entire nation learnt a new slogan for political violence, 'tatatata'. The barbaric killing of a woman, Salome Abuh, who was burnt alive in her house shortly after the announcement of the results of the governorship election on November 18, 2019, saw Kogi's rating in political absurdities rise. Recent developments show 2023 may not be different from previous election years. On June 3 this year, there was a clash of convoys between Murtala Ajaka and Governor Yahaya Bello. Speaking of the convoy attack, Governor Bello said: *"Let it be the first and last time an antelope will cross the lion's way. Next time, there will be no warning"*¹. Not long after that, suspected political thugs invaded and vandalized the SDP campaign office in Lokoja, the state capital. After accusations and counter-claims, the hoodlums returned to same campaign office and set it ablaze². Also, "there have been reports of unrest in Ayingba in Dekina LGA of Kogi East, when the SDP candidate went to commission his campaign office. The office was allegedly vandalized on 2 separate occasions, with one person reported dead from the incident. There have also been reports of attack on APC secretariat in Igalamela-Odolu local government³. An APC chieftain Khadijat Yahaya allegedly lost her life after a clash between supporters of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and those of the APC in Kotonkarfe. Which made the APC suspend its campaign by a day, this could lead to retaliatory attacks⁴. The signs are ominous and if allowed to fester, it will surely affect the election with the possibility of low turnout of voters.

- **Anti-Party Activities**

ADC won two House of Representatives seats in Kogi state during the February 2023 elections due to anti-party activities. The fallout from primary elections has led to politicians leaving parties in anger at both state and national levels. The contentious primaries may lead to more anti-party activities before the governorship election.

- **Power of Incumbency**

The ruling APC party has the advantage of incumbency and federal and state powers in Kogi. The opposition faces a tough battle. Ahead of the 2023 elections, the Kogi State Government blocked a road leading to the stronghold of the PDP's senatorial candidate.

- **Controversial Endorsement and Defections**

Political parties in Nigeria have experienced recent controversial endorsements and defections. For instance, the ADP candidate endorsed SDP's Murtala Ajaka, but later the party supported APC's Usman Ododo. The ADC Idah chapter endorsed Dino Melaye but the party denied it, claiming the officials were impostors. Additionally, the ruling party announced defections from SDP, but SDP denied it, accusing the APC of being scammed.

- **Insecurity**

The upcoming off-cycle elections may be influenced by security concerns in Kogi State, where there have been reports of kidnappings and alleged attacks on political figures.

¹ <https://kogireports.com/5-issues-that-will-shape-2023-kogi-governorship-election/>

² <https://dailypost.ng/2023/07/24/kogi-guber-again-suspected-thugs-set-sdp-campaign-office-ablaze-in-lokoja/>

³ 5 Issues That Will Shape 2023 Kogi Governorship Election

⁴ <https://dailypost.ng/2023/10/04/apc-suspends-kogi-guber-campaign/>

- **Poverty/Economic Crisis**

The removal of fuel subsidies has increased the economic hardship in the country. With the increase in transportation, food items and other basic amenities, citizens having difficulties coping with the current realities. The increasing economic hardship has created a more vulnerable system susceptible to vote buying and inducements by politicians which can be exploited during the upcoming off-cycle elections.

<u>Possible Conflict Drivers Ahead of the 2023 Kogi Off-Cycle Election</u>	<u>Possible Types of Violence</u>
Ethnic Arrangements	Violent rallies
Cross Carpeting	INEC inability to transmit electronically and the functionalities of the BVAs
Candidate Endorsement	Victimization of political opponents
Lack of internal Democracy, transparency and Legitimacy	Assassination, Arson and Kidnapping
Imposition of candidates	Intensified use of the state security Machinery and forces
Excessive use of Executive Powers.	

Scenario of possible election violence in Kogi State

S/n	Elections	During Elections	After Elections
1	Intra party struggle for PDP and APC governorship candidate	Polling unit destructions	There will be a case at electoral tribunal
2	Polarization between the parties may deepened	Voter intimidation	Mass violence in the state between PDP and APC supporters, especially the youth
3	Youth Restiveness, Use of Youths as Political Thugs	Inter- party violence especially in volatile LGAs (Kogi Central, kogi west, Ofu, Olamaboro, Omala, Dekina, Ajaokuta, Okene, Adavi, Okehi, Ijumu)	Heightened security presence, including military, in the state.
4	Political exploitation and vote trading	Violence continues (post-Election Violence)	

Summary of EST Analysis for Kogi State

Factors	High	Moderate	Low
	5	3	1
History of electoral violence in the region	X		

Banditry, kidnapping, and farmer-herder conflict	X		
Criminal gang activity, including thuggery	X		
Ethnic tension and conflict and interconnected with politics	X		
The extent of violence since the campaign started	X		
Level and types of security challenges in the region	X		
Police and public relations – the extent of police-public violence			X
The extent of hate speech in the campaign		X	
Misinformation of the public by the media		X	
Disposition of the ruling party towards opposition – tolerance or intolerance	X		
Proliferation or availability of arms,	X		
Undue influence of money during campaign		X	

Recommendations/Conclusion

Federal Government

- The Federal Government must exhibit neutrality and avoid interference in the election process.
- The government should ensure that security is beefed up and improved in the state to avoid disruption of the polls.

Security Agencies

- The deployment of a high number of security personnel to high-risk polling units, against low-risk polling units should be a priority.
- The IGP should ensure a robust security presence before, during, and after elections to deter violence and ensure the safety of voters, candidates, and election officials.

Political Parties

- Discourage the use of thugs and violence as political tools.
- Abide by the rules governing elections in Nigeria and seek constitutional means when aggrieved.

INEC

- INEC should activate and institutionalise its Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security to enhance pre- and post-election electoral security.
- In collaboration with Political parties conduct voter education campaigns targeted at youths and educating them on the importance of peaceful elections.
- Encourage civic engagement and voter registration to increase citizen involvement in the electoral process.
- INEC should conduct similar election risk assessment for the states to identify and take appropriate measures in the major flashpoints.
- There is need for all stakeholders, particularly INEC, political parties, mass media and CSOs to intensify political education and sensitization of citizens about the need to eschew all forms of violence in the elections.

- INEC should intensify its inter-agency collaborations at all levels in the state.
- INEC should consider the prompt and adequate training of adhoc electoral officials and party agents as a matter of priority.

Media:

- Should be neutral in the coverage and broadcast of electoral campaigns.
- Promote responsible journalism and ethical reporting during elections to avoid sensational reportage capable of stimulating violence.
- Encourage fact-checking and the dissemination of accurate information.
- Effective regulation of the mass media not just to ensure compliance with established rules and standards, but also ensure enforcement of penalties when such rules and standards are violated, especially with respect to equality of access for all parties and candidates to state-own media outlets, as well as the broadcasting and/or publishing of hate speech.

Nigeria's elections since 1999 have been plagued by security and administrative challenges, leading to flawed off-cycle elections. Security agencies and INEC must ensure free, fair, and credible processes. Failure to do so could result in the November 2023 election going the way of previous polls, further eroding trust in INEC.