



CROSS RIVER STATE: Election Security Threat Assessment

Key Risk Factors:

- Decision of INEC to move forward the date of the election from April to February 2012.
- Rumours and intemperate utterances by aspirants and politicians in the state.
- Veiled threats of violence by opposition parties if the election is manipulated.
- Unemployment and lack of economic opportunities for the youths.

Key Mitigation Factors:

- Absence of incumbency factor.
- Weak structure and presence of opposition parties in Cross River State
- Perception of INEC's Resident Electoral Commissioner as a person of integrity.
- Training of all DPOs and Areas commanders in the state on election security management.

Introduction

This brief provides an assessment of the security environment in Cross River State before the gubernatorial election scheduled for February 25, 2011. Although the state does not have a history of electoral violence, the assessment is appropriate in the light of developments that appear to be overheating the political temperature of the state. This stems largely from unhappiness of opposition candidates with the decision of INEC to move forward the election from the earlier date in April to February and uncertainties arising from the unceremonious and sudden removal of Senator Liyel Imoke from office as governor by the Supreme Court. The assessment highlights security threats and mitigating factors and recommends measures needed to prevent violence and ensure free and fair elections.

Brief History of Cross River State

Cross Rivers State was created on August 27, 1967 on the eve of Nigeria's civil war from the former Eastern Nigeria as then South Eastern State. Creation of the state satisfied the agitations of the people of the Calabar and Ogoja Provinces that had been mobilizing for a state under the auspices of the Calabar Ogoja Rivers (COR) State Movement since 1952. The agitations stemmed from grievance of ethnic minorities in the former Eastern Region over marginalization in politics and economic development. This political history and identity as a minority state influenced the classification of the state in the south-south geo-political zone. It was renamed Cross River State in 1976 after the Cross River, the major natural feature in the area. The renaming of the state was accompanied with some boundary adjustments, which saw some districts of the state transferred to Rivers State. In September 1987, the southwestern part of the state was excised to create Akwa Ibom State. The state also lost some of its islands with the ceding of Bakassi Peninsula to Republic of Cameroun, following a decision of the World Court of Justice over a boundary dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon.



Calabar the state's capital occupied an important place in Nigeria's history as it was until 1906, the capital of the colonial administration. The city, alongside Lagos, was one of the first locations where elections were organized in colonial Nigeria following the introduction of elections in 1922. Early missionary influence in the area made the state one of the first sections of the country to embrace western education.

The establishment of Hope Waddell Training Institute in Calabar in the 1890s created room for the emergence of educated middle class in the state early in the country's history. Unfortunately, by the 1980s, the state had lost its reputation as the glorious provenance of western education in Nigeria as it was categorized as one of the 'educationally disadvantaged states' in the country.

Cross River State shares boundaries with the republic of Cameroun in the east, Benue State in the north, Enugu and Abia states to the west and Akwa Ibom and Atlantic Ocean to the south. The 2006 population census puts the state's population at 2,892, 988 million. It is divided into three senatorial districts, 18 Local Government Areas (LGA) and 196 electoral wards. It also has 8 federal constituencies and 25 state constituencies. Over its nearly 45 years, the state has been governed by many governors including four civilian governors as follows: Dr. Clement Isong 1979-1983, Clement Ebri- 1991-1992, Donald Duke 1999-2007 and Liyel Imoke 2007-2012.

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Ethnic and religious composition

Cross River State is a microcosm of Nigeria in terms of plurality, housing more than 20 ethnic groups. However, the dominant ethno-linguistic groups are Bekwarra, Efik and Ejagham. The Bekwarra are found in the northern senatorial district, the Efik in the southern senatorial district and the Ejagham in southern and central senatorial districts. These identities are often mobilized during electioneering campaigns. Historically, the southern district, which constitutes Old Calabar, is more developed than the northern section. This horizontal inequality has contributed to the politicization of the northern Cross River identity often against the dominance of the Efik whose elites brokered early liaisons between local communities and the British colonial administration. Generally, there is peaceful coexistence among the different ethno-linguistic groups. Most incidents of inter-communal violent conflicts arise out of disputes over ownership of arable land.

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Christianity is the dominant religion in the state. However, the different Christian denominations tend to hold sway in different parts of the state. For instance, while the Presbyterian Church is common in the southern district, most northern Cross Riverians are adherents of Catholicism. There are pockets of Muslims among the indigenous population in the state as well as migrants from other states. Many aged persons in rural areas also practice African traditional religion.

Economy of Cross River State

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Cross River economy employing about 80 per cent of the population. The state is well endowed with natural resources including forest resources, biodiversity, waterfalls and some solid minerals and oil. Its status as an oil producing state was significantly undermined by the ceding of Bakassi Peninsula and reallocation of some of its oil wells to neighbouring Akwa Ibom State. Since 1999, the state government has invested heavily in tourism. This has yielded dividends and the state is today a major tourist destination in Nigeria. The tourism potential of the state is anchored on its rich history, culture, natural environment and famed hospitality of the people. Among the major tourist

attractions in the state are the Calabar Carnival (which for the past eight years has attracted millions of visitors) and Obudu Cattle Ranch (a prime tourist spot).

Given the potential for international trade as a result of the Calabar Port, a Calabar Export Processing Zone was established to facilitate export oriented industrialization. The project has not yielded the desired results due to inconsistency in the implementation of the policy by the Federal Government. Cross River State has the lowest per capita income in the south south zone and an unemployment rate of 14.5 per cent.

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The effort of the state government to revitalize the concept of export-oriented industrialization through the establishment of the Tinapa Business Park is yet to yield benefits. Consequently, the state remains a civil service state where most of the population not employed in agriculture are in the civil service. Absence of industries and a commercial nerve centre implies that the state lacks a strong private sector. This throws up a political economy where the state is the major means of production with adverse implications for electoral competition.

Politics and Political Parties

Historically, Cross River has had one of the most open political systems where elections are highly competitive. This stems from the long experience with elections and multipolar ethnic structure that has discouraged concentration of power. The main indicator of this competitiveness is the small margin of electoral victories in the first elections of successive republics (1979, 1991 and 1999). A case in point is the 1999 elections in which Donald Duke of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) narrowly defeated the All Peoples Party (APP) candidate. The 1999 elections, which were regarded as one of the most competitive in the state's history, also produced 12 APP state legislators and 13 PDP legislators. The two parties also evenly shared the seats in the National Assembly.

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Liyel Imoke

Although, there are four key contenders for the post, it is mostly likely that the candidate of the ruling PDP, Liyel Imoke, would emerge victorious. Most people believe that Imoke who was one of the five governors sacked by the Supreme Court over the tenure extension largesse is on a 'short term leave' and would return to his seat in grand style. Imoke enjoys the advantage of incumbency, as the speaker who is the acting governor is a political ally. The lawyer turned politician was a senator in the short-lived Third Republic and special adviser to President Olusegun Obasanjo between 1999 and 2007. He comes from a prominent family, as his father was a First Republic minister. He is also from the Central Senatorial District, which is expected to produce a governor to complete its outstanding four-year slot. Imoke is considered as the most acceptable candidate from the zone since any other candidate may nurse ambition to serve for two terms of 8 years.



Usani Uguru Usani

The candidate considered to have the brightest chance of challenging Imoke is Usani Uguru Usani, who is running under the platform of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). A politician and clergyman, Usani was a member of the House of Representatives between 1999 and 2003 under the platform of the APP. He was commissioner in the 90s under military rule and contested for the governorship in 2007 under the platform of the New Democrats (ND). Like Imoke, Usani is from the Central Senatorial District, which is believed to have the slot to produce the governor. Consequently, he is unlikely to win the support of political stakeholders from other senatorial districts who are expecting a quick turn over and are not likely to support a candidate that would be eligible for a second tenure. Although Usani is seen as an astute politician who built goodwill as commissioner of information and agriculture, many believe he lacks the resources and political structure to challenge Imoke. An indicator of his lack of resources is the claim by many political analysts in the state that he is largely running a newspaper campaign and has not travelled to the different LGAs of the state to campaign.



Patrick Okomise



The second contender is Patrick Okomiso of the All Nigeria's Peoples Party (ANPP). Like Usani, Okomiso is from Yakurr LGA in the central senatorial district. To enhance his acceptability by stakeholders from other zones he has emphasized his ambition to run for a single tenure. He has also promised to resign if he fails to deliver in two years. He is generally not considered a strong contender. Many believe he was planted by the PDP to prevent a more formidable candidate emerging. This is because Okomiso left the PDP at the eve of the party's governorship primaries and has essentially been campaigning to consolidate the achievements of Duke, which he alleged were abandoned by Imoke.

Ima Nsa Adegoke

Ima Nsan Adegoke is the candidate of the Labour Party and the only female contender in the race. This could be a great boost to her chances if she is able to mobilize and inspire the women, given their numerical advantage and matriarchal attitude of the people, especially in the southern part of the state. However, a number of factors count against her. Firstly, she is said to have no political structure on the ground and has largely been away from the state. Secondly, her chances are further undermined by the fact that she is from the southern senatorial district that produced the governor (Donald Duke) between 1999 and 2007 and with the rotational mind-set of Nigerian politics, her candidature is considered a no-no by people from other parts of the state. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, she is widely believed to be one of those encouraged by the PDP to participate to make the elections appear competitive. An allegation she has not been able to effectively dispel.



Security threats for governorship election

Although many believe the election is all but won by the ruling party and that violence is unlikely in the context of the absence of effective opposition, some factors constitute potential security threats to the conduct of free, fair and violence free elections. These factors include the following:

Rumours and intemperate utterances by aspirants and politicians

The campaigns for the election have been associated with damaging rumours and allegations against all candidates. It seems that many of the opposition candidates feel that their best strategy is to discredit the ruling party and its candidate. Consequently, the rumour mills have been producing stories about disqualification of the former governor or his imminent arrest by the EFCC. This has unnecessarily raised the political temperature and engendered reactionary responses from the ruling party. For instance, following the rumours that Imoke had been disqualified after the court ruling, the party organized a rousing reception ceremony for him on his return from Abuja. The forum was used to respond to and dismiss the opposition parties as opportunists. Such utterances are likely to trigger confrontations among supporters of the candidates.

Threats of violence over electoral conducts

Another development that is heating up the political system is the veiled threats of violence if the elections are manipulated. Some of the key contenders have given press statements where they alleged that the ruling party rigged the previous elections. The contestants claimed that the people of the state have been clamouring for change since 2003 but have been denied the change due to manipulation of the political process by the ruling party. The candidates have claimed that the people are fed up with alleged electoral fraud and may resort to violence since prospects of changing government by peaceful means appear elusive. The penchant for opposition candidates to repeat their warning that those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable may set the stage for violent reactions by some of their supporters. For a state that has been known for largely peaceful elections, incendiary statements are troubling.

Localization of candidates

Another potential security threat is the fact that three of the four candidates hail from and therefore draw most of their support from the Central Senatorial District and LGAs. While the ACN and ANPP candidates are from Yakurr LGA, Imoke is from neighbouring Abi LGA. This localization of the candidates from the zone and contiguous communities is a possible threat to security as electioneering issues could aggravate existing local political and conflict issues. The central zone is already troubled by the removal of the chairman of the Urban Development Board in Ikom, alleged to be a strong supporter of Imoke's opponent during the party primary. Clashes between the supporters of the political bigwigs are possible in the midst of the disagreements.

Peace tourism and cover up of insecurity

The assessment also found that peace tourism is a potential source of threat to election security. Peace tourism refers to the situation whereby the state government consciously tries to downplay violence and conflict situations to maintain the image of the state as 'the people's paradise'. The government is said to have succeeded in ensuring that activities of gangs and criminal groups are not reported in the media. Some of the riverine areas like Akpabuyo and Bakassi LGAs reportedly experience continuous raids by gangsters and militants that are not reported. Hence it cannot be ruled out that some of the gangs may be mobilised to play a role in the elections. Many fear that underreporting and cover-up is making the state and security agencies not to keep track of these developments. This is particularly disturbing as it does not appear that the security agencies have the capacity for early response given the thin presence of police in many rural communities.

Unemployment and lack of economic opportunities

The persistence of unemployment and limited economic opportunities for young persons in the state continues to make young men to be vulnerable to being mobilized as thugs during the elections. There are just so many youths waiting to be hired for any purpose. It is alleged that most of the attendees to election rallies are unemployed youths. The youths attend meetings not out of conviction but as a result of opportunities for receiving transport and entertainment money. Joblessness is further aggravated by illicit drug use and weapons proliferation in the coastal areas of the state.

Mitigating factors

In spite of some of these warning signs the overall assessment is that Cross River State remains a green zone on a typical election hotspots matrix. Several mitigating factors account for this:

- The first is the 'temporary' removal of the governor from office before the elections. Although the acting governor and speaker is an ally of the immediate past governor, it is believed that the removal has reduced the leverage he had to use state apparatus to advantage. Many feel that Imoke had started taking desperate measures to ensure his re-election in reaction to perceived threats. One of the brazen instrumentalization of incumbency for electoral purposes was his sacking of the chairman of the former chairman of the Urban Development Board.
- The second mitigating factor is the weak structure and presence of opposition parties and candidates in the state. The perception is that they lack resources to campaign and pay agents. The fact that the election is a contest among unequal parties and that opposition candidates have little electoral prospects would reduce the possibilities for violence. The poor electoral prospect of the opposition

candidates is likely to make them to work to lend legitimacy to the elections in order to enhance their prospects for incorporation in the new administration.

- The third factor is the perception current INEC Resident Commissioner in Cross River State, Mike Igini, is a person of high integrity would maintain his neutrality. The Commissioner is already being credited for making moves to ensure that INEC staff members live up to expectation in the performance of their functions. The trust of the election management body is likely to lend legitimacy to the elections and prevent post-election violence.
- Finally the training of all Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) and Area Commanders in Cross River State on election security management by the DFID's Justice for All (J4A) Programme, which enables them to map violence hotspots in the state and deploying more policing resources to forestall possible outbreak of violence before, during and after the February 25 election.

Conclusions and recommendations

The assessment concludes that the 25 February 2012 gubernatorial election in Cross River State is likely to be conducted in an atmosphere of peace. The factors likely to engender peace and non-violence include majorly the low stakes in the elections, the weakness of opposition elements and the seeming popularity of the ruling party candidate that enhances his prospects of winning a free and fair election. Still it is important that this positive outlook and the prevailing peace tourism do not blind all stakeholders. Against this backdrop, some of the following recommendations should be considered.

First, strategic initiatives targeting aspirants and the media to be cautious about making or reporting incendiary statements are needed.

Third, the police and other security agencies should be equipped and fully mobilized for election duties. The authorities need to take all measures necessary to prevent dependence of security agencies on logistics provided by the government and political parties.

Finally, INEC should take all measures to ensure early and safe arrival of personnel and materials to election polling centres. INEC authorities should also ensure that appropriate measures are put in place for orientation and effective supervision of electoral staff.