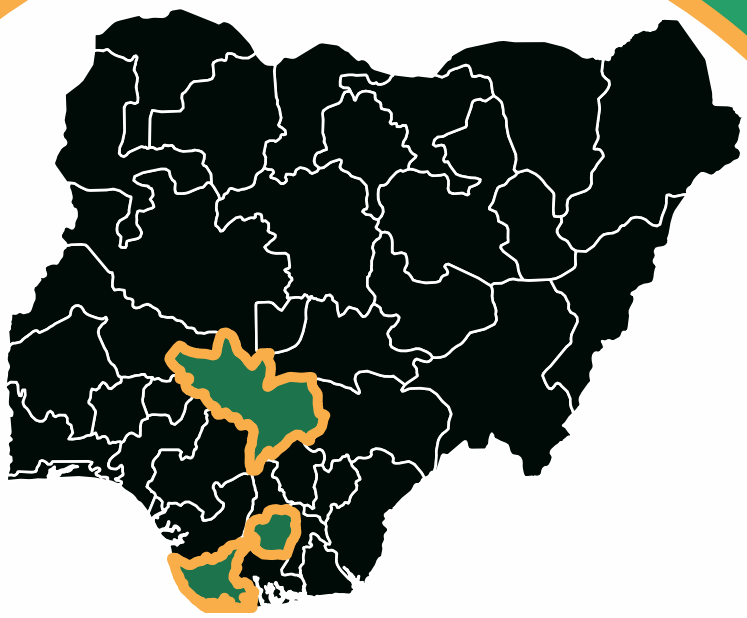
BEFORE THE VOTES

A Brief Ahead of the Off-cycle Elections in **Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo States**

2023 The Kukah Centre
Secretariat of the National Peace Committee
Vol. 1



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The Kukah Centre has produced this document to provide information on the pre-election security risk assessment in Imo, Bayelsa, and Kogi States in preparation for the 2023 governorship elections. Please note that the views expressed in this document do not reflect the views of the National Peace Committee. They only represent the analytical views of the information gathered by The Kukah Centre's Short-Term Experts, Field Observers, and Social Media Analysts. We have taken meticulous efforts to provide verified and accurate information. However, The Kukah Centre and the National Peace Committee are not responsible for any errors or views expressed in this report, nor for any actions taken resulting from the information provided herein.

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Introduction

The health and resilience of every democracy are dependent on the quality of its political parties who transit into governance through a credible, free, fair, and peaceful election process. Hence, election is an essential chord that binds democracy and governance, it is a constitutional pathway that leads to representational leadership at various elective positions of governance.

Elections are influenced by a confluence of interrelated factors broadly categorized into five, political parties, the electoral management body INEC, security agencies, citizens, and civil society organizations. These critical stakeholders are expected to operate within the ambits of the provisions of the law as enshrined in Nigeria's constitution and the 2022 Electoral Act.

> **The peaceful transition of power in the just concluded 2023 elections despite the controversies surrounding the transmission of the presidential results exemplifies the growing commitment of Nigeria to democratic governance and the inextricable relationship between elections and democracy.**

In recent years, Nigeria has taken significant steps to strengthen its democracy.

The electoral reform as provided in the 2022 Act has improved the voter registration process. There are visible commitments by INEC to transmit results electronically to enhance the integrity of the election process.

The peaceful transition of power in the just concluded 2023 elections despite the controversies surrounding the transmission of the presidential results exemplifies the growing commitment of Nigeria to democratic governance and the inextricable relationship between elections and democracy.

The 2023 Off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi are another opportunity for INEC to rebuild the public trust that was broken in the 2023 general elections due to the technical glitch experienced in the transmission of results for the presidential elections.

This report looks at the influence and the level of preparedness of these key actors as the off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo draw near. It provides analysis regarding the current political atmosphere and the emerging security challenges likely to impact adversely on the off-cycle elections in these states.The report also identifies some strategic recommendations for the election stakeholders in Nigeria.

Background and Context

Elections are said to be 'off-cycle' when they are conducted outside the general election period. Nigeria currently has eight off-cycle elections. The first of these off-cycle elections started in 2006, when the court overturned the election of Chris Ngige as governor of the then People's Democratic Party (PDP) in favour of Peter Obi, then governorship candidate of the All- Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA).

However, the 2007 elections witnessed more of these court judgments in Ekiti, Osun, Kogi, Bayelsa, Ondo and Edo states. The most recent was in the 2019 elections when the Supreme Court – almost six months after elections were concluded – overturned the elections and declared Sen Hope Uzodinma as governor of Imo state.

Candidates that have emerged from these tribunal judgements assumed office and are expected to complete their terms in line with the provision of the constitution. This resulted in having elections outside the general election cycle in Nigeria.

On the 11th of November 2023, Nigeria will witness the off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo states. In preparation for this exercise, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officially released the final list of governorship candidates in Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo states on the 6th of July.

Gender Disaggregation of Governorship Candidacy

States	Governor		Deputy	
Bayelsa State	14 87.5%	2 12.5%	15 87.5%	2 12.5%
Imo State	17 100%	1 PWD 5.8%	15 88.2%	2 11.8%
Kogi State	17 94.4%	1 5.6%	15 83.3%	3 16.7%

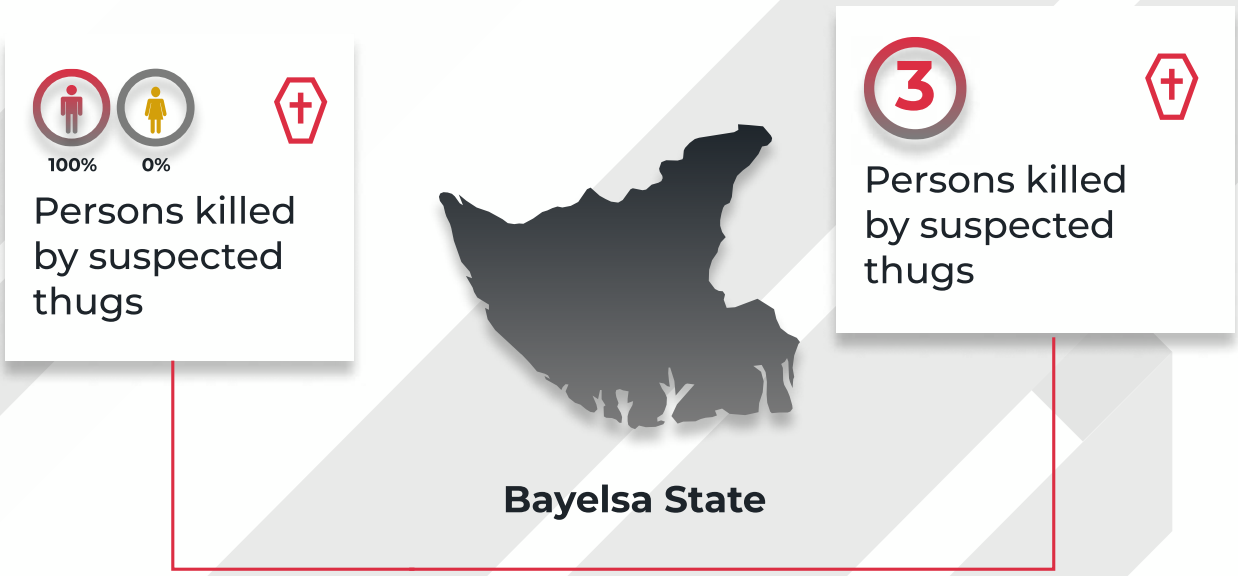
Methodology

The Kukah Centre adopted a mixed methodology, using both **quantitative and qualitative data** in producing this report. The qualitative information was gathered by **TKC** during its multi-stakeholder engagements in Imo and Kogi states. It also relied on information provided by the electoral management board, INEC, media reports and information by other CSOs. The Independent- state-based Peace Architecture in Imo and Kogi were instrumental in providing information that made up this report.

Security Situation

The security situations in the states of Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo have been a subject of significant concern due to recurring challenges such as political violence, assassinations, hate speech, and attacks by non-state actors. Among these challenges, IPOB in Imo has been a continuous threat due to the seat-at- home order, attacks on government facilities, and the killing of security personnel. It is imperative to address these security challenges and ensure that measures are put in place to prevent the occurrence of such incidents in the coming elections. It is crucial to have a comprehensive approach that involves collaboration between the government, security agencies, and the public. This approach will ensure that the root causes of these challenges are identified and addressed and that measures are taken to prevent their recurrence.

Information on Pre-election violence in Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo states (September - October 2023).



Information on Pre-election violence in Bayelsa, Kogi and Imo states.

1

Law Makers' House Burnt Down by Thugs

Imo State

8

Police Officers killed by Thugs

Kogi State

1

APC Campaign Office Burnt Down by thugs

2

Persons killed by Thugs

3

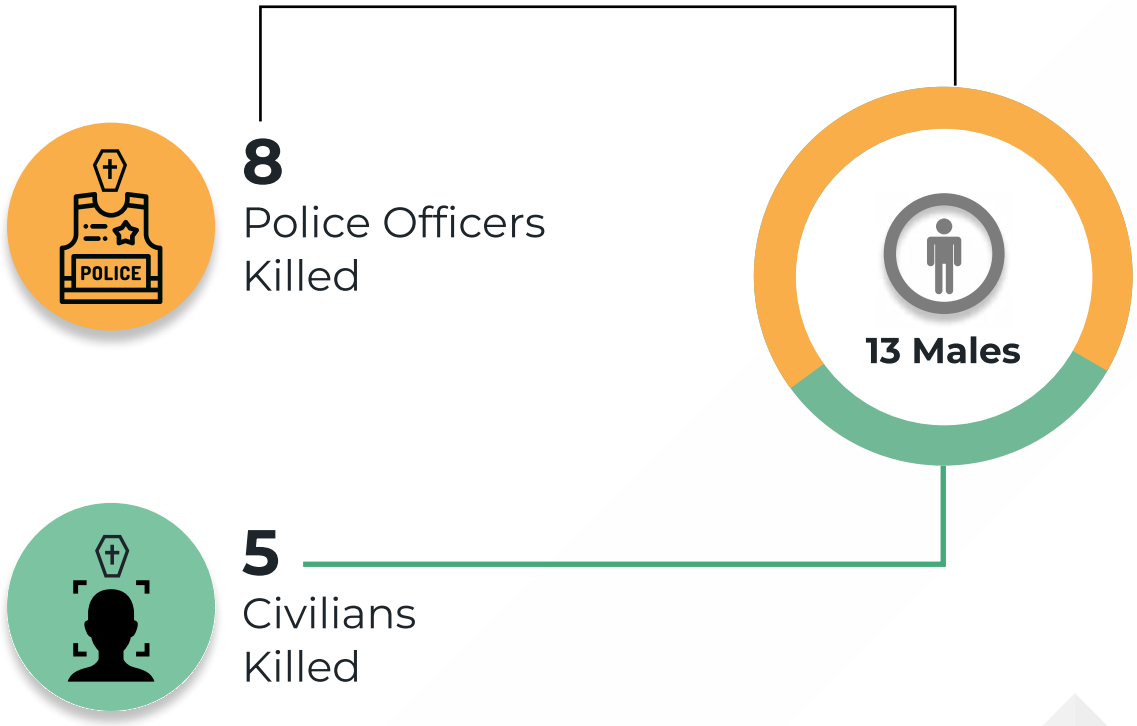
Political Campaigns:

Alleged attack on SDP campaign rally in Kogi.

SDP accuses APC of importing thugs from Jigawa, Nasarawa to unleash violence in Kogi.

LP governorship Candidate alleges of being body-shamed by opposition parties.

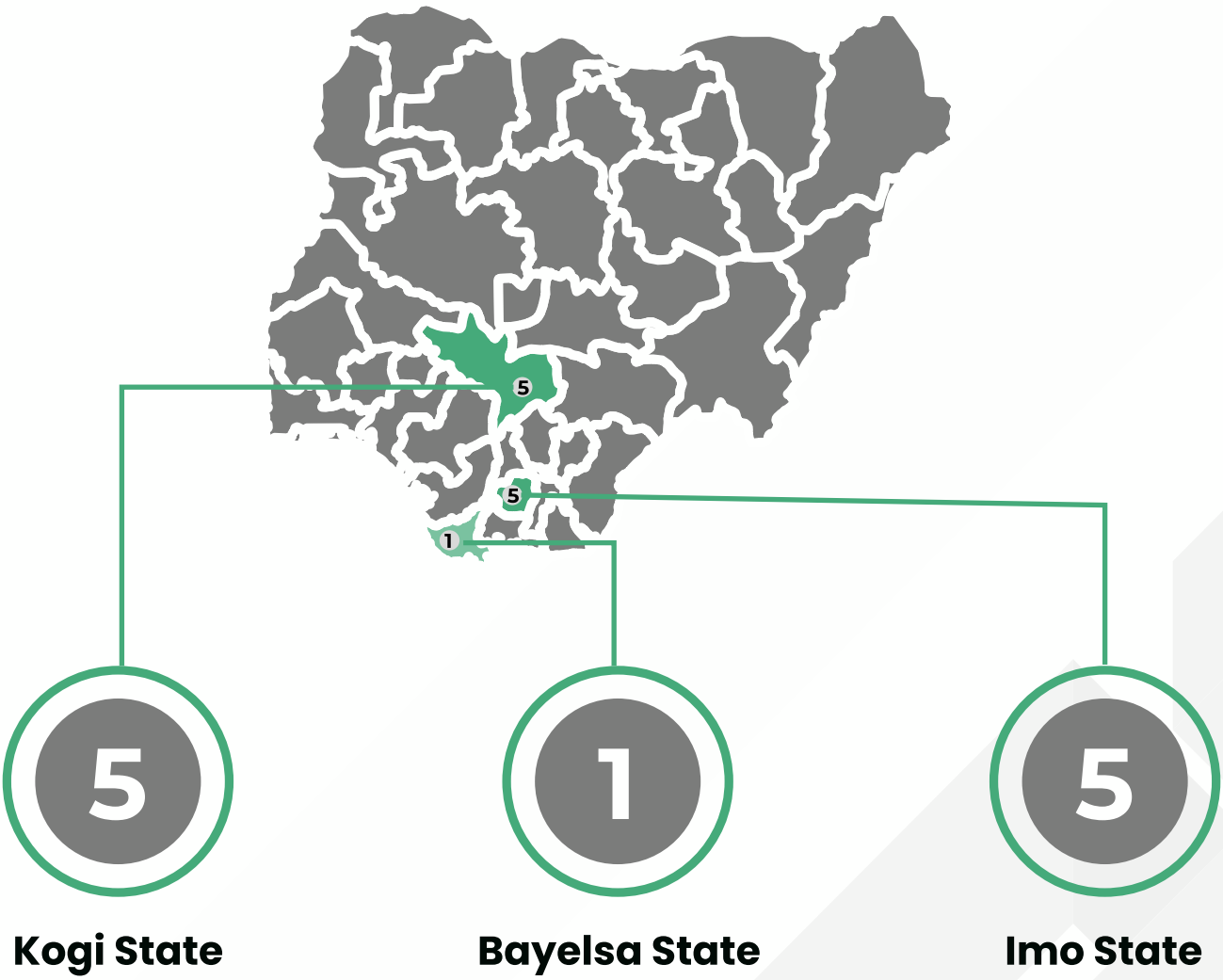
Dissaggregation By Gender



There has been a surge of violence related to elections in Kogi state, which is mainly fuelled by the political rivalry between the All-Progressives Congress (APC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

These tensions have the potential to spill over and directly affect the electoral process and outcome of the elections in the state. This could also undermine the credibility of the electoral system. To tackle these security concerns, it is crucial to have a strong security presence before, during, and after the elections.

Showing Number of Documented Pre-Election Violence



There is currently a renewed agitation by the members of IPOB in Imo state who are pushing for the creation of the Biafran state. The groups activities have had a significant impact on the economy as they have called for sit-at- home orders on certain days of the week. The attack on INEC offices is still ongoing in Imo and other southeastern states.

The Independent National Electoral Commission

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is at the centre of organizing and conducting elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi states. INEC faces a myriad of challenges in conducting elections while it strives to ensure free, fair, and credible elections. These challenges encompass issues ranging from security concerns to logistical hurdles and the compliance of election guidelines by political parties to mention a few.

The Commission had on the 8th of October decried the slow response of political parties in uploading the details of their agents which commenced on Thursday 24th August 2023. According to the Commission, only 55% of the expected total of 189,180 polling unit agents have been uploaded to the designated INEC Portal. The rate of violence in the states where elections are scheduled to be held is another concern that can affect the conduct of the elections. **Imo has experienced incessant attacks on INEC facilities since the beginning of 2023.** The Commission has raised concerns about security situations ahead of the elections: "The Commission is concerned about the spate of insecurity and violence, including clashes among supporters of Political Parties and candidates in the forthcoming elections. In our engagement with Political Parties, the Commission has constantly called on parties to rein in their supporters from actions capable of jeopardizing the peaceful conduct of elections in Nigeria. INEC earnestly appeal to all Political Parties and candidates to avoid utterances and acts that may heat up the polity. The Commission will continue to closely monitor the situation and sustain its engagement with security agencies and stakeholders to ensure a peaceful conduct of elections in the three States." This suggests that the preparedness of INEC is largely dependent on the cooperation of political parties as well as other election stakeholders.

Overall, overcoming these challenges requires adherence to extant laws guiding elections, as well as the collaboration between INEC and Security agencies, civil society organizations, as well as political parties.

Risk Assessment

Conducting elections in Kogi, Bayelsa and Imo presents several risks associated with some underlying social, economic, and political factors. Some of the risks are recurrent while others are emerging.

Security Concerns:

Prior to the commencement of campaigns in Imo state, there have been reports of renewed attacks by gunmen in the state. People have been killed, kidnapped, and INEC offices set ablaze in some Local government areas of the state. There were also reports of attacks on prominent politicians in the state. For instance, on the 2nd of January 2023, the former governor of the state, Ikedi Ohakim was attacked by gunmen killing the four police officers attached to his convoy.

Similarly, on the 18th of June 2023, the convoy of former governor Rochas Okorocha was attacked while returning from Enugu state, resulting in the death of one person. There have been reports indicating that numerous residents from Oru East, Oru West, Oguta, Orlu, Okikwe, Orsu, and Njaba have fled their communities due to insecurity caused by armed non-state actors. If this is not addressed, it could lead to a low voter turnout in the upcoming election.

Electoral violence:

Historical evidence and security reports have highlighted Kogi state as a potential hotspot for electoral violence. Unfortunately, during the last general elections, incidents of violent activities by thugs were reported in Anyigba and Dekina LGAs, resulting in the loss of two lives and the abduction of 11 individuals. Additionally, there was an attack in Ejule that led to the loss of several lives and properties worth hundreds of millions of naira were destroyed. The story is almost similar to Baylesa where there have been reported cases of attacks by suspected thugs in Opu-Nembe.

Logistical Challenge:

Flooding and the presence of water bodies in and between communities in the Bayelsa have become a breeding ground for pirates and criminals. They exploit this situation to carry out heinous crimes such as the operation of illegal refineries. In terms of election logistics, it has been a daunting task for INEC to navigate through riverine communities to deploy election materials. This challenge leads to the late arrival of materials and, in some cases, the failure to deploy election materials as witnessed in 2023 presidential and Houses of Assembly elections.

Zoning Dilemma:

One major issue in the political landscape of Kogi State is the competition among the senatorial zones to produce the governor. From 1999 to 2015, the governors have all come from the Kogi East Senatorial zone, which is predominantly inhabited by the Igala tribe and has the largest population among the three major tribes in the state. However, in 2015 and 2019, Kogi Central Senatorial zone produced the governor. Electing the next governor in the state is a topic of significant interest in Kogi West and Kogi East Senatorial Districts. Kogi Central believes that it is their turn to produce a governor due to their large population, while Kogi West argues that they have not yet had the opportunity to produce a governor. The current governor, hailing from Kogi Central, is supporting a candidate from within his region. The competition for the governorship position is expected to be intense, with candidates from various regions vying for the position.

Partisanship of Traditional Institutions:

The Imo State Council of Traditional Leaders have been accused of publicly supporting the incumbent governor which has resulted in agitations by some youth groups. The resultant effect of this action is the gradual erosion of trust in the traditional leadership system in parts of Imo, particularly in Owerri, where the youth groups have come out to condemn the actions of the council. This has added to the already existing trust deficit between the citizens and the State Independent Electoral Commission, the Nigeria Police Force, and the Judiciary in the state. These issues, if not addressed can breed violence as a means of agitation by groups in the state.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Elections in Nigeria are characterised by multifaceted factors which have elicited the achievement of some significant milestones and have equally presented some persistent challenges. The recommendations below should be considered to ensure credible off-cycle elections in Kogi, Bayelsa, and Imo states.

Security Concerns:

The Nigeria Police Force and its sister agencies should deploy mechanisms and adopt a community-policing approach to mitigate political violence. It should also prioritize the security of voters and election officials on election day by deploying adequate security personnel to sensitive areas, particularly in LGAs and communities prone to violence and electoral disruptions.

Voter Education and Sensitisation:

Civil Society Organisations should collaborate with INEC to conduct comprehensive voter education campaigns to inform citizens about the electoral process, their rights, and responsibilities, as well as the need to shun electoral violence. Community-based organisations should drive a grassroots. campaign to ensure that citizens are well-equipped with the right information before going to the polls.

Community Engagements

INEC should collaborate with local communities, traditional leaders, and civil society organisations in promoting peaceful elections and voter turnout while addressing any barriers to voting, such as voter suppression and intimidation.

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The Kukah Centre is a non-profit organisation that promotes an active and engaged citizenry by providing support for inclusive dialogue and advocacy initiatives. The Centre treats political leadership as a collaborative exercise and aims to promote governance structures which incorporate multiple levels of engagement, including individuals, households, small businesses, the private sector, NGOs, and government. Interfaith dialogue is at the core of the Centre's work and involves actively promoting conversations among Nigeria's faith communities, as well as between leaders in faith and public policy. The centre has been transformed into a National-Regional Think Tank that formulates policies on issues of peace, social cohesion, development, political participation, diversity, leadership training and knowledge promotion.

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