BEFORE THE VOTES

Assessing Political and Security Challenges in Imo, Bayelsa, Kogi State

THE KUKAH CENTRE
FAITH • LEADERSHIP • PUBLIC POLICY

NATIONAL PEACE COMMITTEE

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About The Kukah Centre

The Centre was established by Bishop Kukah to enhance and encourage greater citizen engagement in Nigeria, 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.

Disclaimer

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 made 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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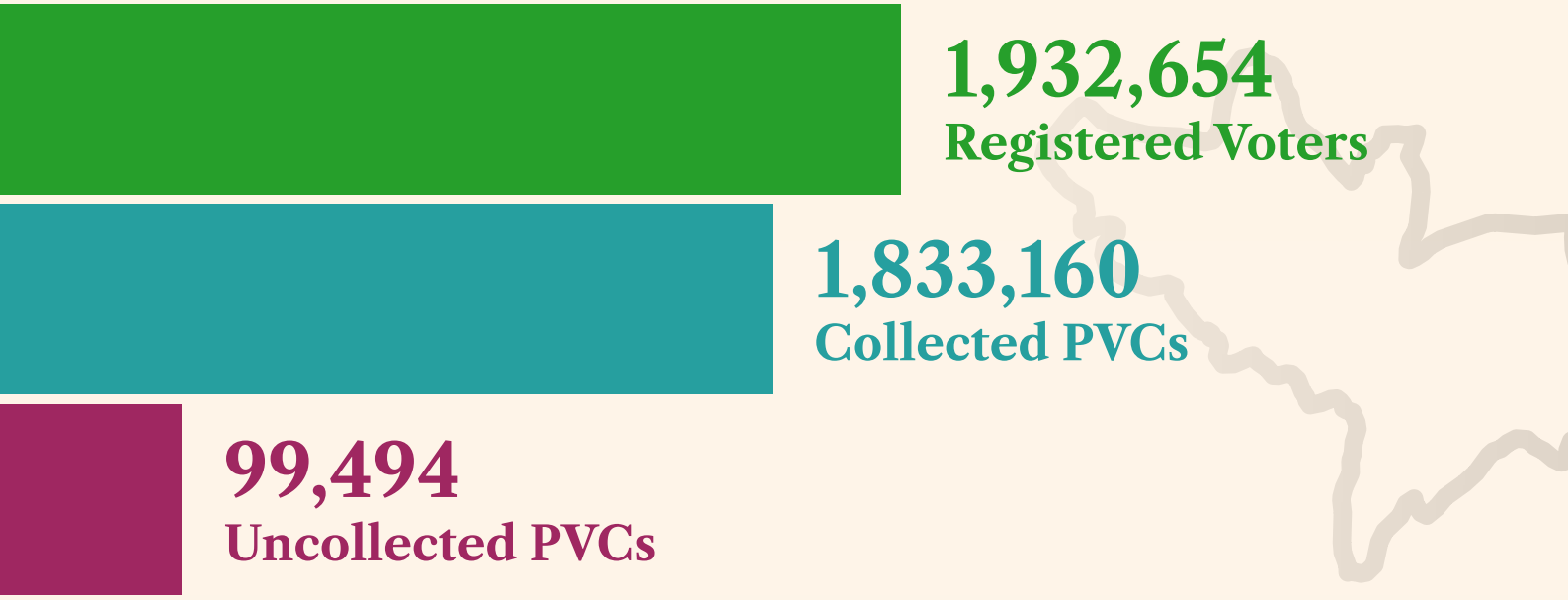
Introduction

The off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi are set for November 11, 2023. It is the first time off-cycle elections will take place concurrently. For some election stakeholders, these elections can serve as a significant step and a litmus test for the election management body, INEC to redeem the public trust lost during the presidential elections. Thus, like the 2022 off-cycle elections in Osun and Ekiti states, it is expected that the transmission of election results through the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IRev) will be timely and glitch-free.

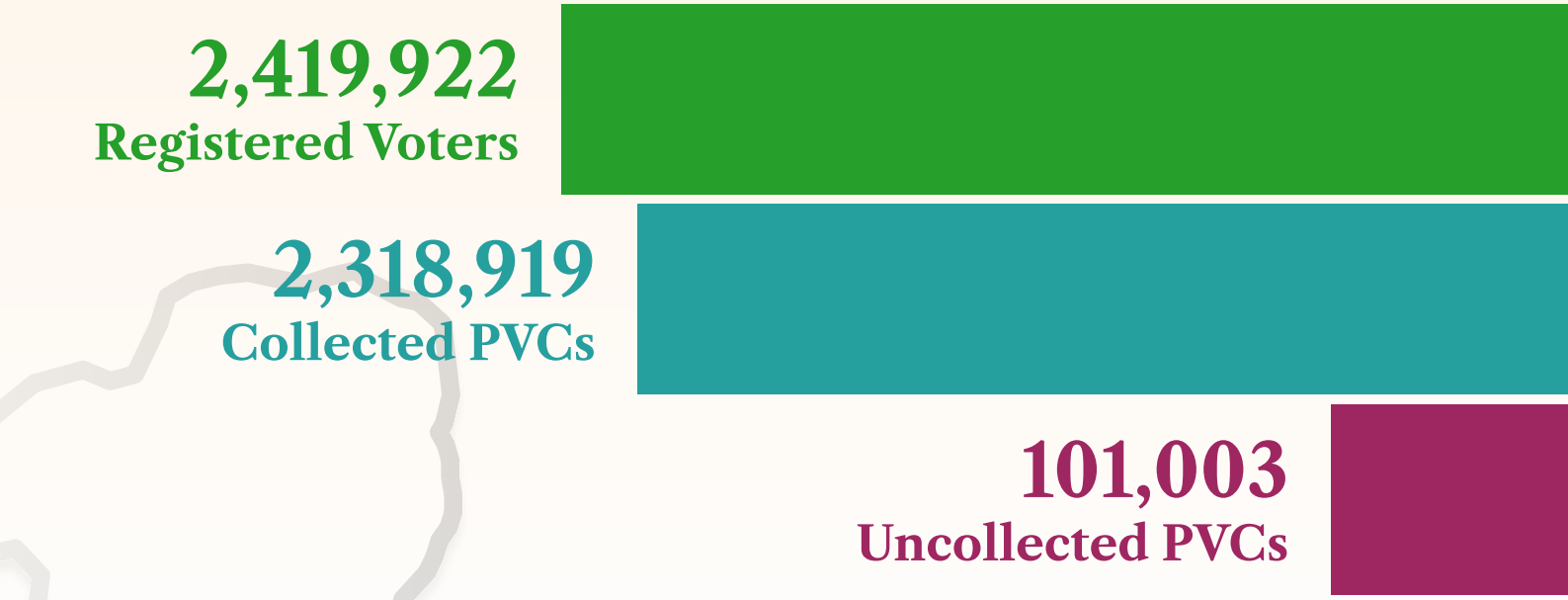
Elections are a multi-faceted and collaborative exercise that goes beyond the sole capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The responsibility of ensuring credible, free, and fair elections is shared among various stakeholders, including security agencies and voters. Regrettably, insecurity issues have remained a challenge in the conduct of elections in Nigeria, both in the past and recent times. A report by The Kukah Centre's Situation Room on the presidential elections had highlighted Kogi, Bayelsa, and Imo states among the states highly at risk of election violence in the just concluded 2023 presidential elections. Additionally, a total of 93 incidents of electoral violence were recorded in Kogi, Imo, and Bayelsa from January 2023 to October 2023. Of these, Imo state recorded the highest number of incidents with 44, followed by Kogi with 41, and Bayelsa with 8 incidents

Total Number Of Registered Voters and Collected PVCs

Kogi State



Imo State



Total Number Of Registered Voters and Collected PVCs

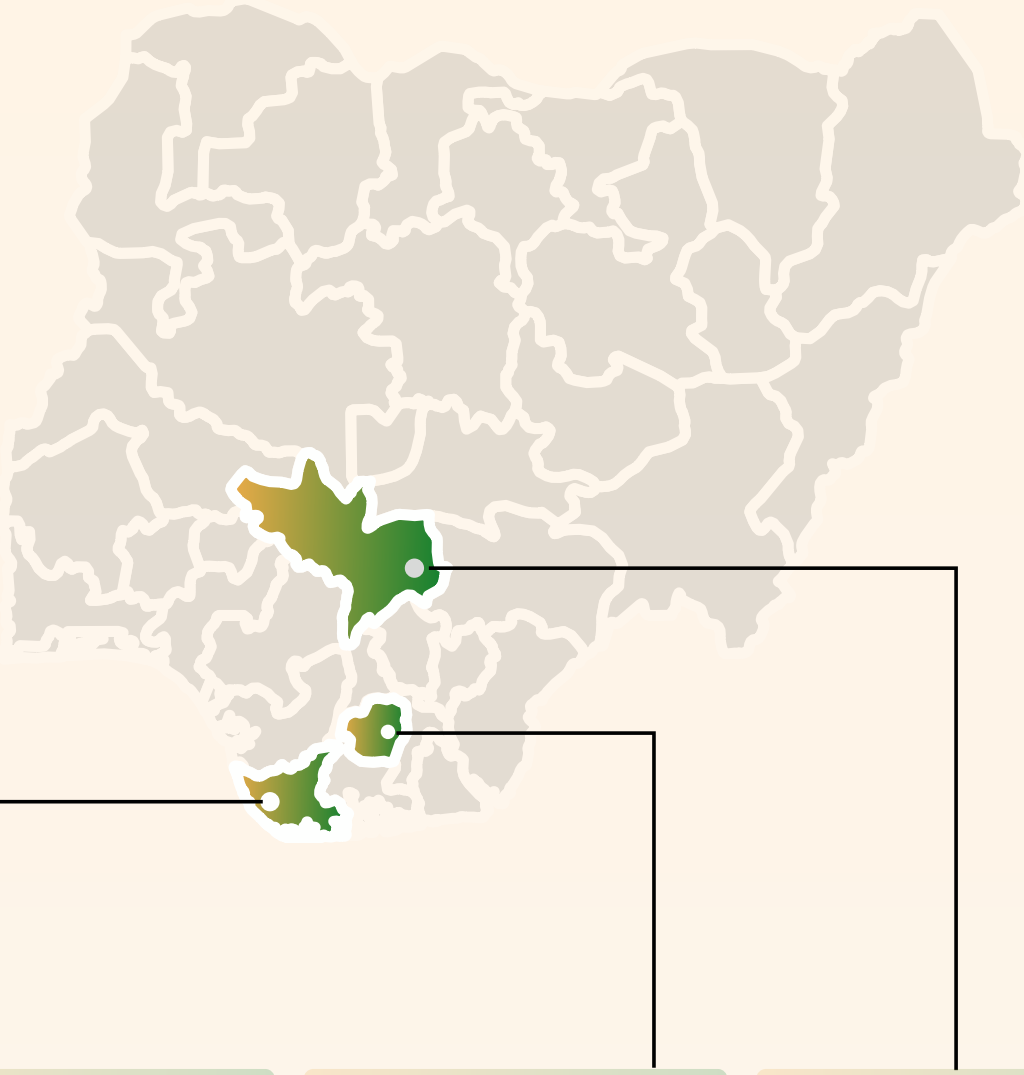
Bayelsa State

1,056,862
Registered Voters

1,017,162
Collected PVCs

39,249
Uncollected PVCs

Total Number Of LGAs and Polling Units



Bayelsa State

8 LGAs

2,224 Polling Units

Imo State

27 LGAs

4,758 Polling Units

Kogi State

21 LGAs

3,508 Polling Units

This report analyses factors that could impact the November 11 elections in different states. It examines state-specific issues, assesses the preparedness of election stakeholders, and analyses factors such as demographics, political climate, and historical voting patterns. The report also examines factors unique to each state, such as local economic conditions and the presence of major industries, and identifies challenges related to voter registration and participation. Overall, this report offers valuable insights for election stakeholders and policymakers.

Methodology

The Kukah Centre, as the Secretariat of the National Peace Committee, developed a methodology to assess the security situation ahead of off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi states, employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. This approach was designed to provide a sufficient understanding of the security landscape in these states.

The Centre initiated and participated in several stakeholder engagements with a wide range of individuals and groups, including government officials, political parties, civil society organizations, traditional leaders, and other relevant actors. These interactions provided qualitative insights into the prevailing political and security dynamics, as well as the concerns and expectations of these stakeholders. To gather quantitative data, the Centre conducted surveys and administered questionnaires to a representative sample of the population in the three states. The survey was conducted to gauge public sentiment, attitudes towards the electoral process, and perceptions of security. The Kukah Centre also reviewed and analysed security reports, including those from security agencies, CSOs and local authorities.

Findings & Assessment

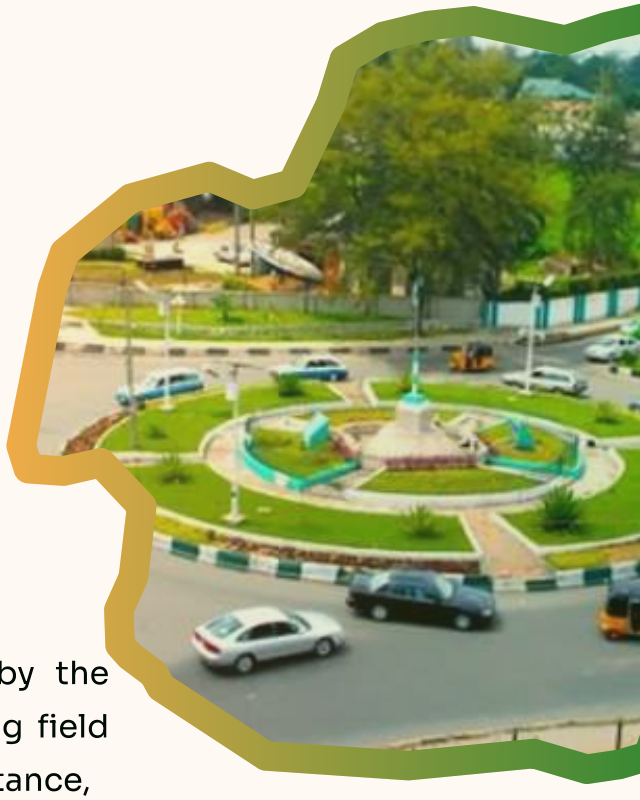
Bayelsa State

Bayelsa has a complex political history that has been marred by occurrences of political and electoral violence. This violence has been attributed to several factors, including the pursuit of political power, control of oil resources, and some underlying ethnically charged tensions. Signs of a reoccurrence of the violent nature of elections in the state are beginning to manifest as seen in the rhetoric of some leading political parties. For instance, the deputy governorship candidate of the All-Progressives Congress (APC), Joshua Maciver, was reported to have made some inciteful comments at a political campaign in Twon Brass Local government, where he urged his supporters to adopt a violent approach to resisting opposition, even at the expense of the lives of the opposition supporters.

In past gubernatorial elections, there have been allegations of politicians supporting cult groups to disrupt the electoral process. Before the reinstatement of the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate on the ballot by the courts, there were reports of political instability in Nembe and Brass local government areas (LGAs). Specifically, there have been reports of serious agitations by certain militant groups in Nembe seeking to truncate the elections because the APC candidate's name was not listed on the ballot

Similarly, in Brass LGA, certain groups have threatened that the elections will not be held in the state unless the court reverses its decision to exclude the APC's candidacy from the ballot. While the decision of the courts to bring back Sylva's name on the ballot may have addressed the issue, it also highlights how election-related matters can potentially affect the voting process on election day and beyond. The deployment of 27,000 security personnel in the state is anticipated to substantially alleviate the current security challenges.

Imo State



Multidimensional issues are currently plaguing Imo State. These issues include political violence, social unrest, and widespread insecurity caused by the activities of IPOB and gunmen. With the election date approaching, the political and social crises in the state are making the electoral terrain even more contentious. There have been reports of politically motivated and election-related attacks by unknown gunmen in various locations such as Orlu East, Mbaitolu, Okigwe, and Mbano.

Political campaigns in the state are influenced by the power of incumbency, leading to an uneven playing field for opposition parties to campaign for votes. For instance, opposition parties are required to pay 54 million to place adverts on billboards in the state. There have been reports that the government has exerted undue influence on some critical election stakeholders in the state, raising concerns about the credibility and fairness of the upcoming elections on November 11, 2023. Overall, accessing various security and political indicators in the state, such as the activities of unknown gunmen and the volatile nature of security in the state, chances are high that there will be a low voter turnout on election day.

Kogi State

Elections in Kogi state have a history of being marred by political violence, which is often linked to ethnic divisions and personal grievances both within and between political parties. In addition to these electoral-related clashes, there are also communal clashes, incidents of banditry, and a farmer-herder crisis occurring in the state. All these factors have contributed to making Kogi highly susceptible to political violence and insecurity.

There have been several instances of such conflicts in recent times. For instance, there was a communal clash on the 30th of May 2023 in Bassa Local Government, in East Senatorial District of the state, where properties worth millions of Naira were reportedly razed as a result of renewed fighting between the people of Bassa and Igburra. Such conflicts have inter-laced with politically motivated attacks that have built up over time leading to the coming off-cycle elections in the state.

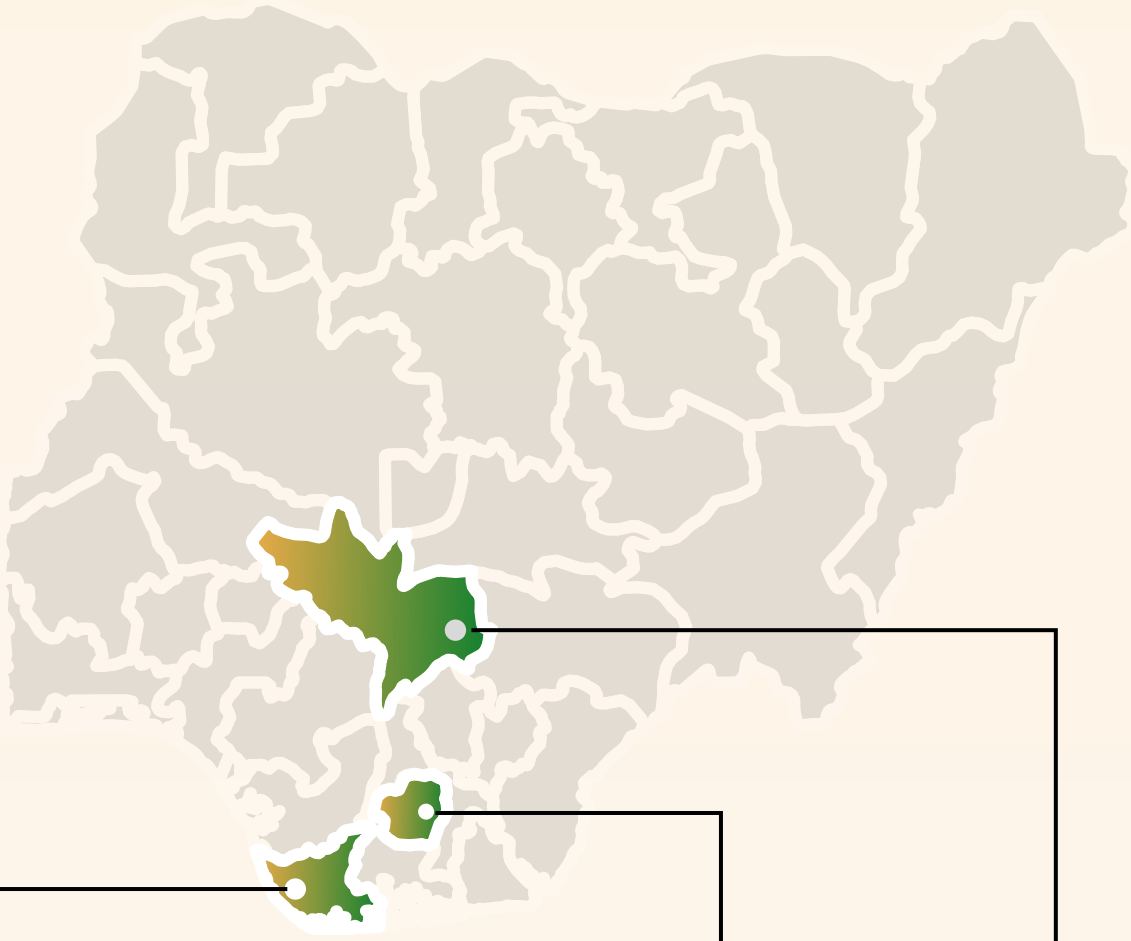
Kogi is said to be notorious for violence during political campaigns and on election day. The political rivalry between APC and SDP in the state continues unabetted. The recent violent lash was in Idah, where the supporters of the ruling All Progressives Congress and the Social Democratic Party engaged in a gun battle, leaving many people injured. Similarly, INEC officials in the state are victims of such violence. In the just concluded State House of Assembly Elections in the state, six (6) INEC staff were reported to have been kidnapped by political thugs. Based on historical evidence of violence and the recent political rivalry in Kogi, there are likelihood of low voter turnout due to insecurity. The election will likely also be characterised by violence.

Survey Of Election Security in Imo, Bayelsa and Kogi States

The Kukah Centre conducted this survey to understand how people perceive election security in Imo, Kogi and Bayelsa. The respondents of this survey were field observers who were present in the 56 local government areas across the three states.

To assess public perception of election security, we deployed a purposive sampling method. This approach allowed us to select 56 election observers based on specific criteria that matched the objectives of our research. Our election observers were trained on how to understand the complexities of the electoral process and are therefore considered qualified to observe and assess security issues in their respective LGAs. This will also ensure that our findings reflect the diverse perspectives and experiences of voters across the three states.

Percentage of Responses Across LGAs in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi



Bayelsa State

62.5% responses across **8** LGAs

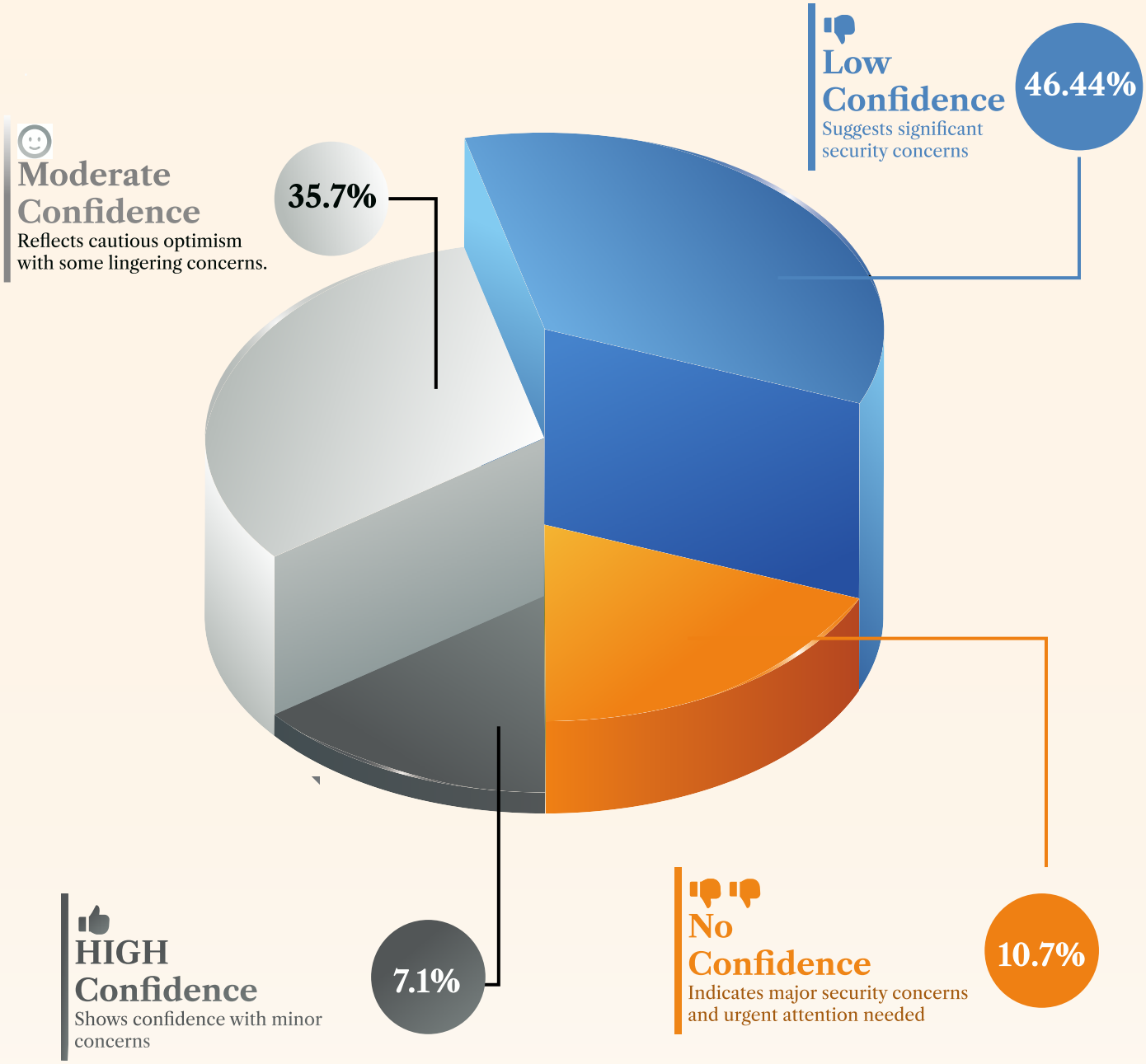
Imo State

37% responses across **27** LGAs

Kogi State

66% responses across **21** LGAs

Security Confidence Ratings



The survey responses across the three states indicating 46.44% low public confidence in security agencies ahead of the off-cycle elections in Kogi, Imo, and Bayelsa states, alongside 7.1% high public confidence, reflect a significant divide in the public perception of the security apparatus leading up to these crucial electoral events. The high percentage of respondents expressing low confidence in security agencies is concerning and suggests that a substantial portion of the population has reservations about the ability of Security Agencies to ensure a safe and secure electoral process.

Factors contributing to this low confidence might include previous electoral violence and concerns about their ability to maintain law and order during the elections. The lack of confidence in security agencies can have various consequences, including reduced voter turnout, potential civil unrest, or an increased sense of insecurity among voters.

However, the 7.4% percentage of respondents indicating high confidence in security agencies is noteworthy. It could indicate that some individuals still have faith in the security forces' capacity to ensure a peaceful and fair electoral process.

Election Related Violence During Campaign

Are there cases of election-related violence or disturbances in your LGA during the campaign rallies?

Imo State

Kogi State

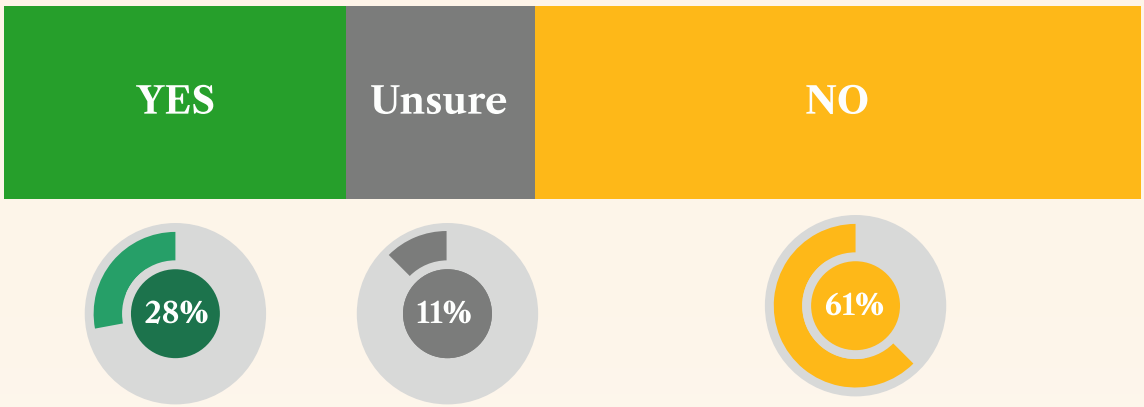
Bayelsa State

The above illustration provides a clear breakdown of the number and percentage of respondents from each state who answered either Yes or No when asked if there were any recorded cases of election-related violence or disturbances during campaign events in their Local Government Area (LGA). Kogi had the highest percentage (73%) of respondents who reported cases of violence in their LGA. Imo, on the other hand, had an equal number of respondents answering Yes and No. The majority of respondents from Bayelsa (62%) reported that there were no incidents of violence in their LGA.

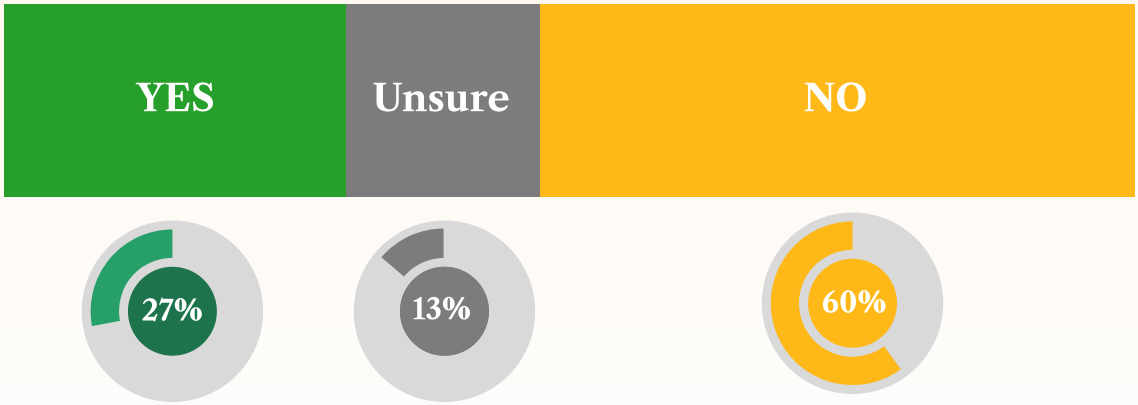
Conduct of political parties during campaigns

Are political parties conducting themselves during campaign rallies?

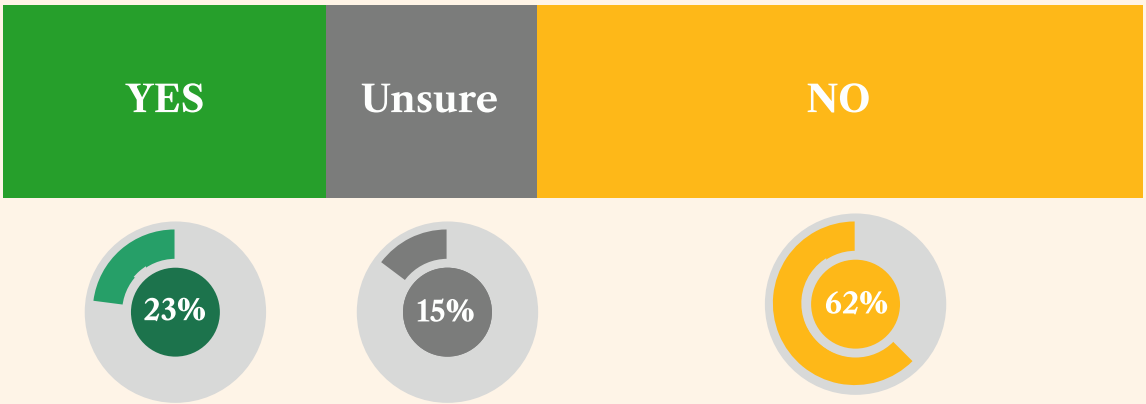
Imo State



Kogi State



Bayelsa State



61% of respondents said political parties are not conducting themselves well during election campaigns in their state/LGAs, while 26% said Yes, parties are conducting well. Only 13% are not sure if political parties are conducting themselves well.

Observations

Across all 3 states, **over 60%** of respondents feel political parties are not behaving appropriately during campaigns. Imo and Kogi had comparable results, with about **60% answering No**. Bayelsa had the highest percentage **(62%)** saying parties are not conducting well. Less than **30%** of respondents in each state said parties were conducting themselves well.

Overall, the majority of respondents across the three states feel political parties need to improve their conduct during election campaigns in the LGAs based on the survey results.

Conclusion

The upcoming elections in Imo, Kogi, and Bayelsa have been marred by a worrying escalation of election violence and insecurity. This development poses a significant threat to the integrity of the electoral process and the turnout of voters on election day. The prevailing climate of fear, intimidation, and violence may have an adverse effect on eligible voters, leading to a potentially low voter turnout that could compromise the principles of a free and fair election.

It is imperative that all stakeholders, including the government, security agencies, political parties, and civil society organizations, take proactive measures to ensure a safe and secure environment for voters to participate in the electoral process. This will enable the electorate to exercise their democratic rights without fear or coercion and will ensure that the electoral process is transparent, credible, and peaceful.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Security Measures: Security Agencies should deploy a substantial number of security personnel, especially to places considered hot spots to ensure the safety of voters and maintain law and order during the election.

2. Conduct of Political Parties: Political parties should conduct themselves in accordance with civil laws to ensure the protection of human lives and property, and peaceful elections during the off-cycle elections

3. The state government should ensure the independence of INEC and other critical institutions saddled with conducting free and credible elections in the state.

4 INEC should liaise with election stakeholders to ensure that it delivers its mandate of conducting credible and transparent elections in the states.

2 State governments must create a safe environment that encourages active participation in civic duties and rights of citizens. This will encourage civil society organizations, community leaders, and religious institutions to actively engage in promoting peace and tolerance in the region.

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This report is produced by The Kukah Centre, a Nigeria-based non-profit, non-governmental and public policy organisation that offers alternative approaches to the challenges of leadership and the impact of conflict on national development. The Centre's core programme areas include Good Governance, Leadership Development, Interfaith Dialogue, Knowledge Promotion, Advocacy and Memory Preservation.

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