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SITUATIONROOM

Report of Pre-Election

Assessment of the 2023

Kogi State Governorship Election

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report investigates the socio-political context of the Kogi Governorship election scheduled to hold on Saturday, 11th November 2023. The broad aim of this report is to provide an explicit, detailed, but concise pre-election assessment of issues that are likely to determine the outcome of the election, the role of INEC and other Stakeholders.

Specifically, this report seeks to:
a.   Analyse the socio-political and topographic landscape of the State;
b.   Identify current flashpoints and areas of high-security risk based on the history of election violence in the State.
c.   Analyse INEC preparations ahead of the election as well as issues arising from the previous elections and how they impact the process of the 2023 Governorship election in the State.

A large number of voters in Kogi State reside in relatively low-lying areas and river flood plains. As a result, their communities experienced varying degrees of flooding, which in previous elections, compounded logistical difficulties faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The history of electoral violence in the state, reports of several political attacks –including killings, and the use of ethnicity as a strategy for political mobilization are high points in the build-up to this election. Therefore, slightly poor management of the election process by INEC and the Security Agencies can be a trigger for a major breakdown of law and order during the election.

Consequently, recommendations are made based on identified challenges. To succeed, INEC will have to uphold electoral regulations and conduct its processes with transparency, honesty and integrity including transporting electoral materials and officials to hard-to-reach areas and locations affected by flood, based on lessons learnt from previous elections in the State; security agencies should track incidents of violence and deploy strategies to contain it; civic groups will have to intensify efforts on voter education and peace messaging across all the divides; while political parties and their candidates should focus on issue-based campaigns as against ethnic mobilization.

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INTRODUCTION

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has scheduled Governorship election to hold in Kogi State on Saturday, 11th November 2023, ahead of the expiration of tenure of the incumbent as provided by Section 180 (2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

This year's Governorship election will be the fifth off-cycle Governorship election in the State since 1999, following cancellation of the 2007 governorship election in the State in February 2008 by the Supreme Court of Nigeria over irregularities.

In the build up to 2023 Governorship election, the political environment is characterized by bitter political competition and ethnic rivalry[1]. The political environment is tensed for a number of reasons. First, the manner in which party primaries were conducted in the major political parties led to massive defections amongst members. Another is the contest for power shift, which has resulted in ethnic mobilization has deepened. And lastly, use of power of incumbency to intimidate groups and control campaign materials placement through Signage Agency is on the rise.

The nature of primary elections ahead of this election has conspicuously altered the usual pattern of two major candidates facing each other and using a third force as a bargaining chip. Although, all the 18 political parties fielded candidates for the 2023 Governorship election, there are four major candidates competing. They are Leke Adejide of the African Democratic Congress (ADC) from Kogi West Senatorial District, Usman Ahmed Ododo of the All Progressives Congress (APC) from Kogi Central Senatorial District, Dino Melaye of the Peoples Democratic party (PDP) from Kogi West Senatorial District, and Murtala Yakubu Ajaka of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) from Kogi East Senatorial District.

Despite of the enormous experience of political campaigns among the candidates, they are failing to build their campaigns around issues of development of the State. Ethnic mobilization of voters has been observed across board and has, therefore, become a competition among the three dominant ethnic nationalities.

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1 Ralph, O.A. (2023), 'Kogi Guber Poll: Another Season of Ethnic Politics, Endorsements. The Guardian, July 10, 2023

The history of past elections in the State and the early signs of violence orchestrated by the underlying inter-ethnic contestation between the three ethnic power blocs, the poverty situation exacerbated by irregular and percentage payments of salaries to workers, removal of fuel subsidies and the consequent increase in the cost of transportation of goods and people have further worsened the economic hardship in the State. This condition has made many people more vulnerable to thuggery and handouts from politicians in the form of vote buying.

Additionally, confidence of voters in the electoral process and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has dipped following the numerous violent incidents and the poor manner in which INEC conducted both the last Governorship election in 2019 and 2023 General elections in the State. The 11th November 2023 election will be another test of commitment to promoting electoral credibility in the State for Security Agencies and INEC.

This report, therefore, provides a contextual analysis of demographic and socio-political issues shaping the 2023 Governorship election in Kogi State. It examines historical electoral issues, preparedness of electoral institutions and the security situation in the State, and offer recommendations for ensuring peaceful and credible election come 11th November 2023.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF KOGI ELECTION

Kogi State was created from eastern Kwara and western Benue on 27th August 1991 by the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida. The State has 21 Local Government Areas (LGAs), and is located in the North Central region of Nigeria. It is also called the "Confluence State" because of the meeting point of River Niger and River Benue in Lokoja, the State capital. Lokoja was one of the administrative cities of modern-day Nigeria.

Kogi State has a landmass of 29,833 square kilometres and shares boundary with nine States and Federal Capital Territory (FCT). They are Niger, Nassarawa, Benue, Edo, Enugu, Anambra, Ondo, Ekiti and Kwara.

Comparatively, Kogi is one of the States with the highest connections to other States along both land borders and river plains in Nigeria. The implication of this linkage phenomenon is that, it has a robust political, economic and sociological relations and influence with many States. In the same vein, political thugs can easily be mobilized during elections from anywhere across the borders.

According to the National Population Census 2006, Kogi State has a population of over 3 million people,[2] spread across different ethnic groups including Igala, Ebira, Okun, Bassa Komu and Nge, Ebira-Koton, Gana, Ogori, Magongo, Oworo, Agatu and Kakanda, amongst others around which political alliances are formed and mobilized during elections. The people are mainly farmers, fishermen, traders and palm oil producers as well as civil servants.

The State is rich in natural resources such as iron-ore, limestone, and coal, amongst others and has fertile arable land for agricultural activities. It has also been included in the group of Nigeria's oil producing States by the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), following the recognition of oil wells in Ibaji LGA. However, despite these endowments, poverty is widespread in the State, which is further exacerbated by irregular payment of salaries, youth unemployment and violent conflicts in different forms.

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2 Abuh, P.O. and Nwanne, U.L. (2021). 'Population and Urban Growth in Kogi State, Nigeria', in Ifatimehin, O.O, Ocholi I.U. & Abuh P.O. (Eds). Kogi State: Environment, Society and Development. Anyigba, Banter Press.

The Igala people from the Eastern part of the State has dominated the politics and leadership of the State since creation, on the basis of numerical advantage, until the death of former Governor Abubakar Audu on election-day in 2016 while he was coasting to victory on return for his second term. Abubakar Audu served as the Governor of the State between 1999 and 2003. Upon his death, Yahaya Bello from the Ebira ethnic group, who came second in the APC party primaries, was given the opportunity to inherit Audu's victory.

Bello was re-elected in 2019, and is completing his final term as Governor of the State on 16th January 2024. Governor Bello, desirous of retaining power in the Central on the assumption that the Central needs to balance up with Kogi East that has ruled the State for 16 years, is supporting a candidate from his Okene LGA, Usman Ododo. The Okun, on the other hand, who are yet to have an elected governor from their ethnic bloc, are mobilizing votes for both the ADC and PDP candidates, Leke Abejide and Dino Melaye respectively.

The politics of power rotation amongst the major ethnic identities gained prominence in 2003 when the political elements from Central and West came together to demand power shift. It, however, did not happen until in 2016 by providence. Since then, ethnic politics has become more conspicuous, and it is now defining the contest in 2023.

The topography of Kogi State is undulating in most parts and river tributaries with mainstems in some other part, which could add to the perennially logistics challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in elections. A considerable number of voters reside in these low-lying and river flood plain areas, due to the abundance of natural resources and agricultural potentials. Hence, they become victims of flooding regularly. Flooding is a regular occurrence in the State, which has led to loss of farmlands, roads and bridges as settlements are submerged, killing tens of people and rendering thousands of people homeless, as well as destroying livestock and aquatic animals. In recent times, the magnitude and impact of flood disaster in the State has increased greatly especially in the third and fourth quarters of the year.

In 2012, flood submerged about 73 communities in 7 LGAs of Lokoja, Koton-Karfi, Bassa, Ajaokuta, Ofu, Idah and Ibaji[3]. In 2022, the number increased to nine (9) LGAs to include

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3 Aderoju, O.M., Jantiku, J., Fagbemiro, O.A., Aliyu, I., Nwadike, B.K., Ajonye, S.E., Salman, K.S. (2014) Geospatial Assessment of 2012 Flood Disaster in Kogi State, Nigeria. IOSR Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology (IOSR-JESTFT). Vol. 8, Issue 2, pp 74-84.

Omala and Igalamela, as water took over half of the State's landmass. Presently, in Ibaji in particular, and some parts of Bassa, Koton-Karfi and Lokoja LGAs are experiencing flooding.

On Saturday, 7th October 2023, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) issued an alert over the threat of rapid flooding along the River Niger and River Benue Basin, and calling for urgent activation of an emergency response plan in Kogi, Bayelsa, Benue and Nasarawa, amongst others.

Most political parties find it difficult to access riverine areas for campaign at this time, and INEC may have difficulties conducting voter education and transporting electoral materials to these areas.

ELECTORAL MAP OF KOGI STATE

Kogi State has twenty one (21) Local Government Areas, namely: Adavi, Ajaokuta, Bassa, Dekina, Ibaji, Idah, Igalamela/Odolu, Ijumu, Kabba-Bunu, Kogi, Lokoja, Mopamuro, Ofu, Ogori-Magongo, Okene, Okehi, Olamaboro, Omala, Yagba-East and Yagba-West (NBS, 2012).

Figure 1. Map of Kogi State showing the Local Government Areas

There are nine LGAs in Kogi East Senatorial Distict which are Ankpa, Bassa, Dekina, Ibaji, Idah, Igalamela/Odolu, Ofu, Olamaboro and Omala; Kogi Central has five LGAs -Adavi, Ajaokuta, Ogori-Magongo, Okehi and Okene; while Kogi West has seven LGAs - Ijumu, Kabba-Bunu, Kogi, Lokoja, Mopamuro, Yagba-East and Yagba-West.

The Igala people of Kogi East historically believe that they had been cheated in the distribution of LGAs in spite of their huge population. They argue that the West and the Central use their relevance in national politics to marginalize, subjugate, and suppress them at national level. The Ebira in Central and the Okun in West, on the other hand, feels that the East is marginalizing them in State politics. On this basis, ethnic mobilization for the election has becomes a useful tool in the hands of exploitative political elements.

The table below shows the population of the State by LGAs and electoral district:

S/N	Senatorial zone	Local Government Areas	2006 population census	Number of electoral Wards/RAs
1	KOGI	Ankpa	266,176	13
2	EAST	Bassa	139,687	10
3		Dekina	260,968	12
4		Ibaji	127,572	10
5		Idah	79,755	10
6		Igalamela/Odolu	147,048	10
7		Ofu	191,480	11
8		Olamaboro	158,490	10
9		Omala	107,968	11
Kogi East Total			**1,479,144**	**97**
10	KOGI	Adavi	217,219	11
11	CENTRAL	Ajaokuta	122,432	14
12		Ogori/Mangogo	39,807	10
13		Okehi	223,574	11
14		Okene	325,623	11
Kogi Central Total			**928,655**	**57**
15	KOGI	Ijumu	118,593	15
16	WEST	Kabba/Bunu	144,579	15
17		Kogi Koton Karfi	115,100	11
18		Lokoja	115,100	10
19		Mopa-Muro	43,760	10
20		Yagba East	147,641	10
21		Yagba West	139,928	14
Kogi West Total			**824,701**	**85**
Grand Total			**3,314,043**	**239**

Table 1 Kogi State population by Local Government Area and number of electoral wards[4]
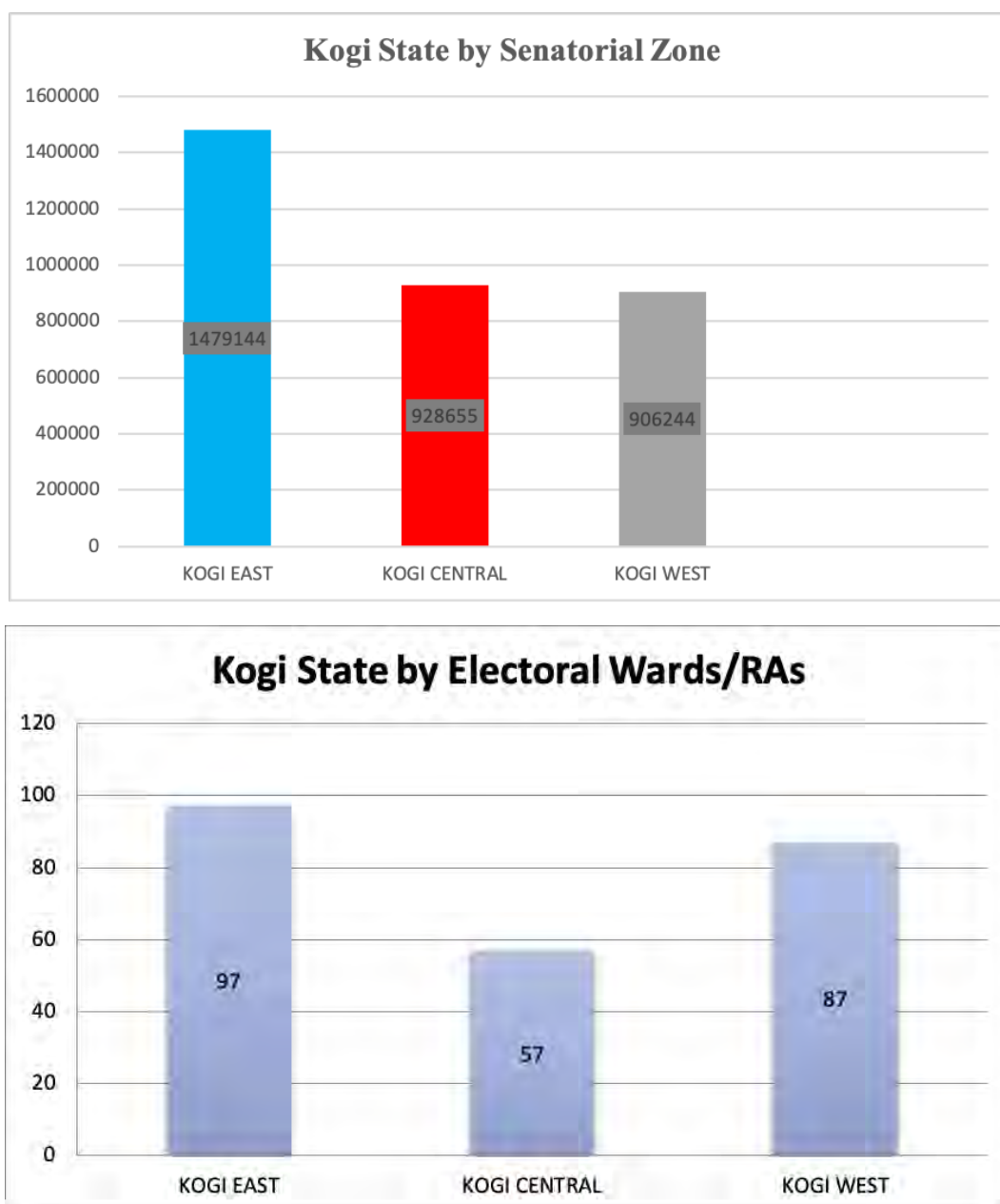
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4 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2012); Annual Abstract of Statistics.

S/No	Senatorial Zone	2006 Population Census	Total Number of Electoral Wards/ RAs
1	Kogi East	1,479,144	97
2	Kogi Central	928,655	57
3	Kogi West	906,244	85
	Total	**3,314,043**	**239**

Source: NBS (2012).

The population of each senatorial zone demonstrated above, is represented in the chart below:

Figure 2: Kogi state by Senatorial zone

These Senatorial Zones represent the three blocs that define the politics of the State. Apparently, kogi East is larger in terms of population and that explains their dominance in State politics. However, alliance between the Central and the West could pose a threat to their dominance.

PARTY PRIMARIES AND OUTCOME

Internal party democracy is the bedrock of any democracy. A lack of adherence to laid down rules and processes, denial of rights and poor mechanisms for handling grievances are part of the routine challenges with Nigerian political party system.[5] Many of the party primaries conducted ahead of this election, have generated a considerable number of conflicts and legal disputes. In the ruling party APC, for example, the manoeuvrings that bedevilled the process of primary election of April 14, 2023 and the eventual outcome have set conflicting tunes amongst aspirants and party supporters. Although the judiciary has affirmed the candidature of Usman Ododo who emerged winner in the APC primary election, the conflict led to defections by some aspirants. While Muritala Yakubu moved to SDP and Hassan Baiwa Abdullahi who moved to New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) in order to appear on the ballot for this election.

There were challenges with primary elections conducted by other parties also, including that of the PDP and NNPP, leading to another round of decamping of many political stalwarts. However, most of the conflicts have been resolved either by Court or resignation to fate.

From the list released by INEC, out of the 18 governorship candidates, only one is female; and from the 18 deputy governorship candidates, only 3 are female. Also, in both governorship candidates and their deputies, there is lack of inclusion of Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) in the list. The list of all the candidates and their running mates released by INEC is depicted below:

Political party	Position	Candidate	PWD	Age	Gender
A	Governor	Jibrin Usman Oyibe	X	63	M
	Deputy Governor	Olamife Raphael	X	59	M
AA	Governor	Braimoh Olayinka Adenehon	X	46	M
	Deputy Governor	Tijani Yahaya Imam	X	46	M
AAC	Governor	Achimugu Augustine Abu	X	48	M
	Deputy Governor	Bamidele Oladeji Victor	X	45	M
ADC	Governor	Abejide Leke Joseph	X	48	M
	Deputy Governor	Omeide Idris	X	60	M

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5 Ralph, O.A. (2023), 'Kogi Guber Primaries: No Bridges across the Divides. The Guardian, April 24, 2023.

Political party	Position	Candidate	PWD	Age	Gender
ADP	Governor	Elukpo Julius	X	77	M
	Deputy Governor	Adaava Abdullahi	X	42	M
APC	Governor	Usman Ahmed Ododo	X	45	M
	Deputy Governor	Salifu Joel	X	55	M
APGA	Governor	Ilonah Idoko Kingsley	X	44	M
	Deputy Governor	Nweke Benjamin Ikechukwu	X	52	M
APM	Governor	Isah Dauda Utenwojo	X	41	M
	Deputy Governor	Ologe John Kola	X	61	M
APP	Governor	Onaji Sunday Frank	X	35	M
	Deputy Governor	Kekere Rahanatu	X	35	F
BP	Governor	Muhammed Kabir Umar	X	40	M
	Deputy Governor	Eleojo Victoria	X	42	F
LP	Governor	Okeme Adejoh	X	40	M
	Deputy Governor	Hamza Mohammed	X	55	M
NNPP	Governor	Hassan Baiwa Abdullahi	X	-	M
	Deputy Governor	Oni Felix Sunday	X	56	M
NRM	Governor	Dirisu Bala Abdulghafar	X	44	M
	Deputy Governor	Onoja Ernest Enemona	X	43	M
PDP	Governor	Melaye Daniel Dino	X	49	M
	Deputy Governor	Muhammed Deen Habiba	X	45	F
PRP	Governor	Dr Abdullahi Bayawo	X	54	M
	Deputy Governor	Sunday Dennis Ozomata	X	48	M
SDP	Governor	Yakubu Murtala	X	45	M
	Deputy Governor	Abenemi Sam Ranti	X	62	M
YPP	Governor	Omale Samson Agada	X	64	M
	Deputy Governor	Suleiman Mohammed Siyaka	X	41	M
ZLP	Governor	Suleiman Taiye Fatima	X	48	F
	Deputy Governor	Omolowo Mathew	X	46	M

Table 5. List of Candidates for 2023 Governorship Election

Source: INEC, 2023.

ASSESSMENT OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR CANDIDATES

Since the creation of Kogi state, no single political party has dominated the state. Power has been shifting between the dominant political parties. For example, after the state creation in 1991, National Republican Convention (NRC) was the first political party to win the governorship election in the State in the aborted third republic in 1992. When Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999, All Peoples Party (APP) won the election and PDP became the opposition party. However, in 2003, PDP emerged the winner and ruled the state till 2016 until All Progressive Congress (APC) became victorious in the 2015 election, and since then APC has been ruling till date. Although, Kogi State is a multi-party state and different political parties are represented in the 2023 governorship election list.

Although, there are many candidates vying for the governorship position, however, there are four leading candidates whose strengths cannot be ignored. They include: Usman Ododo of APC, Leke Adejide of ADC, Dino Daniel Melaye of PDP and Murtala Yakubu of SDP. Fundamentally, there are different factors that will determine the outcome of the 11th November election, such as power of incumbency, poverty, bad governance, the determination of the opposition to defeat the ruling party at the State and the complex nature of ethnic politics. The goal of this section however, is not to attempt to figure out what the outcome of the election may be, but to examine the strength and weaknesses of political parties and their candidates for context purpose.

The power of incumbency plays a vital role in any election. APC is the ruling party both at the national and the State levels. In the 2019 House of Assembly elections in Kogi State, APC won all the 25 seats while in the 2023 elections, that number reduced to 22 as PDP and ADC wrestled 2 and 1 respectively from the APC. For the Senatorial elections in 2023, INEC declared APC winner of all the 3 seats until the Election Petition Tribunal upturned to that of the Central Senatorial District in favour of PDP while ordering a supplementary election in 94 polling units (PUs) involving 59,730 registered voters in the East Senatorial District over failure to comply with extant laws.

Furthermore, out of the 9 seats in the House of Representatives from Kogi State, APC won 7 in the 2023, leaving ADC with 2 and PDP with none. This implies that the performance of the party in the last general elections can be an advantage for the candidate of APC. In addition to being the governorship candidate of the ruling APC, Usman Ododo enjoys the anointing of the

incumbent governor. Moreover, Ododo strategically picked his running mate from Kogi East from where the party can garner supports that can translate to votes. However, Ododo's role as Auditor-General for Local Government Councils in Governor Bello's government may dent his chance because of the percentage and irregular payment of salaries of Local Government workers.

In the case of PDP, it is one of the strongest political parties in Nigerian fourth republic, with a formidable structure and experience, and has ruled the State for about 13 years in the past but the performance of the party in recent elections has been poor. The party lost all the three senatorial elections in the State during the 2023 general elections. However, the Tribunal has declared a candidate of PDP, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, winner of the Kogi Central Senatorial election. Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan is a politician that has a huge followership and admiration across party line. Her popularity, if properly harnessed, can bring PDP many vital votes. Also, the party has strategically chosen a female deputy governorship candidate in order to mop up votes from women and other groups that are historically marginalized in the leadership of the State. Nevertheless, the governorship candidate of the party, Dino Melaye is an experienced politician who can mobilise votes from all segments of the society and also has the support of some Okun groups.

Also, the candidate of Social Democratic Party (SDP) Murtala Yakubu, is known for grassroots mobilization and enjoys massive supports from the Igala group. The choice of his running mate from Lokoja in Kogi Central can be an advantage to garnering votes from other zones. However, SDP as a party in Kogi State has no root. It has no seat in the State House of Assembly, House of Representatives and the Senate. The major strength of Murtala Yakubu is the support of Igala population, who constitute about 50% of the entire population of the State. Nevertheless, there are many other candidates of Igala extraction in this governorship race, which can limit the chance of Murtala Yakubu ermerging winner. Though, there are ongoing conversations amongst stakeholders from the Igala axis to harmonize and select a consensus candidate from the zone. If this goes through, it can provide a more formidable threat to the performance of the ruling party in the 11th November election.

Leke Abejide, the candidate of African Democratic Congress (ADC) from the West of the State, who performed convincingly in the 2023 February/March polls, can cause a major political upset in the State with his increasing popularity. As the leader of the party in the State, he took ADC into limelight and winning 3 legislative seats -2 Federal House of Representatives and 1 State

Assembly Constituencies in the 2023 General elections. The popularity of Abejide and ADC is rapidly on the increase in the State.

In addition to the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates and their political parties, there are other factors that could determine the outcome of the election. The pervasive violence recorded in previous elections in the State and the ominous signals of violence in the lead-up to 2023 governorship election may affect voter turnout. The ubiquity of vote trading as a result of poverty, if unchecked, could undermine polling outcome. Also, excessive use of power of incumbency, such as the recent ban of campaign posters/billboard placement in Lokoja metropolis, Kabba/Bunu, Ijumu, Yagba West, Ankpa, Idah, Anyigba, Adavi, Okene, Dekina and Okehi towns could affect the performance of other political parties. Kogi State Signage and Advertisement Agency (KOSSAA) has directed that campaign materials can only be displayed on the billboards after paying a fee of N2 million and N5 million for every outdoor material, in addition to other fees including a N50 million refundable caution fee. This is already affecting the traditional campaign environment.

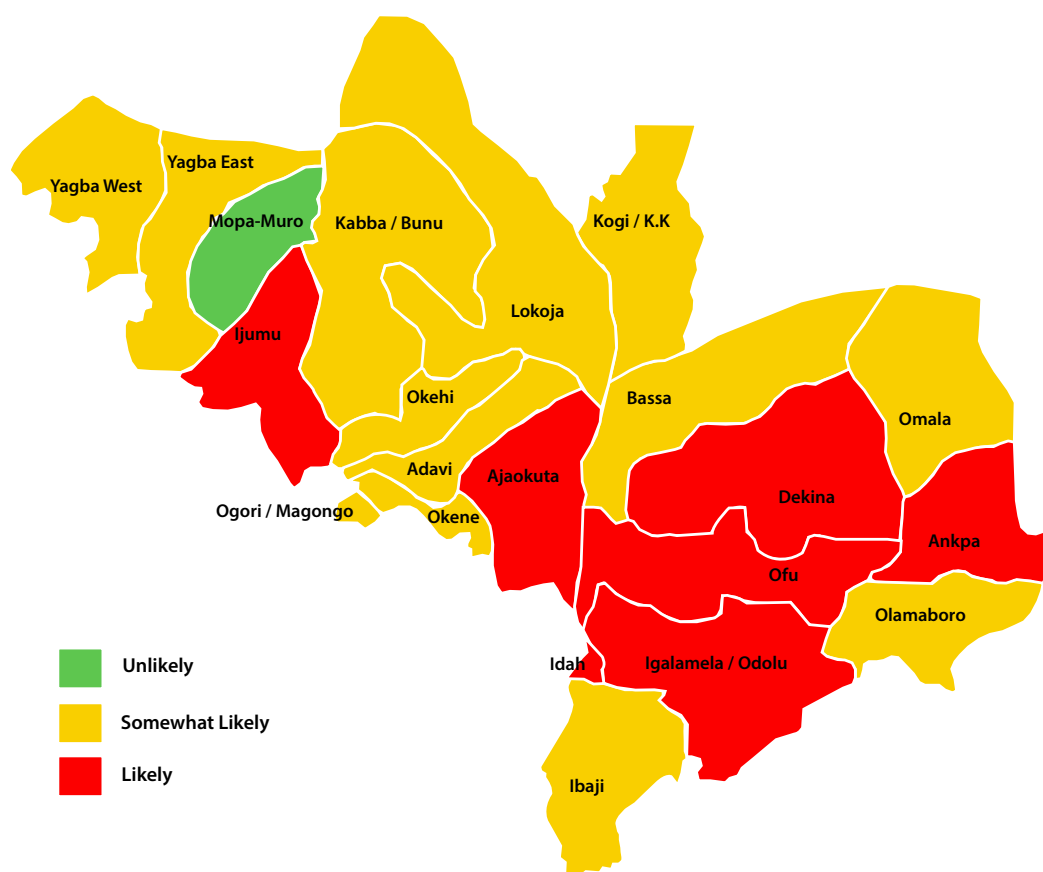# SECURITY SITUATION AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN KOGI STATE

The security situation in Kogi State is a serious concern and a major threat to the 11th November Governorship election. In the build up to the election, numerous incidents of violence[6] have been reported in Dekina, Lokoja, Koton Karfi LGAs, amongst others.

The desperation among the candidates, the inflammatory expressions among their supporters in the print and social media and the mobilizations of violence, are fundamentally shaping the political environment ahead of the election. Electoral violence has been a perennial problem in the State. In every election in Kogi state, the security situation is a serious concern to stakeholders. Early signs of violence have shown that the next election may not be different previous ones.

Retrospectively, the history of election violence in the State date back to 2003 general elections when the fierce contest between the ruling Prince Abubakar Audu of APP and Idris Ibrahim of PDP led to recruitment and empowerment of political thugs. By 2007, thuggery has become a lucrative business in the State. Recruitment of young unemployed people as thugs became attractive because the perks the enjoy in the form of appointments as special advisers, Local Government Council Chairmen, delegates during primary elections, and access to government facility and protection from prosecution. By 2019 governorship election, election violence reached a climax with the gruesome burning of the PDP Women Leader, Salome Abuh and her properties in her residence at Ochadamu, Ofu LGA.

According to CLEEN Foundation's *Election Security Threat Assessment and Kimpact Development Initiative's Violence Hotspots Mapping, there is a possibility of widespread violence during the election. The reports, when combined, reveal that only 1 LGA -Mopa Muro -out of 21 is likely not to experience any form of election violence throughout the process of the 2023 governorship election in Kogi State.*

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6 Iwoh, I. (2023), 'Worrying Signs as Pre-Election Violence Threatens Kogi Guber Poll'. Business Day, July 17, 202

Possible major flashpoints communities:

- Dekina township, Anyigba, Abocho, – Dekina LGA

- Ochadamu, Ejule - Ofu LGA

- Ganaja - Ajaokuta LGA

- Okene township – Okene LGA

- Ajaka - Igalamela/Odolu

- Obangede -Okehi LGA

- Idah township -Idah LGA

- Ogugu and Imane -Olamaboro LGA

- Iyara-Ijumu LGA

- Lokoja metropolis –Lokoja LGA

- Ankpa township -Ankpa LGA

There have been clashes amongst supporters of political parties and candidates in the forthcoming elections. The biggest incident was the attack on SDP candidate and his supporters on the Lokoja - Koton road in the early stage of the campaign season. As a result, many stakeholders have also cautioned political parties to constantly restrict their supporters from actions that are capable of jeopardizing the peaceful conduct of the elections.

Kogi State provides a complex security environment for election officials as well. Both in 2019 and 2023 elections, a number of election officials came under attack from political thugs, particularly in Dekina and Lokoja LGAs. This form of violence is a major concern going into this election.

In addition to electoral violence in Kogi State, there are other crises that may have impact on the forthcoming governorship election. For example, the crises between the herdsmen and the farmers, which has displaced people from their place of residence in Oganenigwu and 13 other villages around it, in Dekina LGA and Gbagda, Agbenema, Ajichekpa and Opada villages in Omala LGA can affect voters turnout in the areas.

Security Agents

Security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. Security agents are involved in the election process to enforce law and order, to protect voters, election materials and election-day workers, and to intervene in trouble spots during elections. They are required to discharge their duties with absolute neutrality and professionalism and ensure a level playing ground for all parties.

In the preparation to this election, leadership of security agencies have affirmed their commitments to securing the process, election officials, voters and the general public.

It should be emphasised that security personnel deployed for this election should not provide cover also for dubious politicians to rig elections and cause violence. According to Situation Room Report of Observation of Kogi State Governorship Election in 2019, political thugs were observed moving around freely and disrupting voting process in several locations in company of security agents, contrary to pledge made to the public to maintain law and order as well as prevent thugs from interfering with the process.[7]

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7 Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2020) Observation Report of Kogi State 2019 Governorship Election

INEC PREPARATIONS TOWARDS THE ELECTION

In the preparation towards the off-cycle governorship election in Kogi State, INEC has been holding meetings with stakeholders both in FCT and in the State to deliberate on the process and emerging issues in the election. Also, INEC conducted an exercise between 11th September and 9th October 2023 to distribute permanent voter's cards (PVCs) to those who were yet to collect theirs. According to the Commission, 119,052 registered voters, out of a total of 1,932,591, failed to collect their PVC in precious exercises.

Electoral Wards with over 1,000 uncollected PVCs before the exercise:

Senatorial Zone	Local Government	Wards with over 1000 uncollected PVCs
Kogi East	Ankpa	Ankpa Township Ward; Ankpa Ward I; Ankpa Suburb Ward I; Ankpa Suburb Ward II; Enjema Ward I; and Enjema Ward II.
	Dekina	Anyigba Ward
	Igalamela/Odolu	Ajaka Ward I; and Ajaka Ward II.
	Ofu	Ogbonicha Ward; Aloji Ward; Aloma Ward; Ugwolawo Ward I; Ejule-Ala Ward; Ochadamu Ward.
	Olamaboro	Olamaboro Ward III
	Omala	Akpacha Ward; Abejukolo Ward I.
Kogi Central	AJaokuta	Ganaja Ward
	Lokoja	Oworo Ward; Lokoja Ward A; Ward B; Ward C; Ward D; and Ward E.
Kogi West	Ijumu	Iyara Ward
	Kabba Bunu	Asuta Ward
	Yagba East	Itedo Ward; Makutu Ward II; and Ilafin/Idofin/Odo-Ogba Ward

From the table, Kogi East had the substantial number of uncollected PVCs. In 6 LGAs from the zone, 18 Wards had over 1000 uncollected PVCs each. In Kogi Central, the number of Wards with over 1000 uncollected PVCs was 7 from 2 LGA while Kogi West had 5 Wards with over 1000 uncollected PVCs from 3 LGAs.

INEC has also said a total of 3,876 Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) will be deployed to 3,508 polling units in the State for the election.

Polling Agents

With respect to accreditation of polling agents, INEC announced on 8th October 2023 that out of a total of 63,144 polling agents required from all the participating political parties, only 23,720 representing 37.6% were uploaded. Similarly, from a total of 5,004 Collation Centre agents, only 1,095 representing 21.9% have been uploaded. This implies that a number of political parties will not have agents in the majority of polling units and collation centre if they fail to complete the upload by the deadline of 10th October 2023.

Training of Election Officials and Mock Accreditation

According to INEC, training of election officials has been going on in batches at the State-level. Also, INEC conducted a mock accreditation exercise on Saturday, 14th October 2023, to test-run the BVAS and the Result Viewing Portal (IReV) in 3 polling units from each Senatorial Zone of the State.

Table 7. Polling Units for Mock Accreditation

S/No	LGA	REGISTRATION AREA	POLLING UNIT	REG. VOTERS
KOGI WEST SENATORIAL DISTRICT				
1	Lokoja	Lokoja	Crowther Memorial Sabongari	2055
2	Kabba/Bunu	Asuta	ST. Paul School Kabba	1116
3	Yagba East	Itedo	Itedo Irunda Open Space	1002
KOGI CENTRAL SENATORIAL DISTRICT				
1	Adavi	Ogaminana	LGEA School Ogaminana Prem. Sec 1	635
2	Ajaokuta	Ganaja Township	LGEA Primary School Ganaja Village	13425
3	Okehi	Obangede Uhodo	Opp. FCE Campus 1	I663
KOGI EAST SENATORIAL DISTRICT				
1	Dekina	Anyigba	Ajetachi (Opp. Abuchagi's House	2618
2	Idah	Ukwaja	Open Space Ofuji	1319
3	Omala	Abejukolo 1	Central School Abejukolo Olo-mala IV	881

Source: INEC, 2023

In conclusion, the credibility of the 2023 governorship election in Kogi State will depend majorly on INEC as an umpire and partly on the security institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Given the issues above, the following recommendations are made:

1. INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION (INEC)

INEC should do the following:

- Deepen its awareness and sensitization around the voting process and guidelines;
- Ensure adequate security arrangement is made to protect election officials and materials;
- Ensure timely deployment of materials and officials and opening of polls;
- Any report of malfunction BVAS should be treated promptly;
- Proper management of voting in the flooded communities, in line with global best practices;
- Ad-hoc staff of INEC should be properly trained on the voting process, BVAS, appropriate forms to be filled and the modality of results collation and transmission of result;
- Utilise vehicles owned by security agencies for the transportation of electoral officials and materials, where possible. This may be complex but it is possible since this election is a standalone one. The same applies to areas affected by flooding. INEC should rely only on the use of boats owned by the Nigerian Navy; and
- Finally, the Commission should uphold electoral guidelines, rules and processes with transparency, honesty and integrity based on lessons learnt from the previous elections

2. POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR CANDIDATES

Political parties should do the following:

- Obey and respect electoral laws and guidelines provided by INEC;
- Take responsibility in sensitizing their supporters on the voting process and the need for a peaceful election;
- Parties and their candidates should focus on issue-based campaigns and desist from hate speech and any form of inflammatory utterance; and
- Ensure adequate training of their election agents to conduct themselves properly in the polling unit and collation centres.

3. SECURITY AGENCIES

- Adequate security personnel should be deployed across all the polling units to boost voters' confidence to come out and vote;
- Ensure incidents of snatching of ballot boxes, and destruction of ballot boxes and papers, as reported in previous elections, are mitigated;
- Security of the identified flashpoints should be fortified;
- Be prepared to track incidents of vote trading and take appropriate actions against perpetrators;
- Reinforce inter-agency cooperation to protect voters, INEC officials, polling units and collation centres across the state;
- Ensure their personnel deployed for election abstain from any form of partisan and unprofessional conduct; and
- Carry out adequate training of personnel on electoral laws, guidelines, offences and penalties.

4. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOS)

CSOs and civic groups should

- Engage in civic and voter education activities in both urban and rural areas;
- Intensify enlightenment campaigns about the danger of violence;
- Encourage issue-based campaigns among the political parties; and
- Engage community leaders and religious leaders to promote peace messaging, and mutual understanding amongst the ethnic groups and encourage voters to come out on election day to vote.

5. MEDIA:

The Media should:

- Strive to equally cover and broadcast political campaigns for all candidates;
- Be ethical their reporting throughout the process; and
- Encourage fact checking and disseminate information accurately.

CONCLUSION

This report explores the demographic and socio-political context of the 2023 Governorship election in Kogi State. It explains how the demographic elements, political configuration and economic conditions are shaping the impending election. It shows that incidents of floods in some locations within the State may contribute to logistical difficulty for INEC.

It further reveals how the inter-ethnic contestation among the three ethnic power blocs in the State is heating the polity, as ethnicity is being used as a strategy to mobilize votes by the political elites, further splitting the State along tribal lines.

The political environment is already tense and vulnerable in the lead-up to the 2023 Governorship election.

The credibility of the Governorship election in Kogi State is majorly dependent on the impartiality and performance of INEC officials and security agents. Significantly, this election provides the basis to evaluate if lessons have been learnt from the 2023 General elections.

ABOUT

PLAC hosts the secretariat of the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room and is a member of its steering committee. The Situation Room provides a co-ordinating platform for civil society engagement on governance issues. It is also a platform for information sharing among civil society groups working on elections and topical national issues. It intervenes in the electoral process by promoting collaboration, proactive advocacy and rapid response to crisis in the electoral process. The Situation Room provides a forum of advance planning, scenario building, evidence based analysis, constructive engagement with various stakeholders in the electoral process and observation of elections.

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