



WATCHING THE
VOTE
Making Votes Count... **ORG**

Emerging Political and Security Trends in Bayelsa, Kogi and, Imo States.

June to August, 2023



Emerging Political and Security Trends in Bayelsa, Kogi and, Imo States.

About

WatchingTheVote

WTV Project

#WatchingTheVote is a citizen led election observation initiative aimed at enhancing the integrity of elections in Nigeria using technological tools like SMS and evidence-based research methodology tools for election observation. The initiative is designed to promote credible elections and boost citizens confidence in the electoral process through the provision of citizens' oversight on elections throughout the electoral cycle.

Driven by Data

WatchingTheVote relies heavily on the use of SMS to provide real time election updates that validate the credibility of election results as well as elicit real time response from election stakeholders before, during and after elections.

For All Nigerians

#WatchingTheVote is designed as a movement of citizens observers with the capacity to gather data, detect fraud and escalate critical incidents that could potentially undermine the conduct of elections.

Beholden to None

#WatchingTheVote is undertaken in line with the inherent responsibility vested on citizens and civil society organizations to serve as watchdogs over electoral activities.

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Introduction

The 2023 gubernatorial elections in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo states will be conducted in accordance with the Election Legal framework in Nigeria. This includes the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) and the Electoral Act of 2022, as well as all other ancillary policies of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). INEC had set the date for the elections as November 11th, 2023, in compliance with Section 8(1) and (2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, which mandates that such elections be held no earlier than 150 days and no later than 30 days before the expiration of the term of the last holder of the office. The incumbent Governor of Imo State's tenure will end on January 14th, 2024, while those of Kogi and Bayelsa States will end on January 26th, 2024, and February 13th, 2024, respectively.

INEC scheduled gubernatorial party primaries from March 27th to April 17th, 2023. All political parties contesting in the three states held their primaries within the stipulated timeline. On Friday, June 9th, 2023, the Commission published the final

list of candidates who will be contesting in the gubernatorial elections in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo States in accordance with Section 32(1) of the Electoral Act 2022. From the published list, all 18 political parties fielded candidates in Kogi State, 17 political parties in Imo State, and 16 political parties in Bayelsa State. Based on the list of candidates, only 2 political parties are fielding female governorship candidates in Bayelsa State, 1 political party in Kogi State, and no political party is fielding a female governorship candidate in Imo State. Political party campaigns have already begun in the three states and will continue until Thursday, November 9th, 2023.

INEC is currently carrying out election-related activities in accordance with the timetable for the upcoming elections in the three states. Post the 2023 general elections, there were expectations that INEC would commence the Continuous Voter Registration Exercise (CVR) in these three states to enable first-time voters who turned 18 years after the last nationwide CVR in 2022 to register

as voters. However, with less than 60 days until the elections, it is not likely that the Commission would resume the CVR exercise before the elections in the states. Especially considering that the Electoral Act 2022, provides that the CVR exercise ends 90 days before the election date. By implication, the failure of INEC to conduct the CVR exercise before the election would disenfranchise eligible registrants, especially first-time voters who are yet to be registered in the states. However, the Commission announced the resumption of the collection of Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) for registered voters who could not collect their PVCs before the suspension of the exercise on 5th February 2023 ahead of the last General Election. The current exercise only covers the three States where the Governorship elections will be held on Saturday 11th November 2023. According to INEC, the PVCs will be available for collection at all INEC's Local Government area offices in the three

States. In addition, the Commission has created other designated centres with a large number of uncollected PVCs. The Commission has earmarked weekdays (Monday - Friday) from 9.00 am to 3.00pm for the collection of PVCs for a period of four weeks from 11th September - to 9th October 2023¹.

The upcoming statewide elections will be the first to take place after the contentious 2023 Nigeria general elections, which have received mixed reactions from various stakeholders and election enthusiasts. In addition, the election will be conducted in an environment where trust in both the electoral process and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has plummeted. The off-cycle elections will be another test of Nigeria's democratic credentials and its institutions' commitment to promoting democratic sustainability.

Historical Background of Off-Cycle Elections in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo states

Bayelsa state began to conduct off-cycle elections in 2007 when Timipre Sylva of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was declared as the governor-elect. His opponent, Ebitimi Amgbare, of the defunct Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), challenged the outcome of the election in court and won at the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal ordered INEC to conduct a fresh election and the election was held in 2008. Mr Sylva re-emerged as the winner. Three other off-cycle elections have been held in the state since 2007. In 2019, Duoye Diri of the PDP, became the state governor after the Supreme Court declared the nullification of the election of David Lyon and his deputy, Biobarakuma Degi-Eremieoyo because the deputy was accused of presenting falsified certificates to INEC.

The 2023 governorship election in Kogi state will be the 4th Off-cycle election to be conducted in the state. Off-cycle elections began in Kogi in 2007 when the court cancelled the re-election of Ibrahim Idris due to INEC's wrong exclusion of Prince Abubakar Audu of the defunct All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) from the ballot. Audu petitioned the tribunal and took the Commission and 57 of its electoral offices to the Appeal court for infringing on his rights. The election was nullified, and a fresh election was conducted. However, Ibrahim Idris re-emerged as the winner in the fresh election that was conducted on March 29, 2008.

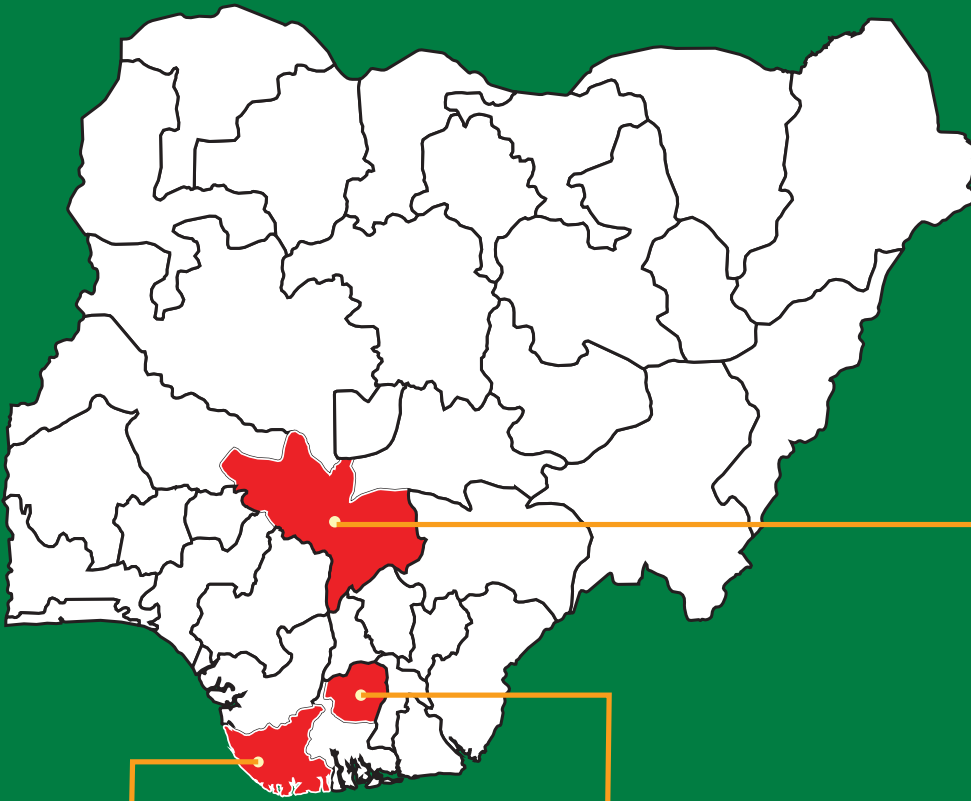
The November 11, 2023 governorship election in Imo state will be the first off-cycle election to be conducted in the state. Like the majority of the states in the nation, Imo has consistently maintained a regular schedule for governorship elections since 1999. This changed in 2019, barely 8 months after the candidate for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the then-sitting Governor Emeka Ihedioha was removed from office and the All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate Hope Uzodinma was declared the winner of the election by a decision of the Supreme Court. The decision of the Supreme Court was an unexpected outcome which was at the least controversial and received mixed reactions from different sections of society. In Imo state, it meant an overhaul of the already celebrated and constituted state Executive and some already appointed officials. This unpopular judgment by the Supreme Court was seen as a miscarriage of justice by the PDP, its supporters and its voters in the state and remains a subject of debate amongst different stakeholders. The judgment and its enforcement further heightened the political tension in the state which had a history of controversial elections and electoral fraud.

Election Data for Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo states

Number of polling units: Bayelsa: 2,224 | Kogi: 3,508 | Imo: 4,758

Number of registered voters: : Bayelsa: 1,058,174 | Kogi: 1,932,591 | Imo: 2,423,788

Number of Candidates in the elections: Bayelsa: 16 (Male 14, Female 2), Kogi: 18 (Male 17, Female 1) and Imo: 18 (Male 18, Female 0)



BAYELSA STATE



Number of Polling units
2,224



Number of registered voters
1,058,174



Number of Candidates **16**

IMO STATE



Number of Polling units
4,758



Number of registered voters
2,423,788



Number of Candidates **18**

KOGI STATE



Number of Polling units
3,508



Number of registered voters
1,932,591



Number of Candidates **18**

Front Runners in the Bayelsa Election:

Timipre Sylva, of the All Progressive Congress (APC), a former Governor and immediate Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, and Duoye Diri, of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the incumbent Governor, are the two front-runners in the governorship election. It is important to note that in both the National and State assembly elections in 2023, PDP clinched the most number of seats (Senator: 3, HoR: 4, SHoA: 17), while other parties like APC won only 4 seats in the SHoA and APGA only 2 seats as well.



Timipre Sylva



Duoye Diri



Front Runners in the Kogi Election:

Kogi will see three (3) front liners battle for the coveted seat of the governor in the state. Usman Ododo of the All Progressive Congress (APC), enjoys the strong support of the incumbent governor, Yahaya Bello who allegedly is his cousin. The closest rival is Murtala Ajaka of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), he hails from Kogi East and was a former political ally of the incumbent governor. Another major contender in the election is Sen. Dino Malaye, of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a former Federal lawmaker and major critic of the incumbent governor. In the 2023 National and State assembly elections, the ruling party in Kogi state, APC won the most, 22 seats for the state assembly elections, the APC won 5 seats for the Federal House of Representatives and all the senatorial seats in the state.



Usman Ododo



Murtala Ajaka



Sen. Dino Malaye

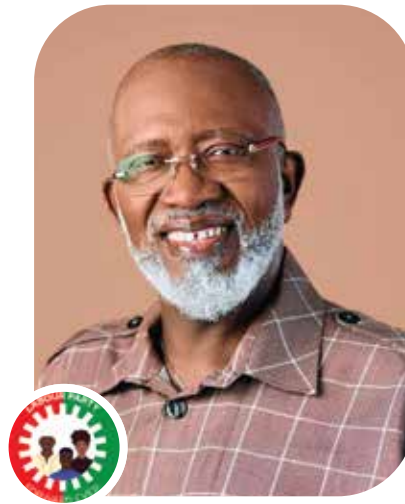


Front Runners in the Imo Election:

As in Kogi, three major political parties are headlining the governorship election in Imo; The All Progressive Congress (APC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Labour Party (LP). The APC is fielding the incumbent governor, Hope Uzodinma as its candidate in the election. His emergence was not surprising considering that he is the party's major leader in the State, although there seems to be a hangover of public resentment from the Supreme Court decision which declared him the winner of the 2019 election. The dark horse in the election might be Achonu Nneji, the candidate of the Labour Party who may be riding on the party's popularity and gains in the 2023 general election. Another major contender is Sen. Sam Anyanwu, of the People's Democratic Party, (PDP) former Federal Lawmaker and party-man, is riding on the party's popularity from the 2019 election. The APC won 26 seats, while the PDP won 1 seat for the 2023 State House of Assembly elections. APC won 2 and LP won 1 senatorial seat, while the number of seats in the House of Representatives was shared by three parties (APC: 3, PDP: 3 and LP: 2).



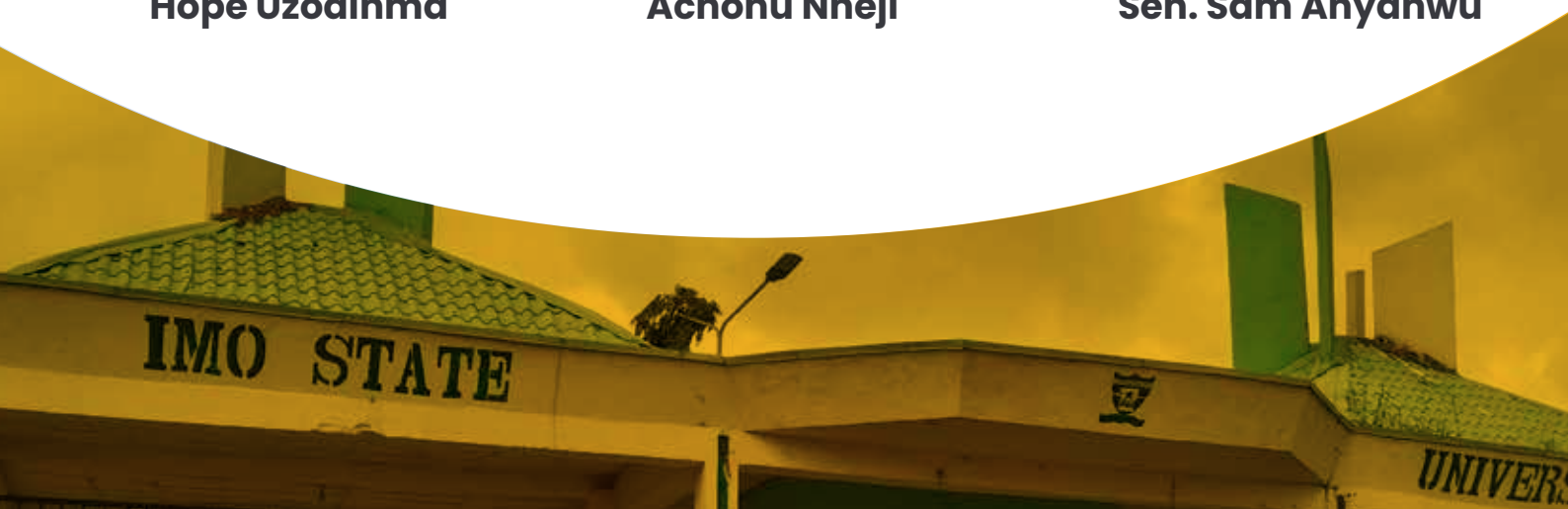
Hope Uzodinma



Achonu Nneji



Sen. Sam Anyanwu



Emerging Issues/ Contextual Background

Insecurity:

The upcoming off-cycle elections are likely to be influenced by the issue of security, which is a major concern in the country. The Southeast region has experienced several security crises, with militia groups posing a significant threat to the socio-economic well-being of the area. The enforcement of the Monday seat-at-home by The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and unknown gunmen has further hampered economic activities. Reports have indicated that 5 LGAs (Ehime/Mbano, Okigwe, Oru West, Oru East, and Orlu LGAs) in Imo State are hotspots for violence leading up to the 2023 general elections. The secessionist group has also heightened the vulnerability of the state to armed violence, causing deaths and property damage, including attacks on State facilities, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission assets. In Imo State, there have been 12 reported cases of attacks and destruction of INEC's assets and facilities, the highest in the country between 2019 and 2023. Other areas in the state, such as Orlu, Orsu, Ideato North and South, Okigwe, Oguta-Izombe, Njaba, Oru East and Oru West, have also been identified as security hotspots. Professor Sylvia Agu, the

Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) in Imo State, recently announced that 2,300 soldiers would be deployed for the election.

While the security situation in Bayelsa state seems to be relatively calm ahead of the election, there are still concerns that it may be premature to predict what will happen during the election. Recently, there was a report of an attack on Saturday, August 13th, where armed men in multiple vehicles invaded Opu Nembe (Basambri) in Nembe Local Council, resulting in one fatality and several injuries.

The heightened security situation in Kogi State has been exacerbated by the rhetoric and activities of politicians in the state. In June 2023, the Kogi State Government alleged that suspected thugs loyal to the SDP candidate attacked Governor Yahaya Bello's convoy while on his way from Abuja to Lokoja, the state capital. Mr Bello and Mr Ajaka traded blame over the incident, accusing each other of being responsible for the attack. While the Governor alleged that his convoy was attacked by the SDP's team, Mr Ajaka claimed that it was an

assassination attempt on his life by the Governor and his men. There was a report of unrest in Ayingba in Dekina LGA of Kogi East, on Sunday 28 August 2023, when the SDP candidate went to commission his campaign office. The office was allegedly vandalized on 2 separate occasions, with one person reported dead from the incident. Yiaga Africa also received reports that the SDP candidate's office in Lokoja was also burnt down. The incident was said to have occurred on Sunday 28 August 2023. There also have been

several reports of kidnappings in Kogi State, one of which was the kidnap of Oba of Idofin and his wife in Yagba East Local Government Area by gunmen on Monday, 19 June 2023. There was also the kidnap of Passengers who were travelling on the Peace Mass Transit Bus. This incident occurred on Wednesday, July 26, 2023. Also, a report of the kidnap of 3 family members in the Greenland community, Ganaja Ajaokuta, Kogi state was received by Yiaga Africa. This incident happened on Monday, June 5th, 2023.

Distrust in Government Institutions/ Weak Institutions:

Citizens' trust in public institutions has plummeted following the conduct of the 2023 general elections due largely to unmet expectations and promises of improved elections. The appetite and enthusiasm for political participation were impacted by amongst other things, a plethora of logistics challenges, issues with the quality of the administration of the election and violence-related incidents in the 2023 general elections. For instance, the election administration was

confronted with several challenges ranging from inconsistencies in following the electoral guidelines and regulations across states, to the failure of the technology designed to drive transparent results management. The off-cycle elections therefore provide an opportunity to restore hope in our electoral process and demand redoubled efforts from public institutions to regain citizens' confidence in the forthcoming off-cycle elections.

Unfair competition/executive impunity:

Yiaga Africa is concerned about reports of what may be projected as not guaranteeing a level playing field across the states where INEC will be conducting the off-cycle elections. Reports from Kogi and Imo states have revealed that the state governments are charging exorbitant fees for signage and

advertisements which may constrain the equality in competition for all candidates and limit visibility for other contesting parties in the states. It is reported that in Kogi, the government has imposed the payment of N5,000,000 (five million naira) for outdoor campaign materials, N2,000,000 (two million naira) for every

billboard, N1,000,000 (one million) for every banner to be displayed and another N50,000,000 (fifty million naira) to be deposited as caution fee². In Imo, the state government requires parties to pay over N54 million to the state government before they will be permitted to campaign for the upcoming November 11 governorship election in the state. Political parties must obtain a permit from the Imo Signage and Advertisement Agency, IMSAA, and have it signed by the General

Manager before erecting any campaign structures, including billboards, posters, and other forms of advertising. The fee is N54 million. Candidates were also required to pay N100,000 as a form/processing charge, N50,000 for a site inspection, and N150,000 as an approval fee, according to a document headed "Schedule of Rates and Terms for Political Advertising and Ancillary Signage Displays in Imo State for Gubernatorial Campaigns 2023."³

Intimidation of Political Opponents

Yiaga Africa expresses concern over the recurring issue of intimidation of political opponents in our electoral democracy. Politicians resort to various tactics to intimidate or discredit their opponents and hinder their participation in the electoral process. During the 2023 election season, violence and threats of violence were used to intimidate opposition parties and suppress voters, particularly in Kogi and Imo states, as noted by Yiaga Africa. This unsettling trend continues, with similar incidents occurring before the governorship elections. In Kogi state, there

have been reports of attacks and intimidation against opposition parties, their candidates, and supporters, allegedly by those loyal to the governor. SDP and its candidate have been attacked, with the SDP campaign office in Lokoja set ablaze by arsonists shortly after the candidate's visit on Sunday, July 9th, 2023. The PDP and LP in Imo state have also claimed to be victims of intimidation by the state government. On August 28th, 2023, the LP secretariat in Owerri was allegedly destroyed under the watch of armed police officers.

Poverty/Economic Crisis:

The removal of fuel subsidies has increased the economic hardship in the country. With the increase in transportation, food items and other basic amenities, citizens are trying hard to cope with the current realities. The increasing economic hardship has created a more vulnerable system susceptible to vote buying and inducements by politicians

during the upcoming off-cycle elections. The government must prioritize economic policies and the provision of opportunities that will help to ameliorate the sufferings of the citizens. Otherwise, as poverty and financial hardships worsen, those affected will be increasingly willing to sell their votes to politicians who have the resources to purchase them.

INEC's Preparatory Activities:

INEC has been consistent in adhering to the timetable for conducting the upcoming elections in the three states. The commission had announced the resumption of collection of Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) for registered voters who could not collect their PVCs before the suspension of the exercise on 5th February 2023 ahead of the last General Election. The current exercise only covers the three States where the Governorship elections will be held on Saturday 11th November 2023. The PVCs will be available for collection at all INEC's Local Government area offices in the three States: eight in Bayelsa, 27 in Imo and 21 in Kogi. As part of the preparations for the elections, the commission has been holding meetings with stakeholders both in Abuja and in the three respective states. During one of these meetings, the commission announced that it is

reconfiguring the Bimodal Voter Accreditation Systems (BVAS) ahead of the elections. For this purpose, 11,355 BVAS would be deployed in the three states. According to INEC, Bayelsa State has 2,244 polling units, Kogi has 3,508 polling units, and Imo has 4,758 polling units. Consequently, 2,400 BVAS will be deployed to Bayelsa State, while 5,079 and 3,876 BVAS will be used in Imo and Kogi, respectively. Additionally, the commission has started recruiting ad-hoc staff for the elections. On August 31, 2023, the commission invited interested individuals to apply as Ad-Hoc Staff for the upcoming off-cycle Governorship Elections in Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi States. The statement specified that the recruitment portal opens on Thursday, August 31, 2023, at 8:00 AM and closes on Monday, October 2, 2023, at 12:00 midnight.

Recommendations

- 1** INEC should sustain its meetings with stakeholders and prioritize providing information on every aspect of its preparation towards the election to rebuild public confidence.
- 2** INEC should take all necessary measures to ensure unhindered access to every aspect of the electoral process to increase citizen participation.
- 3** Given the emerging security concerns in the three states, the security agencies should prioritize intelligence gathering and enforcement of sanctions for security breaches and violence-related activities in the states.
- 4** Security agencies must review and reinforce institutional mechanisms to ensure total impartiality in the conduct of official duties during the entire electoral process.
- 5** We urge political parties and candidates to conduct their political activities with civility and decorum as peaceful electioneering heralds a peaceful election. Political parties and Candidates have a responsibility to de-escalate tension ahead of the elections.
- 6** The ruling party and incumbents in these three states should ensure an even playing field, that enables equal opportunity for all candidates in the election and promotes confidence in the outcome of the election.

Endnotes

1

<https://inecnews.com/pvc-collection-resumes-in-bayelsa-imo-kogi-sept-11-ends-oct-9/>

2

<https://tribuneonlineng.com/kogi-guber-pdp-rejects-n50m-campaign-material-signage-fees/>

3

<https://saharareporters.com/2023/08/08/opposition-candidate-kicks-imo-government-demands-n54million-political-billboards>



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