

Kogi State

Governorship Election 2019:



*Socio-Political
Context*



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Executive Summary

This report examines the socio-political context of the 2019 Governorship elections in Kogi State, and has three specific objectives. (1) Analyse the Socio - political context and topographical landscape of Kogi State; (2) Identify flash points and areas of high security risk; (3) Develop a well-articulated assessment of the context before the election and possible areas of concern during and after the election. The analysis notes the difficult geographical terrain of the state and highlights the challenges posed to the conduct of free and fair elections, and the work of security personnel who are deployed to secure men and materials during elections. The mobilization of ethnic cleavages defined by dialectical differences in the language spoken for electoral purposes was also discussed, in addition to the implications of the electoral map of the state for peaceful elections and stable polity. The potential challenges to the election highlighted include: violence, poor political education, failure of Smart Card Readers; the commoditisation of the electoral process, possible compromise of electoral officials, difficulty in transporting election materials/INEC staff, and the unprofessional conduct of security personnel on election duty in previous elections. The report notes political campaigns and the associated hate speech and intemperate utterances, contentious political party primaries, political thuggery and intolerance as the dossiers of potential conflict that require attention.

A number of recommendations are made for intervention. These include issues on political education, review of security architecture for elections in the state, further decentralization of electoral materials distribution points and the recruitment and training of ad-hoc staff. It is suggested that the training of ad-hoc staff be done for a period of at least two months to ensure proper training and competence, and that ad-hoc staff should be recruited from a pool that satisfactorily pass competence test based on job content. This report also suggests that INEC should explore using boats and helicopters owned by the marine division of the Nigerian Police and Nigerian Navy, so as to avoid hiring transport facilities owned by partisan individuals.





Introduction

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has scheduled Kogi state's off-season governorship election to hold on November 16, 2019. It will be the fourth of such off-season elections in the state since the Supreme Court in August 2008 annulled the April 2007 governorship election and ordered a re-run of the election which took place on November 22, 2008. The annulment was on the ground that the candidate of the ANPP in that election, Alhaji Abubakar Audu, was excluded from the ballot.

The two major contending parties in the forthcoming governorship election, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) have concluded their primaries. The incumbent APC governor, Yahaya Bello, has emerged as the party's candidate, while Engr. Musa Wada, younger brother of a former governor, Captain Idris Wada (who also contested the party primary) emerged as the flag bearer of the PDP.

The two leading candidates in the contest have nominated their running mates for the election. While Governor Yahaya Bello has announced Mr. Edward Onoja, his Chief of Staff, from Kogi East as his running mate, the PDP flag bearer, Engr. Musa Wada has nominated Hon Samuel Bamidele Aro, a former member of the House of Representatives from Yagba Federal Constituency as his running mate. While the PDP candidate is from Kogi East, his running mate is from Kogi West. Furthermore, INEC has officially published the list of 49 candidates along with the party platforms on which they are vying for the election.

Although the election appears to be a two-way contest between Yahaya Bello of APC and Musa Wada of PDP, the significance of other candidates in splitting the votes or forming alliances could make the outcome of the election indeterminable. This is particularly true of the candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Natasha Akpoti, who showcased her popularity as SDP Senatorial candidate for Kogi Central in the last February/March general

elections. Other political parties and their candidates include Action Alliance (AA) which is fielding a US-based medical doctor, Samuel Alfa; People's Party of Nigeria (PPN) which has selected Ukwumonu Joseph Idachaba; Allied People's Movement (APM) which has chosen as its flagbearer, Mamman Yusufu Dantalle Dabo; and the Mass Action Joint Alliance (MAJA) whose candidate is Jimoh Ahmodu. It however remains to be seen whether a 'third force' that would pose a credible alternative to either of the two major parties, APC and PDP, will emerge from any of these parties or any alliance that could be formed in the rapid countdown to the November 16, election.

Despite being an off-season election, the gubernatorial election has all the trappings of a contest that will command the attention of the stakeholders in Nigeria's electoral democracy including the international community. Among others, the election promises to be characterized by keen competition between the ruling party and the opposition, a 'balance of terror' between the two leading candidates, political mobilization of ethnic and communal identities, deliberate voter suppression and partisanship of security agencies. This foreboding draws from a number of factors, including the history of past elections in the state and early signposts of violence and desperation, fueled by the underlying inter-ethnic contestation between the three ethnic power blocs, the situation of mass poverty exacerbated by irregular payments of salaries of public sector workers, and relative insecurity occasioned by kidnapping and rural banditry, among others, that have flourished in different parts of the state in recent years.

The emergence of Yahaya Bello as governor of Kogi state in November 2016 in the aftermath of the death, mid-way into the election, of Alhaji Abubakar Audu, the APC candidate who was coasting to victory, had all the elements of a political accident. Although this appeared to have, at least, temporarily resolved a lingering political question of power rotation among the three ethnic blocs in the state, the question of power shift has been forced into the front burner of the forthcoming election to the extent that it may become a significant factor in determining the outcome. There are however, other factors that may be critical in determining the outcome. These include the salience of ethnic mobilization occasioned by politics of power shift, the possible role of electoral violence, incumbency factor and the prevailing conditions of poverty and insecurity.

All these require that INEC in a systematic manner addresses some of the key challenges noticed in the 2019 general elections and the lessons learned from its post-election review to address issues of logistics, voter education, PVCs distribution, recruitment and training of adhoc staff, and proper engagement and mobilization of security agencies. With specific reference to the state, there is urgent need to address the security challenges in the 2019 general election and the accompanying feeling of helplessness on the part of citizens and voters. It will also require focused engagements with other key stakeholders, especially security agencies, traditional and religious leaders, as well as the youth population based on sustained campaigns for peaceful elections.

The purpose of this analysis is to provide the broad demographic, social, political and topographical context that will shape the conduct and outcome of the 2019 governorship election scheduled to hold in Kogi state on November 16. The analysis therefore provides useful insight into the history of elections conducted in Kogi state over the years, the analysis of socio-cultural aggregates that make up the state and how political identities formulated by these groups shape political contest and elections. It also highlights the role of violence in previous elections and specifically identifies areas of high security risks, including the challenges that violence will pose in the election. It further provides an assessment of the context before the election and possible areas of concern during and after the election, and broad suggestions in terms of the role of stakeholders in making the outcome of the elections peaceful.





Demographic, Socio-Economic and Political Context of Kogi Election

Kogi state was created on August 27, 1991 out of Kwara and Benue states when Nigeria then became a 31-state federal structure. The state is further sub-divided into 21 local government areas. According to the 1991 Nigerian national population census, the total population of Kogi state was 2,141,756. A further breakdown shows the following: Kogi East, 943,434; Kogi West, 444,865; and Kogi Central, 753,456. However, this population figure is a subject of contestation by the different ethnic groups, highlighting the level of politicized ethnicity in the state.

As it is presently constituted, the territorial area occupied by Kogi state coincides with the boundary of the Old Kabba Province under which the Igala, Ebira and Okun were administered for some time in the colonial period. Furthermore, all the socio-cultural aggregates that constitute the state were a part of the Old Kwara state when Nigeria has a 12-state federal structure between 1967 and 1976. It was the states creation exercise in 1976 that carved the Igala-speaking part into Benue state. It was a common agitation by these groups for "their own" that resulted in the creation of Kogi state in 1991 by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida. It therefore can be safely assumed that the groups that make up Kogi state today have not been brought together by historical accident, but in recognition of the underlying deep historical and cultural ties that bind them together.

Unfortunately, inter-group relations have been based on antagonism and mutual suspicion rather than harmony since Kogi state came into existence. Public discourse in the state is saturated with ethnic interpretations, prejudice and perception. Issues like population census as earlier alluded to, distribution of local government and the composition of the civil service have issues of contestation among the dominant ethno-regional aggregates that make up the state. In particular, the question of who becomes the governor of the state at every election is reduced to a contest between the three ethnic blocs distributed into three senatorial zones.

To a large extent, Kogi state reproduces the pathology of ethnic politics that plagues Nigeria as a nation. First, is the reality of a tripod – the Igala, Ebira and Okun – who are primary contenders for the governorship position. Second, besides the three major ethnic blocs are other layers of ethnic and sub-ethnic identities around which political mobilization and formulation of distinct political interest could matter. For instance, despite what is portrayed to outsiders as a ‘monolithic’ Kogi East represented by the Igala, there are other minority groups which include, Bassa Komo, Bassa Nge, Nupe (Onugba), and Agatu people that can project different interests and become relevant in forming political alliances.

Similarly, the Ebira in Kogi Central and the Okun in the West senatorial district are surrounded by other micro-nationalities which cannot be subsumed within the larger identities. While the Ebira constitute an overwhelming demographic force in Kogi Central, the Ogori and Magongo are important minorities. Other ethnic minorities outside the dominant Okun identity in Kogi West who under some political circumstances can assert ‘own’ interests include Oworo, Kakanda, Gana Gana, Koto, Nupe and Hausa.

There is yet another layer of identity on the basis of which political interest can be formulated in the complex identity politics of Kogi state are the internal fractions and factions within each of the dominant ethnicity in the state. Among the Igala of Kogi East, for example, discourse on governorship in Kogi State is based on power rotation between the Dekina, Idah and Ankpa that constitute the three axes among the Igala people. It is interesting that the opposition PDP which hopes to defeat the incumbent governor in the November 16 election is internally paralysed by the insistence of Dekina axis to produce its governorship candidate on the ground that Captain Idris Wada who was defeated in November 2016 has to complete eight years in Lugard House¹ as the Ankpa axis did when Alhaji Ibrahim Idris served as governor between 2003 and 2011.

Elite fragmentation along this line appears even more pronounced in the Kogi Central senatorial district where competing clan identities create tension and division among the Ebira speaking population. This partly explains the high incidence of violence in the countdown to the 2007 elections, driven by the confluence of party politics and contestation over chieftaincy matters. Added to this was the rhythm of political violence caused by the high level of poverty and unemployment among the youth population of Kogi State.

Like other parts of Kogi state, the Okun speaking Yoruba people in Kogi West senatorial district is not immune from internal divisions that threaten group coherence. Thus, despite a common Okun identity which can be asserted in some political context, there could be some internal differences among Ijumu, Kabba and Bunu, which can be the basis for asserting some interests. According to Shola Omotola², this reality of sub-ethnic identity and the political interests that can be formulated by the leadership within a group can become politically relevant in the

1 Kogi State Government House

2 Shola Omotola, ‘Democratization, Sub-ethnic identities and Intra-Group Relations among the Okun of Kogi State, Nigeria,’ *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* (January, 2007).

context of democratization and mobilization of identity.

The geographical location of Kogi state at the confluence of Rivers Niger and Benue and in the north-central geo-political zone, confer on the state a fairly distinct identity which may have implication for electoral politics. To begin with, shares a common border with five other states seven other states. On the north, it has boundary with the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Niger, and Plateau states; on the east, it has boundary with Anambra, Enugu and Benue states; and finally on the west, it has boundary with Ekiti, Ondo, Kwara, and Edo states. It is important to note that borders between Kogi and these states are occupied by communities who share common linguistic identities with the Kogi communities. For instance, it is hardly difficult to distinguish between Idoma and Igala in many border communities as it is the case in the border areas between Kogi on the one hand, and Kwara and Ekiti states on the other.

This fairly unique and complex geographical location could have a number of implications for the election. The experience has been that politicians desperate to win mobilize voters who may not be holders of PVCs printed from the state's voter register and political thugs from neighbouring states. Such mobilized voters could still vote through deliberate resistance to the use of card readers, while armed non-state actors procured from neighbouring states are the cannon-fodders in the perpetration of electoral violence. The immediate implication of this is that security agencies are expected to factor in this geographical location in strategies aimed at securing the electoral environment.

Finally, arising from the geographical location and topography of the state, flooding and consequent population displacement could pose a challenge for the election. However, the fact that the election is scheduled for November severely reduces the risk of flooding which parts of the state, especially Ibaji and Kogi Koton-Karfi Local Governments are prone to considering the last experience in 2012. It was reported by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in that year that in Kogi State alone, more than 500 thousand people were dislodged from their homes across nine out of the 21 Local Government Areas³. Flooding at whatever scale or magnitude is an annual phenomenon in the Ibaji Local Government. Although there is renewed fear of flooding in some states including Kogi, the highest risk of flooding in the state occurs between July and September when rainfall reaches its peak.

It is the state of human development and security in Kogi state that constitutes the most important context for politics and elections. According to Idris Malik Abdul⁴, Executive Director of one of the few active civil society organisation in the state, Conscience for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, (CHRCR), Kogi state has been characterised by misrule, misplaced priorities, lack of inclusiveness of the people in governance and above all, fantastic corruption in its close to three decades of existence as a state. This is buttressed by the fact that most of

3 The damaging impact of flooding was widely covered by the report of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) for the year. See also A. A. Adaji, et al (2019) 'The Aftermath of 2012 Flooding in Ibaji and Lokoja Local Government Areas of Kogi State, Nigeria' International Journal of Academic Management Science Research (IJAMSR) Vol. 3 Issuer 1, January.

4 "28 Years of Kogi State" text of a Press Release on the 28th Anniversary of the Creation of Kogi State

the human development indicators point in the negative direction: basic needs such as access to education, health, housing, public infrastructure, public safety; maternal and infant mortality rates, among others.

Despite the fact that Kogi state is one of the states with high natural endowments in the country, which include a variety of mineral deposits and potential for agriculture as well as great potentials for tourism, a succession of poor leadership and governance have kept the state in a pitiable condition of backwardness. The state of backwardness is illustrated by the following: the GDP Per Capita was \$:1,386 in 2007; Unemployment Rate stood at 14.4 per cent in 2011; while Literacy Rate and Adult Literacy rate stood at 62.8 per cent in 2010.

The poor development statistics of the state logically translates into declining human security situation for the people across the state regardless of the ethnic and religious backgrounds. The consequence has been growing crime rates including kidnapping, rural banditry, and occasional communal disturbances. In reality, these are challenges of governance and leadership. The situation has been further worsened by the general perception that Governor Yahaya Bello has failed to deliver on governance and democratic dividends. As in all cases, the failure of democracy to serve as a guarantor of the collective interest by being predicated upon popular participation and representation that is truly inclusive, open and transparent, fuels new suspicion and reinforces existing cleavages especially along ethnic lines.

The human security situation and failure of government provides a very useful context to the politicization of ethnic and communal identities in the state. Unfortunately, politicians across the three major ethnic blocs strongly believe they can fetch votes by exploiting difference. By so doing, mobilization around governance issues and inclusive political participation takes the back stage. How ethnic calculations may play out in the governorship election is analysed in the section that follows.

Ethnic Mobilization and Politics of Power Shift

All indications point to the fact that November 16 governorship election in Kogi state between incumbent governor Yahaya Bello and his main challenger from the opposition PDP, Engr Musa Wada will be a very keen contest. However, the electioneering process and appeal to voters will be dominated by ethnic mobilization around the issue of power shift. While concerns about the performance of the incumbent governor should make governance a key issue in the campaigns, the force of ethnic and communal mobilization may drive governance issues to the background.

On the contrary, religion is not likely to acquire the salience enjoyed by ethnicity, although there could be some level of religious undercurrent in Kogi politics and elections⁵. The population

5 Although there could be subtle reference to the preferred religious identity of persons favoured for governorship position in the state, public debate around this issue is being avoided because of the sensitivity of the religion in Nigeria's 'Middle Belt' and Kogi state in particular.

of Kogi state, especially Kogi East and Central, is fairly evenly split between Christianity and Islam; however, a significant majority of the population of Kogi West is Christian. Furthermore, adherents of Traditional African Religion also constitute a significant population of the state and this tends to moderate the claims of the two dominant religions.

The last four years of Governor Yahaya Bello's administration in the state and the count down to the governorship election has been marked by a charged political atmosphere in which ethnic mobilization of voters to achieve power shift has been at the centre. The centrality of power shift to the management of diversity in the state was highlighted by the resolution of the 2014 National Conference passed at the instance of Kogi state delegates to the Conference for power rotation among the three senatorial zones. The resolution was compelled by the demands for new states tabled by the Igala and Okun delegates to the Conference for Okura and Okun states respectively. The delegates were persuaded that such an arrangement for power rotation and the delivery of effective governance could end the perennial agitation for new states.

The absence of elite consensus across ethnic lines on the issue of power rotation in the state has ensured that until the death of Abubakar Audu foisted Yahaya Bello as governor in 2016, the Igalas (Kogi East) have produced all the governors since 1999. The only exception in which Kogi West briefly served as Acting Governor was in 2008 when the court annulment of the 2007 governorship election forced the sitting governor, Ibrahim Idris to handover to the Speaker of the State House of Assembly, Clarence Olafemi. With the end of the tenure of Yahaya Bello in sight, the struggle for hegemony among the three ethnic blocs in the state appears to be the key defining issue.

Unfortunately, rather than making governance issue central to the election, agitation for power shift will be beclouded by power rotation as important as it may be.

However, there are different nuances and scenarios in the politics of power shift, each having consequences for patterns of ethnic mobilization and political alliances. Prior to the conclusion of party primaries, there were three currents in the demand for power shift in the state. One perspective and scenario in the push for power shift is represented by the mainstream Igala political elite and ordinary Igala people who have been made to believe that progress and development of Igala people is tied to occupying the seat of power in Lugard House. The second coalition of interest and forces around power is built around mobilizing support for the victory of the incumbent governor whose emergence in 2016 delivered power shift by providence. A third current of the politics of power shift which appears to be fueled by the perceived failure of Yahaya Bello seeks to mobilise support for any other candidate other than Yahaya Bello from either Kogi Central or West, to achieve power shift in a more meaningful sense. While each of the three currents has a clear ethnic base, advocates of each current also garner support across the ethnic cum zonal divide.

The push for power shift in favour of Kogi East is largely master minded by the Igala political elite who are pursuing the agenda on the platform of the opposition PDP. Apart from Senator Dino Melaye who is the foremost aspirant from Kogi West, all other aspirants who picked the PDP nomination forms are from Kogi East. The argument of this group is that being the dominant ethnic group in the state, the logic of majority rules puts the Igalas in a position to produce governor in all electoral cycles. They stress the argument further that on account of other factors including the distribution of local governments among the three dominant ethnic blocs and perceived suppression of Igala population, they could end up as a demographic majority and a sociological minority without the position of governor.

The argument about being shortchanged by the other zones in the distribution of local governments is that Kogi East which is coterminous with the Igala ethnic bloc has only 9 out of the existing twenty one (21) local government areas, despite accounting for over 50% of the population as possessing greater land mass. The other argument is that the Igalas have become a victim of a deliberate agenda to reduce their population through official manipulation of census figures. According to Omale, et al,⁶ there has been a carefully executed ploy by political elites from the Central and West senatorial zones to downsize Igala population with the ultimate aim of suppressing their votes, and, by so doing marginalize them politically. He opines that whereas the percentage share of Igala population in the Old Kabba Province published for 1931, 1952 and 1963 showed an average of over 50%, more recent census figures have downsized the Igala population. It is argued that under the Babangida military regime, prominent elites from Kogi Central in particular used their influential positions which include Inspector General of Police, Chief of Army Staff and membership of the National Population Commission (NPC) to manipulate the official census figures for 1991 and much worse in 2006. The counter-factual argument has been that it is the inconsistency between the official census figures for Kogi East and the fact that the zone until the last general election has accounted for about 55% of the recorded votes in elections, a figure that appears consistent with the civil registration records for the state.

On the other hand, the tendency from both Kogi Central and West who perceive themselves as marginalized in the political equation of the state is to mobilize along ethnic line. This has been the case since 2003 when it became obvious that political succession in the state would always favour the Igala as occupant of Lugard House. For the Ebira of Kogi Central senatorial zone in particular, the creation of Kogi state in 1991 seemed to have reduced their political fortune. They argue further that if as an ethnic minority in the Old Kwara state, they enjoyed the honour of producing a governor in the person of Abdullahi Attah in the second Republic, they expect to have fared better under Kogi state. The position of Deputy Governor which they had always occupied except for the period between 2012 and 2015 would only appear to confirm their second class status.

6 Omale, et al, (2004) *The Igalas: How Many?* A publication of ICDA Action and Publicity Committee on the Census 2005. Bencaz Prints.

Deep sentiments that feed on perception of unequal access to power by groups other than the Igala political elite are shared by the Yoruba-speaking Okun people in the Kogi West senatorial District. Power shift agitation in the countdown to the 2019 governorship election is, among other groups and platforms, largely driven under a platform, Movement for Power Shift Consolidation (MPSC), comprising politicians from Kogi West and Central Senatorial Districts. It should also be noted that over the years, there has been in existence, Central and Western Senatorial District Forum, brought into existence by the need to build a united front to resist the monopolizing tendency of the Igala politicians. However, the pursuit of power shift even when the incumbent governor Yahaya Bello comes from the Central Senatorial zone would have the consequence of fragmenting a common opposition to the Igala and the opposition PDP on whole platform whose power shift agenda is to wrestle power from Yahaya Bello.

What seems to be clear, however, is a sense of a common opposition to Yahaya Bello across the three zones for different reasons. From the perspective of Igala political elite, the platform of the PDP is the most formidable in the efforts to unseat Yahaya Bello in the November 16, election, because they can tap into the anger in the zone occasioned by both the reality of loss of power and the perception of poor governance record of Yahaya Bello. There are also significant elements of the political elite from both Kogi Central and the West who believe that defeating Yahaya Bello in the next election is more realistic if the opposition PDP fields a governorship candidate from Kogi East zone.

It would appear that there was power shift undertone in the way the two major political parties contended with the organization of the party primaries that produced the flag bearers for the parties contesting the election. The period leading to the primary conducted on August 29 for the ruling APC was characterized by acrimony and contestation regarding the modality for the exercise. The source of disagreement was the calculation of aspirants largely from Kogi East within the party who feared that 'indirect primary' proposed to be adopted by the National Working Committee (NWC) was a deliberate ploy to confer advantage on Yahaya Bello. On the contrary, they indicated preference for 'direct' primary on the assumption that it could reduce the influence of 'money politics' which could be to the advantage of an incumbent. The level of ethnic anger was such that they sought to use the court to stop the party primary, an attempt that failed.

On the part of the PDP, the logic of power shift clearly informed the handling and outcome of the party primary. The overwhelming assumption is that only a strong candidate from Kogi East can garner Igala votes to defeat Yahaya Bello in the election. It was therefore that of the over ten aspirants who paid the 25 million naira to obtain the party form, only Senator Dino Melaye was the notable politicians outside Kogi East. The same logic informed the decision of seven of the aspirants from Kogi East to withdraw from the race in solidarity with the former PDP governor, Captain Idris Wada, who lost the contest to his younger brother. It is instructive to note that a pan-Igala group, Kogi East Elders Committee (KEEC), set up a Political Committee to produce consensus candidates for the two parties.

Given the emergence of Natasha Akpoti who is from Kogi Central on the platform of the SDP, it remains to be seen whether power shift agitators from both Kogi Central and West who are opposed to the candidature of Yahaya Bello will provide a rallying point. It appears too early to make useful conclusion, but the point remains that the political dynamics of power shift will play a crucial role in determining the outcome of the gubernatorial contest on November 16.



Parties and Candidates; Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses

As expected in all elections, self-proclaimed experts and crystal ball gazers have begun to make permutations about the likely winner. While crystal ball gazers make their prediction from the spiritual realm, analysts including those that are motivated by partisan considerations claim to draw insights from the complex nature of ethnic politics, incumbency factor, poor governance record of the governor and the determination of the opposition to unseat the incumbent. This section seeks to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the parties and candidates in order to give broad indications of issues that may shape the election and its outcome rather than predicting outright winner.

The incumbent governor, Yahaya Bello, who is running on the platform of the ruling APC and Engr Musa Wada who won the ticket of the opposition PDP are clearly the two leading contestants for the governorship election of November 16. Governor Yahaya Bello weathered the storm of the opposition within his party to emerge the winner following disagreement over the modality of the party primary. The manner in which he appeared to have easily emerged from among other aspirants who many consider to have the war chest to pose formidable opposition stands him in good stead. He also appears to enjoy the confidence of his party given the support he has garnered from the NWC of the party. The confidence of the party in his candidature may as well derive from the performance of the party in the February/March general election, winning in the presidential election, two of the three senatorial elections and the 25 seats in the State Assembly election. It would also seem that there is a determination to ease the ground for the sitting governor in the N30 billion⁷ naira bail out given to Kogi state to enable address challenges that may prove obstacle to his re-election.

On the other hand, the PDP candidate who is a beneficiary from the internal negotiation within

⁷ Sahara Reporters, September 7, 2019.

Kogi State that Dekina axis of the zone should produce the governorship candidate and most likely to be the rallying point in Kogi East to unseat Yahaya Bello is also a strong candidate. His ability to defeat the former PDP governor of the state, Captain Idris Wada, his senior brother may suggest that he won by striking a deal with other contestants. The general perception that he won largely because he had the financial muscle to 'purchase' the delegates could also mean that he could give the incumbent a match in terms of spending in the election. It is believed in many circles that when it matters most, he might cultivate the support of the former PDP governor of Kogi State, Alhaji Ibrahim Idris who is his father-in-law.

However, apart from being an incumbent who appears to have a grip of his party, Governor Yahaya Bello has deliberately recruited traditional rulers to support his re-election bid. Although this appears as a reflection of the breakdown of the traditional and moral order in the Nigerian society, traditional rulers in Kogi State are known to have made representation to President Muhammed Buhari to the effect that Yahaya Bello deserves a second-term on account of his performance. More recently, Governor Yahaya Bello embarked on a rapprochement with the only dissenting prominent traditional ruler, Ohinoyi of Ebira land, Alhaji Ado Ibrahim, who happened to be the paramount chief of Kogi Central. It is also strongly believed that the decision to upgrade a total of 128 traditional rulers in the state, and presenting them staff of office a few months to the election is aimed at bolstering his grassroots electoral base⁸.

Supporters of Governor Yahaya Bello have sought to present him as having performed creditably to deserve a second term. In addition to what they have presented as a check list of achievements, they present him as the only 'detrribalized' governor of Kogi State who has appointed his Chief of Staff outside his ethnic home land. This, contrary to public perception, they have listed significant public good the governor has delivered in the forms of projects such as the Omi Rice mill and Greenhouse farming as well as all three senatorial districts, Agassa road, Okene-Kuroko-Eika road, Ankpa Township road, Ejule-Idah road, Obehira-Ihima road, and many more Sura electrification projects among others.

However, the general perception that first four years have been marked by non-payment of salaries in addition to the decimation of the work force in the name of staff audit to cut down waste is a key challenge to his re-election bid. This is a very formidable weapon for the political opposition that will be used to undermine electoral support for his re-election. Although it is not yet clear how the opposition will make political capital out of this, it could prove to be his major undoing in the November 16 election. However, even if the Kogi East-led opposition succeeds in benefitting from this weakness, there is no guarantee that it can enjoy block voting from the East because of the relatively vast network of patronage and loyalty from the zone.

In other words, while ethnic mobilization will count, there are a number of intervening variables that need to be considered in determining the outcome of the election. Such variables, among others, include the role of incumbency, violence and vote buying. Against this backdrop, unless

8 The Nation Newspaper, August 28, 2019

adequate measures are taken the stakeholders to focus electioneering on policy issues and stem the tide of violence, the election may not produce an outright winner and could become inconclusive.





Combating Threats to Free Fair and Peaceful Elections

Electoral violence in all its manifold manifestations will pose a critical challenge in the November 16, governorship election. These include structural, physical and psychological forms of violence, more likely to scare away women voters from polling centres.. While violence in election may not depart from the patterns observable with political violence in general, the major concern arises from the fact that it is one element of the “menu of manipulation” that can be used to manipulate election results⁹. When the specific situation in Kogi State is considered against the general Nigerian background of patronage politics and clientelism, and how formal political institutions are superseded by informal relationships based on the exchange of resources and political loyalty, the risks of electoral violence are very high. It is therefore not out of place to suggest that ‘balance of terror’ will be a defining element of the November 16 election.

It is not surprising that there exists palpable trepidation about the role of violence in the election. A number of factor accounts for this, the least not being the history of electoral violence in all elections in the state since 1999. On the basis of the past history of electoral violence in Kogi State, the fear of unrestrained deployment of violence and resort to self-help of different types by parties and candidates is real. The rerun election in the state in November 2008 was marked by a ‘balance of terror’ between the then incumbent governor, Alhaji Ibrahim Idris, and his challenger, Alhaji Abubakar Audu¹⁰ in which the former using incumbency to advantage. Violence was massively deployed despite the massive deployment of the Army and the Police.

Indeed, an earlier TMG report on the 2007 general election specifically mentioned Kogi State

9 A. Schedler (2002) ‘The Menu of Manipulation’ *The Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2) pp 36-50.

10 Samuel Egwu, “Popular Struggles for Electoral Mandate Protection in Kogi State” in J.Ibrahim and O. Ibeanu, eds. *Popular Capture of People’s Sovereignty in the 2007 Election*, CDD Abuja (

as one of the states where the integrity of the polls was severely undermined by the high levels of violence and on that basis called for outright cancellation of the results¹¹. Two Local Governments, Idah and Ofuh, both in Kogi East, were reportedly marked by sporadic violence which resulted in the killing of police officers¹². In local governments such as Igalamela/Odoru and Dekina Local Government Area, the integrity of the polls was marred by well-coordinated violence and intimidation perpetrated by thugs of the ruling party¹³.

It is important to note as part of this entrenched culture of election-related violence in the state dating back to the 2003 general elections is a perverted reward system which ensures that thugs are rewarded with appointments into government as Special Advisers and positions of Chairmen of Local Governments. The general impression that perpetrators of electoral violence in the state are often rewarded, instead of being apprehended and prosecuted has encouraged many youths arm themselves with charms and amulets to be eligible for recruitment as thugs.

In the more recent general election conducted in February/March 2019, Kogi state took centre stage in organized violence that called into question elections into the National and state assemblies. Reports of election observers, confirmed by INEC sources pointed to occurrence of different forms of electoral malfeasance. These include reports of abduction of INEC staff, allegedly carried out by persons in fake Army and Police uniforms; sporadic shootings and snatching of ballot boxes which allegedly took place in Lokoja the state capital, under the watch of security agencies. According to Hakeem Buhari, the State Commissioner of Police, the infractions resulted in three deaths¹⁴. The high level of violence that characterized the election largely accounted for a number of inconclusive National Assembly elections and did not depart from the experience recorded in the bye-election into the Lokoja/Kogi Federal Constituency conducted in August 2018.

Early foreboding that issue of power shift could generate acrimony and violence can be traced back to 2016 when youths from Kogi East angrily reacted to the emergence of Yahaya Bello as governor in the aftermath of the death of Alhaji Abubakar Audu. The angry youths claimed they were reacting to a situation then in which Kogi Central which produced Yahaya Bello was also keeping the positions of Speaker of the State House of Assembly and Chief Justice of the state. On the other hand,, several eruptions of violence in both Kogi Central and Kogi West are linked to agitation in favour of power shift to Kogi Central and West even with Yahaya Bello as sitting governor¹⁵.

Besides the history of electoral violence in the state, there are other reasons that will make occurrence of violence real. One of them already exhaustively is the centrality of ethnic agitation

11 TMG (2007) The Votes Do not Count

12 Vanguard Newspaper, April 15, 2007.

13 Egwu, Ibid.

14 Punch Newspaper, March, 9, 2019.

15 Shola Omotola, 2007

and mobilization around power shift in whichever way it is defined. The emergence of several ethno-political groups across the state in response to this will partly provide the organizational vehicle for this purpose. There is also the problem of prevalence of insecurity across the state with concerns about kidnapping, rural banditry and proliferation of small arms and Light Weapons among several non-state actors. The problem of irregular payment of salaries in the state where public sector employment is the linchpin of livelihood can particularly provide a fertile ground for recruitment of 'private armies' to fight the November election by all the contending groups.

The prospect of violence in the election will be very high because the ethnic undertone of ongoing electioneering to achieve power shift in whatever form will be a progenitor of hate speech with direct consequence for violence. The concern with hate speech in Kogi elections is not new. A report by TMG from its pre-election observation in Kogi State in the period leading to the 2015 election established evidence of hate speech drawing on gender, origin, age, religion or physical disabilities¹⁶.

Apprehension that violence linked to hate speech could pose a problem in the state persuaded Ayodele Phillips¹⁷, the Kogi State Commandant of the NSCDC, one of the security agencies that have elicited public confidence to warn the politicians to desist from hate speech and calling for public support in the form of intelligence for the purpose of tracking and prosecuting the perpetrators.

Although it is difficult to determine the source of the violent disruption of PDP primary at the Lokoja Township Stadium after delegates had voted and counting of ballot almost completed, the invasion of the venue gives strong indication of the disruptive role of gun-wielding thugs in the forthcoming elections. Both the ruling party and opposition elements will rely on violence to gain electoral supremacy as they are already engaged in arms procurement, recruitment and training of thugs. As expected based on the experience of the past, both sides are likely to recruit thugs from the neighbouring states, especially Edo and to some extent, Delta states.

Considering the nexus between electoral violence and inconclusive elections in Nigeria's more recent electoral history, it is not surprising Kogi State was the first state where inconclusive gubernatorial election was experienced in November 2012. It is for this reason that INEC and other stakeholders need to approach the forthcoming election with a carefully designed and well implemented strategies based on lessons learned from the past elections and the early warning signs that presently exist to stem the tide of violent disruption of the process.

It is a welcome development that INEC recognizes the difficulty that Kogi elections may pose alongside the governorship election in Bayelsa that will hold on the same day and has

16 Nigeria Kogi Pre-Election Hate Speech Perpetrators (<http://www.voteswithoutviolence.org/nigeria-kogi-pre-election-hate-speech-perpetrators>)

17 John Akinfehinwa, '2019 elections: NSCDC warns Kogi politicians' *Daily Post*, January 21, 2019.

expressed the determination to launch peace advancing initiatives to improve the integrity of the elections. The Commission will be expected to launch without delay, the initiatives, factoring in lessons learnt from the post-election review that has been undertaken at different levels. The Commission has opportunity within the short time left to undertake stakeholders' engagements with the purpose of bolstering public confidence ahead of the elections. INEC's engagement with the security agencies in the areas of training and careful deployment will go a long way in creating that public confidence.

On the basis of available evidence, the vigilance of security forces and election observers whose strong presence can provide check to the behaviour of both security agencies and perpetrators of violence should focus on Kogi East and Central that are most likely to constitute the battle grounds in the election. In Kogi East, particular attention needs to be paid to Dekina, Olamoboro, Ofu and Igalamela/Odoru Local Governments. Dekina is not only the Local Government of the PDP candidate, the University town, Anyigba, appears to be a major recruitment and training ground for thugs for parties and candidates. In the last six months, politically related killings have risen dramatically as rival thug groups are involved in mutual killings. Yahaya Bello's Chief of Staff whom he has nominated as his running mate hails from Olamoboro, while Ofu and Igalamela/Odoru are known to be hotbeds of election-related violence in the state.



Money Factor: Vote Buying and Vote Selling

The election will be a litmus test for INEC's resolve to collaborate with the relevant institutions and agencies to combat the phenomenon of vote buying/selling which has been on the ascendancy since the return to civil rule in 1999. In addition to all the concerns with the negative role of money in politics including the erosion of a level playing field for all the parties and contestants, its more devastating impact is trading away the people's mandate and eroding the possibility for demanding political accountability.

All the available reports seem to suggest that the just concluded primaries by the two leading political parties was a dress rehearsal for what is to be expected in terms of vote buying and vote selling in the November 16, election. The winners of the primaries in the APC and PDP simply turned out to be the highest bidders considering the horse trading that characterized the two primaries. While Governor Yahaya Bello relied on incumbency factor, including the control of the party machinery, it is believed that money played a major role in the conduct of party primary and its outcome.

The outcome of the PDP primary brought into bolder relief the role of money in determining the eventual winner of the ticket. The party primary turned out to be a contest between the families of Ibrahim Idris and Captain Idris Wada - two former governors of Kogi state who ruled on the platform of the PDP. While Abubakar Idris who made a great show in the primary is the son of Ibrahim Idris, Captain Idris Wada and his younger brother, Engr Musa Wada, the eventual winner, come from the other family. Sources close to the party indicate that delegates were paid in foreign currencies and that the eventual winner simply out spent the other competitors.

Since the phenomenon of vote buying is predicated on the availability of willing sellers to meet

their immediate material rather than using the vote as instrument of enforcing accountability, Kogi state provides a fertile ground for it to thrive. Ordinarily, Kogi state is a “civil service state” where the public sector, especially salaries paid to civil servants provides a major source of livelihood. As earlier indicated by the state of human security conditions in the state, irregular payment of salaries which predated the emergence of Yahaya Bello as governor in 2016 has further aggravated the situation and has almost crippled the economy. In the absence of aggressive voter education and advocacy around the sanctity of the vote and mandate protection, desperate attempts by politicians to purchase votes will become relatively easy because of the likely availability of vote sellers.



Going Forward: Recommendations

The foregoing provides broad indications of the myriad of challenges that need to be addressed to make the governorship election in Kogi credible and peaceful. They include the threats of violence fostered by the ethnic undertones of electioneering and the surge of hate speech; incumbency factor and the determination of the opposition to win; the huge possibility of voter intimidation and community resistance to the use of card readers; the deleterious economic and social conditions of the people that will encourage vote buying/selling; fake news, and the ascendancy of fake news, among others.

There are three other challenges that need to be highlighted in order to develop appropriate responses. First, is the problem of inadequate voter education in the state even though it is a general concern. Voter education has limited reach outside the few urban areas and the semi-urban areas as a result of poor funding of agencies expected to engage the public. Improved voter education is needed particularly to encourage voter turnout in the light of violence that kept a significant number of voters away in the previous elections.

Secondly, there is minimal presence of civil society organizations in the state are strong in advocacy work around elections and governance, despite the existence of many civic groups that have related in response to other dynamics. This means that there is a dearth of organizations that can meaningfully undertake grassroots voter education and mobilization in the face of dysfunctional parties.

Third, is the need to mobilise communities to ensure that uncollected PVCs are distributed before November 16, election to avoid the disenfranchisement of thousands of potential voters. According to INEC source, Kogi state has a total of 170,644 uncollected PVCs. In the light of initiatives introduced by INEC to move to the ward level to incentivize PVC collection towards the 2019 general elections, it is expected that greater creativity should be introduced to ensure maximum collection of the available PVCs.

On the basis of the foregoing, the following recommendations have been put forward:

1. The Independent National Electoral Commission

INEC has a greater share in exercising leadership aimed at improving public trust and confidence as follows:

- Ensure improvement in its processes and guidelines on the basis of lessons learned from the 2019 elections, but upholding its rules and processes through greater openness and transparency.
- Hold confidence-building dialogues between the local leaders of ethnic and religious communities as a means of undercutting efforts by politicians to stoke divide for their own ends
- Leverage on its relationship with the security agencies through the platform of ICES to be able to track violence and hate speech and identify the perpetrators with the aim of making them to face the law.
- Improved oversight of the behavior of political parties in the lead up to and during elections, in the following ways: setting guidelines to complement the existing Code of Conduct for political parties on on-violence, respect for electoral rules, among others.
- Facilitate high level political dialogue that bring together senior citizens across the three zones of the state to promote a shared understanding of the need for peaceful elections including the promotion of a Peace Accord.
- Ensure early and adequate training of all categories of Ad Hoc staff, especially on the use of Smart Card Readers and completion of appropriate forms and the modality of results collation and transmission processes.

2. Political Parties and Candidates:

- Political parties and their candidates are to rein in their supporters with regard to civility and democratic conduct including non-resort to violence and other forms of self-help, and to refrain from the use of hate speech, while promoting respect for rules guiding the conduct of the election.

3. Security Agencies

The security agencies need to:

- Improve security arrangements by identifying and sanctioning politicians and groups

using inflammatory rhetoric, inciting violence or plotting to perpetrate it; ensuring order at campaign rallies.

- Factor into plans to secure Kogi governorship election, the need to block inflow of armed non-state actors (political thugs) from neighbouring states with which the state shares common borders.
- Strengthen inter-agency cooperation and protecting polling centres in a non-partisan and non-threatening manner;
- Work in synergy with INEC to ensure adequate and even deployment of security personnel across polling units and between urban and rural polling areas.
- Ensure that emergency security numbers are posted at polling units where voters can easily access and call when the need arises on Election Day.

4. Civil Society Organizations

Civil society across Nigeria should:

- Intensify civic and voter education across the state to improve awareness around PVC collection, voter turnout and the civic importance of voting and mandate protection.
- Promote peace campaign to discourage hate speech and all forms violence in all the stages of the electoral process.
- Ensure adequate mobilization of election observers, improve on their training and ensure a more balanced deployment between urban, semi-urban and rural polling units.
- Work closely with the Police Service Commission considering the leadership of the Police within the ICESS framework to monitor the activities of security agencies in the election





Conclusion

Coming on the heels of INEC's review of the 2019 general elections and reports of many domestic and international observers on the elections, the off-season governorship elections in Kogi and Bayelsa will receive deserved domestic and international attention. First, on the commitment of INEC to use the just concluded review exercise to improve on its processes and conduct in the two impending governorship elections, and, by so doing improve public confidence in the Commission. While the numerous challenges identified with the Kogi governorship election are matters of grave concerns, INEC's conduct in terms of refining its process and rules, the professionalism of its staff and living up to its bidding as a truly unbiased umpire can change the entire outcome.

It is important that stakeholders in Nigeria's electoral democracy including Nigeria's development partners focus on the elections and put pressure on INEC, political parties and candidates to conduct themselves properly are be accountable to Nigerian citizens and the general public. The civil society community working closely with civic groups and associations in Kogi are specially tasked to step up advocacy around non-violence and peaceful elections alongside voter and civic education that will contribute to improved integrity in the election.

About Situation Room

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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