

# Renewed Potential for Violence: Bayelsa Gubernatorial Elections

Briefing: October 2015

Transition of gubernatorial power has historically been fraught with violence in Bayelsa. In 2012, for instance, political tensions were high, with reported explosions at party secretariats, cultist violence targeting political aspirants, a reported assassination attempt, kidnappings, and general political thuggery. Now, in 2015, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has fixed 5th December 2015 for the Bayelsa State gubernatorial elections, and there are signs that conflict issues are emerging once again.

## Background

While the March 2015 presidential elections were relatively peaceful in Bayelsa, the next challenge will be how to maintain peace and security, as the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) warm up for an election that is likely to be keenly contested. In many ways, the results of the gubernatorial elections will be more directly significant for local constituents and ethno-political interests than the presidential contest, especially given the prominent role that political patronage plays in the state with political leaders rewarding their supporters with privileged positions in government establishments and lucrative government contracts. Bayelsa has always been a PDP state, but the emergence of the APC as the ruling party at the federal level has reduced the 16 year-long popular support enjoyed

by the PDP, and contributed to a stream of defections to APC. One leading defector includes former Governor Timipre Sylva, whose tenure was terminated by the Supreme Court two months prior to the 2012 elections. Thus, there are indications that political thugs and ex-militants may be less unified than usual in their support for a single candidate or political party. Both leading contenders, incumbent PDP Governor Seriake Dickson and APC candidate Timipre Sylva, are ethnically Ijaw (of the Izon subgroup). However, the fault lines could take on a regional dimension, as Sylva is from the Nembe axis in the South, while Dickson is from the northern Sagbama axis. Moreover, despite the fact that both candidates are Ijaw, ethnic sentiments are being politicized inasmuch as APC is being painted by some as anathema to the Ijaw cause.

## Fallout from 2015 Presidential Elections

Former President Goodluck Jonathan's loss in the March 2015 elections has deepened political hostilities among the major political stalwarts in the Niger Delta, especially between the PDP and APC in Rivers and Bayelsa States.

During the 2015 general election, the sentiment was widely held in the South-South that APC represented Nigeria's Western and Northern political blocs, leaving the many in the Niger Delta, and

## Bayelsa State, Nigeria



This briefing summarizes some of the key drivers of conflict in Bayelsa since 2009, and the trends in incidents which have the potential to renew the political violence in the lead up to the Gubernatorial elections scheduled for December 3rd 2015. It then provides recommendations for key stakeholder groups to mitigate the risks of election violence.

*Scope and Limitations: We recognize that the data collected in this project is not an exhaustive tally of all incidents of violence. However, to the extent that data are representative of the patterns and trends, findings are indicated in the report.*



## Upcoming Bayelsa Gubernatorial Elections

Bayelsa in particular, disappointed with the results. Some notable ex-militant generals have sought to inflame those grievances. Asari Dokubo in an interview with PM News on September 8, 2015 stated:

*"...the Ijaw nation will not allow Governor Henry Seriake Dickson and former President Goodluck Jonathan to be disgraced by losing the December 5 gubernatorial election to the main opposition party in the state, All Progressives Congress, APC."*

Dokubo's statement went further to reinforce the significance of the December 5, 2015 elections within the context of the Ijaw nation and pride:

*"We Ijaws don't run away from our enemies. Jonathan did a lot for all those who have turned against us. Nobody, wherever he is, can move the Ijaw nation. We've never been conquered, the British knows this fact. This fight is beyond Henry Seriake Dickson, it is beyond you and me, it is for all. He will never be disgraced on December 5. They have boasted that they have control of the Army, INEC, Police, Navy and SSS. But we will meet in the battlefield on Election Day."*

### Implications for Peace and Security

Unlike previous elections in the state, this election seems to be a real contest between the ruling PDP and the opposition APC, which has raised the stakes considerably. The emergence of the APC party flag bearer, Chief Timipre Sylva (a former Governor of the state from 2008 to 2012 under the platform of the PDP), is thought to be highly significant as he was one of the founding members of the PDP in Bayelsa, and has been able to garner a large support base in the state of erstwhile PDP supporters. Allegedly, he also has the support of various ex-militant generals, many of whom enjoyed his patronage during his tenure as Governor under the PDP and not a few of whom hail from his LGA, Nembe. Since 2010, former militant generals, such as these, have been seen to play a more involved role in determining who emerges in the key political positions in the state.

Meanwhile, in September 2015, after months of speculation, former President Goodluck Jonathan threw his weight behind Governor Seriake Dickson of the ruling PDP in a public show of support and camaraderie. This public support helped to close the ranks of disgruntled politicians who had previously expressed discontent over what they reportedly perceived as the high handedness of the Dickson administration.

Since June 2015, there has been increased insecurity in the state, including abductions and killings, prompting the state government to declare in July after a security meeting that they had uncovered plans by the opposition to recruit unrepentant cultists to unleash mayhem. Shortly afterwards, on August 7, 2015, unknown gun men attacked a Joint Task Force (JTF) military base in Nembe, killing four soldiers and a mobile policeman (MOPOL) in the process. In the midst of these incidents, both political parties have been locked in a blame game concerning

### Bayelsa Event Timeline

#### 2009

- ⇒ Amnesty Programme announced for demobilization of militants in Niger Delta

#### 2009-2011

- ⇒ Violence between MEND and security forces in Bayelsa, with attacks on oil infrastructure resulting in fatalities in Yenagoa, Nembe, Ijaw South and Brass
- ⇒ Former MEND leader alleges that oil spills in Ijaw South have contributed to the deaths of as many as 30 children, as reported in the Daily Trust.

#### 2012

- ⇒ Election related violence including political kidnappings and bombings during the gubernatorial election period
- ⇒ Governor Timipre Sylva's tenure is terminated by Supreme Court on January 27
- ⇒ PDP candidate Henry Dickson is elected as Governor on February 14

#### 2013

- ⇒ Thousands of cult group members meet with political leaders to renounce criminality on June 5

#### 2014

- ⇒ Former Governor Sylva defects from PDP to APC
- ⇒ Election related violence increases lead up to 2015 Presidential race

#### 2015

- ⇒ Spikes of violence including, piracy, abductions, shootings, and cultist recruitment by political groups.
- ⇒ Gunmen attack JTF base in Nembe killing several in August.
- ⇒ Ex-Militant General Ogunboss declares ex-militants are not for hire by politicians for in gubernatorial run-up
- ⇒ Former President Goodluck Jonathan and his wife endorse Governor Dickson at the launch of his re-election campaign on September 8
- ⇒ Ex-Militant Asari Dokubo links support for PDP in the Gubernatorial elections with the wider Ijaw cause as reported in PM News.

who is responsible for these attacks.

Bayelsa State was pivotal during the pre-Amnesty armed struggle in the Niger Delta region. Presently, the state boasts of over 30 ex-militant generals that had hitherto operated within its territories. In the past, ex-militant generals have not shied away from using threats to give their preferred candidates an advantage in the political race, as reported recently in a January 25, 2015 Daily Trust article, and some have played key roles in the election of particular candidates. This situation has raised fears concerning the roles the ex-militant generals and their ‘boys’ would play as it concerns peace and security during the 2015 gubernatorial elections. However, in an August 23, 2015 interview with the Sahara Reporters, prominent ex-militant, General Ogunboss declared that the ex-militant leaders and youths from the existing eight Local Government Councils of the State were not for hire to politicians plotting to perpetuate violence ahead of the December Governorship election. Nevertheless, the fact they have been ready tools in the hands of politicians in the past gives enough room for concern about the roles they could play in the coming elections.

### Reported Issues of Insecurity in 2015 by Local Government Area

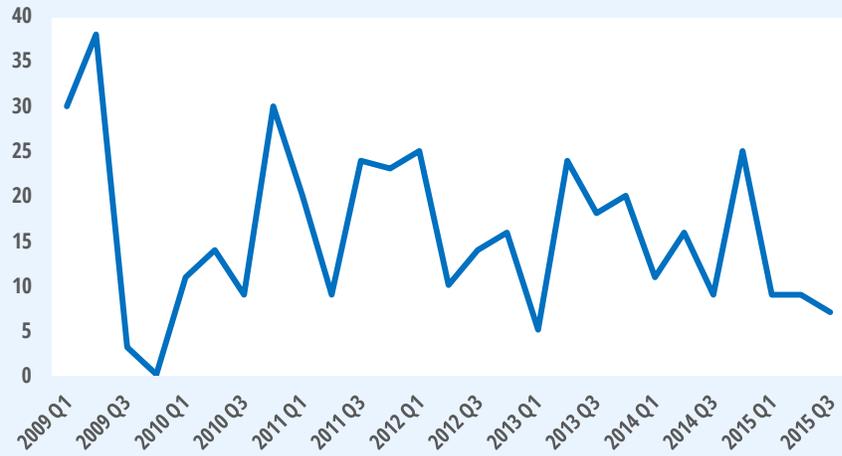
**Brass**

- Attacks by Sea Pirates
- Abductions (including that of five party “chieftains”).
- Political Tension During Federal Election
- Communal Violence
- Cult Violence
- Gang Violence

**Ekeremor**

- Communal Violence
- Youth Restiveness
- Political Tension During Federal Elections

### Quarterly Reported Fatalities due to Violence in Bayelsa



Trend shows quarterly fatalities in Bayelsa related to violence has been declining since the Amnesty Program in 2009. Peaks have continued over the past six years, however, with reported fatalities increasing recently in the lead up to the Presidential elections during 2014 and 2015. Data source: Nigeria Watch [www.nigeriawatch.org](http://www.nigeriawatch.org)

**Kolokuma/Opokuma**

- Intra-Communal Tensions Over Pipeline Surveillance Contracts
- Inter-Communal Tensions
- Destruction of Campaign Materials During Federal Election
- Intra-Party Tensions

**Nembe**

- Inter-Party Tensions
- Political Thuggery; Clashes During Federal Election
- Clashes Between Militants and Police
- Clashes Between Cultists and Police
- Clashes Between Sea Pirates and Military

**Ogbia**

- Abductions (including that of an LGA chairman and two ex-patriate workers).
- Protests

**Sagbama**

- Intra-Communal Clash Over Traditional Stool
- Inter-Party Clash During Federal Election

**Southern Ijaw**

- Attacks by Sea Pirates
- Clash Between Cult Groups
- Inter-Party Hate Speech and Violence
- Restive Youths
- Abduction (including that of an oil worker and a deputy paramount ruler, and three women)

**Yenagoa**

- Abductions (including that of the wife of a former governor, a traditional ruler, a monarch, a political aid to the governor, and one other woman who was kidnapped by men in a speedboat)
- Cult Clash
- Protests
- Clash Between Ex-Militant and Police
- Attack on Ex-Militant
- Inter-Communal Clash over Land

These issues were reported in on the online Peace Map ([www.p4p-nigerdelta.org](http://www.p4p-nigerdelta.org)) and the IPDU SMS Early Warning Platform.

## Recommendations

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The analysis outlined in this bulletin provides the impetus for the following recommendations to mitigate the risks of violence in the lead up to the Bayelsa gubernatorial elections.

### To the Political Parties

1. Refrain from deploying violent means to intimidate opponents and to win the elections. History has shown that when parties use violence during elections, the effects of that violence spills over well beyond that election period and manifests in form of kidnappings, robberies, etc.
2. Restrain supporters from engaging in violence as a means to air grievances. Also let the major candidates make public statements denouncing violence before, during and after the elections. It is important to follow in the footsteps of Former President Goodluck Jonathan as he willingly conceded after the Presidential election results were announced in March 2015.
3. Denounce inflammatory/hate speech.

### To the Media

1. Support local and national media efforts to monitor, document, and report inflammatory rhetoric through social media and traditional media.
2. Increase voter education and non-violent messaging, in partnership with civil society.
3. Increase public discussions around non-violence

### To the Security Agencies

1. Exhibit professionalism and neutrality in curbing violence during this period.
2. Make clear to all political parties in the state that violence and inflammatory/hate speech will not be tolerated and ensure that offenders are prosecuted without recourse to partiality.

### To the Ex- Militant Generals

1. Rally each other to ensure that they aren't used for political violence by politicians. Having ensured a relative peace in the region for over five years, it is important that their good work is not undone as a result of infighting between their groups during the elections.