ELECTION SECURITY THREATS ASSESSMENT FOR BAYELSA STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Election Security Threats Assessment (ESTA) report explores election risk factors in the 2019 Bayelsa governorship election with a view to identifying early warning signals that could assist relevant stakeholders in devising and deploying appropriate responses. Data for the study were collected using the Election Violence Mitigation and Advocacy Tool (EMVAT), to elicit information from 408 respondents (general public and experts) across the state. Analyses were analyzed descriptively and interpretatively using tables, frequency distribution and simple percentages.

The study identified a number of election risk factors which, in their order of rating by the respondents, include : a) corruption among INEC officials (95.2%); b) political interference in the work of INEC (94.2%); c) the presence of strong opposition (93.6%); d) inadequate training and conduct of party agents (91.3%); e) adherence to process and procedures (90.4%); f) proliferation of small arms and light weapons (89.8%); g) inadequate training and conduct of security agents (88.2%); and i) abuse of power of incumbency (88.2%). Others include exclusion and discrimination against the youth (85.3%); INEC's information management (81.3%), confused electoral laws (79.9%); exclusion and discrimination against the elderly (76.9%); widespread availability and use of hard drugs (76.2%); the activities of troublesome politicians, political parties, leaders and candidates (74.6%), the participation of illegal immigrants in the election (74.3%); and the use of hate speech (71.8%).

The two most critical actors whose actions and/or inactions could pose some security threats were identified as religious extremists/cultists/armed groups (72.8%); and security agencies (70.1%).Others with lesser degree of threats include vigilante groups (69.1%), party thugs (66.2%), insurgents (62.8) and political parties (60.1%). At the lower rung of the ladder are INEC (55.4%), the judiciary (51.7%), media (50.5%) pan-ethic associations (49.5%) traditional institutions (46.8%); and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) at 37.8%.

The potential for violence for each of these actors are located in different domains. For political parties, the three most critical risk factors includea) lack of transparency and disagreement over selection of party officials and candidates (78.2%); b) influence of money and godfathers (76.8%); c); lack of respect for electoral laws and party rules (74.5%).For INEC, they are a) the partiality of INEC officials (78.4%); b) problems associated with the distribution, location and adequacy of poling units and voting points (73.0%); and c) problems associated with the movement and distribution of election materials (69.1%). With respect to security agencies, they are a) aggressive and excessive use of force (81.9%); b) poor training and low professionalism by security agents (81.9%); c) partiality of security agents (77.7%); d) low sense of safety among the public (75.7%); e) inadequacy or excessive presence of security agents (75.0%); f) lack of synergy among security agencies (74.5%); g) lack of synergy between INEC and security agencies (73.5%); and h) problems associated with the deployment of security agents (72.3%). For the media, they include a) broadcasting and publishing of hate speech (75.2%); b) sensationalism and provocation (72.8%); c) abuse of social media (72.6%); d) failure of regulatory bodies to ensure adherence to

established rules by the media (71.1%); e) partisanship, favouritism and partiality (71.1%). For the judiciary, the main factors are a) corruption and integrity of the judiciary (73.7%); b) poor capacity (69.1%); c) conflicting and contradicting court decisions (68.4%).

Overall, the outlook for a peaceful election was generally impressive. However, there are variations across the 8 LGAs. The study found high prospects of a very peaceful election in three (3) LGAs: Kolokuma, Ogbia and Sagbama; moderately peaceful election in three other LGAs: Ekeremo, Southern Ijaw and Yenegoa; and violent election in two LGAs: Brass and Nembe (see Table 3).

In the light of the foregoing, key actors in the electoral processes particularly INEC, political parties, security agents, mass media and CSOs need to pay increasing attention to the identified risk factors with a view to tackling them headlong. This demands short, medium and long terms interventions that will address the roots of the highlighted contradictions in a sequential manner. Specifically, the following recommendations are considered pertinent:

➢ There is need for all stakeholders, particularly INEC, political parties, security agencies, mass media and CSOs to intensify political education and sensitization of citizens about the need to eschew all forms of violence in the elections.
➢ Effective regulation of the mass media not just to ensure compliance with established rules and standards, but also ensure enforcement of penalties when such rules and standards are violated, especially with respect to equality of access for all parties and candidates to state-own media outlets, as well as the broadcasting and/or publishing of hate speech.
➢ Greater attention should be paid to the training, welfare and professionalism of security agents in providing election security. Issues of logistics, timeliness and adequacy of deployment are of critical significance. Election security is different from and cannot be handled with conventional security approaches.
➢ Election security goes beyond security agents. For it to be effective there must be collaboration with other stakeholders especially INEC, political parties and CSOs. Synergy among these agencies should be cultivated and sustained.
➢ Special engagement with young people by stakeholders is critical.
➢ Prompt responses to the early warning signs identified in this report should be seen as a priority by appropriate authorities.
➢ Above all else, INEC should intensify its inter-agency collaborations at all levels in the state.

INTRODUCTION

The people of Bayelsa state will go to the polls on 16 November, 2019 in a gubernatorial election to elect a governor that will govern the state for the next four years. From all indications, the election promises to be one of the most keenly contested in the state under the fourth republic. The potential for violence is also exemplified by a number of recent developments. Above all else, the presence of election risk factors, most notably a history of electoral violence, cultism, militancy, kidnapping, contentious party primaries and candidate selection, intra-party conflict and fractionalization symbolized by a gale of defections, unhealthy inter-party rivalry, widespread resort to hate speeches and abuse of social media, among others, attests to this possibility.

This places huge responsibility on all electoral stakeholders, notably the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, security agencies, mass media and others in the administration of the election. The way these agencies comport themselves could help to salvage the situation or exacerbate it. This Election Security Threats Assessment (ESTA) report explores potential election security threats in the general election with a view to identifying early warning signals that could assist relevant stakeholders in devising and deploying appropriate responses.

The analysis is important for a number of reasons. Apart from its relevance to policy and advocacy, it also has the prospects of fostering the effectiveness of the administration of the governorship election. Lessons learnt from the processes can also be helpful in redrawing the map for future elections.
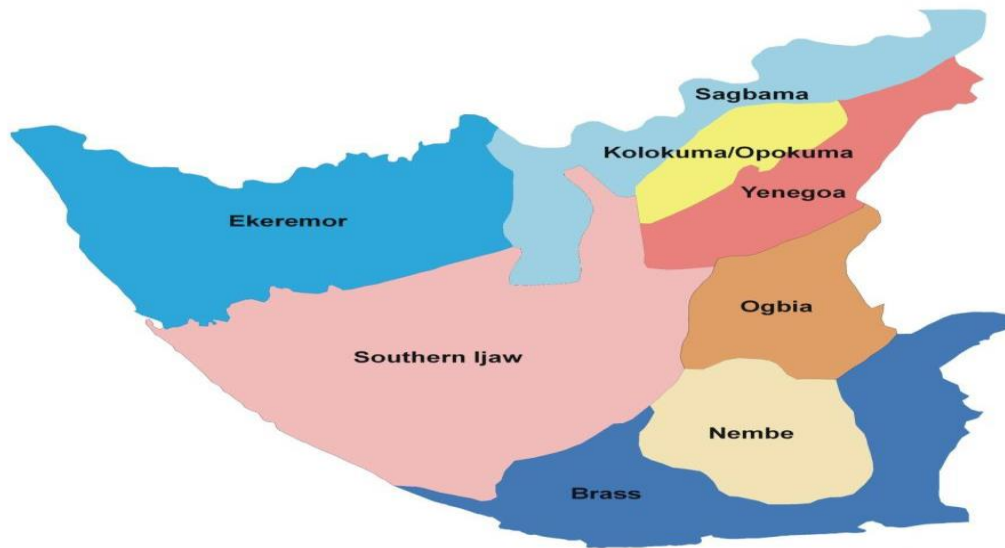
A BRIEF PROFILE OF BAYELSA STATE

Bayelsa state falls under what is today known as the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Created out of the old Rivers state on 1 October 1996 with its capital in Yenegoa, it is bordered on the west by Rivers State, on the East and South by the Atlantic Ocean and on the North by Delta State.

Originally with three Local Government Areas (LGAs) under Rivers state, namely Brass, Yenegoa and Sagbama, Bayelsa state now has eight LGAs spread across three Senatorial Districts. These are Bayelsa East, which contains Brass, Nembe and Ogbia; Bayelsa Central consisting of Kolokuma/Opokuma, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa; and Bayelsa West, which consist of Ekeremor and Sagbama. With a population of 1,704,515 based on the 2006 population census, the state occupies 10,773 square kilometres of land.[1]

Fig. 1: Map showing Bayelsa state and its LGAs[2]

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[1]https://www.legit.ng/1200389-history-bayelsa-state-interesting-facts-know.html
[2] See the link: https://convafresh.com/bayelsa/

The economy of the state Bayelsa State is largely dependent on rents from the vast deposits of crude oil and natural gas. Unfortunately, this would appear not to have adequately transformed the economy of the state for the better. Until now, the majority of people of the state, who are mostly rural dwellers, still live in poverty. Apart from oil and gas, as well as civil service, many of the rural dwellers engage in fishing, essentially on subsistence basis. Pollution of the natural environment has taken substantial tolls on the economy of the state, especially in the farming and fishing departments.

The state has a history of violence, which manifests in diverse forms. These include militancy, kidnapping, cult violence, Inter-Communal cum land Conflicts, piracy and attacks on energy infrastructure, among others[3]. This tendency would appear to have permeated the political spheres in times of elections.

In terms of politics, the state has constantly been governed by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) since 1999. In that respect, it may be right to say that PDP has been the dominant party in the state. But this is not to suggest that it has always been an easy ride for the party. Opposition parties, especially the All Progressive Congress (APC) has always presented itself as a strong alternative, especially since the 2015 general election, but more so in 2019.

After the party primaries and candidate selections across parties, many still expect that these two leading parties strand the best chance of producing the governor of the state.However, it is important to note that 43 political parties have been cleared by INEC to contest the election. This

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[3] See, 'Nigeria Conflict Bulletin: Bayelsa State', Fund for Peace, available at http://fundforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/conflictbulletin-bayelsa-1508.pdf (accessed on 8 October, 2019.

was following the disqualification of six parties for fielding underage candidates.[4] Since the end of the party primaries, there have been tensions in diverse respects, including defections, accusations and counter-accusations between the two leading political parties in the state. While the PDP is in power at the state level, the APC controls power at the centre. As the election approaches, conversations have continued around the use and/or misuse of power of incumbency across the leading political parties.

Methodology
The study adopted descriptive survey method of research, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Data collection employs the method of triangulation, involving a combination of several methods in the collection of data. Primary data were collected through the use of (pre-election) Election Violence Mitigation and Advocacy Tool (EMVAT), to elicit information from the general public and experts in elections and election-related violence in the state. This was complemented with data sourced from documented and online sources.Data collected were analyzed descriptively and interpretatively using tables,frequency distribution and simple percentages.

A total of 600 questionnaires were administered on purposively selected respondents out of which408valid cases were analysed. The breakdown shows that at the aggregate level, 281 (68.9%), 127 (31.1%) represent the general public and the experts respectively. This was evenly spread across the eight (8) LGAs of the state. Adequate attention was also paid to the urban and rural dimensions of the settlements. The gender dimension of respondents is impressive with 273 (66.9%) male and 135 (33.1%) female.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A. Factors likely to Cause Violence in the Election

Despite the hugely impressive positive outlook of a peaceful election, the study found that there were a number of election risks factors that could trigger violence during the governorship election in the state if not mitigated. Such factors, in their order of rating by the respondents, include a) Exclusion and Discrimination against the youth (85.3%); b) confused electoral laws (79.9%); c) exclusion and discrimination against the elderly (76.9%); d) widespread availability and use of hard drugs (76.2%); e) the activities of troublesome politicians, political parties, leaders and candidates (74.6%), the participation of illegal immigrants in the election (74.3%); and f) the use of hate speech (71.8%). These are the most critical factors that could trigger violence in the governorship election, each with an aggregate score of above 70%.

Other electoral risk factors identified include disaffection with government (66.9%), exclusion and discrimination against various groups, most notably ethnic minorities (63.5%), people with disability (60.8%), sexuality (60.5%) and religious groups (58.8%). The lowest ranked factors in this category include history of electoral violence (58.4%) and inter-ethnic/religious/communal conflicts (54.5%).

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[4] Chuks Okocha, 'INEC Releases Lists of Qualified Candidates in Kogi, Bayelsa Elections', *Thisday*, 28 September 2019; available athttps://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/09/28/inec-releases-lists-of-qualified-candidates-in-kogi-bayelsa-elections/ (accessed on 9 October, 2019).

B. Actors likely to cause Electoral violence in each state

The roles of some actors were also found to be critical to the peacefulness or otherwise of the election. In their order of magnitude, the two most critical actors identified as posing some risks of violence to the election are a) Religious extremists/cultists/armed groups (72.8%); and b) security agencies (70.1%) with a score above 70%.

Others with identified with moderate potential of causing violence in the election include vigilante (69.1%), party thugs (66.2%), insurgents (62.8) and political parties (60.1%). At the lower rung of the ladder are INEC (55.4%), the judiciary (51.7%), media (50.5%) pan-ethic associations (49.5%) and traditional institutions (46.8%). The lowest ranked actors here are Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) at 37.8%.

The study also highlighted the specific risk factors associated with each of these key actors. They are as follows:

Political Parties: The risk factors identified in their order of significanceare: a) lack of transparency and disagreement over selection of party officials and candidates (78.2%); b) influence of money and godfathers (76.8%); c); lack of respect for electoral laws and party rules (74.5%); d) problems associated with the distribution of PVCs (65.9%); e) defection and carpet crossing (63.5%); f) disorderly party rallies. Procession and meetings (63.4%); g) lack of training and corruption of party agents (63.0%); h) problems associated with continuous voter registration (CVR) (61.0%); and 1) problems associated with underage registration (55.9%).

INEC: For INEC, the most pertinent risk factors identified by the study in their order of significance include: a) the partiality of INEC officials (78.4%); b) problems associated with the distribution, location and adequacy of poling units and voting points (73.0%); c) problems associated with the movement and distribution of election materials (69.1%); d) failure to prosecute electoral offenders (67.1%); e) quality of electoral officials (65.7%); f) substitution of trained electoral officials (64.9%); g) poor voter education (63.5%); and h) INEC's overall preparation for the election (63.0%).

Security Agencies: Security agencies emerged as the actor with the highest level of threats to the election. The most influential risk factors identified here, also in their order of importance, include: a) aggressive and excessive use of force (81.9%); b) poor training and low professionalism by security agents (81.9%); c) partiality of security agents (77.7%); d) low sense of safety among the public (75.7%); e) inadequacy or excessive presence of security agents (75.0%); f) lack of synergy among security agencies (74.5%); g) lack of synergy between INEC and security agencies (73.5%); h) problems associated with the deployment of security agents (72.3%); and i) problems associated with the welfare of security agents (64.5%). Evidently, all the identified risk factors but one ranked above 70%. This shows that special attention must be paid to the roles and activities of security agents throughout the electoral cycle.

The Judiciary: Regarding the judiciary, major sources of risks identified by the study include: a) corruption and integrity of the judiciary (73.7%); b) poor capacity (69.1%); c) conflicting and

contradicting court decisions (68.4%); d) partiality of the judiciary (63.5%); e) delay in the handling of pre-election cases (53.7%).With these ratings, the judiciary would appear to be the actor with the lowest risk to the governorship election.

The Media: With respect to the media, major issues highlighted in their order of significance include: a) broadcasting and publishing of hate speech (75.2%); b) sensationalism and provocation (72.8%); c) abuse of social media (72.6%); d) failure of regulatory bodies to ensure adherence to established rules by the media (71.1%); e) partisanship, favouritism and partiality (71.1%); f) misinformation (68.9%); and g) unequal access to media (67.1%). From these findings, the media also pose some measure of risks to the governorship election. It is arguably the next to security agents in terms of the weight ascribed to the risk factors.

C. Other Critical Electoral Risk Factors in Bayelsa State

The analysis also revealed some other critical electoral risk factors in the state based on the understanding of experts drawing across the academics, security agencies, mass media, etc. These factors include the following in their order of ranking: a) corruption among INEC officials (95.2%); b) political interference in the work of INEC (94.2%); c) the presence of strong opposition (93.6%); d) inadequate training and conduct of party agents (91.3%); e) adherence to process and procedures (90.4%); f) proliferation of small arms and light weapons (89.8%); g) inadequate training and conduct of security agents (88.2%); and i) abuse of power of incumbency (88.2%).

Other factors include INEC's information management (81.3%), relationships among federal, state and local governments (76.1%), legislative-executive relations at federal level (71.9%), involvement of informal political groups (66.1%), funding of elections (62.9%), problems associated with the recruitment and payment of election workers/adhoc staff (55.9%), reliability of election equipments (55.5%), and foreign interests and interference, including election observers (55.3%).All the risk factors were almost equally rated across the right (8) LGAs of the state.

D. Overall Outlook of the Election

The outlook for a peaceful election was generally impressive. Specifically, 332 (81.4%) of the respondents across the state expected the election to be peaceful. However, 48 (11.7%) of the respondents expected the election to go the other way round. The other 28 (6.9%) were undecided. When further interrogated about the expectation of the election, most of the respondents maintained their earlier position in terms of expectation of a peaceful election, though with a slight drop in the level of expectations of a peaceful election. Specifically, 265 (64.9%) expected the election to either be 'peaceful' or 'very peaceful'. However, 48 (12.0%) of the respondents expected the election to be violent. The remaining 94 (23%) were undecided. This shows some reasonable measure of consistency in the patter of responses to the first and the last questions on the survey instrument. Based on this popular perception, the Bayelsa governorship election should be largely peaceful.

Table 1: Expectation of a peaceful election in the state (%)

	Positive	Negative	Undecided
Question 1: Do you agree that election in this area will be peaceful?	81.4	11.7	6.9
Question 69: On the whole, how do you think that this election will go?	64.9	12	23
Variation (Q69-Q1)	-16.5	0.3	16.1

As Table one (1) indicates, some measure of consistency is noticeable. The decline in the expectations of peaceful election expressed in question 69 is expected. At that point, respondents had gone through all the questions and would have had their expectations mediated by the contents and substance of the intervening questions.

There were, however, discrepancies across the eight (8) LGAs of the state. With respect to the first question, expectations of a peaceful elections was rated over 70% in six (6) of the LGAs, with only Brass and Ekeremo standing at 61% and 57.5% respectively. However, the positive ranking fluctuated up and down with respect to Q69. Specifically, level of expectations remain positive in above 70% rating in five (5) of the LGAs, namely Ekeremo, Kolokuma, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and Yenegoa. While a downward trend was noticeable across these five LGAs, Ekeremo was exceptional, rising from 57.5% to 72.7%. Again, the decline in Nembe is too sharp, falling from 90.6% in Q1 to 36% in Q69.

Table 2: Expectation of a peaceful election by LGAs (%)

| LGAs	Question 1(positive)	Question 69 (positive)
Brass	61	61
Ekeremo	57.5	72.7
Kolokuma	100	94.7
Nembe	90.6	36
Ogbia	95.1	52.5
Sagbama	100	77.8
Souther Ijaw	74	70.3
Yenegoa	78.8	72.7

However, the data in Table 2 above do not tell the full story. It is important to balance it with the other side of the story, showing the negative dimension of the responses.

Table 3: Expectations of a Violent Election by LGAs (%)

LGAs	Q1	Q69	Risk Level Status(Average of Q1 & Q69) Key: 0-9%(Green), 10-19%(Amber), 20% and above(Red)
Brass	21.8	18.8	20.3
Ekeremo	24.2	3.0	13.6
Kolokuma	0	1.8	0.9
Nembe	6.3	34.4	20.4
Ogbia	0	4.9	2.5
Sagbama	0	0	0
Southern Ijaw	24.1	9.3	16.7
Yenegoa	12.2	7.6	9.9

As can be gleaned from Table 3, the data suggests the prospects of a very peaceful election in three (3) LGAs. These are Kolokuma, Ogbia and Sagbama; moderately peaceful election with risks of violence in three other LGAs. These are Ekeremo, Southern Ijaw and Yenegoa; and violent election in two LGAs, namely Brass and Nembe.

Overall, the data above suggest the prospects of a peaceful election in two LGAs of the state. The six others tend to portray a worryingly low level of expectations of a peaceful election especially Brass andNembe on the edge. They deserve greater attentions.
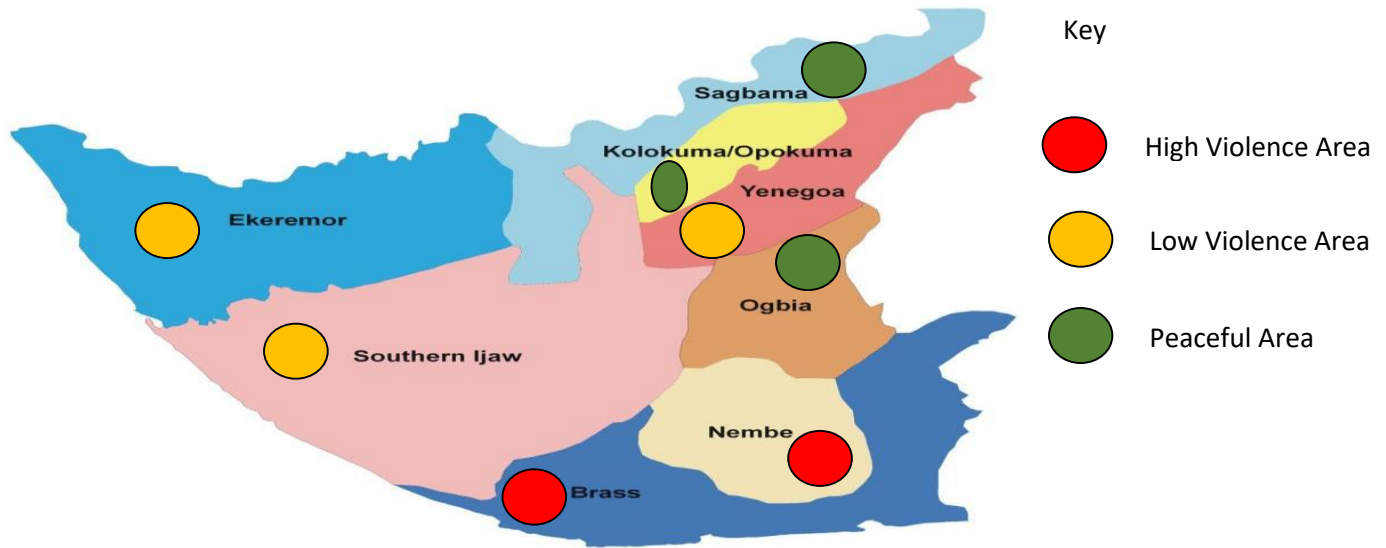
Policy and programmatic implications of findings

The study underscores some salient points. These include, but not limited to:
1. The expectations of peaceful elections in the state seem relatively high. In fact, the electoral outlook for the states looks generally positive, but much more pronounced in the identified two LGAs: Kolokuma and Sagbama.
2. Despite the positive outlook epitomized by the high optimism for peaceful elections, various electoral risk factors with varying weights and prospects of violence were discernible. This suggests that expectations may not always equate reality. By logical extension, such expectations needs to be mediated my paying adequate attention to other key findings of the ESTA.
3. Many factors were found to constitute security threats that could trigger violence during the elections. Such factors are located in the role/activities of key players. Most especially security agents, mass media, INEC, political parties and other environmental factors. Unless these actors operate in line with established rules and standards, the tendency to become democratic liabilities that will undermine the electoral processes is very high.
4. Of these actors, security agents and the mass media emerged as the most critical and should be so treated.
5. While security agents are at the heart of election security, the same way INEC is the engine room of election administration; such tasks require collaboration with other stakeholders,

including synergy between INEC and security agents; and between these bodies and other stakeholders such as political parties and CSOs.

6. The widespread availability and use of drugs, presence and activities of irregular forces such as insurgents, religious extremists, cultists, kidnappers and other armed groups, confusing electoral laws and troublesome politicians were also found, though in varying capacities, to be among the factor that could cause electoral violence in the state.

7. Aggressive and excessive use of force, poor training and low professionalism, as well partiality of security agents; low sense of safety among the people, broadcasting and publishing of hate speech, as well as money and godfatherism, among others, were found to be critical issues (in fact most significant of the risk factors) that could cause electoral violence in the state.

8. The degree of risks/threats associated with these actors/issues does not vary significantly across the eight LGAs..

In the light of the foregoing, key actors in the electoral processes particularly INEC, political parties, security agents, mass media and CSOs need to pay increasing attention to the identified risk factors with a view to tackling them headlong. This demands short, medium and long terms interventions that will address the roots of the highlighted contradictions in a sequential manner.

Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing findings, the following recommendations are considered pertinent. These are:

➢ There is need for all stakeholders, particularly INEC, political parties, mass media and CSOs to intensify political education and sensitization of citizens about the need to eschew all forms of violence in the elections.

➢ Effective regulation of the mass media not just to ensure compliance with established rules and standards, but also ensure enforcement of penalties when such rules and standards are violated, especially with respect to equality of access for all parties and candidates to state-own media outlets, as well as the broadcasting and/or publishing of hate speech.

➢ Greater attention should be paid to the training, welfare and professionalism of security agents in providing election security. Issues of logistics, timeliness and adequacy of deployment are of critical significance. Election security is different from and cannot be handled with conventional security approaches.

➢ Election security goes beyond security agents. For it to be effective there must be collaboration with other stakeholders especially INEC, political parties and CSOs. Synergy among these agencies should be cultivated and sustained.

➢ Special engagement with young people by stakeholders is critical.

➢ Prompt responses to the early warning signs identified in this report should be seen as a priority by appropriate authorities.

➢ Above all else, INEC should intensify its inter-agency collaborations at all levels in the state.

Conclusion

This report undertook an assessment of the election security environment in Bayelsa state. It specifically explored the prospects or otherwise of peaceful election in the state, drawing insights from election risks factors that could negatively impact election security and cause electoral violence. As the report reveals, there was a high expectation of a peaceful election across the states, with variations across LGAs. However, many factors and actors were identified as constituting potential risk factors to the peacefulness of the elections. While these were universal across states, there were variations, most notably in degree, not of kind, across LGAs. The factors and forces have been highlighted in this report and appropriate recommendations offered. Stakeholders need to respond to the issues raised in this report ahead of the next governorship election in the state.