THE ELECTORAL HUB




# POLITICAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS:
## 2023 BAYELSA STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

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## 2023 BAYELSA STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

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**About The Electoral Hub**

The Electoral Hub, an affiliate of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), is a knowledge and advocacy hub which seeks to provide solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. It is committed to promoting electoral knowledge, integrity, and accountability in Nigeria. Our aim is to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through the provision of critical and contextualized process. We believe that the integrity of the electoral process is crucial in improving electoral governance and sustaining democracy in Nigeria. We also believe in solutions rooted in the principles of justice and equity.

Our core values are knowledge-exchange, inclusion, justice, equity, transparency and accountability.

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# Executive Summary

**Background**

The upcoming Bayelsa governorship election scheduled for November 11, 2023, marks the seventh governorship contest in the state since the return to civilian rule in 1999. This election follows the 2023 general elections, which took place on February 25 and March 18, 2023. The incumbent governor, Douye Diri, is seeking re-election, making this election critical for determining the state's leadership continuity. The election also offers an opportunity to apply the Electoral Act of 2022 and enhances the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) institutional capabilities and electoral integrity.

This analysis by The Electoral Hub provides insights into the legal, sociopolitical, and institutional factors capable of impacting the 2023 governorship election in Bayelsa State. It covers major players, interest groups, the Election Management Body (EMB), and the electoral system. The analysis also highlights threats, obstacles, and internal and external forces affecting the credibility of the electoral process. It serves as a guide for stakeholders, offering an understanding of power distribution, actor interests, formal and informal rules, and their contributions to the integrity of the 2023 off-cycle election. The analysis aims to promote electoral knowledge, accountability, and integrity in Bayelsa's political context.

**Legal Framework**

The governorship election in Bayelsa State will be regulated by the body of laws guarding electoral conduct in Nigeria. The legal framework for Nigerian elections includes the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, the Electoral Act 2022, and INEC's Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022. The Constitution sets the foundation for governance, emphasizing free and fair elections and providing jurisdiction for election disputes. The Electoral Act regulates numerous aspects of the electoral process, introducing reforms to enhance transparency and integrity, such as technology use and result transparency. INEC's regulations and guidelines ensure fairness and integrity in voter registration, political party participation, and campaign finance. Additionally, related laws like the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, Child Rights Act (CRA), and Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act play crucial roles in addressing issues like political violence, underage voting, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in elections.

## Electoral Background

Bayelsa State has a distinctive electoral structure consisting of 8 Local Government Areas (LGAs), 105 Registration Areas/Electoral Wards, and three senatorial districts. The state also comprises nine federal constituencies, facilitating representation in the House of Representatives. At the state level, it has 24 constituencies in the State House of Assembly. Bayelsa State boasts 1,056,862 registered voters and 2,244 Polling Units, with recent expansions for enhanced accessibility. The state being a component unit of the Nigerian federal state, is a tier of government with a Governor, Speaker, and Chief Judge as key officials. Governorship elections are decided by a simple majority with a requirement of 25% of the votes in two-thirds of the state's LGAs.

## Geography

Bayelsa State is located in Nigeria's South-South region, was established in 1996, covers around 21,100 square kilometers, and is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Rivers State, and Delta State. The state is culturally diverse, with the Ijaw as the dominant ethnic group. Its topography features wetlands, mangroves, and the Niger River. Bayelsa experiences a humid tropical climate with significant rainfall and a dry season. The state is an oil and gas hub, producing 18-20% of Nigeria's oil. Agriculture includes fishing and crop cultivation, but it needs development. The state is rich in oil and minerals. Flooding is a recurring issue, with major floods in 2012, 2018, and 2022, posing challenges, including potential impacts on the 2023 governorship elections.

## Bayelsa State Electorate

Bayelsa State's population is estimated at 2,537,400 in 2022, with diverse ethnic backgrounds like Izon, Nembe, and Ogbia. The majority rely on agriculture, mainly fishing and farming, with strong family bonds. The state shows progress in education, with a 73.9% literacy rate. However, economic challenges persist, as the poverty rate was 22.6% in 2018/2019, reflecting income inequality and the need for focused development. Families are close-knit, and women play essential roles. The state has a significant number of out-of-school children, emphasizing the necessity for improved education. Bayelsa State hosts several tertiary institutions, fostering intellectual and educational growth, with potential ad-hoc staff for INEC during elections.

## Political Environment

The 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election is part of three off-cycle elections happening on November 11, 2023. It became an off-cycle election due to a legal dispute in 2007 when a court-ordered a fresh election after the initial governor's election. The state's political

landscape has been historically dominated by the PDP, with the APC gaining influence in 2015. Electoral violence is a concern, given the state's history of political violence. Recent incidents during the State House of Assembly Elections and in Opu Nembe raised alarms. Low voter turnout in the 2023 Presidential election is a concern, as Bayelsa State reported only 16% turnout.

Resource control and allocation have been recurring themes in Bayelsa's politics, with leaders advocating for a fair share of oil revenue. The state is contested by 16 parties, with the PDP and APC as the major players. Key candidates hail from different regions of the state. There have been notable defections between parties, particularly from the PDP to the APC. Despite internal factionalism, the APC has also seen shifts in loyalty. The Labour Party, initially gaining support during the 2023 general election, has faced a decline, marked by key defections.

**Political Parties**

There are 16 political parties are contesting the Bayelsa State governorship election on November 11, 2023. The dominant parties are the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which has traditionally held power, and the All Progressives Congress (APC), the main opposition. The PDP has won most state and national seats, and the current governor is from the PDP. The APC pulled more votes in the 2019 governorship contest, but the election result was nullified, resulting in the PDP retaining the status of the ruling party in the state. Other parties, such as APGA and the Labour Party, also have a presence in the state as evidenced by its presence in the state House of Assembly.

**Inclusion and Representation**

The Bayelsa State governorship election lacks adequate representation for women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PWDs). Only two of the 16 governorship candidates were female. For the deputy governorship candidate position, there were also only two females. There were only two youths (under 35) aspiring for a governorship position and only one youth deputy governorship candidate. There was no person with disability as either a governorship or deputy governorship candidate. This falls short of the ideal gender and youth inclusivity practice.

**Political and Socio-cultural Stakeholders**

Prominent political figures in Bayelsa State include former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck E. Jonathan, the PDP governorship candidate and incumbent governor, Douye Diri, the APC governorship candidate, Timipre Sylva, and influential figures like Hon. Seriake Dickson, Heinekken Lokpobiri, and David Lyon

Perewonrimi. Various senators, representatives, and former officeholders also hold significant influence in the state's politics.

Socio-cultural actors in Bayelsa State consist of traditional rulers such as King Bubaraye Dakolo, King Alfred P. Diete-Spiff, and King Godwin Igodo, amongst others, who play vital roles in preserving the region's cultural heritage and governance. These figures collectively contribute to the political and socio-cultural landscape of Bayelsa State.

**Civil Society Actors**

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are actively involved in the 2023 elections and the off-cycle elections in Bayelsa State. In preparation for the election, The Electoral Hub offered recommendations to improve ad-hoc staff performance. They also engage in disseminating election-related information to improve the integrity of the process. The Centre for Democracy and Development conducted fact-check training to combat misinformation in Bayelsa State.

Yiaga Africa, a leading CSO, produced a report on emerging political and security trends and runs the #WatchingTheVote initiative for citizen-led election observation. FIDA Nigeria partnered with the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives to empower community leaders and address violence against women in elections. A coalition of 25 CSOs called for caution among political parties and highlighted security concerns in Bayelsa State. Additionally, the FACE Initiative expressed concerns about the Independent National Electoral Commission's reluctance to conduct Continuous Voter Registration in Bayelsa State before the November 11, 2023 governorship selection. These CSOs play a vital role in enhancing the electoral process and democratic principles in Bayelsa State.

**(In)security and Violence**

Security concerns are a major challenge in the lead-up to the 2023 off-cycle elections in Bayelsa State, as indicated by reports and warnings from various sources, including Yiaga Africa, INEC, and researchers. There have already been signs of political confrontations and clashes between rival parties and candidates. Bayelsa State has a history of political violence, and recent incidents, such as violence during the State House of Assembly Elections in March 2023 and an outbreak of violence in Opu Nembe in August 2023, have raised concerns about potential violence during the upcoming elections. Despite relative stability, the state faces security issues related to cultism, sea piracy, and militancy, which could impact the electoral process. The participation of ex-militant combatants in the elections is also a concern. Urgent steps are needed from stakeholders, political actors, security agencies, and INEC to address these security challenges and ensure the safety of lives, properties, and election materials.

**Efforts at Mitigating Violence**

To ensure a peaceful election in Bayelsa State, electoral stakeholders have engaged in discussions and community mobilization. INEC met with the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) in July 2023, emphasizing the need for security agencies to act against violence and maintain impartiality. INEC has worked with security agencies to create a secure environment for credible elections. The Commission has also engaged with political parties to promote decorum and caution among its followers. Sam Olumekun, the INEC National Commissioner, reiterated the commitment to working with security agencies for a peaceful election.

**Role of INEC**

INEC, responsible for conducting elections, will oversee the 2023 off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo states. Activities include voter registration, using the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System, increasing polling units, and engaging with stakeholders. INEC conducted meetings with political parties' leaders and security agencies, releasing media accreditation guidelines and opening a portal for ad hoc staff recruitment. Other activities include publishing election notices, party monitoring, accrediting journalists and election observers, registering party agents, and hiring and training ad hoc staff for the elections.

**Conclusion**

The 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship Election is a crucial event shaping the state's future. It's the seventh such election since 1999 and an opportunity to strengthen electoral processes. Insights from the 2023 general elections and the dynamic political landscape with 16 competing parties, including the ruling PDP and opposition APC, are significant. Engagement with community stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations is vital for a peaceful election.

# Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| A | Accord Party |
| AAC | African Action Congress |
| ADC | African Democratic Congress |
| ADP | Action Democratic Party APC All Progressives Congress |
| AG | Action Group |
| APGA | All Progressive Grand Alliance |
| APM | Allied Peoples Movement |
| APP | Action People Party |
| BVAS | Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System |
| CCD | Centre for Citizens with Disability |
| CDD | Centre for Democracy and Development |
| CSOs | Civil Society Organizations |
| CVR | Continuous Voter Registration |
| FC | Federal Constituency |
| FCT | Federal Capital Territory |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GNI | Gross National Income |
| HDI | Human Development Indice |
| ICCES | Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security |
| INEC | Independent National Electoral Commission |
| IRIAD | Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development |
| LGA | Local Government Area |
| LP | Labour Party |
| NBS | National Bureau of Statistics |
| NCDC | Nigeria Centre for Disease Control |
| NCNC | National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons |
| NPC | Northern People's Congress |
| NiMet | Nigerian Meteorological Agency |
| NIHSA | Nigerian Hydrological Services Agency |
| NNPP | New Nigeria Peoples Party |
| NRM | National Rescue Movement |
| NWTF | Nigerian Women Trust Fund |
| PCA | Political Context Analysis |
| PCC | Presidential Campaign Council |
| PDP | Peoples Democratic Party |
| PLAC | Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre |
| PRP | Peoples Redemption Party |
| PU | Polling Unit |
| PVCs | Permanent Voter Cards |
| PWDs | Persons with Disabilities |

| | |
|---|---|
| RA | Registration Area |
| RECs | Resident Electoral Commission |
| SC | State Constituency |
| SCR | Smart Card Readers |
| SD | Senatorial District |
| SDP | Social Democratic Party |
| TEH | The Electoral Hub |
| WIPF | Women in Politics Forum |
| YPP | Young Progressives Party |
| ZLP | Zenith Labour Party |

# Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Context

The upcoming Bayelsa governorship election is set to take place on November 11, 2023. During this election, the people of Bayelsa will choose its governor and deputy governor for a four-year term. This will mark the seventh election held in the state since the return to civilian rule in 1999. Previous elections were held in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. It is worth noting that this governorship election follows the 2023 general elections, which included the presidential and National Assembly Elections held on February 25, 2023, as well as the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly Elections held on March 18, 2023. It is worth noting that the Bayelsa State governorship election is an off-cycle contest as it falls outside the period for general country-wide elections in Nigeria. As we prepare for the Bayelsa governorship election, it's crucial to take the lessons learned from the 2023 general elections and implement measures to enhance electoral governance and integrity.

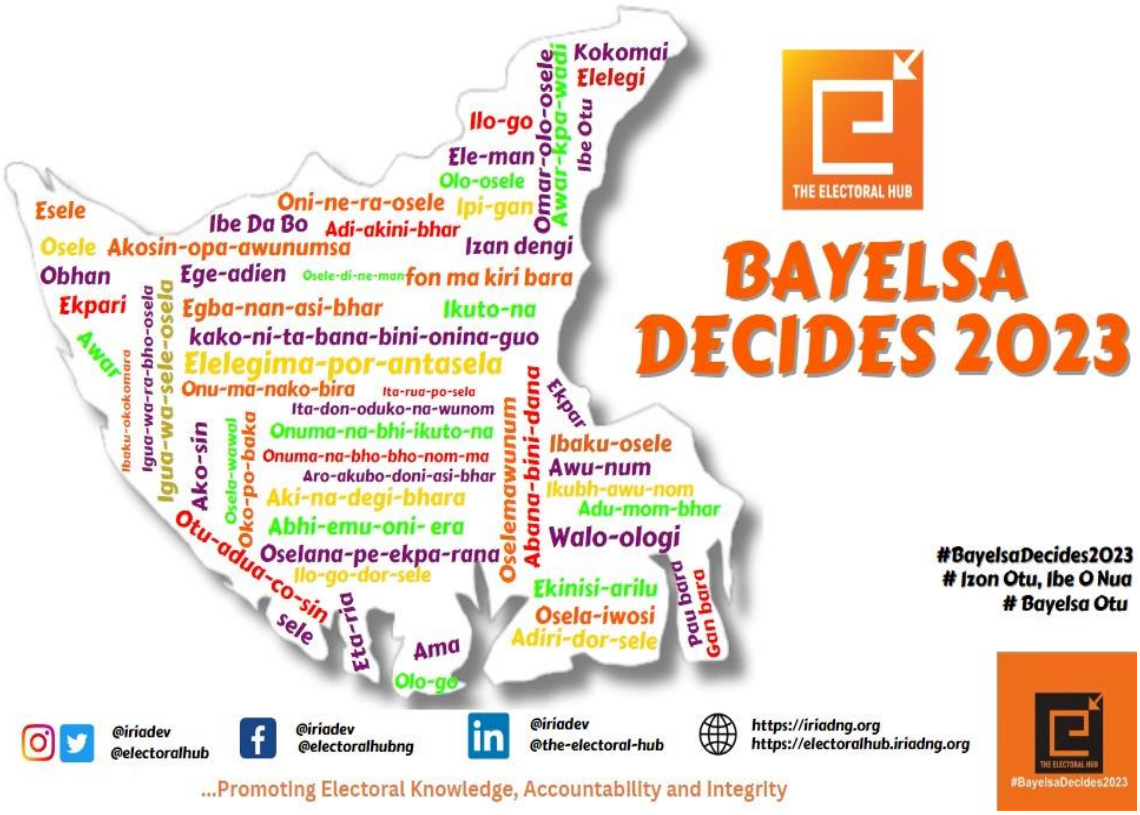
The incumbent governor, Douye Diri, is completing his first term in office. His bid for a second tenure makes the election critical for determining if there would be a continuity of the incumbent in office or if there would be a shift in power in Bayelsa State. It also provides an opportunity to apply the Electoral Act of 2022, strengthen the institutional capabilities of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and bolster Nigeria's electoral integrity and credibility. Via the 2023 off-cycle election in Bayelsa State, INEC would be provided with an opportunity to improve on the performance of the technology deployed for elections in the 2023 general elections - the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal. The election also provides electoral duty-bearers with an opportunity to contribute meaningfully toward improved electoral conduct in Nigeria, focusing on Bayelsa State.

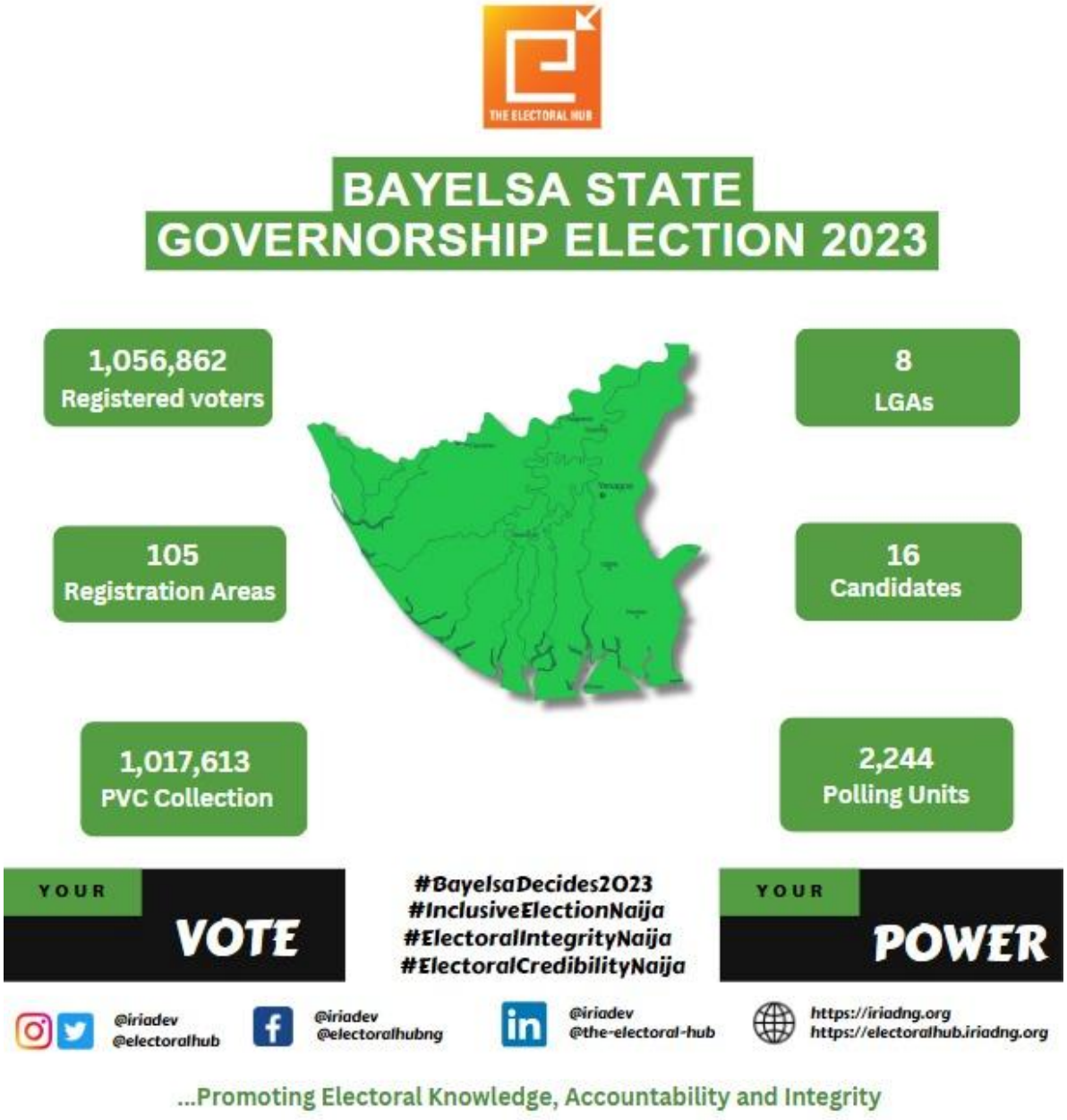
As a precursor to the elections slated for November 11, 2023, The Electoral Hub, in line with its mission of promoting electoral knowledge, accountability, and integrity has produced this Political Context Analysis (PCA), a Pre-Election Analysis to help stakeholders understand the contexts and dynamics in which the 2023 general election will be conducted.

## 1.2 Task and Method

This analysis lays out an overview of the legal, sociopolitical, and institutional factors capable of affecting the election, along with information on the major players and interest

groups that shape election-related events, the Election Management Body, and the electoral system. Threats and obstacles to a credible process are also discussed, as are internal and external forces that can help safeguard and reinforce the integrity and credibility of the electoral process. This analysis is based on unbiased research into past election trends, current political and social dynamics in the state, as well as the electorate's and political observers' perceptions of the election. This analysis should serve as a stakeholder's guide to the distribution of power, the range and interests of the various actors, the formal and informal rules that govern the electoral process, and how all these can contribute to the integrity of the 2023 off-cycle election.




THE ELECTORAL HUB
BAYELSA STATE
GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION 2023
1,056,862
Registered voters
8
LGAs
105
Registration Areas
16
Candidates
1,017,613
PVC Collection
2,244
Polling Units
YOUR
VOTE
#BayelsaDecides2023
#InclusiveElectionNaija
#ElectoralIntegrityNaija
#ElectoralCredibilityNaija
YOUR
POWER
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# Constitutional and Legal Framework

Elections are typically regulated by laws that specify what is permissible or not in the process, ensuring that citizens and stakeholders have a clear knowledge of the activities and processes involved in the election but not the outcome. The Nigerian state's electoral legal framework consists of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), the Electoral Act of 2022, and INEC's Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022. The laws in these legislative frameworks control the conduct of elections throughout the country, making them extremely relevant to the 2023 off-cycle elections in Bayelsa State.

## 2.1 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN)

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria serves as the highest legal authority in the country. It outlines the fundamental rules and structure of how the nation is governed, detailing the roles and responsibilities of various government institutions and specifying the rights and obligations of Nigerian citizens. When it comes to elections, the Constitution provides the basic guidelines for handling legal matters related to the voting process. It grants the National Assembly the power to create laws that define the procedures and penalties for election-related offences, with the goal of ensuring a fair election process and upholding democratic principles.

The Constitution underscores the importance of free and fair elections as a cornerstone of democracy. Sections 33 to 43 of the 1999 Constitution, which outline the fundamental rights of citizens, implicitly highlight citizens' rights to participate in leadership decisions without undue influence or coercion, as seen in electoral offences. Additionally, Sections 106, 107, 131, and 177, among others, specify the conditions for qualification or disqualification for holding executive or legislative positions at the federal and state levels, directly related to electoral matters. Similarly, Section 239(1) establishes the jurisdiction of the election petition court (Appeal Court) to resolve presidential election disputes, and Section 285 establishes election petition tribunals for various elections in the country, further emphasizing the crucial role of the Constitution in regulating electoral conduct.

Furthermore, the provisions in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which prohibit any association from campaigning for a candidate at an election other than a political party (Section 221) and restrict political parties from owning or receiving funds or assets from outside Nigeria (Section 225(3)), demonstrate the pivotal role of the Constitution in governing the electoral process and shaping best practices in electoral conduct in the country.

## 2.2 Electoral Act 2022

In Nigeria, the Electoral Act plays a vital role as a legal tool for overseeing nearly every aspect of electoral behavior and guaranteeing the integrity of the process. It sets forth rules and guidelines that govern the entire electoral procedure, from voter registration to the announcement of results. The 2022 Electoral Act replaced the 2010 version and includes provisions for regulating Federal, State, and Area Council elections. It also authorizes the use of card readers and other technological devices in elections and political party primaries, establishes deadlines for candidate lists, specifies criteria for candidate substitutions, imposes limits on campaign expenses, and deals with issues like the omission of candidate names or party logos.

Additionally, the Act comprehensively addresses electoral offenses, treating them as mostly criminal acts with appropriate penalties. Part VII (Sections 114 – 129) of the 2022 Electoral Act provides a detailed list of electoral offenses and the corresponding punitive measures. These offenses cover various behaviors, such as document forgery, multiple voting, impersonation, and vote buying. The Act takes a strong stance against such activities to protect the fairness of elections and uphold the nation's democratic principles. The Act's electoral offenses are designed to prevent actions that could undermine the public's will and compromise the credibility of elections in the country. Offenses like disseminating false information, engaging in violence or intimidation, and manipulating election results are not only discouraged but also carry penalties for those involved. The Act underscores the importance of peaceful and transparent elections by deterring individuals from engaging in misconduct that could disrupt the electoral process or manipulate its outcomes. By clearly defining these offenses and consequences, the Act plays a critical role in ensuring that elections in Nigeria are conducted fairly and in line with democratic values.

Furthermore, the Electoral Act emphasizes the significance of accountability and responsibility in the electoral process. It places the responsibility not only on voters and candidates to uphold the law but also on election officials and stakeholders to administer the process with honesty and impartiality. This comprehensive approach ensures that all aspects of the electoral process are closely monitored and regulated, minimizing the potential for wrongdoing. The Act is a vital tool in Nigeria's efforts to promote credible elections, protect the people's right to freely choose its leaders, and maintain citizens' trust in the democratic system.

The 2022 Electoral Act introduces reforms and innovations in the electoral process, aiming to enhance transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and the overall integrity of the electoral system. Below are some of its key provisions:

**Table 1: Key Provisions in the Electoral Act, 2022**

| S/N | SECTION | PROVISION |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | Section 3(3) | Early release of INEC's funds |
| **2** | Section 8(5) | Political neutrality of INEC Staff |
| **3** | Section 9 (6) | End of Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) |
| **4** | Section 16 | Possession of one valid PVC by each voter |
| **5** | Section 24 (3) | Suspension of election on security grounds |
| **6** | Section 28 | Notice of election 360 days to election |
| **7** | Section 29 (1) | Early conduct of Party Primaries |
| **8** | Section 34 | Substitution of candidates who dies during election |
| **9** | Section 37 | Contested election of candidate nomination (validity of nomination) |
| **10** | Section 47 (2) | The legalization of electronic accreditation of voters |
| **11** | Section 50 | Allows INEC to determine the mode of results transmission |
| **12** | Section 51 | Redefined Over-voting focuses on the number of accredited voters |
| **13** | Section 54(2) | Inclusion of Persons with Disability |
| **14** | Section 65 | Gives INEC Powers to review results declared under duress |
| **15** | Section 75(1) | Registration of parties terminates 12months before the general election |
| **16** | Section 81(2) | Notice of merger of parties 9months to the general election |
| **17** | Section 84 (12) | Resignation of political appointees before they can participate in primaries as voters and candidates |
| **18** | Section 94 (1) | Extension of the period of campaigns to 150 days before 24 hours to the election |
| **19** | Section 96 | Campaigns by political parties ends 24 hours to the election |

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub[1]

The off-cycle elections in Bayelsa State offers a chance to observe and evaluate the implementation of the Electoral Act, 2022. There are several noteworthy provisions in the

[1] See the Electoral Landscape since the Assent of the Electoral Act 2022. www.electoralhub.iriad.org/blog/

Electoral Act that serve as indicators of improvements in the electoral process, which should be taken into account by those monitoring and observing the proceedings. These according to The Electoral Hub[2] include:

1. **Use of Electoral Technologies:** The Electoral Act empowers INEC to deploy technology into the electoral process in the areas of accreditation, voting and transmission of results. Some of the innovations include the use of the Bi-modal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) and other technological devices for voter accreditation and transmission of results. See Sections 47(2), 60(5) Electoral Act, 2022

2. **Result Visualization Portal:** The new Electoral Act empowers INEC to deploy technologies and innovations in result transmission. The Commission has, therefore, established a Result Visualization Portal – the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) – and deployed it for electoral conduct during the Ekiti and Osun governorship elections. The 2023 general election, however, raised questions on how well this technological innovation would fare given the broad area to be covered by the contest (the entire Nigerian state). This is particularly important because the expansion from a state-level application to a country-wide deployment threw up unforeseen circumstances as was evident in difficulties in upload of results to the IReV portal. The question of whether or not, there be differences or improvements in the result visualization practice after the 2023 general elections, therefore, stands paramount.

3. **Voting by Open Secret Ballot:** The secrecy of the ballot is a universal electoral integrity norm and standard. This is aptly covered by Section 50 (1) which states that "voting shall be by open secret ballot". Proper implementation and compliance with this section will go to a large extent in curbing the major electoral offence of vote trading (buying and selling) at the PU.

4. **Transmission of Results:** Whether transmission of results will be done electronically and what methods would be used in line with provisions of Section 50 that allows INEC to determine the mode of results transmission. Are we going to see results in Excel formats etc.?

[2] The Electoral Hub (2023). *Electoral Accountability Matters: An Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Election.* https://electoralhub.org/publications/post-election-analysis/the-electoral-hub-2023-general-election-analysis/

5. **Overvoting:** Section 51 redefinition and clarification on overvoting to focus on the number of accredited voters and not the number in the register of voters. How will this be done by the presiding officers taking into consideration issues of adequate training and knowledge about this Section.

6. **Inclusion of PWD:** Section 54(2) compels INEC to provide assistive devices to PWDs at the polling units. How well will poll officials comply with this requirement? Particularly looking at issues of competence of poll officials.

7. **Gender Equity and Inclusion:** Section 54(2) also compels INEC to assist special needs and vulnerable persons at the PUs. The elderly, pregnant and nursing mothers fall within this group. They would require quick action at PUs so special attention would include them being attended to before others. This will encourage and promote gender equity and inclusion in the electoral process. Inclusivity is an important measure of electoral integrity and democratic progress.

8. **Dispute during Result Collation:** Section 64 provides for how results collation disputes are to be addressed and resolved.

9. **Powers to Review Results Declared under Duress:** Section 65 provides for a seven-day duration for INEC review of declaration and return made involuntarily and contrary to the law. This clause if not properly monitored can be deployed by desperate politicians who may try to manipulate the result collation process by compelling a false declaration at the different collation points.

10. **Electoral Offences and Offenders:** In line with the new legal provisions, does INEC have a developed plan and/or strategy for preventing electoral offences? Will INEC prosecute more election offenders than before? What are some of the methods INEC seeks to explore to make this possible? How does INEC plan to prosecute electoral offenders? Part VII (Sections 114-129).

## 2.3 INEC Regulations and Guidelines

The INEC regulations and guidelines are a set of rules and procedures created by INEC, the Nigerian electoral management body, to govern various aspects of the electoral process. They are meant to ensure fairness, transparency, and integrity in elections. These regulations cover areas like voter registration, political party participation, campaign

financing, election procedures, and result declaration. INEC has recently issued guidelines for electoral conduct in 2019 and 2022.

In preparation for the 2023 general elections, INEC updated the 2019 regulations and guidelines in 2022 and put them into use. The document, titled "Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022," addresses matters related to election processes, accreditation and voting procedures, result collation, and other aspects, including electoral operations during health emergencies like COVID-19. These guidelines will also be applied in off-cycle elections in Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi States.

## 2.4 Other Related Laws and Policies

In addition to the preceding elections in Nigeria, Bayelsa State inclusive, are regulated by a number of other legislations. For example, INEC's COVID-19 policy for elections remains in effect despite the Federal Government's relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, continuing to mandate measures like facemask use and maintaining a two-meter social distance for voters on election day. The Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, enacted in 2015, plays a crucial role in addressing various forms of violence, particularly against women and vulnerable groups, covering physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, while also emphasizing the protection of all individuals. This Act pertains directly to electoral violence, with provisions relating to injury, coercion, property destruction, intimidation, and political violence, making it essential for regulating electoral offenses. The Child Rights Act (CRA), enacted in 2003, provides comprehensive protection for children's rights, including a specific prohibition on involving children in activities that constitute offenses, such as underage voting, which is a common electoral offense in Nigeria. Furthermore, the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (2019), known as the Disability Act, promotes the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities, ensuring their priority in queues and encouraging their active participation in politics and public life, rendering it pertinent to electoral discussions in Nigeria.

# Bayelsa Electoral Background

## 3.1 Electoral Delimitation

Bayelsa State is located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The state is divided into 8 Local Government Areas (LGAs), each serving as an administrative unit responsible for the local affairs of its residents. Further down, Bayelsa State is divided into 105 Registration Areas/Electoral Wards[3]. These wards are fundamental in the electoral process, as they serve as the basis for organizing and conducting elections, ensuring that the voices of the people are adequately represented. The state is also divided into three senatorial districts: the Western Senatorial District, Central Senatorial District, and Eastern Senatorial District. These senatorial districts play a vital role in the representation of the state at the federal level, with each district electing a senator to the Nigerian National Assembly. This distribution ensures that Bayelsa's interests and concerns are voiced at the federal level, in line with the principles of federalism.

Bayelsa State has five federal constituencies, each with its own unique characteristics. These constituencies include Brass/Nembe, Ogbia, Sagbama/Ekeremor, Southern Ijaw, and Yenagoa/Kolokuna/Opokuma. The presence of these federal constituencies is crucial in the composition of the House of Representatives, which is part of Nigeria's federal legislative structure. This allows for representation at the national level and ensures that Bayelsa's concerns are addressed at the federal level.

At the state level, Bayelsa State has 24 state constituencies, each represented in the State House of Assembly. The State House of Assembly is responsible for making and enacting state laws, ensuring that the state's unique challenges and aspirations are reflected in local governance. These state constituencies serve as the foundation for grassroots representation and policy formulation, ensuring that the state's diverse population is adequately catered for in state matters.

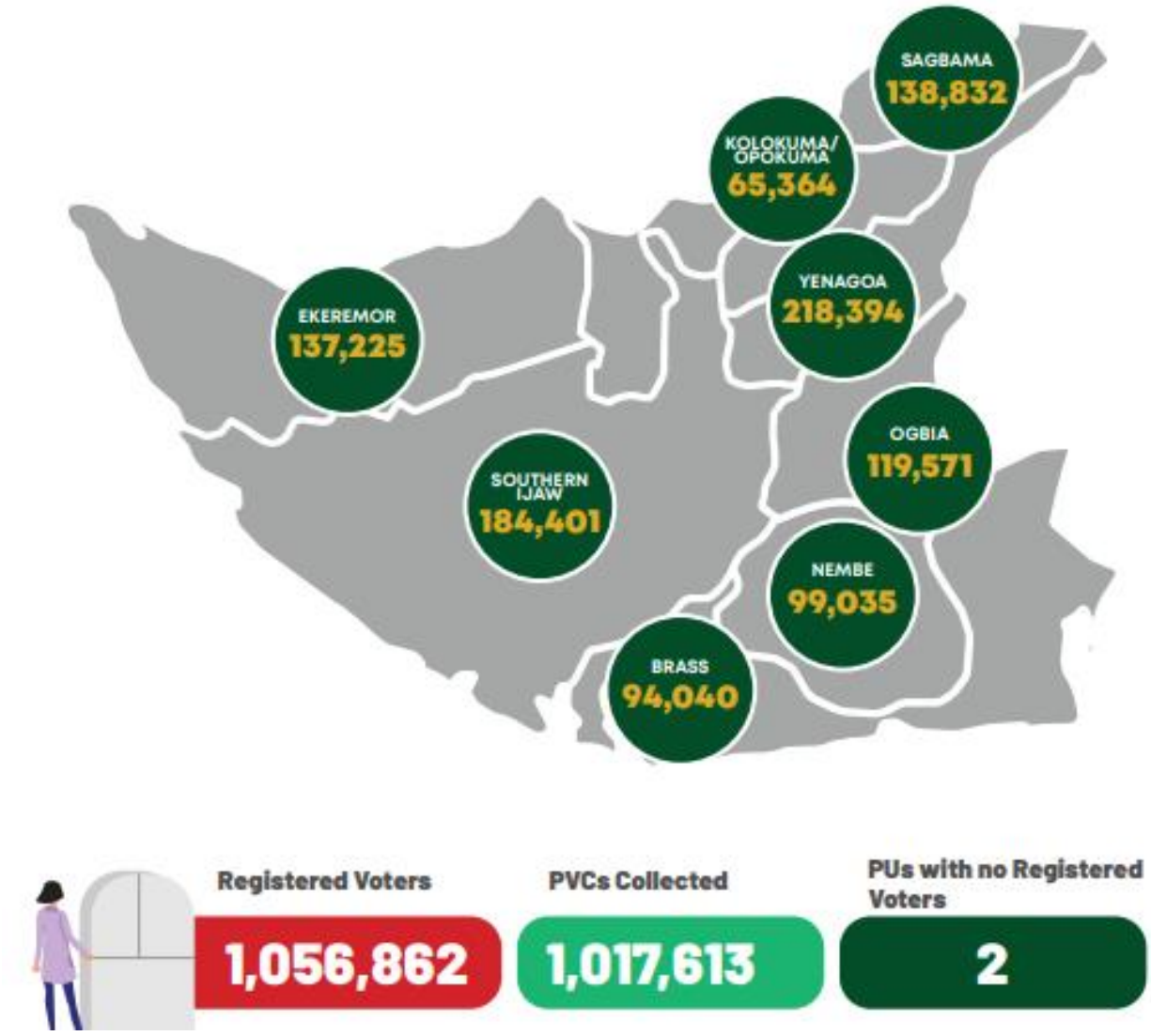
In terms of demography, Bayelsa State has 1,056,862 registered voters[4]. The state also has a total of 2,244 Polling Units, an increase from the previous 1,804 Polling Units. This expansion is a result of converting some Voting Points into full-fledged Polling Units, making the electoral process more accessible and convenient for the residents of Bayelsa State.

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[3] INEC. (2023). Information Booklet on the Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DELIMITATION-DATA-FOR-BAYELSA-IMO-KOGI-ELECTION.pdf; https://www.eduweb.com.ng/bayelsa-state-lga-wards-and-polling-unit/, https://www.shineyoureye.org/places/state-constituency

[4] Ibid

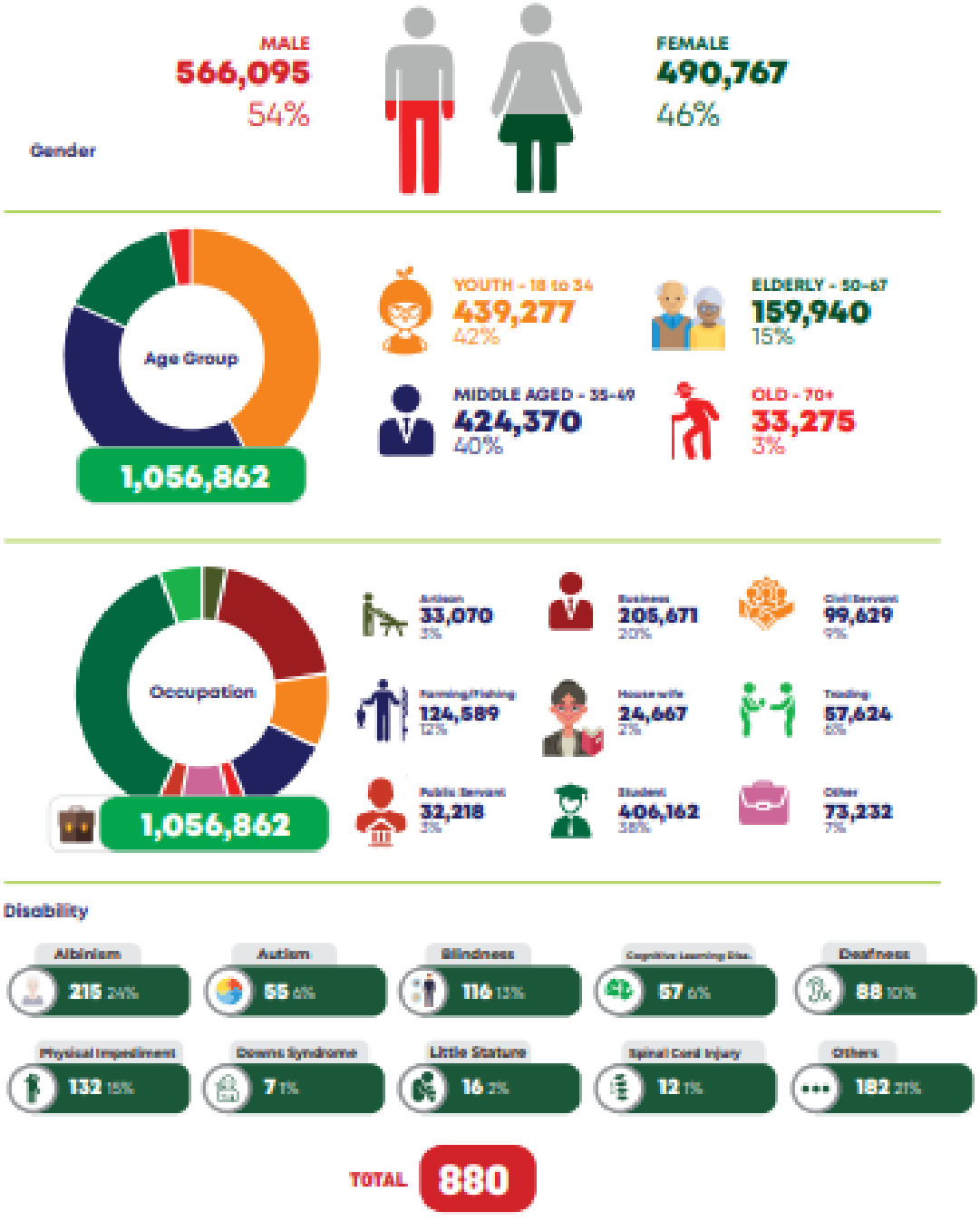
## Number of Registered Voters by LGA




**Source:** INEC[5]

[5] INEC. (2023). Information Booklet on the Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DELIMITATION-DATA-FOR-BAYELSA-IMO-KOGI-ELECTION.pdf; https://www.eduweb.com.ng/bayelsa-state-lga-wards-and-polling-unit/, https://www.shineyoureye.org/places/state-constituency

## Number of Registered Voters by Categories




**Source:** INEC[6]

[6] INEC. (2023). Information Booklet on the Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DELIMITATION-DATA-FOR-BAYELSA-IMO-KOGI-ELECTION.pdf; https://www.eduweb.com.ng/bayelsa-state-lga-wards-and-polling-unit/, https://www.shineyoureye.org/places/state-constituency

## Table 2: Electoral Delimitation of Bayelsa State

| Sen. District | Federal Const. | State Const. | LGA | HQ | RA/ Ward | PUs | Voters |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Bayelsa East** | Brass, Nembe | Brass I<br>Brass II<br>Brass III | Brass | Twon-Brass | 10 | 172 | 94,040 |
| | | Nembe I<br>Nembe II<br>Nembe III | Nembe | Nembe | 13 | 228 | 99,035 |
| | Ogbia | Ogbia I<br>Ogbia II<br>Ogbia III | Ogbia | Ogbia | 13 | 301 | 119,571 |
| **Total** | 2 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 36 | 701 | 312,646 |
| **Bayelsa West** | Sagbama, Ekeremor | Sagbama I<br>Sagbama II<br>Sagbama III | Sagbama | Sagbama | 14 | 224 | 138,832 |
| | | Ekeremor I<br>Ekeremor II<br>Ekeremor III | Ekeremor | Ekeremor | 12 | 258 | 137,225 |
| **Total** | 1 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 26 | 482 | 276,057 |
| **Bayelsa Central** | Southern Ijaw | Southern Ijaw I<br>Southern Ijaw II<br>Southern Ijaw III<br>Southern Ijaw IV | Southern Ijaw | Oporoma | 17 | 466 | 184,401 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yenagoa, Kolokuma/Opokuma | Yenagoa I<br>Yenagoa II<br>Yenagoa III | Yenagoa | Yenagoa | 15 | 427 | 218,394 |
| | | Kolokuma/ Opokuma I<br>Kolokuma/ Opokuma II | Kolokuma/ Opokuma | Kaiama | 11 | 148 | 65,364 |
| **Total** | 2 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 43 | 1041 | 468,159 |
| **Grand Total** | **5** | **24** | **9** | **9** | **105** | **2224** | **1,056,862** |

**Source:** Compiled by The Electoral Hub[7]

[7] From INEC. (2023). Information Booklet on the Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DELIMITATION-DATA-FOR-BAYELSA-IMO-KOGI-ELECTION.pdf; https://www.eduweb.com.ng/bayelsa-state-lga-wards-and-polling-unit/, https://www.shineyoureye.org/places/state-constituency

## Table 3: Bayelsa State Electoral Delimitation

| | |
|---|---|
| **Number of LGAs** | 8 |
| **Number of RAs** | 105 |
| **Number of Senatorial Districts** | 3 |
| **Number of Federal Constituencies** | 5 |
| **Number of State Constituencies** | 24 |
| **Total Number of Polling Units** | 2,244 |
| **PUs with No Registered Voter(s)** | 2 |
| **Total Number of Political Parties Contesting** | 16 |
| **Total Number of Registered Voters** | 1,056,862 |
| **Total Number of PVC Collected** | 1,017,613 |

**Source:** Compiled from INEC[8]

## Table 4: Bayelsa State Senators at the Tenth National Assembly

| S/N | Name | District | Party | Sex |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Agadaga Benson Sunday | East | PDP | M |
| **2** | Benson Friday Konbowei | Central | PDP | M |
| **3** | Dickson Henry Seriake | West | PDP | M |

Source: INEC Twitter[9]

## Table 5: Bayelsa State House of Representatives at the Tenth National Assembly

| S/N | Name | Constituency | Party | Sex |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Brass/Nembe | Ebiriake Marie Enenimiete | PDP | F |
| **2** | Ekeremor/Sagbama | Agbediye Yeitiemone | PDP | M |
| **3** | Yenegoa/Kolokuma/Opokuma | Obuku Abonsizebe | PDP | M |
| **4** | Ogbia | Obordor Mitema | PDP | M |
| **5** | Southern Ijaw | Rodney Ambaiowei[10] | PDP | M |

Source: INEC[11]

[8] INEC. (2023). Information Booklet on the Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Election. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DELIMITATION-DATA-FOR-BAYELSA-IMO-KOGI-ELECTION.pdf

[9] https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1633135608309710848/photo/3

[10] Rodney Ambaiowei was declared the winner of the Southern Ijaw federal constituency supplementary election in Bayelsa State. https://dailypost.ng/2023/04/16/bayelsa-pdps-ambaiowei-beats-apc-rep-wins-southern-ijaw-reps-seat/

[11] https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/LIST-OF-MEMBERS-ELECT-OF-THE-HOUSE-OF-REPRESENTATIVES.FEB_.2023.pdf; https://twitter.com/inecnigeria/status/1633150687331721224/photo/4

The table below shows that Bayelsa State has 24 members in its legislative arm, the Bayelsa State House of Assembly.

**Table 6: Members, Bayelsa State House of Assembly**

| S/N | Name | Constituency | Political Party |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hon. Obein Godknows | Ogbia Constituency 2 | APC |
| 2 | Hon. Edward Irigha Brigidi | Nembe Constituency 2 | APC |
| 3 | Hon. Sampson Douglas Awudulu | Nembe Constituency 3 | APC |
| 4 | Hon. Omubo Ayona Timinyo | Brass Constituency 2 | APC |
| 5 | Hon. Ben Selekaye Victor | Southern Ijaw Constituency 4 | APC |
| 6 | Hon. George Braah Oteigbanyo | Nembe Constituency 1 | APGA |
| 7 | Hon. Waikumo Amakoromo | Yenagoa Constituency 2 | APGA |
| 8 | Rt. Hon. Abraham Ingobere | Brass Constituency 3 | PDP |
| 9 | Hon. Daniel Charles, PhD | Brass Constituency 1 | PDP |
| 10 | Hon. (Barr) Tare Porri | Ekeremor Constituency 1 | PDP |
| 11 | Hon. Living Mitin | Ekeremor Constituency 2 | PDP |
| 12 | Hon. Michael Ogbere | Ekeremor Constituency 3 | PDP |
| 13 | Hon. Pamoh Werinipre | Kolokuma/Opokuma Constituency 1 | PDP |
| 14 | Hon. Wisdom Fafi | Kolokuma/Opokuma Constituency 2 | PDP |
| 15 | Hon. (Dr.) Godbless N. Oyinke | Sagbama Constituency 1 | PDP |
| 16 | Hon. Bernard Sunday Kenebai | Sagbama Constituency 2 | PDP |
| 17 | Mrs. Ebizi Ndiomu-Brown | Sagbama Constituency 3 | PDP |
| 18 | Chief Ayibanegiyefa Egba | Yenagoa Constituency 1 | PDP |
| 19 | Hon. Ted Elemeforo | Yenagoa Constituency 3 | PDP |
| 20 | Hon. Richard Ibegu | Ogbia Constituency 1 | PDP |
| 21 | Hon. Gabriel Michael Ogbara | Ogbia Constituency 3 | PDP |
| 22 | Hon. Felix Bonny Ayah | Southern Ijaw Constituency 1 | PDP |
| 23 | Hon. Moses Marlon | Southern Ijaw Constituency 3 | PDP |
| 24 | Rt. Hon. Monday Obolo Bubou | Southern Ijaw Constituency 2 | PDP |

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

## 3.2 Key Governmental Stakeholders

Nigeria practices a federal system of government with the three tiers of government. The first two tiers, the federal and state levels, each have an executive, legislative, and judicial

arm of government, while the third tier, the local government has an executive and legislative arm. The state level, being the second tier of government, therefore, has the Governor as the head of the executive, the Speaker as the head of the state legislature, State Houses of Assembly, and the Chief Judge as the head of the judicial arm of government. The current office holders at the state level in Bayelsa State are:

**Table 7: Heads of the Three Arms of the Bayelsa State Government**

| Arm | Head | Name | Sex | Tenure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Executive** | Governor | H. E. Douye Diri | Male | 2019 - Date |
| **Legislature** | Speaker | Right Hon. Abraham Ingobere | Male | 2019 -Date |
| **Judiciary** | Chief Justice | Justice Matilda Ayemieye | Female | July 11, 2023 - Date |

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

Governors are elected for a maximum of two terms of four years each. Similarly, the members of the state House of Assembly have a four-year term but can remain in office for as many tenures as they are re-elected. To qualify to contest for the office of the Governor, the Constitution provides that a person:

- Is a citizen of Nigeria by birth;
- Has attained the age of thirty-five years;
- Is a member of a political party and is sponsored by that political party, and
- Has been educated up to at least School Certificate level or its equivalent[12].

The outcome of Governorship elections in Nigeria is decided by a simple majority method. Accordingly, the winner must receive a majority of the total votes cast as well as at least 25% of the votes cast in at least two-thirds of the state's local government districts. If no candidate satisfies these requirements, a run-off election between the two candidates with the highest number of votes is held until a winner is determined.

[12] Section 177, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended)

# The Geography of Bayelsa State

Bayelsa State was officially established on 1st October 1996, during the military administration of General Sani Abacha, carving it out from Rivers State. The official slogan of the state is, “The Glory of All Lands.” The capital of Bayelsa State Yenagoa, which serves as its administrative hub. The state's land area spans approximately 21,100 square kilometers and is bordered to the south and west by the Atlantic Ocean, to the East by Rivers State, and to the North by Delta State. Bayelsa State is culturally diverse. It has the Ijaw as the dominant ethnic group with a range of other groups like Epie/Attisa, Izon, Nembe, Ogbia, Okordia/Zarama, Biseni, Gbarain, and more. Major towns and cities in the state include Yenagoa, Ogbia, Nembe, Amassoma, Okpoama-Brass, and Okolobiri. This unique blend of geography, culture, and resources makes Bayelsa State a distinctive and essential part of Nigeria's South-South region.

## 4.1 Topography

One of the most distinctive geographical features of Bayelsa State is its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, which influences its climate and economic activities. The state is characterized by a network of abundant water bodies, creeks, and swamps, making it a vital part of the Niger Delta region. The Niger River runs through the state, dividing it into mainland and riverine areas, and this unique geography has contributed to the development of a rich mangrove ecosystem.

The topography of Bayelsa State is characterized by low-lying, swampy terrain with numerous creeks, rivers, and mangrove forests. The Niger River, one of Africa's major rivers, flows through the state, dividing it into two main geographical regions, the mainland and the riverine areas. The riverine areas are predominantly wetlands with a complex network of waterways, making transportation a significant challenge in the state. This unique geography has also given rise to the distinct mangrove ecosystem that supports a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna, including various fish species, birds, and mangrove vegetation.

Bayelsa State is blessed with abundant water resources, and its climate is characterized by a humid tropical climate with two distinct seasons: the rainy season and the dry season. The state experiences heavy rainfall from March to October, which can lead to occasional flooding, while the dry season, from November to February, offers some respite from the rains. The state's geography, coupled with its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, has a substantial impact on elections in the state, from pre-election, election day and even post-election periods. The magnitude of logistics challenges that could stem from the abundance

of water in the region becomes clear from the loss of the life of an APC Media Director, Perry Tukuwei, via a boat mishap that happened ahead of the 2023 governorship election.[13]

## 4.2 Agricultural Endowment

Agriculture contributes largely to Nigeria's economy as it employs 35% of the Nigerian population as of 2020[14]. The range of agricultural activities conducted in Bayelsa State includes fishing and crop production. Major crops produced in Bayelsa State include oil palm, raffia palm, cassava, plantains, banana, groundnuts, yams, and so on. The state's agricultural industry, has, however, remained undeveloped, creating a need for efforts to be exerted towards fully harnessing and optimizing the state's agricultural potential.

## 4.3 Mineral Endowments

Bayelsa State is a significant contributor to Nigeria's oil production and is home to several oil and gas installations, including drilling rigs, refineries, and pipelines. Bayelsa State contributes between 18-20 percent to the Nigerian oil industry. The state generates an output of around 290,000 barrels per day as well as 18 trillion cubic feet of gas. rich in oil/gas endowment[15]. The state hosts the Oloibiri oil field, often considered the birthplace of Nigeria's oil industry. The oil and gas sector plays a vital role in the state's economy, but the environmental challenges associated with oil exploration and production are also of concern.

Apart from its oil resources, Bayelsa is blessed with a diverse range of mineral resources spread across different parts of the state, including clay, gypsum, lead/zinc, lignite, limestone, manganese, and uranium[16]. These are barely tapped as the Nigerian state as a whole relies extensively on oil as a revenue source.

## 4.4 Flooding

Due to its topography, Bayelsa State is a flood-prone state. The state experiences annual floods which vary in magnitude and impact. The floods of 2012, 2018, and 2022 were particularly devastating. On October 2012, flooding affected several communities in central and western senatorial districts of Bayelsa State. The flood submerged virtually all coastal communities such as Sagbama, Adagbabiri, Peretorugbene, Agbere, Ofoni, Ayamasa, Sabagriea, Igbedi, Famgbe, Yenaka, Ogu, Fortorugbene, Agbura, Aguadama-

[13] https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2023/10/26/how-apc-media-director-perry-tukuwei-died-in-bayelsa-boat-mishap/
[14] World Bank Data (2021), Employment in Agriculture (% of total population) (modeled ILO Estimate)- Nigeria, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=NG
[15] https://report.bayelsacommission.org/chapters/setting-the-scene-oil-in-nigeria-and-bayelsa-state#:~:text=Home%20to%20Nigeria's%20first%20commercial,trillion%20cubic%20feet%20of%20gas.
[16] https://nigerianembassythehague.nl/about-nigeria/natural-resources/

Epetiama, Oporoma, Ndoro, Tombia, Peremabiri, Elemebiri, Asamabiri, Angalabiri, Opokuma, Odi, Kaiama, Biseni, Gbarantoru, Tombia Amassoma and Ekeremor among others.[17]

On October 2018, former governor of Bayelsa State, Governor Seriake Dickson was reported to have raised an alarm that over 70% of communities in the state were submerged by raging flood[18]. The severity of the flooding was such that some of the communities were cut off from others by the increasing flood level, which had gotten to window and lintel levels in others. A substantial part of the state capital, Yenagoa, especially Tombia, Akempai, Agudama-Ekpetiama, and others, was seriously affected by the flooding[19].

In 2022, the annual flooding submerged around 300 communities and villages either completely or partially[20]. More than 600 lives were lost in floods across Nigeria and almost 1.5 million people were displaced[21]. The catastrophe destroyed homes, farmlands, fishing ponds, schools, markets, hospitals and even roads[22]. In 2022 the crucial East-West Road which links the state to other parts of the country was completely submerged by flood, leaving the state largely shut off from the rest of the nation[23]. Concerns were raised about the potential impact of this on the 2023 general elections. These concerns allude to the importance of recognizing the impact of Bayelsa State's unique geographical features and challenges on the November 2023 off-cycle election in the state.

[17] Oyadongha, S. (2012). Bayelsa State: Flood ravages Bayelsa cummunities. Vanguard, October 6. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/10/bayelsa-state-flood-ravages-bayelsa-cummunities/
[18] Oyadongha, S., Ahon, F. & Idio, E. (2018). FLOOD: 70% of Bayelsa communities under water, Dickson cries out. Vanguard, October 1. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/10/flood-70-of-bayelsa-communities-under-water-dickson-cries-out/
[19] https://saharareporters.com/2018/09/19/flood-sacks-20-communities-bayelsa#:~:text=The%20communities%20include%20Egwe%2Dama,Asamabiri%20in%20Sagbama%20council%20area.
[20] Igoni, D. (2022, October 15). *Flood submerges 300 Bayelsa communities, displaces 700,000 people*. Punch Newspapers. https://punchng.com/flood-submerges-300-bayelsa-communities-displaces-700000-people/
[21] Ibid
[22] https://floodlist.com/africa/nigeria-floods-bayelsa-october-2022
[23] Dengiyefa A. (2022), Analysis: How Flood May Affect Nigeria's 2023 Elections. *Premium Times*. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/562394-analysis-how-flooding-may-affect-nigerias-2023-elections.html

# Bayelsa State Electorates

## 5.1 Population

Following its creation in 1996, Bayelsa state had a population of 1,121,693[24]. This population increased to 1,704,515 (males- 874,083 and females- 830,437)[25] when the 2006 Population Census was conducted. The National Bureau of Statistics NBS (2016) population projection places Bayelsa State's population as 2,209,200[26]. As of 2022, the state's population is estimated at 2,537,400.[27] In Bayelsa State, the percentage of People with Disabilities is 0.39% for men and 0.50 for women[28]. The Table below shows the population of the state by LGA.

**Table 8: Bayelsa State Population Distribution**

| S/N | LGA | 2006 Census[29] | 2022 Projected Population[30] |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Brass | 184,127 | 274,100 |
| **2** | Ekeremor | 269,588 | 401,300 |
| **3** | Kolokuma/Opokuma | 79,266 | 118,000 |
| **4** | Nembe | 130,966 | 195,000 |
| **5** | Ogbia | 179,606 | 267,400 |
| **6** | Sagbama | 186,869 | 278,200 |
| **7** | Southern Ijaw | 321,808 | 479,000 |
| **8** | Yenagoa | 352,285 | 524,400 |
| **Total** | | 1,704,515 | 2,537,400 |

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub

Bayelsa state is a heterogenous state, consisting of a mix of people from various ethnic backgrounds, including the Izon, Nembe, Ogbia, Epie/Atissa, Urhobo, Isoko and more.[31] These groups, though similar, possess distinct socio-cultural, traditional and linguistic traits that differentiate them from each other.

[24] https://www.nigerdeltabudget.org/overview-of-bayelsa/
[25] https://citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/NGA006__bayelsa/
[26] https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/ANNUAL%20ABSTRACT%20STATISTICS%20VOLUME-1.pdf p. 15
[27] https://citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/NGA006__bayelsa/
[28] NBS (2020) Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, page 41 https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1123
[29] Federal Government of Nigeria (2009). Report on the Census 2006 Final Results. https://archive.gazettes.africa/archive/ng/2009/ng-government-gazette-dated-2009-02-02-no-2.pdf
[30] https://citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/NGA006__bayelsa/
[31] https://bayelsastate.gov.ng/our-history/

## 5.2 Livelihood Sources

Residents of the state rely mostly on agriculture for livelihood. Traditional livelihood practices in Bayelsa State, is therefore, predominated by fishing and farming. [32] Traditional fishing is a major occupation, as residents navigate dugout canoes through the intricate network of rivers and creeks. Additionally, farming is essential, with crops like cassava, water yam, cocoyam, maize, and pepper being cultivated. Around 60.3% of the population is actively part of the workforce,[33] contributing to the state's economic activities. Moreover, 43.6% of households receive remittances, including 1.1% from international sources and 43.1% from within the state, reflecting strong family bonds[34].

## 5.3 Living Conditions

In terms of living conditions, 36.6% of the population has access to better sources of drinking water, while an impressive 73.9% are literate[35], highlighting the commitment to education and development. Furthermore, 46.2% of households are connected to the national power grid, and 73.8% have access to electricity, indicating progress in providing essential services[36].

The state, however, faces economic challenges, with a reported poverty rate of 22.6% in 2018/2019.[37] The poverty income gap is 0.053, and the Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, stands at 29.7[38], underlining the need for focused efforts to uplift disadvantaged populations. Families in Bayelsa State typically consist of an average of 3.69 family members[39], emphasizing the significance of family values and community bonds. The state also has a dependence ratio of 0.70,[40] and an average of 29.3% of households are led by females[41], underscoring the role of women in the socio-economic landscape.

A 2022 World Bank report reveals a median deflated consumption per person per year of ₦ 190,084 in Bayelsa State, with 28.7% of its residents considered multidimensionally

[32] https://thedailysblog.com/facts-about-Bayelsa-state
[33] NBS (2020) Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, page 48 https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1123
[34] Ibid Page 61
[35] https://nigeria.opendataforafrica.org/
[36] NBS (2020) Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, page 87 https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1123
[37] The World Bank (2022) Nigeria Poverty Assessment 2022: A Better Future for All Nigerians. p. 28 Accessed from https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099730003152232753/pdf/P17630107476630fa09c990da780535511c.pdf
[38] Ibid
[39] NBS (2020) Nigeria Living Standards Survey 2018/2019, page 8 https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1123
[40] Ibid
[41] Ibid

poor.[42] Furthermore, there are approximately 250,000 out-of-school children in the state,[43] underlining the need for improved access and quality in education.

## 5.4 Tertiary Institutions

Bayelsa State is home to a range of tertiary institutions, including the Federal University Otuoke (FUO); Niger Delta University (NDU), Wilberforce Island; University of Africa Toru Orua (UAT); Bayelsa Medical University (BMU), Yenagoa; Federal Polytechnic, Ekowe; Bayelsa State College of Arts and Science, Agudama-Epie; and the Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education (IJB COE) in Sagbama. These institutions serve as hubs of knowledge and learning, contributing to the intellectual and educational development of the State. These institutions would provide a pool of youths that would form a part of the ad-hoc staff to be deployed by INEC for the election.

[42] The World Bank (2022) Nigeria Poverty Assessment 2022: A Better Future for All Nigerians, Page 28. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099730003152232753/pdf/P176301074766630fa09c990da780535511c.pdf

[43] https://www.thecable.ng/diri-250000-out-of-school-children-in-bayelsa-alarming-we-must-reverse-it

# Political Environment

## 6.1 Brief History

The Bayelsa State governorship contest is one of three off-cycle elections to be held on November 11, 2023. The Bayelsa State election became an off-cycle contest due to a legal dispute in 2007, when Timipre Sylva was initially elected as governor, but a court-ordered a fresh election following a successful appeal by his opponent, Ebitimi Amgbare[44] on April 14, 2008[45]. Although electoral contests in the state was formerly dominated by the PDP, the All Progressives Congress emerged as a major force in 2015 when former governor of the state, Chief Timipre Sylva decamped from the PDP and contested under APC for the governorship ticket. Although the APC is yet to be occupy the apex leadership position of the state, the party pulled more votes in the 2019 governorship election before the result was upturned by a supreme court judgment[46]. These are pointers to the competitive nature of the political environment in Bayelsa State.

## 6.2 The 2023 Governorship Election

As the state prepares for the governorship elections, electoral violence is a major issue of concern. This is as Bayelsa state has a recurring history of political violence associated with over zealousness and desperation of politicians[47]. Unfolding events as the state prepares for the election have made the possibility of violence an issue of concern. The State House of Assembly Elections of March 18, 2023, were reported to have been marred by the incidence of violence in Ogbia Local Government Area[48]. Also, on August 2023, ahead of the 2023 general elections, Opu Nembe (Bassambiri) was reportedly thrown into violence which was widely suspected as politically motivated[49].

The 2023 Presidential election also raises a concern about voter turnout in Bayelsa State, as only 16% voter turnout was reported in the state[50]. It is worth noting, however, that this may be as a result of the general trend of low voter turnout during the 2023 general elections recorded across Nigeria.[51] The most recent governorship contest, the 2019

[44] https://www.zikoko.com/citizen/why-these-nigerian-states-have-off-cycle-governorship-elections/
[45] https://saharareporters.com/2008/04/14/breaking-news-court-appeals-nullifies-election-govtimipre-sylva-bayelsa-state
[46] https://punchng.com/breaking-supreme-court-nullifies-bayelsa-governor-elects-election-declares-pdp-winner/
[47] http://aapw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Bayelsa-Policy-Brief-Aug-10-1.pdf
[48] https://blueprint.ng/happening-now-violence-breaks-out-in-bayelsa-voting-materials-snatched-destroyed-on-2023-election-day/
[49] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/08/opu-nembe-killings-bayelsa-reps-caucus-asks-tinubu-to-probe-police/
[50] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/592686-data-what-the-voting-pattern-in-2023-presidential-election-is-telling-us.html
[51] The Electoral Hub (2023). *Accountability Matters! An Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Elections*. https://electoralhub.org/publications/post-election-analysis/the-electoral-hub-2023-general-election-analysis/

governorship elections in the state had 54.8% voter turnout. As the state prepares for the governorship contest, the voter turnout is something to look out for.

Bayelsa State's political history is also intertwined with issues of resource control and resource allocation. The state's leaders and activists have consistently advocated for more control of the oil revenue generated within its borders, reflecting broader discussions on fiscal federalism and fair resource management. The quest for resource control has been a defining theme, influencing the state's political discourse and interactions with the federal government. Bayelsa's political journey reflects the complex interplay of regional, economic, and governance dynamics that characterize the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Leaders of the party since 1999, all at certain points, relied on the mantra of resource control and the 'Ijaw struggle' to rally public support. The table below shows the leaders of Bayelsa State since its creation in 1996.

**Table 9: Leadership of Bayelsa State Since Creation**

| S/N | Name | Title | Tenure | Party |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Phillip Ayeni | Administrator | 7 Oct 1996 - 28 Feb 1997 | Military |
| **2** | Habu Daura | Administrator | 28 Feb 1997 - 27 Jun 1997 | Military |
| **3** | Omoniyi Caleb Olubolade | Administrator | 17 Jul 1997 - 9 Jul 1998 | Military |
| **4** | Paul Obi | Administrator | 9 Jul 1998 - 29 May 1999 | Military |
| **5** | Diepreye Alamieyeseigha | Governor | 29 May 1999 - 9 Dec 2005 | PDP |
| **6** | Goodluck Jonathan | Governor | 9 Dec 2005 - 29 May 2007 | PDP |
| **7** | Timipre Sylva | Governor | 29 May 2007 - 16 Apr 2008 | PDP |
| **8** | Werinipre Seibarugo | Acting Governor | 16 Apr 2008 - 27 May 2008 | PDP |
| **9** | Timipre Sylva | Governor | 27 May 2008 - 27 Jan 2012 | PDP |
| **10** | Nestor Binabo | Acting Governor | 27 Jan 2012 - 14 Feb 2012 | PDP |
| **11** | Henry Dickson | Governor | 14 Feb 2012 - 14 Feb 2020 | PDP |
| **12** | Duoye Diri | Governor | 14 Feb 2020 to date | PDP |

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub[52]

The 2023 off-cycle election in Bayelsa state is contested by 16 parties, with two major parties wielding significant influence across the state. The PDP (the ruling party at the state level) and the APC (the ruling party at the federal level) feature as the major political parties in the contest.

Hailing from Sampou Town in Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, the PDP governorship candidate, Douye Diri, is from Yenagoa/Kolokuma/Opokuma

[52] Compiled from https://www.dawodu.com/state-governors/bayelsa-7?page=2

Federal Constituency in Bayelsa Central Senatorial District. His major opponent, Timipre Sylva of the APC hails from Brass Local Government Area, Brass/Nembe Federal Constituency, Bayelsa East.

Following the commencement of campaigns on September 11 2023, political parties across the state kick-started their campaigns. The major parties constituted their campaign council/committee which consisted of major political stakeholders within and beyond the state. For the APC, the campaign council featured a notable lineup of key party stakeholders. Chaired by Gombe State Governor Muhammad Inuwa Yahaya, the council includes Co-Chairmen: Minister of Defence Badaru Abubakar, Senate President Godswill Akpabio, and Secretary to the Government of the Federation George Akume. A noteworthy addition to the council is Nyesom Wike, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, who brings a unique perspective as the former Governor of Rivers State and a former Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) member[53]. This council was assembled following consultations by the party's National Chairman, Abdullahi Ganduje, with the National Working Committee. Its primary mission is to lead the governorship campaign in Bayelsa State and drive the APC's efforts to succeed in the upcoming November 11, 2023, governorship election.

For the PDP, the Campaign Council for the 2023 Bayelsa State governorship election is made up of several prominent stakeholders of the party drawn from the federal and state levels. It is headed by Chairman Kefas Agbu, the Governor of Taraba State, and includes Deputy Chairman Chenedu Nwoko. The council is further supported by Deputy Director Generals like Barrister Rex Jude Ogbuku, Dr. Tonye Isenah, Hon. Fyneman Wilson, Sam Ateki, and Chief Suru Oyaride. Additionally, key figures such as Oyo State Governor Seyi Makinde, Rivers State Governor Siminalayi Fubara, Senator Seriake Dickson, PDP's Deputy National Chairman for the South, Taofeek Arapaja, and former Delta State Governor Chief James Ibori are part of this council[54].

## 6.3 Intra-Party Issues and Defections

As the 2023 governorship elections in Bayelsa State draw near, the political landscape has witnessed notable shifts and realignments, illuminating the ever-evolving power dynamics in the state. The political scene has been marked by a series of defections, with some members of the ruling PDP crossing over to the opposition APC, and vice versa. This significant realignment underscores the fluidity of political loyalties in Bayelsa State. The

[53] https://politicsnigeria.com/wike-makes-apc-campaign-council-for-bayelsa-election/
[54] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/07/guber-polls-pdp-unveils-363-member-campaign-team-for-bayelsa-kogi-imo/

LP has also witnessed major shifts in alignments amongst its members as the state prepares for the election.

**All Progressives Congress**

The APC in Bayelsa State has had a history of internal divisions, including concerns over Chief Timipre Sylva's leadership style, intense rivalries between factions loyal to Sylva and Senator Heineken Lokpobiri[55]. The divide in the party was such that in 2021, factions reportedly opened a parallel secretariat[56]. As the state prepares for the 2023 governorship elections, concerns have been raised about the internal divide affecting the performance of the APC in the governorship election. To this, Lokpobiri was reported to have responded by affirming his unalloyed support for his party[57].

Despite the above, the party has witnessed notable shifts in loyalty amongst members, with figures of influence like Chief Werinipre Seibarugu, former Speaker of the State House of Assembly, and Hon. Israel Sony-Goli, a former member of the House of Representatives decamping to the PDP.[58] Their decisions to switch allegiances have garnered attention and may impact the dynamics of the upcoming elections.

**People Democratic Party**

Ahead of the 2023 governorship election in Bayelsa state, the PDP has also experienced outward-shifts in loyalty of core members. Major defections that have faced the party as it prepares for the off-cycle elections include, the defection of Mr. Doubara Benjamin, a Special Assistant to Governor Douye Diri, and grassroots mobilizer Apostle Bodmas Prince Kemepadei have joined the APC. These defections underscore the growing appeal of the opposition party in the state.

Furthermore, aides and political allies of Governor Douye Diri, who is the PDP candidate, have defected to the APC. Among these defectors are Nunieh Odede, the state youth leader of the PDP, and former commissioners who served under the PDP-led government in the state. The wave of defections from the PDP to the APC also includes influential figures such as Chief Saviour Ibegu from Ogbia local government area, Chief Diodei Week from Southern Ijaw LGA, and three former local government chairmen, namely Victor Isaiah and Nathaniel Sylva from Brass, along with Ebinyu Turner from Ogbia. These individuals, with their local influence, could potentially sway support in the APC's favor.

[55] https://thenationonlineng.net/we-need-reconciliation-in-bayelsa-apc/
[56] https://dailypost.ng/2021/05/05/bayelsa-apc-crisis-faction-opens-parallel-party-secretariat/
[57] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/10/lokpobiri-rubbishes-alliance-with-diri-says-im-committed-to-apc-victory-in-bayelsa/
[58] https://dailytrust.com/bayelsa-govship-gale-of-defections-hit-pdp-apc-lp-as-battle-for-creek-haven-hots-up/

**Labour Party**

During the February 25, 2023, presidential elections, Labour party emerged as a country-wide third force. In Bayelsa state, the party garnered momentous support that transcended political divide. As the state prepares for the 2023 off-cycle elections, the wide support it hitherto enjoyed has taken a clear downward slope. This was especially marked by the defection of former campaign coordinator of the party, Mr. Morris Alagoa to the PDP.

The movement of key political figures from one camp to another is indicative of the shifting tides in Bayelsa's political landscape. These realignments set the stage for a highly competitive and dynamic electoral contest in Bayelsa State. The power dynamics are in flux, and the choices made by both prominent and grassroots politicians will play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of the 2023 governorship elections.

## 6.4 COVID-19 Pandemic

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, INEC introduced a policy for the conduct of elections in the context of COVID-19. This policy remains in effect despite the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) that the pandemic is no longer a public health emergency. It is important to note that WHO in absolving the pandemic of the status of a public health emergency, pointed out that it remains a global threat[59]. The COVID-19 protocol introduced by INEC is still in effect despite the fact that experience to date has shown that voters rarely abide by COVID-19 procedures. The policy mandates the use of face masks at voting stations, a two-meter social distance, the use of hand sanitizers, and the washing of accreditation equipment and surfaces with mentholated spirit. Despite the Federal Government's easing of several COVID-19 restrictions, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has remained firm. The policy was, however, widely neglected during the 2023 general elections,[60] and as Bayelsa State prepares for the governorship elections on November 11, 2023, it is quite possible that the COVID-19 regulations will not be observed.

[59] https://www.who.int/news-room/speeches/item/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing---5-may-2023

[60] The Electoral Hub (2023). *Accountability Matters! An analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Election*. https://electoralhub.org/publications/post-election-analysis/the-electoral-hub-2023-general-election-analysis/

# Contesting Political Parties

## 7.1 Parties and their Candidates

Under the law, only political parties can canvass for votes and present candidates at an election.[61] Membership of a political party and sponsorship by it is a requirement for running for political office. Candidates have been presented by sixteen (16) political parties for the Bayelsa State governorship election.[62] These are: Accord Party (A), Action Alliance (AA), African Democratic Congress (ADC), Action Democratic Party (ADP), All Progressive Congress (APC), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Allied Peoples Movement (APM), Action People Party (APP), Boot Party (BP), Labour Party (LP), New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), National Rescue Movement (NRM), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Zenith Labour Party (ZLP).[63]

The candidates presented by the political parties for the November 11, 2023, governorship elections are as follows:

**Table 10: Political Parties and Candidates for the 2023 Governorship Election**

| Party | Position | Candidate | PWD | Age | Sex |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A** | Governor | Idikio Warmate Jones | - | 27 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Owo Desmond Inodu | - | 38 | M |
| **AA** | Governor | Mufumoh Akpoebi Alex | - | 47 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Okoya Ladebi Lilian | - | 35 | F |
| **ADC** | Governor | Kalango Stanley Davies | - | 43 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Obesi Otasome Benjamin | - | 36 | M |
| **ADP** | Governor | Oguara Nengimonyo | - | 41 | F |
| | Dep. Governor | Omonibo Angonimi | - | 51 | M |
| **APC** | Governor | Sylva TImipre Marlin | - | 58 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Joshua Maciver | - | 44 | M |
| **APGA** | Governor | Subiri Waibodei Joseph | - | 66 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Lott Kime Thompson | - | 59 | M |
| **APM** | Governor | Osharikeni Saturday | - | 38 | M |

[61] Section 221, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended)
[62] https://www.pulse.ng/news/politics/inec-drops-list-of-final-candidates-for-bayelsa-imo-kogi-governorship-elections/n0h8yxy
[63] https://www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=12836

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Dep. Governor | Ugbenbo Woyindeinyefa | - | 40 | M |
| **APP** | Governor | Ogege Kemelayefa Mercy | - | 35 | F |
| | Dep. Governor | Leigh Robertson Kirk | - | 52 | M |
| **BP** | Governor | Ben Victor Magbodo | - | 41 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Ineinei Ebiowei Major | - | 39 | M |
| **LP** | Governor | Eradiri Udengmobofa | - | 47 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Nathus Benjamin | - | 64 | M |
| **NNPP** | Governor | Azebi Bestman Ayabeke | - | 65 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Ganagana Ebimowei | - | 59 | M |
| **NRM** | Governor | Micah Akeems | - | 46 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Ziprebo Pius Emomotimi | - | 38 | M |
| **PDP** | Governor | Diri Douye | - | 63 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Ewrudjakpo O. Lawrence | - | 57 | M |
| **PRP** | Governor | Ozato Erepadei Erepadei | - | 42 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Okala Azibola | - | 43 | M |
| **SDP** | Governor | Osuluku Binalayefa | - | 42 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Doibi Ebinabo | - | 40 | F |
| **ZLP** | Governor | Simeon I. Karioru | - | 47 | M |
| | Dep. Governor | Josiah Famvie | - | 39 | M |

Source: INEC[64]

The office of the governor and deputy governor of Bayelsa State have been dominated by the PDP since the inception of democracy in Nigeria. The current governor of the state Senator Douye Diri was sworn in on February 14, 2020, following the supreme courts nullification of the candidature of the APC candidate in the 2019 governorship elections in the state[65]. The PDP produced all members of the National Assembly from the State in the 2023 general elections including the three senators and the five members of the federal house of representatives[66]. The PDP also maintained majority in the state house of assembly clinching 17 out of the 24 seats of the state assembly[67]. The PDP have been the major opposition at the federal level following its defeat in the 2015 general elections. The party's candidate is the incumbent governor of the state.

[64] INEC (2023). Final list of Candidates: 2023 Governorship Election Bayelsa state. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/List-of-Candidates-Bayelsa-State.pdf
[65] https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2020/02/14/breaking-douye-diri-sworn-in-as-governor-of-bayelsa/
[66] https://sunnewsonline.com/nass-results-diris-men-sweep-apc-away-in-bayelsa/
[67] INEC (2023). Report of the 2023 General Election. pp. 447 – 448. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2023-GENERAL-ELECTION-REPORT-1.pdf

Despite being the major party at the National level, the All Progressive Congress (APC), is the major opposition party in the Bayelsa State. In the 2019 governorship elections in the state, David Lyon of the APC was declared winner and governor-elect by INEC[68]. The Supreme Court however nullified his candidature on the eve of the swearing-in[69]. In the State House of Assembly elections held on March 25, (add year) the APC won 5 out of the 24 assembly seats in the state. In the 2019 legislative elections, the party won the Bayelsa West senatorial district[70], and two House of Representative seats from the state[71]. The party's candidate Chief Timipre Marlin Sylva is a former governor of the state and a former minister of state for petroleum resources. The party suffered a setback following the release of the amended list of candidates released by INEC where its candidates name was missing leaving the column of the party blank[72]. The commission cited a court order in its remark.[73] The court order was later upturned, resulting in the reinsertion of the names of the candidates of the APC Sylva Marlin Timipre and his deputy, Joshua Maciver on candidates list.

Other parties to look out for in the coming elections is the APGA which produced two (2) members of the state Assembly[74] and Labour Party that is fielding a former Commissioner of Youth and Development, as well as former President of the Ijaw Youths Council (IYC), a foremost socio-cultural organization in the state.

[68] https://sunnewsonline.com/inec-declares-apc-winner-of-bayelsa-governorship-election/
[69] https://guardian.ng/news/supreme-court-sacks-bayelsa-governor-elect-lyon/
[70] INEC (2019). Report of the 2019 General Election. pp. 339. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/REPORT-OF-THE-2019-GENERAL-ELECTION.pdf
[71] Ibid, p. 345
[72] https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=12983
[73] https://www.legit.ng/politics/1560239-bayelsa-2023-tension-erupts-apc-candidate-names-missing-inec-final-list/
[74] https://blueprint.ng/2023-election-apga-clinches-2-seats-in-bayelsa-state-assembly/#:~:text=2023%20election%3A%20APGA%20clinches%202%20seats%20in%20Bayelsa,seat%20in%20the%20Bayelsa%20State%20House%20of%20Assembly.

# Inclusion and Representation

Inclusion and representation are key principles of a representative democracy. In Nigeria, women, youth, and PWDs have largely been marginalised from the electoral process due to structural and socio-cultural barriers. A breakdown of the candidates contesting the Bayelsa State election provides insights into the level of inclusion and representation of these groups.

**Table 11: Inclusivity of Governorship Candidates**

| S/N | Party | Candidate | M | F | PWD | Youth |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** | A | Idikio Warmate Jones | √ | | - | √ |
| **2.** | AA | Mufumoh Akpoebi Alex | √ | | - | |
| **3.** | ADC | Kalango Stanley Davies | √ | | - | |
| **4.** | ADP | Oguara Nengimonyo | | √ | - | |
| **5.** | APC | Sylva Timipre Marlin | √ | | - | |
| **6.** | APGA | Subiri Waibodei Joseph | √ | | - | |
| **7.** | APM | Osharikeni Saturday | √ | | - | |
| **8.** | APP | Ogege Kemelayefa Mercy | | √ | - | √ |
| **9.** | BP | Ben Victor Magbodo | √ | | - | |
| **10.** | LP | Eradiri Udengmobofa | √ | | - | |
| **11.** | NNPP | Azebi Bestman Ayabeke | √ | | - | |
| **12.** | NRM | Micah Akeems | √ | | - | |
| **13.** | PDP | Diri Douye | √ | | - | |
| **14.** | PRP | Ozato Erepadei Erepadei | √ | | - | |
| **15.** | SDP | Osuluku Binalayefa | √ | | - | |
| **16.** | ZLP | Simeon I. Karioru | √ | | - | |

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub[75]

**Table 12: Inclusivity of Deputy Governorship Candidates**

| S/N | Party | Caniddate | M | F | PWD | Youth |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** | A | Owo Desmond Inodu | √ | | - | |
| **2.** | AA | Okoya Ladebi Lilian | | √ | - | √ |
| **3.** | ADC | Obesi Otasome Benjamin | √ | | - | |
| **4.** | ADP | Omonibo Angonimi | √ | | - | |
| **5.** | APC | Maciver Joshua | √ | | - | |

[75] From INEC (2023). Final list of candidates: 2023 Governorship Election Bayelsa state. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/List-of-Candidates-Bayelsa-State.pdf

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6.** | APGA | LOTT Kime Thompson | √ | | - | |
| **7.** | APM | Ugbenbo Woyindeinyefa | √ | | - | |
| **8.** | APP | Leigh Robertson Kirk | √ | | - | |
| **9.** | BP | Ineinei Ebiowei Major | √ | | - | |
| **10.** | LP | Nathus Benjamin | √ | | - | |
| **11.** | NNPP | Ganagana Ebimowei | √ | | - | |
| **12.** | NRM | Ziprebo Pius Emomotimi | √ | | - | |
| **13.** | PDP | Ewrudjakpo O. Lawrence | √ | | - | |
| **14.** | PRP | Okala Azibola | √ | | - | |
| **15.** | SDP | Doibi Ebinabo | | √ | - | |
| **16.** | ZLP | Josiah Famvie | √ | | - | |

Source: Compiled by The Electoral Hub[76]

Youths in the tables above refers to persons who are not more than 35 years of age. The table clearly shows that the level for representation for women, youths and persons with disability is very poor. Only two candidates for the governorship election from the A and APP parties are under 35 years old, which is a very low proportion of 12.5% of all the candidates. Similarly, only one candidate for the deputy governorship position from the AA party is within the youth age bracket of 35 years or less, which is an even lower proportion of 6.25%. None of the people running for governor or deputy governor have any disability, which leaves people with disabilities (PWDs) without any representation in any of the parties. This is a complete lack of representation for PWDs in both categories. The situation is also very poor for young people, as they have a very small percentage of candidates.

There are very few women candidates for the governorship and deputy governorship positions, with only two each out of 16 candidates in each category. This means that women account for only 12.5% of the total 32 candidates. The percentage of women candidates for governor and deputy governor is the same: 6.25%. This is much lower than the 35% that the National Gender Policy (NGP) recommends.

The laws and policies of Nigeria, such as the Constitution, the Electoral Act, 2022, the PWD Act and the National Youth Policy, support the inclusion of groups that have been historically excluded from politics, such as women, youth and PWDs. However, it is not enough to give these groups the opportunity to run for elections; they also need to compete

[76] From INEC (2023). Final list of candidates: 2023 Governorship Election Bayelsa state. https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/List-of-Candidates-Bayelsa-State.pdf

fairly with other candidates. These groups still face many obstacles, such as social, economic and structural barriers. For example, research by IRAD and PWAN shows that women politicians, both young and old, struggle with lack of money and logistics[77]. This means that women candidates have less access to financial support or sponsorship than men. The same problem affects other excluded groups, such as PWDs and youth. Therefore, it is important to not only encourage more women, youth and PWDs to run for office, but also to reduce the role of money in the electoral process.

The Electoral Act, 2022, which replaced the Electoral Act, 2010, did not deal with the problem of high election costs that discourage excluded and marginalised groups. The limit for how much a candidate can spend for a governorship election is N1 Billion[78]. This limit will make it harder for these groups to compete and put them at a bigger disadvantage. To make the competition fairer and give these groups a better chance of winning, there is need to lower the spending limits for different positions and also introduce other special measures that can help increase the representation of these groups.

There are also important roles for INEC, political parties, CSOs, and the media to play in promoting the inclusion and representation of marginalised groups. INEC has updated its gender policy[79] and created a framework for PWDs to access and participate in elections[80]. INEC has also promised to give priority voting and assistive devices to PWDs during the elections.[81] Some notable advocacy efforts have also been done, such as the Womanifesto Gender Bills Movement[82]. This is a movement of over 300 women groups across the country that are pushing for the National Assembly to reconsider the rejected Constitutional Amendment Bills on gender. Another example is the Reserved/Special Seat for Women advocacy led by several CSOs including Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), one of the main supporters. The goal is to increase women representation at the National and State Assemblies through legislative quotas. Also, there is 'Run to Win' campaign organised by Yiaga Africa, which aims to support youth candidates in

[77] IRIAD (2021) *Women Political Representation in Nigeria: Closing the Gender Gap in Representation*, www.iriad.org/publication/. See also SDN (2019) Women's Political Participation and Representation in Niger Delta, http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/More-women-in-governance.-Report.-2019.-DIGITAL.pdf; https://von.gov.ng/women-seek-sustainable-representation-in-nigerias-leadership-space/
[78] The Electoral Act 2022 Section 88(3)
[79] https://www.blueprint.ng/inec-unveils-revised-gender-policy-preaches-inclusivity/
[80] https://www.inecnigeria.org/news-all/inec-framework-on-access-and-participation-of-persons-with-disabilities-pwds-in-the-electoral-process/
[81] See INEC's Regulations and Guidelines on Elections, 2022
[82] https://guardian.ng/news/gender-bills-equality-others-top-agenda-as-nigerians-mark-intl-womens-day/

elections[83]. These advocacy efforts are likely to be more effective if they are combined with a supportive legal framework.

[83] Amaza, M. #RunToWinNG: Yiaga Africa Galvanizes Support for Young Candidates Ahead of FCT Polls. *Yiaga Africa*. https://yiaga.org/yiaga-africa-calls-for-more-youth-participation-in-politics-hosts-youth-and-women-candidates-in-the-2022-fct-area-council-elections/

# Main Political and Socio-cultural Actors

## 9.1 Political Actors

**Douye Diri** is the incumbent governor of the state and flagbearer of the ruling party within the state. He has served as governor of the state from 2020 following the Supreme Court Judgment that nullified the victory of the APC. As governor, he wields significant influence throughout the state. Also, he has had a very active political career,

**Timipre Sylva** is the APC governorship candidate. He was one time governor of Bayelsa State, having served as governor from 2008 to 2012. Prior to this, he had held various leadership positions in the state, and he wields significant influence amongst supporters dotted across the state. Sylva also served as Minister of State for Petroleum under former President Muhammadu Buhari.

**Dr. Goodluck Jonathan** hails from Otuoke community in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. He wields significant influence in Bayelsa State politics as he has served, not only as a former deputy governor and acting governor of the state, but also as a former Vice President and Former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Jonathan has had a long political career beginning since the country's return to democratic rule in 1999 when he was elected deputy governor under the PDP. Jonathan served as deputy governor till 2005 when he became acting governor of Bayelsa State till 2007. In 2007, Jonathan became the Vice-president of Nigeria under the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua administration from 2007 – 2010. Thereafter, Jonathan became the Acting President of Nigeria until 2011 when he was elected as President. Despite leaving office in 2015, Jonathan has remained a notable political figure with enormous influence in his immediate constituency and beyond. In 2019, he was appointed as the Honorary Special Advisor to the Bayelsa Education Trust Fund Board[84]. In June 2019, Goodluck Jonathan was made the Chairperson of the newly inaugurated International Summit Council for Peace[85]. Goodluck Jonathan has been part of several peacekeeping missions across Africa. An example was in July 2020, when he led mediation talks during the 2020 Malian coup as he was appointed Special Envoy of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)[86]. By virtue of his long and fruitful political career, Jonathan wields massive influence on Bayelsa State politics.

[84] Lanre B. (2019), Goodluck Jonathan Gets New Appointment, *PM News*. https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2019/05/24/goodluck-jonathan-gets-new-appointment/
[85] Khadijah T. (2019), Goodluck Jonathan Got Another International Appointment, https://www.legit.ng/1242326-goodluck-jonathan-international-appointment.html
[86] https://www.africanews.com/2020/07/16/ex-nigerian-president-goodluck-jonathan-in-mali-to-mediate-crisis//

**Hon. Seriake Dickson**

Dickson is the immediate former governor of Bayelsa State and Senator representing Bayelsa West Senatorial District in the Senate. Dickson wields massive support amongst his constituents and has been a major supporter of the Douye Diri administration since inception in 2020. He participates actively in party campaigns for the PDP candidate ahead of the off-cycle elections.

**Heinekken Lokpobiri** is a prominent and influential figure in the political landscape of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. He comes from a family with a rich political history, as his late father, October Lokpobiri, was well-known in the political arena of the former Rivers State and later in Bayelsa State. Lokpobiri made history by becoming the first and youngest Speaker of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, assuming this significant role at the age of 31. He served in this capacity from June 1999 to May 2001, demonstrating his leadership abilities at a young age. His political career continued to flourish as he later represented Bayelsa West Senatorial District in the Nigerian Senate from 2007 to 2015, representing the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). He decamped to the APC in 2015. Under the APC, Lokpobiri served as the Minister of State for Agriculture and Rural Development in the administration of former President Muhammadu Buhari. The present Tinubu's administration has appointed him Minister of State for Petroleum Resources.

**David Lyon Perewonrimi**, born on December 20, 1970, is a notable figure in Bayelsa State politics, with a diverse background that includes education and entrepreneurship. Starting his political journey in the Third Republic as a member of the defunct National Republican Congress (NRC), he later played a crucial role in the formation of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Southern Ijaw and served as the Caretaker Committee Chairman of Apoi Olodiama Local Government Development Center in 2000. In 2015, Lyon switched to the All Progressives Congress (APC) and emerged as the party's candidate in the Bayelsa State governorship primary election in 2019, ultimately winning the governorship elections. However, his victory was nullified by the Supreme Court of Nigeria due to irregularities involving his running mate's certificate just a day before his inauguration as governor, underscoring his significant presence in the state's political landscape.

Other influential political stakeholders in Bayelsa State include:

- Senator Friday Konbowei Benson, Former Speaker of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly and current Senator representing Bayelsa Central Senatorial District.
- Senator Benson Agadaga, Senator representing Bayelsa East Senatorial District in the 10th Assembly.

- Honourable Oboku Abonsizibe Oforji, member of the Federal House of Representatives representing Bayelsa Central federal constituency.
- Other occupants of key executive and legislative positions at the state and national level, including Hon. Maria Ebikake, Hon. Rodney Ambadiowei, Hon. Fred Agbedi, Barr. A. J. Turner, as well as members of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly listed in the preceding section.
- Professor Steve Azaiki, Hon. Lawrence Ewrudjakpo, Paulker Emmanuel, are also amongst former political office holders in the state who continue to wield significant influence.

## 9.2 Socio-Cultural Actors

Globally, socio-cultural actors also wield significant influence in their respective areas of influence. For Bayelsa State, the following are socio-cultural influences across the state.

— HRM, King Bubaraye Dakolo: He holds the title of Amanana-owei of Ekpetiama Kingdom and serves as the Chairman of the Bayelsa State Traditional Rulers Council.

— HRM, King Alfred P. Diete-Spiff: He is the Amanyanabo of Twon Brass Kingdom and is notable for his role as a former military Governor of Old Rivers State.

— HRM, King Godwin Igodo: King Godwin Igodo holds the title of Obenibe of Atissa Kingdom in Bayelsa State.

— HRM, King Malla Sasime: He is the Obenibe of Epie Kingdom, a significant traditional ruler in the state.

— HRM, King Funpere Akah: King Funpere Akah holds the title of Ibenanaowei of Gbarain Kingdom and is the Chairman of the Yenagoa Traditional Rulers Council.

— HRM, King Consul Oluku: He is known as the Ibedawei of Akassa Kingdom, a respected traditional ruler in Bayelsa.

— HRM, King Paul Seide: King Paul Seide holds the title of Ibedawei of Bilabiri Kingdom, contributing to the cultural heritage of the region.

— HRM, King D.D.A Akpele: He is the Amayanabo of Sangana Kingdom, playing a significant role in the socio-cultural landscape of Bayelsa.

— HRM, King Perekebina Alfred: As the Paramount Ruler of Koromotoru Kingdom, he holds a crucial position in the state's traditional hierarchy.

— HRM, King Christian Atan Otobotekere: King Christian Atan Otobotekere is recognized as the Amananaowei of Tombia Kingdom.

— HRM, King Joshua Igbagara: He holds the title of Ibenanaowei of Oyakiri Kingdom, contributing to the cultural and traditional values of the region.

— HRM, King Edmund Maduabebe Daukoru: King Edmund Maduabebe Daukoru is the Amayanabo of Nembe Kingdom, a respected traditional ruler known for his influence in the region. These individuals collectively form an integral part of Bayelsa State's socio-cultural landscape and play key roles in preserving traditions, governance, and community welfare.

Importantly, socio-cultural actors are expected to, under ideal circumstances, maintain a neutral posture in electoral contests. Groups, including INEC, have in the past, called on traditional rulers to stay out of politics.[87] This has, however, not ruled out their influence as political candidates have reportedly sought endorsements of traditional rulers in successive elections across Nigeria.

[87] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/143213-stay-out-of-politics-group-warns-traditional-rulers.html?tztc=1

# Civil Society Actors

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are independent non-governmental groups that voluntarily work to raise awareness, foster the development, and ensure the endurance of democratic principles globally. In Nigeria, they are well-known for their efforts in strengthening and enhancing the electoral process and for enriching people's understanding of democratic institutions and values through activities like advocacy, voter education, and enhancing the capabilities of those engaged in democratic processes.[88]. CSOs have been active throughout the 2023 electioneering season and have continued to act in the off-cycle elections in Bayelsa state. The following are some of the active participants in the Bayelsa off-cycle election.

## 10.1 IRIAD - The Electoral Hub

The Electoral Hub is the electoral arm of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development. The organization has been an active stakeholder in the electoral space, promoting electoral knowledge, integrity and accountability. Ahead of the 2023 off-cycle elections, The Electoral Hub prepared a factsheet and Political Context Analysis to provide insight into the political and social environment ahead of the election[89]. On November 7, 2023, The Electoral Hub also held a roundtable on Citizens' Rights and Impact of Insecurity on Elections[90]. This is part of its project supported by the **Open Society Foundations** and targeted at providing support to INEC through the production, policy dialogue and dissemination of three well-researched policy and briefing papers on the impact of insecurity on elections.

The Electoral Hub also proffered recommendations for improving ad-hoc staff performance drawing from its Electoral Ad-hoc Staff Experience Sharing Roundtable. It has also disseminated election-related information through infographics aimed at to

[88] The Electoral Hub (2022) Political Context Analysis: 2022 Osun State Governorship Election. https://electoralhub.org/publications/political-context-analysis/political-context-analysis-2022-osun-state-governorship-election/

[89] www.electoralhub.org/publications

[90] https://electoralhub.org/news-and-events/gallery/
https://electoralhub.org/publications/policy-papers/impact-of-insecurity-on-inecs-preparedness-for-the-2023-general-election/
https://electoralhub.org/publications/policy-papers/gender-and-inclusion-dimension-of-impact-of-insecurity-on-the-2023-general-election/
https://electoralhub.org/publications/policy-papers/threat-of-electoral-violence-during-and-after-the-2023-general-election/

improve knowledge public knowledge about the electoral process, enhancing voter education, and strengthening their quality of participation.

## 10.2 Centre for Democracy and Development

The Centre for Democracy and Development is a think-tank and foremost think tank involved in promoting democratic governance in Nigeria. Ahead of the 2023 general elections in Bayelsa State, they hosted a factcheck training in Bayelsa State to counter misinformation in the state.

## 10.3 Yiaga Africa

Yiaga Africa one of the leading Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) actively engaging the electoral process carried out a report titled the "Emerging Political and Security Trends in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo States". The report highlights emerging issues as well as contextual background ahead of the Off-cycle elections on November 11, 2023. Some of the emerging issues identified include, insecurity, distrust in Government institutions/weak institutions, unfair competition/executive impunity, intimidation of political opponents, poverty/economic crisis[91]. Yiaga Africa would also be engaging the Bayelsa State governorship election through the #WatchingTheVote a citizen led election observation initiative geared[92].

## 10.4 Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)

As part of its effort FIDA Nigeria, in partnership with the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), took significant steps to promote gender equality and amplify the voices of women in the electoral process ahead of the 2023 off-cycle elections in Bayelsa State. They organized a one-day Capacity Building Workshop for Community Leaders, addressing the critical issue of Violence against Women in Elections in September 2023. The primary objective of the workshop was to empower community leaders with the knowledge and tools needed to identify and combat the factors that contributed to violence against women during electoral processes. By equipping participants with a comprehensive understanding of these issues, the goal was to enable them to actively protect the rights and safety of women in the November 11, 2023, off-cycle Governorship election.

A key focus of the workshop was the establishment of effective referral channels between communities and prominent security agencies. This strategic move was expected to revolutionize the response mechanism for incidents of violence against women, ensuring swift action and a safer environment for female participants in the political arena.

[91] https://yiaga.org/publications/political-and-security-trends-in-bayelsa-kogi-and-imo-state/
[92] Ibid

Furthermore, this initiative aimed to strengthen a resilient community protection framework, with a special emphasis on indigenous women and other vulnerable populations in Bayelsa State. By prioritizing inclusivity and equal representation, the endeavor sought to create an environment where every voice was not only heard but also valued.[93]

## 10.5 Coalition of CSOs

As part of the efforts towards the 2023 off-cycle elections in Bayelsa state, a coalition of 25 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) issued a call to security agencies to caution political parties to prevent potential crises in the off-season governorship elections in Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi states. In Bayelsa State, the CSOs noted signs of security concerns arising from accusatory and volatile campaign language between the leading candidates of the APC and PDP, with a 35% possibility of violence[94].

## 10.6 Fostering Achievement of Community Empowerment (FACE) Initiative

Fostering Achievement of Community Empowerment (FACE) Initiative, on May 15, 2023 expressed concerns over the reluctance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct a Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) in Bayelsa state ahead of the November 11, 2023 governorship selection in the state.[95] This reflects an effort towards improving the quality of the Bayelsa State off-cycle governorship election, which, if acted upon, could increase the quality of the process.

[93] https://fida.org.ng/2023/09/empowering-community-leaders-to-combat-violence-against-women-in-elections-fida-nigerias-workshop-in-bayelsa-state/
[94] https://leadership.ng/imo-bayelsa-kogi-polls-dont-plunge-states-into-chaos-csos-caution-candidates/
[95] 2023 Bayelsa governorship election: CSOs worried over non-conduct of CVR - Blueprint Newspapers Limited

# In (Security) and Violence

Ahead of the 2023 off-cycle elections, security concerns have emerged as the foremost challenge in the lead-up to the off-cycle governorship in Bayelsa State. This is highlighted in a report titled "Emerging Political and Security Trends in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Imo States" released by Yiaga Africa[96]. INEC has also expressed concerns about the potential for political violence in the run-up to the elections, noting that there were indications of political confrontations and clashes between opposing political parties and its candidates.[97] Similarly, researchers from Nextier SPD have issued warnings that violence may disrupt the off-season polls as it had in previous elections, including the February 25 presidential and national assembly elections, as well as the March 18 governorship and House of Assembly elections[98]. These events have raised alarms about the possibility of violence looming over the upcoming elections in Bayelsa State.

Bayelsa state has a recurring history of political violence associated with the over zealousness and desperation of politicians[99]. Ahead of the November 11 contest, recent events have made the possibility of violence an issue of concern. The State House of Assembly Elections of March 18, 2023 were reported to have been marred by incidence of violence in Ogbia Local Government Area[100]. Also, on August 2023, ahead of the 2023 governorship election, Opu Nembe (Bassambiri) was reportedly thrown in an episode of violence which was widely suspected as politically motivated[101]. It is, however worth noting that despite security concerns in Opu Nembe and alleged political undertones, the security situation across the state has remained relatively stable ahead of the 2023 general elections with no other major incident of violence been recorded.

Bayelsa State, despite being relatively calm ahead of the 2023 governorship elections, has a history of security issues including cultism, sea piracy, militancy, and kidnapping, among others. These are intersecting and complex security concerns with a potential impact on electoral conduct. As the state prepares for the off-cycle elections, concerns have been

[96] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/09/insecurity-tops-challenges-ahead-of-bayelsa-kogi-imo-govship-elections-yiaga/
[97] https://punchng.com/political-violence-inec-raises-concerns-ahead-of-bayelsa-imo-kogi-elections/
[98] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/06/imo-kogi-bayelsa-guber-polls-insecurity-may-mar-exercise-nextier-experts-warn/
[99] http://aapw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Bayelsa-Policy-Brief-Aug-10-1.pdf
[100] https://blueprint.ng/happening-now-violence-breaks-out-in-bayelsa-voting-materials-snatched-destroyed-on-2023-election-day/
[101] https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/08/opu-nembe-killings-bayelsa-reps-caucus-asks-tinubu-to-probe-police/

raised about the security implications of the participation and influence of ex-militant combatants on the elections[102].

These concerns, taken together with antecedents of insecurity during elections where lives, properties, and election materials have been lost, destroyed, and vandalized respectively calls for urgent steps to address the security menace by stakeholders, political actors, security agencies, and INEC. This is especially important as addressing election-related security is crucial for preventing broader security issues.

[102] https://www.cddwestafrica.org/blog/ex-militants-and-bayelsa-s-governorship-election-an-impending-oil-surveillance-contract-war/

# Efforts at Mitigating Violence

To achieve a peaceful and orderly off-cycle elections in Bayelsa State, several electoral stakeholders have participated in discussions and community mobilization. This acknowledges that maintaining security is essential to the conduct of elections and that cooperation between security agencies is necessary to prevent violence both during and after elections. Specifically, On July 28, 2023, INEC held a meeting with the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES)[103]. During the meeting, INEC Chairman, Prof. Yakubu Mahmood stated the need for Security agencies to take decisive action against promoters of violence and other anti-democratic behaviors like vote-buying, assaults on election officials, and interference with the electoral process while upholding absolute impartiality[104].

INEC through its Chairman Mahmood Yakubu had taken measures to address these threats by engaging security agencies and working with the agencies on the best strategies to provide an enabling environment that is secure enough to achieve a peaceful and credible election[105]. This was on the backdrop of a meeting held with the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) on the review of the 2023 general elections[106]. The ICCES is the platform through which INEC addresses election-related security concerns. The Consultative Committee consists of security stakeholders including the Office of the National Security Adviser, Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, Federal Fire Service, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Police Affairs, National Orientation Agency, and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, among others.[107]

INEC has further engaged political parties calling for decorum in the Bayelsa governorship elections while also charging the parties to ensure its followers were adequately cautioned to desist from acts capable of endangering the life of electorates and a threat to a peaceful and credible election[108]. The Commission referenced the reported clashes of supporters of political parties and called on candidates of the parties to refrain from actions and utterances leading to such acts. On October 8, 2023, Sam Olumekun the INEC National

[103] Ogunseyin O. (2023), INEC Wants Security Improved for Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Elections. *Guardian*. https://guardian.ng/news/inec-wants-security-improved-for-bayelsa-imo-kogi-governorship-elections/
[104] Ibid
[105] Ibid
[106] The Guardian Newspaper (2023) INEC wants security improved for Bayelsa, Imo, Kogi governorship elections https://guardian.ng/news/inec-wants-security-improved-for-bayelsa-imo-kogi-governorship-elections/
[107] https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Statement-Issue.pdf
[108] Vanguard Newspaper (2023). Security Challenge is our Major Concern in Kogi Guber Poll — INEC https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/10/security-challenge-is-our-major-concern-in-kogi-guber-poll-inec/

Commissioner and Chairman of its Information and Voter Education Committee maintained that the Commission would continue to engage with security agencies and monitor activities to ensure the conduct of the election was peaceful[109].

[109] Ibid

# Role of INEC

The Independent National Electoral Commission is the body constitutionally responsible for conducting general elections, and governorship elections amongst others[110]. INEC will therefore oversee and conduct the 2023 off-cycle election in Bayelsa State as well as in Kogi and Imo states. In preparation for the elections in Bayelsa State, INEC has carried out the following activities:

## 13.1 Voter Registration

CVR training virtually started in June 2021 via the platform at cvr.inecnigeria.org. Voter registration includes both an online pre-registration phase and an offline full registration phase that involves biometrics capturing and calls for physical presence at INEC's local offices. According to the Commission, there are 1,250,102 registered voters in Bayelsa state[111].

## 13.2 Use of Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

The Commission informed the general public that the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), which replaced the Smart Card Readers (SCR), would be utilized, in the Bayelsa state governorship election as it was used for the elections in Anambra, the FCT, Osun and Ekiti, as well as the 2023 general election[112]. The Commission also noted that the results would be uploaded on the INEC Result View Portal (IReV)[113]. The Commission had carried out mock accreditation exercise in three polling units from each senatorial zone in the three states, which are 9 senatorial districts and 27 polling units[114].

## 13.3 Increasing Access to Polling Units

Delivering effective electoral services is a fundamental concept and a gauge of election integrity. In accordance with this notion and to enhance voters' access to polling units INEC raised the number of polling units around the nation. In Bayelsa State, INEC increased the number of polling units in the state from 1,804 to 2,244[115]. This is to ensure that voters have easier access and fewer queues in casting their votes.

While this is a good innovation, it is relevant that the Commission effectively manage the process to ensure that the main goal of the exercise is not defeated. For instance, during the

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[110] Third Schedule, part I, Paragraph F, Section 15 (a), CFRN, 1999 (as amended)
[111] https://plustvafrica.com/2023-election-bayelsas-registered-voters-now-1250102-inec-reveals/
[112] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/633789-bayelsa-imo-kogi-election-results-to-be-uploaded-on-irev-inec-chairman.html, https://radionigeria.gov.ng/2023/10/17/inec-to-deploy-bvas-irev-in-kogi-imo-bayelsa-polls/
[113] Ibid
[114] https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=12938
[115] https://businessday.ng/politics/article/inec-increases-bayelsa-polling-units-by-440/

2023 general election Observers from The Electoral Hub observed that many persons were confused on election day as their polling units had been changed. This eventually led to the disenfranchisement of some voters who went to their old polling unit only to realize that their polling unit had been changed[116].

## 13.4 Engagement with Stakeholders

Engagement with stakeholders is a crucial part of the election process and is expected and a basic duty of EMBs. In accordance with this tenet, and in order to prepare for the election, INEC conducted a number of stakeholder interactions with various electoral stakeholders and voters at both its Abuja headquarters. These interactions are meant to guarantee a fair and orderly election in Bayelsa State. The following are a few of the stakeholder gatherings for the Bayelsa governorship election:

— On July 25, 2023, Mahmood Yakubu, the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and national commissioners of the electoral umpire met with leaders from political parties[117].

— The meeting was aimed at reviewing the 2023 general elections and preparing for the off-cycle governorship elections in Imo, Kogi, and Bayelsa states[118].

— On July 28, 2023, INEC held a meeting with the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES)[119]. During the meeting, INEC Chairman, Prof. Yakubu Mahmood stated the need for Security agencies to take decisive action against promoters of violence and other anti-democratic behaviors like vote-buying, assaults on election officials, and interference with the electoral process while upholding absolute impartiality[120].

— The Commission released the Guide for Media Accreditation for 2023 Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi States Governorship election. The portal was also opened for Media organizations intending to deploy Journalists to cover any or all the three

[116] The Electoral Hub (2023). Electoral Accountability Matters! An Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 General Election. https://electoralhub.org/publications/post-election-analysis/the-electoral-hub-2023-general-election-analysis/
[117] Channels (2023), INEC Chair, Party Leaders Review 2023 Elections. https://www.channelstv.com/2023/07/25/inec-chair-party-leaders-review-2023-elections/
[118] Ibid
[119] Ogunseyin O. (2023), INEC Wants Security Improved for Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi Governorship Elections. *Guardian*. https://guardian.ng/news/inec-wants-security-improved-for-bayelsa-imo-kogi-governorship-elections/
[120] Ibid

Governorship elections to apply online to the Commission via the designated website; https://imap.inecnigeria.org[122].

- Ahead of the elections for governor of Imo, Bayelsa, and Kogi, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) opened the portal for ad hoc staff recruitment on August 31, 2023[123].

## 13.5 Other Activities

On the Timetable and Schedule of Activities for the Bayelsa state elections, the Commission's other activities include publishing the election notice and the final candidate list, election and party monitoring, accrediting journalists and election observers, registering party agents, and hiring and training ad hoc staff. Each of these tasks is to be completed for the election.

[121] https://imap.inecnigeria.org/accreditation-guide
[122] https://imap.inecnigeria.org/accreditation-guide
[123] Egobiambu E. (2023), Apply: INEC Begins Recruitment of Ad-hoc Staff for Imo, Bayelsa and Kogi Polls. *Channels TV*. https://www.channelstv.com/2023/08/31/apply-inec-begins-recruitment-of-ad-hoc-staff-for-imo-bayelsa-kogi-polls/, https://inecnigeria.org/?page_id=12870

# Election Observation and Observers

The democratic and electoral processes are not complete without election observation. The credibility of the election, and consequently the electoral process, is increased by election observation. Electoral observation, among other things, prevents fraud and identifies electoral irregularities. Allowing observers to participate in an election is a sign that the Election Management Body is ready to hold credible elections[124].

It is also among the simplest ways to compile reliable election-related data. Election observers have a significant impact on how transparent and credible elections are, as well as how widely accepted election outcomes are[125]. The acceptance of observers is further proof of the electoral process transparency. Election evaluations by observers also validate elected government. Additionally, observers' reports are frequently considered to be reliable records of how elections were conducted.

Ahead of the 2023 governorship election in Bayelsa State, the Chairman of INEC, Mahmood Yakubu, has been quoted to have asserted that a total of 145 organizations have been approved as observers, who would be deploying 7,896 observers across the three states where off-cycle elections are to be conducted[126]. This is a key step towards the prevention of electoral malpractices and strengthening the credibility of the election.

[124] https://openelectiondata.net/en/guide/electoral-integrity/election-observation/
[125] African Union. (2013). Election Observation Manual. https://www.eisa.org.za/pdf/au2014EOMmanual.pdf
[126] https://punchng.com/kogi-bayelsa-imo-elections-crucial-inec/#:~:text=Yakubu%20noted%20that%20the%20commission,145%20organisations%20deploying%207%2C896%20observers.%E2%80%9D

# Conclusion

The forthcoming 2023 Bayelsa State Governorship election will play a critical role in shaping the future of the state. As a mechanism for determining the next governor of the state, the leadership direction of the state for the next four years, its policies, actions and inactions can all be said to be dependent on the outcome of the election. In view of its importance, this political context analysis has provided insight on the numerous issues that are either associated with, or capable of influencing the electoral process and its outcomes.

Understanding the circumstances of the election is critical. It is the seventh governorship election in Bayelsa since civilian rule was restored in 1999. The election provides an opportunity to implement the provisions of the Electoral Act, 2022 and respond to challenges observed during the February 25 and March 11, 2023 General Election. More so, Bayelsa State's distinct topography, cultural diversity, and demography are all factors that can shape the electoral process and its outcome. The activities of political parties, candidates and stakeholders is also a notable factor. The political scene is dynamic, with 16 political parties competing, including the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the principal opposition, the All Progressives Congress (APC). Political defections highlight power dynamics and their possible influence on election results. The engagement of community stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is critical on the civil front. The influence of traditional leaders, as well as the vigilance of CSOs working with security authorities, are critical for a calm election atmosphere.

Finally, as Bayelsa State prepares for the 2023 governorship election, the lessons learned from previous elections, active stakeholder involvement, and the adoption of integrity measures will all contribute to a more transparent, credible, and peaceful electoral process. The people of Bayelsa and the rest of the country are anxiously awaiting the results of this crucial election, which will surely impact the state's leadership for the next four years. It is our common hope that this election would mark a step forward towards improved credibility and integrity in Nigeria's electoral process and democratic journey.

...promoting electoral knowledge, accountability, and integrity

## ABOUT THE ELECTORAL HUB

The Electoral Hub, an affiliate of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), is a knowledge and advocacy hub which seeks to provide solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. It is committed to promoting electoral knowledge, integrity, and accountability in Nigeria. Our aim is to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through the provision of critical and contextualized analysis, and solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. We believe that the integrity of the electoral process is crucial in improving electoral governance and sustaining democracy in Nigeria. We also believe in solutions rooted in the principles of justice and equity.

Our core values are knowledge-exchange, inclusion, justice, equity, transparency and accountability.

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