

Benue State Elections Scenarios and Recommendations

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Disclaimer: The following analysis is based on discussions with State-level actors and so reflects their perceptions, not the view of the Peace and Security Working Group. These scenarios were produced prior to the 2014 primary elections and are thus subject to change. Where relevant, updates have been made to reflect evolving dynamics.

Benue At-a-Glance

Current Governor	Gabriel Torwua Suswam
Current Ruling Party	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)
Key February 2015 Elections	Presidential, Gubernatorial, National Assembly and State House of Assembly
Prognosis	Benue State is identified as a high level risk state (Red Category) in CLEEN's latest report.

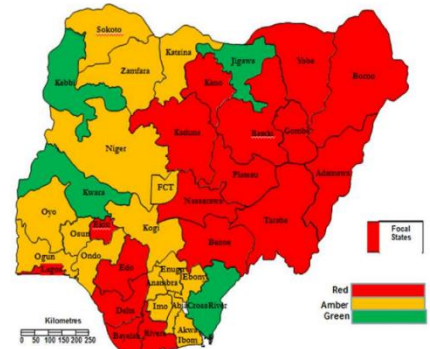


Figure 1: CLEEN Map of Hot Spots for Election Violence

Benue Violence Data

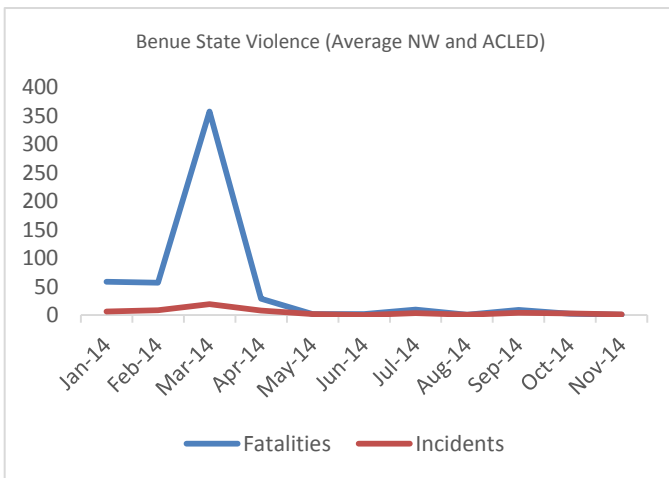


Figure 2: Peace Map (www.p4p-nigerdelta.org)

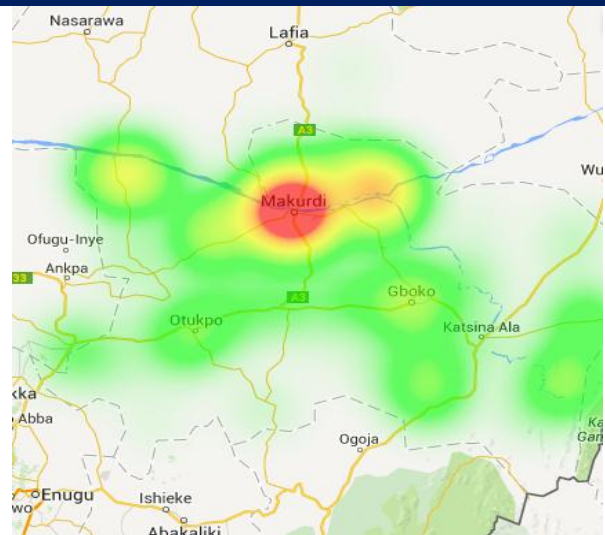


Figure 3: Violence Heat Map Jan 2009-Dec 2014



History of Political Violence before 2011 Elections

- Benue has a history of relatively low levels of political violence, although this is marked by at least one wave of high-intensity violence (as reflected in high rates of reported fatalities) in the 10 years preceding the 2011 elections. Historical conflict events have tended to centre on dynamics such as:
 - Inter-communal clashes ethno-linguistic livelihood groups (including semi-nomadic pastoralists and settled agricultural populations, and between Fulani and Tiv communities);
 - Intra-communal clashes in which rival factions or lineages within communal groups have resorted to violence to settle disputes;
 - Clashes between local communities and security forces, particularly where security have been deployed to restore order, such as during the October 2001 rioting in Makurdi, in which over 200 people in total were reported killed;
 - The escalation of demonstrations into riots, particularly those concerning protests or dissatisfaction over police or military activity, such as deaths in police custody or at police checkpoints, as recorded in February 2005, or in February 2011;¹
 - Targeted attacks on political leadership in ambushes and assassination attempts, such as those which occurred in an apparent wave of attacks on political figures in the months following the 2011 elections;²
 - Violent disputes over land ownership.³
- Other historical violence includes the attempted assassination of then-Benue Governor in March 2004.⁴ The state also has a history of violence surrounding elections. In February 2003, rival supporters of the PDP and ANPP clashed in Makurdi. In March 2007, there were clashes between rival political supporters in the state.⁵ Rights groups have been critical of the failure to prosecute the alleged perpetrators of historical violence, focusing in particular on the violence by security forces in Benue from 22-24 October 2001, in which over 200 people were killed.⁶
- One analysis identifies the presence of a large number of former military with easy access to weapons and light arms as a contributing factor to violence in Benue, among other states, where the presence of arms themselves is a concern, as is the fact that 'These individuals [with combat training] are also available to form and train militias based on existing vigilante groups.'⁷

Elections in 2011

¹ Source: ACLED Data, www.acleddata.com, Version 4; *Vanguard*, 'Tension as Soldiers, Civilians Clash in Makurdi,' 1 February 2011.

² Source: ACLED Data, www.acleddata.com, Version 4.

³ Nigeria Watch, *Third Report on Violence in Nigeria (2006-2011)*, [http://www.nigeriawatch.org/media/html/NGA-Watch-Report11\(1\).pdf](http://www.nigeriawatch.org/media/html/NGA-Watch-Report11(1).pdf), p. 14.

⁴ BBC News, 'Nigeria Governor Survives Ambush,' <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3529849.stm>, 3 March 2004.

⁵ Source: ACLED Data, www.acleddata.com, Version 4.

⁶ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2012: Nigeria*, January 2012, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/nigeria_2012.pdf, p. 3;

Human Rights Watch, *Military Revenge in Benue: A Population Under Attack*, April 2012,

<http://pantheon.hrw.org/reports/2002/nigeria/Nigeria0402.pdf>.

⁷ Small Arms Survey, *A Deadly Cycle: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria*, 2011, p. 28.



There was noted concern about the possibility of violence in Benue during the 2011 elections, with the state being declared a prospective 'hotspot' (along with 11 other states) in the run-up to the polls.⁸ Benue was also among the states in which military were put 'on alert' in January 2011 over a rise in unrest.⁹

Features of Political Violence in 2011 Elections

- A pronounced feature of the recorded violence in Benue in the months preceding and surrounding the 2011 elections is the prominence of targeted attacks and assassination attempts by unknown assailants on prominent politicians. While not unknown in other states in Nigeria, Benue appeared to witness a dramatic increase in targeted assassination attempts during this period.
 - The dynamic of this unrest differs dramatically from otherwise relatively spontaneous and un-orchestrated rioting or violent protest: a high degree of coordination and planning appears to be central to a number of the targeted attacks, which often involved armed ambushes on political convoys travelling to and from scheduled campaign events.
 - Because of the nature of such attacks, the perpetrators were rarely identifiable in reports, and even more rarely prosecuted.
 - As such, key players in the political context of Benue could leverage this opacity, and level allegations at political rivals and their supporters, with neither side in a position to prove or disprove the allegations.
 - In addition to presenting a challenge for the successful identification and trial of perpetrators, unattributed violence of this nature may also have a particularly damaging effect on voter confidence in the political process and elite accountability in a context of escalating, but largely unidentified, violence.
- A second feature of the violence in Benue State is that it was primarily concentrated before the elections; although sporadic, targeted attacks on politicians persisted for several months thereafter. Although there was some rioting in the wake of polling results, the state was not, however, racked by comparable levels of unrest in the wake of results, unlike some neighbouring regions.

Key Violent Incidents of 2011 Elections

- Violence in the period surrounding the elections which explicitly involved electoral institutions, candidates or workers included:
 - January 2011, reports that one candidate in the PDP primaries engaged thugs to intimidate and disrupt the polling process in Buruku constituency. Security forces – deployed in the area to provide security – shot in the area to disperse the would-be assailants.¹⁰
 - 18 January 2011, violent protests were held in Makurdi by PDP youth supporters who were angered by the outcome of the party's presidential primary, in which President Goodluck Jonathan emerged as the party's candidate for president. The youths reportedly blocked traffic and burned their registration cards in public.¹¹
 - 11 February 2011, supporters of the rival ACN and PDP parties reportedly clashes in Yandev, Gboko LGA, resulting in five injuries. However, a PDP spokesperson denied any party supporters were involved in the clash, and alleged the opposing party had staged the violence to instigate unrest and generate sympathy.¹²
 - 23 February 2011, Benue State Chairman of the CAN and two other party officials were shot at by unknown gunmen, leading to one hospitalization, and the release of a statement by the party which described political tensions in Benue as 'heating steadily to a boiling point.'¹³

⁸ International Crisis Group, *Lessons From Nigeria's 2011 Elections*, Africa Briefing No. 81, 2011, p. 3.

⁹ *Vanguard*, 'Army Puts Men on Alert over Rise in Kidnapping, Terrorism, Armed Robbery,' 31 January 2011.

¹⁰ *Vanguard*, 'PDP's primaries of intrigues, controversies,' 6 January 2011.

¹¹ *Daily Trust*, 'Protest Spreads to Benue,' 19 January 2011.

¹² *Leadership*, 'ACN/PDP Supporters in Violent Clash,' 13 February 2011.



- 28 February 2011, a House of Representatives candidate and his entourage were attacked in Katsina-Ala LGA by unknown assailants, resulting in the death of one of the candidate's supporters.¹⁴
- 3 March 2011, then-Benue Governor Gabriel Suswam's convoy was shot at by unidentified assailants on the Gbajimba-Makurdi road, resulting in at least one hospitalisation.¹⁵
- 5-6 March 2011, the ACN deputy gubernatorial candidate reported his home was attacked by would-be assassins over the weekend, wounding some supporters in the process.¹⁶
- 19 March 2011, unknown assailants attacked the convoy of PDP Senate President in Igumale; three PDP supporters sustained injuries.¹⁷
- 2 April 2011, an aide of the Gboko Tarka MP, was shot dead by unknown assailants in Adekaa, Gboko LGA.
- 26 April 2011, two people were shot dead in Makurdi while trying to steal ballot boxes at the opening of the gubernatorial election.¹⁸
- 13 May 2011, although it occurred in nearby Nasarawa State, the ACN gubernatorial candidate for Benue in the recently concluded elections was killed by unidentified gunmen near Kadarko, in Nasarawa State, 25 minutes from Makurdi.¹⁹
- Attempts at instigating violence were reportedly foiled by security forces in the months leading to the elections, including in February 2011, when buses of youths were transported to a campaign rally of then-Governor Gabriel Suswam in Buruku LGA, with the apparent intention of disrupting the rally before being dispersed by security.²⁰
- Elsewhere, incidents of less directly electoral-related violence included the following:
 - 9 May 2010, violent clashes between rival PDP supporter factions over support for a traditional ruler in the state.²¹
 - Mid-February 2011, a wave of intercommunal conflict resulted in the deaths of at least 36 people, over 10,000 displaced, and widespread property destruction in Gwer West LGA, in a dispute related to tensions between the Fulani and Tiv communities.²²

Violence Against Women and Girls: There are no detailed reports on an increase or change in patterns gender and sexual-based violence or harassment in Benue surrounding the elections.

Response:

Civil Society: In the run-up to the April 2011 elections, a workshop was coordinated by Benue State Police, and with the participation of all major political parties, to encourage violence-free elections.

Political Leadership: Northern Nigerian state governors met in February 2011 to discuss the condition of insecurity affecting the region, and propose immediate action. In attendance were the governors of Benue, Jigawa, Kaduna, Katsina, Kwara, Nigeri, Sokoto and Zamfara states.²³ In wider attempts at reducing violence, the Benue State Government established a committee to identify the underlying and immediate drivers of intercommunal violence between Tiv and Fulani communities in Gwer West LGA, in February 2011.²⁴

¹³ *Vanguard*, 'Gunmen Attack Benue ACN Chairman, Scribe,' 23 February 2011.

¹⁴ *Vanguard*, 'Thugs Attack Lawmaker,' 28 February 2011.

¹⁵ *Leadership*, 'Gunmen Hit Reporters in Suswam's Convoy,' 4 March 2011.

¹⁶ *Daily Trust*, 'Benue ACN Deputy Gubernatorial Candidate Alleges Assassination Attempt,' 7 March 2011.

¹⁷ *Vanguard*, 'Armed Men Attack Mark's Campaign Train,' 19 March 2011.

¹⁸ *Vanguard*, 'Benue Gubernatorial Polls – Two Shot Dead, Over 50 Fake Observers Arrested,' 26 April 2011.

¹⁹ *Sahara Reporters*, 'Benue ACN Chieftain Assassinated,' 13 May 2011.

²⁰ *Daily Champion*, 'Hoodlums Chased out of Governor Suswam's Campaign Venue,' 23 February 2011.

²¹ Source: ACLED Data, www.acleddata.com, Version 4.

²² *Daily Independent*, 'Fulanis Sack Benue Community,' 21 February 2011; *Vanguard*, 'Tiv/Fulani Crises – 36 Dead, 10,000 Displaced in Benue,' 25 February 2011.

²³ *Xinhua General News Service*, 'Nigerian Governors Decry Insecurity in Northern Region,' 8 February 2011.

²⁴ *Leadership*, 'Fulani Raiders – Benue Government Inaugurates Committee,' 16 February 2011.



Security Forces: The deployment of security forces has been credited by some with containing the overall level of violence during the elections themselves. There was a particularly heavy deployment in Benue in advance of the gubernatorial elections, given the contest was seen as potentially volatile as a close race between PDP and ACN candidates.²⁵ However, several incidents in the months preceding the elections involve incidents in which security forces' activities – such as alleged harassment of civilians – appeared to inflame tensions, rather than dampen them.²⁶

Major Political Players in Benue State

Name	Position	Elected / Appointed	Party	Additional Information
Gabriel Suswam	State Governor	2007	PDP	Governor Suswam is running for senator in 2015.
Steven Lawani	Deputy Governor	2011	PDP	Lawani has declared interest to run for the governorship race in 2015
George Akume	Senator	2011	APC	-
David A.B Mark	Senator	2011	PDP	-
Barnabas Andyar Iyorher Gemade	Senator	2011	PDP	-

Scenario of possible election violence in Benue State:

Scenario 1

Before Elections

- Intra-party struggle for governorship ticket within PDP
- Ioretom wins the PDP primaries for governorship
- Baranabas Gemade wins ticket to contest for Zone A Senate for APC
- Emmanuel Jime wins APC primaries for governorship
- Tension with fears this will lead to violence in zone A specifically around Kwande because Suswam loses his Senatorial aspiration
- Federal stakeholders from Benue and traditional leaders make statements calling for peace

During Elections

- Ballot snatching and stuffing
- Massive vote rigging
- Accreditation issues
- Thuggery and intimidation from party agents, specifically in Zone A and Makurdi
- Violence in Zone B because of APC (Akume) influence in Tarka, Guma, and Gboko LGAs

²⁵ *Daily Trust*, 'Nigeria Strengthens Security ahead of 26 April Elections,' 25 April 2011.

²⁶ *Vanguard*, 'Tension as Soldiers, Civilians Clash in Makurdi,' 1 February 2011.



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After Elections

- Court cases declare Iretom (PDP) as winner
- Gemade, Akume and David Mark retain Senatorial seat

Scenario 2

Before Elections

- Intra party struggle for PDP and APC governorship candidate
- Hingah Biem gets the PDP governorship ticket
- Iretom decamps from PDP to APC and APC gives him governorship ticket; which leads to APC internal party conflict
- The electorate feel there is foul play in Iretom losing the PDP candidacy and there will be violence in Makurdi, Guma, Gboko, Tarka LGAs
- TIV traditional ruler (Tor Tiv, who is from Guma) will call for peace
- Gemade gets the APC ticket for Zone A senatorial seat
- Suswam gets the PDP ticket for Zone A senatorial seat
- Akume retains APC ticket for Zone B senatorial seat

During Elections

- Ballot snatching
- Massive rigging by both APC and PDP with PDP out-rigging
- Voter intimidation
- Inter party violence especially in Zone A and Zone B senatorial zone
- Hingah Biem emerges as governor; populace outraged due to perceived foul play leading to more violence
- Suswam emerges as Senator in Zone A
- Akume emerges as Senator in Zone B
- Violence continues in Zone A and Zone B senatorial zone

After Elections

- There will be a case at electoral tribunal
- Electoral tribunal declares Iretom as winner
- Mass violence in the state between PDP and APC supporters, especially the youth, especially in Zone B Senatorial district (Guma, Tarka, Makurdi, Gwer East, Gwer West, Buruku and Gboko LGAs)

BENUE STATE
ELECTION VIOLENCE SCENARIO



- Heightened security presence, including military, in the state
- President, David Mark, Akume and Tor Tiv will weigh in and ask for peace