



Building Transparent Polls

Reducing 2019 Election Risks

Executive Summary

The 2019 Nigerian elections are now less than three months away. Given the relative success of the 2015 elections – which, although flawed, saw an incumbent president relinquish power for the first time since Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999 – they have the potential to mark a major milestone in the consolidation of Nigerian democracy. But in a poll already fiercely contested, it is vital that confidence is strengthened in the security and transparency of the polls, especially in parts of the country that have seen serious abuses both during and since the 2015 elections.

This report is a qualitative analysis of the challenges facing those charged with building fair and transparent polls in light of this context, including, in particular, Nigeria’s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It is based on SDN’s engagement with off cycle elections since 2015, discussions with INEC, political actors and other civil society organisations, and contacts with a wide range of stakeholders who have engaged with election preparations in this cycle.

The report identifies three key problem areas.

First, a series of recent elections have been marred by well-documented political violence and manipulation. One result of this is that public confidence in the organisation of elections in Nigeria has taken significant knocks from each negative event. The breakdown in trust in the government and other agencies tasked with supervising polls includes the perception that the police and other security agencies are not only refusing to acknowledge or address these problems, but are actively involved in perpetuating them.

Second, one of the key means by which manipulation occurs is to either buy or intimidate voters into supporting particular parties. There is some evidence that this is getting worse, or has at least been under-recognised as problem that is also associated with voter harassment and intimidation. For example, vote-buying may previously have been a last resort to tip

the political balance in particularly competitive locations. But the persistent impunity for those alleged to be involved in such tactics means it may now be used at scale across the board, not just in areas where the polls are especially tight.

Third, confidence is diminishing in the processes that occur once voting has closed. New fears such as the threat of hacking – significant given INEC’s determination to digitise key processes – are combining with longstanding concerns about basic vote-counting procedures to increase the perception that the results chain from polling units through to final state figures is a key area of weakness, which could render void any progress made in supervising the elections themselves.

The cumulative risk of these three areas is simple. Public confidence in the overall ability of the government to organise safe and fair elections in 2019 already appears to be decreasing, well in advance of specific election threats. But if it continues to do so, turnout itself will be suppressed, as voters who would otherwise participate stay away because of the fear of violence, harassment, and the inability to prevent manipulation, as well as apathy and cynicism regarding the process. The potential for the election to be rigged will then become much higher, as those who would use violence and money to do so have relatively greater resources to focus on those voters who do turn out.

In order to avoid this becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, there are a number of key actions that can be taken.

First, there need to be specific and public commitments by INEC, the police, and the relevant security agencies to address those who would undermine the elections – including within their own ranks.

Second, INEC and the relevant agencies need to outline the clear and practical steps they will take to improve voting processes themselves,

such as by ensuring privacy at the polling booth.

Third, INEC should outline the key criteria it will use to determine whether to pursue the 'nuclear option' in the event of brazen manipulation, which is to suspend or postpone polls – and credibly signal that it will do this, despite the cost and disruption, if the integrity of an election is at risk.

Finally, it should adopt a number of key measures to improve transparency and confidence in the results chain, such as by making a public commitment to publishing results received at ward level within a week of the national polls.

These problems, and SDN's suggested responses to them, are outlined in detail below.

2. Election Security – a breakdown in trust

With just two two months to finalise their preparations for the 2019 elections, INEC and the security services are facing very low levels of trust in their ability to deliver an impartial election since the universally condemned polls of 2007.

This breakdown in trust has multiple negative impacts. The most damaging two are the risk of a collapse in confidence in the poll itself, and the prospect of all actors preparing with the assumption that the security services will be heavily partisan. To a large extent this

assumption of partisan security services is already 'priced in' to assumptions about the 2019 polls driving political behaviour from both the major parties.

One scenario is a poll where partisan behaviour and violence is assumed by all, suppressing voter turnout and leaving the poll at the mercy of heavily partisan groups, whose preparation has focused primarily on a combination of intimidation, vote buying, and violence. The final significant poll before 2019 – the run-off section of the Osun election in September 2018 – has reinforced public attention on this type of scenario.

This low-engagement, high-violence poll scenario should be of immediate concern to INEC, the Federal Government, and the international community, because it risks becoming self-fulfilling. Without clear actions to restore confidence, the most recent actions of the security services will become the reference point around which the public and all stakeholders make their own plans.

2.1 A trail of negative news

It is unfair to characterise the present challenges in security service conduct as new only to the present election cycle, as partisan conduct has been an issue since 1999. However, the 2015 and 2019 cycles have contained a growing chain of incidents that have undermined public and civil society confidence in the readiness of the security services to play a neutral role in the polls. The table below contains some examples:

Event	Issue
2015 Presidential Election – security services pressure for a six-week delay to polls for "Boko Haram operations".	Widely seen as a (PDP) government-driven delay because of uncertainty regarding the poll outcome.
2015 Presidential and Governorship Election in Rivers State – police and armed services.	Both major parties exploiting connections to security services for partisan support.
2016 Edo Election – police announce that forces are not available for poll just four days before the election, resulting in a two-week delay.	olls delayed for two weeks because of police unavailability – widely interpreted as a politicised move backed by the ruling APC.
2016 Rivers State re-runs.	Media and election observers report on systematic intervention of the police in favour of the APC.
2018 Port Harcourt State Assembly by-election.	Election suspended after INEC reports interference by groups escorted by uniformed personnel.
2018 Osun run-off.	Three major observer groups refuse to sign off on poll as credible due to violence and security management issues.

While there have been elections where security services performance has been acknowledged as better than expected (for example, the Anambra Governorship election in 2017), public perception is often driven by the most recent developments and overall trends. The last two high visibility polls before 2019 cast a disturbing light on the conduct of the security services:

- A suspended state assembly election in Port Harcourt, Rivers State in August 2018, where INEC's leadership publicly decried disruption by groups escorted by "uniformed personnel".
- The Osun Governorship run-off, in September 2018, where all of the major observer groups cited partisan violence in which security services were either directly implicated or stood by while abuse occurred.

Unless action is taken to address concerns these are the polls and security conduct that the public and political stakeholders will reference in framing their final expectations for 2019.

2.2 Perceived and real impunity

One of the key drivers for public distrust is the lack of accountability for action and inaction on the part of the security services in relation to elections. A Nigerian police statement on the conduct of the Osun run-off directly contradicts the views of the major observer groups:

"There were no official complaints of violence or injury to persons reported at any Police Station/Division in all the Seven (7) Units where the re-run election was held on 27th September, 2018." - Nigeria Police Force Statement September 28th 2018

In relation to the other events listed in 2.1, there have been no significant investigations or prosecutions of security personnel publicly reported. This lack of consequence has created a strong public and civil society impression that these actions have been carried out with either command acquiescence or active approval.

The best documented case backing this perception is in Rivers State in August 2018. Despite investigations from INEC producing reporting which explicitly names Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) police in serious incidents and alleges that the SARS commander, Akin Fakorede, assaulted an INEC official, there appears to have been no

action taken by the police. The same SARS commander remains in place in the state and was reported as unusually having been

redeployed for a period of just three months before being returned to the same position.

There have been no reported cases of disciplinary action taken against officers alleged to be involved in the Rivers re-run polls or the August by-election. Instead there has been silence since an initial denial of partisan behaviour by the Rivers State Police Commissioner, and a commitment to "work with stakeholders" on the investigation into the cause of the August by election being suspended in Rivers State.

The police reaction to the Osun run-off poll – of outright denial of any problem – is the most problematic development in promoting confidence in police accountability. It stands in contrast to widely documented live reporting by both media and election observers who had previously been positive about police conduct during the main poll:

"Members of the public are hereby implored to disregard and discountenance claims in some sections of the media that Security Agencies intimidate Journalists, Election Observers and voters during the re-run election" - Nigeria Police Force Statement September 28th 2018

2.3 The dysfunctional INEC-security services relationship

Before the 2015 elections, an inter-agency committee on election security was created. This was intended to be an interface and co-ordination mechanism between INEC and the security services who are supposed to support the organisation of the elections. This committee is also supposed to be replicated at the state level.

It is at this level that systematic failures like those cited above could be thrashed out and plans for elections in which officers could be held accountable would also be agreed. Yet to external actors there is little sign of the co-operation and leadership that would address incidents like those cited above.

2.4 Collaboration between violent partisan groups and security services

Probably the most damaging perception of security services is their observed and reported

willingness to act in collaboration with armed groups favouring the government during polls.

This has become part of the public narrative at several levels:

- Clear reporting of their partisan involvement in states such as Rivers.
- Political chatter – where mid- and low-level (and, reportedly, some members of the leadership of political parties) boast of the co-operation of security services and how it will ensure impunity for their actions.
- Political accusations of collaboration. These are given greater credence when there are additional incidents locally and nationally, such as the police action around the National Assembly, widely described as an ‘invasion’, in August 2018.

This expectation of partisan collusion is especially damaging to the prospect of the public participating in elections without fear of intimidation and harassment.

These are not baseless fears. During the Osun run-off, there were highly visible examples of intimidation and harassment of voters, the media, and observers, despite a security presence that was sometimes reported as being just metres away. It is this intimidation and violence, with the apparent acquiescence of the security services, that was the most frequent allegation regarding the Osun run-off.

During the Rivers State by-election, in Port Harcourt in August 2018, there were multiple security agencies within the eight wards where the poll was conducted. Despite this, INEC and the media reported a group moving from ward to ward including uniformed personnel assaulting election officials and collecting election materials over a period of approximately two hours. During this period, complaints to the police seemingly went unanswered.

Within Rivers and Akwa Ibom states there is a persistent narrative in political circles of both the major parties that anticipates blatant collaboration between the security services and party youth in the upcoming 2019 polls. This narrative is bolstered by evidence that includes:

- Observation and media reports during the 2016 Rivers re-run polls of security forces and APC agents moving in tandem to collect election materials from polling units.

- Post-election interviews indicating that young people were put into uniform and embedded with security services during the re-run polls.

2.5 Preparations for violence

The ‘off cycle’ polls in Nigeria tend to suggest a more optimistic picture of election preparedness than is realistic for national polls. This is because they enjoy radically more resources than are available for the regular polls and have a degree of oversight that cannot be replicated when 36 states are voting together.

We foresee two major problems.

First, those associated with the ruling political party will be emboldened by the relative impunity enjoyed by actors in recent months in Rivers and Osun. ‘Successful’ disruption will be taken as a sign that an effective election campaign can and should involve the co-optation of the security forces. As a result, the PDP-centred opposition will likely conclude that they require as much of their own leverage as they can secure, and will continue preparations accordingly. This will continue a political arms race that has already started nationally, risking a much broader recourse to armed violence than has been seen previously.

3. Election security and the breakdown in trust – what can be done?

The steps that need to be taken at this stage in the election cycle need to be highly visible and mark a change in approach that is beyond debate. Half-measures will be too readily dismissed as an attempt to whitewash a problem already firmly established in voters’ minds.

The following steps could be taken within the available time:

- **Ensure that the leadership of security services meet with INEC and civil society on security risks and specific steps that need to be taken to reassure the public.**

By now both independent organisations such as CLEEN, and the security services themselves, will have identified states which they consider

to be at high risk of violence and electoral abuse.

Steps that the working group could take could include security services working with INEC to reinforce independent monitoring in these states, and combining efforts to bring non-partisan pressure on political parties to restrain their behaviour through the election period.

This is also an area where the Police Services Commission could engage and give greater weight and urgency to its role in the oversight of police conduct, deployment and accountability.

4. Vote buying, intimidation and harassment

Vote buying has optimistically been described as a sign that politicians are being moved on from more direct forms of rigging elections to indirect efforts to influence outcomes. Therefore vote buying is a 'side effect' of progress.

Experience from Niger Delta states suggests this may be a dangerous simplification. Vote buying can be a final gambit by politicians, but our observations suggest that:

- Vote buying can also be a symptom of populations completely losing faith in elections (so voters will not come out for a 'charade' without being paid).
- Vote buying can be strongly associated with voter intimidation and harassment.
- Vote buying can also be a sign of serious impunity problems – where brazen vote buying is considered an option with little consequence.

One of the risks with vote buying is that it forms a strong example of the problem of reducing options for fraud in one area while leaving a path of "least resistance" open in others.

A longstanding problem – now a norm in too many areas?

SDN's experience in Niger Delta states since 2007 is that there has been a significant problem with vote buying and payment for turnout to voters in every election that we have observed. One of the key issues with attention on vote buying and payments to voters is that in troubled areas, there has been an understandable focus on more

dramatic manipulation of results and violence, which have seen vote buying move into the background. But based on media reports and our observation (although less frequent) in other regions, we think vote buying is far more established across the country than is often acknowledged.

Unless the longstanding nature of this problem is recognised, then efforts to address it are unlikely to be successful. In the 2019 election efforts to curtail vote buying need to be realistic and to tackle aspects of vote buying that are reasonably within control of INEC and other actors.

There is an apparent marked difference between urban and rural areas, for a number of reasons, which include:

The reliance of vote buying politicians on rural areas as a 'vote bank' that can be manipulated with less public and media scrutiny.

The economic situation and nature of electorate – vote buying in urban areas is inevitably more costly, faces a diverse population that is more difficult to organise, and contains many more actors who are likely to generate resistance or attention.

As mentioned above there is a history of making payments in various forms for turnout.

4.1 What has changed with vote buying?

The main change in relation to vote buying over the last two-four years appears to have been a shift:

- From payments to voters whose presence alone legitimises dubious efforts to produce inflated and manipulated results.
- To a much more transactional arrangement, where increasing amounts of money are paid to voters, and there is more attention on (and hence expectation around) exactly how they have voted.

This is also a sign of vote buying taking place in more contested areas. Previously, payments tended to be for turning out in areas which were dominated exclusively by one political party, and in the most troubled areas there was little pressure on how this would impact the ability to generate favourable (inflated) results.

Now there is a double change:

- With increasing political competition between the two major parties, vote buying is a tool that is applicable in contested areas where other means are not an option.
- The card reader putting a cap on turnout increases the pressure on these two main parties to bring out more 'real people' as voters, and really does limit options for relying on manipulation during collation.

4.2 Impunity

We would argue that from 2015 onwards there has been a serious problem of impunity relating to vote buying in both the main elections and off cycle polls.

Aside from the more recent controversies in Ekiti and Osun state, there has been significant reporting of vote buying as a norm in elections in Bayelsa and Edo, with virtually no consequence.

This was likely a leading factor in vote buying being practised with increasing visibility over the past three years. It can appear as a low or no-risk activity, other than the partisan risk that opposition parties attempting to buy votes in a given election were more likely to have funds intercepted by the authorities than the incumbent party.

So after the issue of increased political competition and the advent of the card reader, impunity has potentially been the next major factor for vote buying moving from being a component of manipulating polls to a much more central part of influencing outcomes.

4.3 Harassment and voter intimidation

The recent Osun run-off election highlighted how vote buying can be strongly associated with voter suppression and intimidation.

The small pool of voters set off a bidding war for payments to voters, but also massively increased the benefits from blocking voters who had not been recruited from accessing the poll in the first place, or casting a free vote.

In these circumstances, the harassment of opposing voters becomes a key tactic, because blocking opposing voters can be less effort

than buying voters in your favour.

Although the Osun supplementary election was an extreme example, it highlights what has been seen in the Niger Delta states and elsewhere alongside vote buying. Increasingly agents involved in vote buying are looking for certainty that their investment has paid off. So efforts will be made to watch how voters cast their vote, prevent opposing voters from turning out, and generally seize control of a polling unit as far as possible.

A key lesson is that where action on vote buying is seen as critical there is an associated need to act broadly on the other standard abuses that will influence how votes are cast. For example, acting on privacy at the polling booth is laudable, but the commitment of the security services to protecting voters from harassment becomes critical in tense environments.

4.4 Voter disillusionment

There is a much larger discussion about how to restrict vote buying and selling in the medium term. This will require serious action on the transparency of government and private funds, as well as public education. One key condition for a vote selling market is the belief that the activity 'makes little difference'. This is associated with the presumption on the part of the voter that their vote will not count, either locally, at a collation level, or state-wide.

In more troubled areas this perception is often well founded. Voters in parts of Rivers, Delta, and Bayelsa state have seen election results that bear no resemblance to local participation for almost two decades.

However, it is crucial to recognise that this perception is also sometimes seriously misplaced. In the Osun main election, the poll would have been concluded if only a very small number of extra voters had turned out for the PDP.

In areas that have suffered from repeated abuse, there is a need to systematically rebuild public confidence. This will require patience, and a focus on determining areas where improvements can be secured. Efforts should also be made to highlight how neighbouring areas could benefit from the same changes.

5. Vote buying, intimidation and harassment – what can be done?

There are three contrasting points to be considered for those seeking to address vote buying and selling in the run-up to the 2019 elections.

First, the combination of vote buying and voter suppression/intimidation is a serious threat to the credibility and acceptability of the 2019 polls. However, second, with limited time and powers, there is a need to be realistic about what INEC can do. Third, applying measures in isolation can be hazardous, and there is the potential for unintended consequences. For example, increasing voter privacy at the polling booth – in principle, a positive development – could increase the incentive for voter harassment and obstruction before voters reach the polling unit (as seen in the Osun runoff poll).

In the circumstances we would suggest a focus on the following:

- **Have the strongest possible commitment from INEC and security services on voter privacy at the polling unit.**

This is critical as it is a key issue for both voter intimidation and for reducing 'value' in vote buying. It also takes some pressure off voters, who if they are being leaned on to take payments, can accept funds but still vote in private.

It is still feasible for INEC to issue additional specific instructions (and training) for polling unit staff and police for 2019 on how to lay out and protect voter privacy when voting.

This is also an issue where success or failure will be relatively visible for election observers and party agents – and progress or lack thereof can easily be put on record.

One lesson from Osun is that better voter privacy is more easily achieved in some environments, such as schools, than others. Advice and planning for polling units in less ideal locations is something that can be tasked to state and local government offices.

INEC appears to be making efforts in this direction and increasing the visibility of this can both help voter confidence and allow voters and actors at the polling units to assert themselves on the need for privacy while voting.

- **Push the security services to commit to their core responsibility of preventing voter harassment and intimidation before and during the polls.**

The Osun run-off highlighted the problem of systematic harassment of voters before they even reached the polling unit. Preventing this needs to be a core responsibility of the police and other services in 2019, and there needs to be a clear acceptance of this responsibility by services under direction from INEC.

The Osun run-off also made clear the risk of partisan abuse to be ignored or actively supported by security services.

The responsibility lies with the police and the armed services to make public commitments to both impartiality and protecting voters ahead of the polls, and to back this with visible action in the coming months.

Without these steps, there is a high risk of the 2019 polls being tainted well before polling booths open. INEC will then be left with few options to restore any legitimacy or public confidence in the polls, with the potential for low voter turnout and the election to be more easily rigged to become self-fulfilling.

- **Encourage INEC to consider all its options to respond to trouble, including suspending polls where voter harassment and intimidation is seen as severe.**

INEC needs to consider all its levers for maintaining a degree of normality in the elections. It has specific relevant powers, such as those to suspend ongoing elections (or postpone before they commence) if conditions are not conducive to a reasonable poll. It was this justification that was used to suspend elections in Port Harcourt in August 2018, when they spiralled out of control with the violent collection of election materials by armed groups with the backing of as yet unexplained "uniformed personnel".

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INEC should outline the key criteria that will be used to determine whether these conditions are met and have mechanisms on election day that can respond swiftly enough to prevent the presentation of a *fait accompli* by those driving abuse.

Postponing a given election is another option. This should not be considered lightly, not least because it is highly disruptive and expensive. But unless INEC is prepared to use such provisions it risks being held hostage by actors whose interests are in producing partisan results by any means necessary.

6. Diminishing confidence in election results

Since 2010, INEC has made various promises about publishing the detailed results of elections so that voters and political parties can see that votes cast at local units reflect in the final results. Generally these promises have not been met.

There was a brief period three months after the 2011 elections where scanned versions of results sheets for much of the country were available online, although the site was later removed. Since then, INEC has failed to publish a single set of results broken down beyond local government level, and even at that level, such numbers are not readily available.

This systematic failure has allowed space for growing distrust in results from INEC alongside questions about results chain integrity.

6.1 An increasingly suspicious environment

As the 2019 poll approaches, there are an increasing number of voices raising concerns about the integrity of INEC’s electronic systems, specifically regarding the potential for partisan actors to hack INEC systems. Having made a choice to have electronic systems at the

core of its election, INEC will need to answer tough questions on whether card readers can be hacked, how data is protected at its head office, and whether its vendors for equipment or other suppliers are possible sources of vulnerability.

6.2 Card reader vulnerability

INEC has taken steps to upgrade its voter card readers and fingerprint authentication, but claims of absolute invulnerability will be weighted against public experience that no system is perfect. Software upgrades have to be balanced against the technology being deployed for more than four years - a relatively long time for those with malign intent to be able to probe for vulnerabilities. What will matter in terms of credibility of the system is a better public understanding of the checks and balances that surround electronic systems (noting that some protections will inevitably be confidential).

6.3 Results chain - space for questions

The results chain came under scrutiny in the Osun election partly because of a laudable attempt at transparency on the part of INEC. The publicly released summation for the Ayadadee local government had a figure of 10,836 votes for PDP, which was later corrected as 9,836 in the results presented at state collation. INEC is standing by the lower figure, but has no explanation on how a mistake like this could arise, given that it is not an obvious typographical error. Meanwhile, the PDP has made specific allegations about changes in results in other LGAs with a combined effect of over 4,000 votes¹ – enough to swing the poll. The accuracy of the PDP claims will be tested in the ponderous process of election tribunals, but that will do little to answer questions in the six months until a ruling, not to mention of the limited public confidence in the tribunal system.

The space for such challenges is left wide open by INEC’s failure to release results breakdowns under anything other than a court order. Yet INEC’s electronic vote system has all of the data that would be required to release results immediately, at least down to ward level.

6.4 Space for manipulation

INEC has for some time held the position that results chain manipulation is a thing of the

¹ <https://leadership.ng/2018/09/25/osun-poll-pdp-accuses-inec-of-removing-4387-from-party-valid-votes/>

past, as a result of the introduction of checks and balances using the card reader system. This is only partially true at best. It ignores three options for results chain manipulation:

- Manipulation of the vote share for political parties within the stipulated turnout.
- Compromise of the card reader system itself.
- Blatant manipulation of results at the unit and ward level - where politicians in some states are acutely aware that the Supreme Court has ruled that inconsistency with card reader numbers is not alone sufficient for rejection of a result.

Of these three possibilities, manipulation of the vote share is far easier and could be done at the unit, ward, or even local government collation without being easily detected (unless tracking back to source material).

In terms of public and political party suspicion and controversies, the least visible results after compilation of results are the unit and ward levels. In the past it has been these lower levels where results have most frequently been manipulated. Public and stakeholder confidence remains seriously dented by this history, and by an informal narrative coming from various levels of political parties that they can still control results at this level.

7. Diminishing confidence in election results – what can be done?

One clear course to address these issues is as follows:

- First, INEC should publish the unit-level results for Osun state as a demonstration of its commitment to transparency in advance of the 2019 polls.
- Second, it should introduce a clear additional step of referring back to source material where objections arise during collation.
- Third, political parties should improve their own approach to collation and ensure that specific objections on results are publicly raised at the earliest possible stage (and transmitted up the chain).

- Fourth, INEC should make a public commitment to publish results as received at ward level within a week of the national polls alongside data on voter turnout from card readers.
(In meetings with civil society organizations INEC has reported that it continues to develop the capacity to collect results data both via electronic transmission trials and the scanning of results sheets, so the primary question is willingness and confidence in releasing this material externally)

There are legitimate fears around publishing results, which, given the scale and variable capacity of officials, will inevitably contain some errors and signs of manipulation. But the additional steps required for INEC to release data at ward level should be minimal, and INEC can take steps to sensitise the public – for example, highlighting that paper results hold primacy in the event of transcription errors. INEC can also protect itself from controversy and accusations of being partial by being ready to release source material (such as unit and ward results) swiftly and on demand in areas where there have been questions about the compiled results.

This a tricky area for INEC, as these measures would acknowledge the fact that that published results will contain imperfections. But this would bring INEC into line with countries that have passed this hurdle and, it is accepted that publication of detailed results can allow errors to be corrected and rightly throw a spotlight on areas that need attention because of manipulation.

On the key issue of ensuring poll credibility the publication of result breakdowns, there are three big wins for INEC. Firstly, by publishing breakdowns they will be able to confront allegations of manipulation that don't have a basis in reality. Secondly, they will be able to isolate areas that are questionable and show that they are willing to act on these from the outset rather than maintaining a defensive posture in the face of all allegations. Thirdly, they will be able to reduce the space for manipulation- where the certainty of exposure will limit how far some abuses can go.

Conclusion

In the final weeks going into the 2019 elections, INEC faces the challenge of a closely contested poll which will inevitably magnify both tensions and focus on their own performance.

Time is short but there is still scope for action on these key measures where:

- All stakeholders need to press for improved security services support to INEC, especially in communicating that the services will act neutrally under the clear direction of INEC.
- Action on vote buying needs to recognise the broad base of the problem and include steps to protect voters from harassment and intimidation.
- INEC should protect election credibility by acting on its past commitments to publish breakdowns of election results within days of the poll conclusion.

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