

NIGER DELTA WATCH 2019

A citizen-led election observation project

Report: Niger Delta Watch 2019 #1

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Summary

This is the first weekly report of Niger Delta Watch 2019.

Niger Delta Watch 2019 is a citizen-led elections observation project reporting on the 2019 Nigerian presidential and governorship elections. It focuses on the States of Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Akwa Ibom. The project is a joint initiative of Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) and the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (CSSR).

The goal of Niger Delta Watch 2019 is to generate accurate information on the 2019 Nigerian election campaign as it unfolds in the Niger Delta. The information is for the benefit of the Nigerian government, its electoral agencies, security services and journalists, researchers, civil society organisations and others working to support democracy in Nigeria.

This short introductory report contains qualitative analysis of political dynamics and key incidents in the project's target States. The reporting format and structure will be developed as the project progresses.

Future reports will include qualitative and quantitative visual analysis for Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta, as well as the region as a whole. This will be based on information submitted by trained citizen Election Observers to a bespoke database developed for this project. For Akwa Ibom State, there will be a qualitative report based on a smaller number of observers.

The reports will also include analysis of social media traffic, examining issues relating to fake news and misinformation spread online concerning the Niger Delta.

Reports will be published each Monday, and more information will be provided in blog posts, in-person briefings in Abuja and Port Harcourt, and online webinars. These will provide the opportunity for report recipients to discuss the information contained in the reports with members of the project team.

Please visit www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections2019, which will be updated regularly, for more information on all aspects of this project.

Disclaimer: note that the information and analysis contained in these reports do not represent the views of any one organisation. SDN and CSSR have made efforts to ensure that the information is accurate, but will aim to correct any errors or omissions as new information emerges.

Rivers

There is already an atmosphere of insecurity in Rivers State.

Some key incidents reported by observers this week include:

- Visits to Tai LGA by the two major political parties (APC and PDP) in Tai LGA as part of operation show your voters' card. The PDP started from Ward 2, Kpite, and ended at Ward 10, Ban Ogoi. The APC started from Ward 5, Kira and ended at Ward 2, Kpite. It was good to note that the parties conducted the activities with no violent incidents recorded.
- In Bakana community, Degema LGA, the APC Governorship candidate Arc. Dele Cole and his campaign team were reportedly attacked by gunmen and were prevented from campaigning in the community.
- In Ahoada West LGA, APC members defected to the PDP and were received by the LGA Chairman, Hon. Evang. Hope Ikiriko.
- In Omoku LGA, which has been deeply troubled by gang violence and killings, two major political parties were going about their ward to ward campaigns simultaneously without violence, believed to be as a result of local vigilantes OSPAC and other security agencies alert in the LGA. The OSPAC announced through a local town crier in Erema community (a political violence hotspot) for boys and girls who had fled the community to return. Locally, many see this as a likely opportunity for violence before, during and after the elections.
- Cases of campaign misconduct (inflammatory speech) in Oyigbo LGA by the major parties, APC and PDP.
- In Port Harcourt LGA, women from the opposition party accused Governor Wike of being behind the spate of killings in the State. Governor Wike on the other hand, has accused the APC-led federal government of planning to plant 800 guns in the State in connivance with the security agencies, to cause violence that would affect the Governorship election in Rivers. The APC, in turn, through its spokesperson at a radio press conference, accused Governor Wike of having bought guns for his thugs to intimidate others.
- Shooting in Ikwere LGA by alleged APC hoodlums, during a Permanent Voter Card collection sensitisation rally led by the LGA Chairman Samuel Nwanosike of PDP. This reportedly led to one death, scores of injuries and smashed vehicles. An APC Chieftain, Samuel Wanjoku, was kidnapped by unknown gunmen and murdered in Ikwere LGA. His body was reported as found around Nov 17 while another APC member, remains missing. Media reports list six deaths in recent weeks and appeals from the LG Chairman naming the operator of a gang in the area. Observers also report allegations of gangs being armed in the area by major political parties. In Rumuokoro, Obio/Akpor LGA, a SARS police unit harassed and detained men on their daily business on accusation of being responsible for this. In the process, six men reportedly were shot and killed by the policemen.
- Also in Ikwere LGA, the LG Chairman accused the Minister of transport, Hon. Chibuke Amaechi (who comes from the local government) and other APC chieftains of sponsoring cult gangs and playing politics of desperation, intimidation and assassination.

Bayelsa

The last seven days have generally witnessed a peaceful campaign trail in Bayelsa. Some key incidents include the following:

- In Southern Ijaw, the largest LGA in the State and which has very prominent political stakeholders, ex-militants and activists, campaigns for the National Assembly elections by the PDP and the APC have commenced with peace and no major incidents of interest.
- The situation is similar in Ekeremor, where candidates have so far been adhering to INEC guidelines for the campaigns.
- Several violent clashes took place in Brass LGA, most specifically in Twon-Brass where a building belonging to an APC member was targeted. Some party members were also injured and hospitalised. The NULGE Chairman alleged that he escaped an assassination attempt that was politically engineered. The situation in Brass is interesting because it is home to both the former Governor Timipre Sylva (now APC leader in Bayelsa) and a strong APC aspirant for the Nembe-Brass Federal Constituency.
- In Yenagoa, the aspirant for the Yenagoa-Kolga Federal Constituency Election from the APC alleged that his billboards and posters had been torn down by thugs who had been paid by his opponents. While observers confirm the torn posters, there is no evidence of who is doing it. Beside this, the National Assembly Campaigns have also started and aspirants are moving from community to community to try to win support from voters.
- In Sagbama, home of the current Governor, campaigns have generally been peaceful. While not much violence is expected here, there are rumours that some persons are being arraigned for attempting to rob the Governor in his Country home. It has not been verified whether this incident has any political undertone.
- In Nembe, the Amanyano of Nembe hosted a peace meeting where all aspirants from the area were made to sign undertakings to be of good conduct in the forthcoming elections. There was no other major political incident recorded during the last 7 days. Nembe is also likely to be a flashpoint, and will be closely monitored as we move closer towards the Elections next year.
- In Ogbia, the LGA of former President Goodluck Jonathan, several young people have issues with the Governor. Last week, youths were in court to support the IYC Vice Chairman Central Zone who has been in detention on the alleged orders of the Governor. The political tension between those who are loyal to the former president and those loyal to the governor is growing.
- Kolokuma/Opoluma is the smallest LGA in terms of political strength, with just two State Constituencies. It is the home of Timi Alaibe, a former NDDC MD and Governorship hopeful who recently defected back to the PDP and is getting a lot of support from his constituents, and Honourable Douye Diri, a House of Reps member and PDP Senatorial District aspirant for Bayelsa Central. Their campaigns have started and have so far been peaceful. As we move closer to the elections, however, KOLGA may be a conflict hotspot.
- One very interesting fact in this period is the fact that majority of the aspirants are establishing specific media teams with the high involvement of young people with strong social media followings. The implication is that the social media will be strongly used as a campaign medium in the forthcoming elections.

Delta

Election Observers in Delta State reported instances of election-related violence, and political party and campaign misconduct. These are summarised below:

- In the last one week, there have been verbal and physical threats aimed at intimidating political opponents, particularly with respect to the two major political parties, the PDP and APC.
- In Ndokwa East LGA, armed ADC/political supporters reportedly shot sporadically at a PDP House of Assembly Member to try and intimidate them into withdrawing from the forthcoming election in Delta State.
- One critical element from the reports so far are that the Governorship Candidates of APC and PDP in the State have been very civil, but their surrogates are potentially fanning the embers of violence should their candidates not win.
- One person was killed in Uvwie LGA, while there were reports of kidnapping in Udu LGA to deter political opponents.
- There were violent protests by youths in Patani LGA who have vowed to prevent the 2019 elections from taking place in their communities if the violence usually unleashed by herders in Bensengha is not mitigated.
- Similarly, there was a violent protest by a militia group in Warri South West for their neglect and they have alleged will deploy their members to willing and ready "Pay Master" in any available political party during the 2019 general elections.
- Contention over APC party primaries and candidates in Delta State resulted in the destruction of APC Governorship Candidate posters by suspected supporters of a contending aspirant on the same political party platform, indicating high internal party rivalry and discord.
- These incidents may be pointers of things that may come. The atmosphere is heated with mass mobilisation of supporters of the two largest parties.

Akwa Ibom

In Akwa Ibom State a smaller number of observers are deployed with a brief to update on specific incidents and the overall atmosphere. Akwa Ibom State has a history of electoral violence and fraud. Its elections in 2011 were marred by widespread violence, resulting in wanton killings and destruction of property. In 2015, there were also reports of violence, though not as widespread as in 2011. Recent developments have heightened political tensions in the State and raised concerns about the 2019 polls.

State House of Assembly

This comes against the backdrop of the defection of Godswill Akpabio, former Governor of the State and now Senator, from the PDP to the APC. The senator was recently quoted in Vanguard saying that APC's takeover of the State would be like Hitler's invasion of Poland, a statement that has been widely interpreted by the PDP and others as a threat of violence. Recent developments appear to be a fulfilment of this assertion as rival factions of the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly have been embroiled in a battle of control which many, especially members of the PDP, have alleged is orchestrated by the ruling APC.

Five lawmakers had their seats declared vacant by the State Assembly for defecting from the PDP to the APC on 19 November amid violent protests (although rarely used the Electoral Act stipulates that a seat shall be declared vacant if a member switches party). The affected lawmakers forcefully entered the Assembly after their ouster and on Tuesday 27 held a session where they purportedly impeached the Speaker and suspended 11 members with their leader, Nse Ntuen, now claiming to be Speaker of the State Assembly. The ensuing tension has left the State in a state of apprehension as tempers remain high and allegations and counter-allegations have filled the air. Governor Emmanuel has accused the Police of providing support to APC actors both during the violent protests against the suspension of the five Assembly members and subsequently during their sitting to form a competing Assembly body. He has also claimed to have video of youths armed with AK47s in security services uniform who were reportedly arrested and later released by the police (with denials from the Police Commissioner). Police Commissioner Bassey Abang was replaced with Musa Kimo on November 23 after just one month in the position.

Cash for support?

It will also be important to monitor the influence of money on the elections as many groups are reportedly already sharing money which suggests vote buying in advance of the elections. These are serious warning signals of the possibility of violence and corruption during the general elections in 2019 in Akwa Ibom.

PDP women's groups in Onna held a political rally on Saturday, November 24. The rally, which started at about 11am, took off from Onna Secretariat, Abat through Science school junction and ended at about 2pm at Awa round about. The rally was to drum up support for Governor Udom Emmanuel's re-election. However, a citizen election observer saw huge sums of money being shared to each group leader to disburse to their members.

Coming soon: social media in the Niger Delta

Social media plays a key role in the dissemination of news and debate around the world. It is therefore particularly relevant to democratic processes, including elections.

Social media can also be used to spread misinformation and fake news. This is a problem in Nigeria as it is elsewhere in the world, and so this project aims to provide information on this aspect of the Nigerian elections.

Future reports will include summaries of stories that are trending on Nigerian social media that are relevant to the elections in the Niger Delta, and how these stories have been shared.

The reports will include an analysis of any narratives that are prevalent in these and their state-specific context. They will focus on the dissemination of fake news or inflammatory speech.

The goal of incorporating this information into this project is to try to identify dangerous narratives at an early stage. The project team will be engaging with relevant stakeholders to support responses that can be taken to address these.

To do this, a small number of Social Media Analysts (SMAs) have been trained as part of the project. Based in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states, the SMAs took part in the same election observation training as other project team members, and were then provided with further training on how to identify, gather and process data on social media traffic.

Each week, the SMAs will observe social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, to analyse public responses to news stories and social media posts in their state, using online tools to aid them in identifying fake news.

The data compiled each week will be summarised and form the basis of an overall social media report for the Niger Delta region.

Note that this is an emerging area of work in democracy support around the world, and the format of this report may vary.

About Niger Delta Watch 2019

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The goal of Niger Delta Watch 2019 is to generate accurate information on the election campaign as it unfolds, for the benefit of the Nigerian government, its electoral agencies, and journalists, researchers, civil society organisations and others working to support democracy in Nigeria.

The project's reporting is based on information generated and analysed by approximately 100 citizen Election Observers, Data Analysts, and Social Media Analysts.

Reports are published each Monday, covering the period of the preceding Monday-Sunday. For example, this report is published on Monday 03 December, and refers to the period of 19-25 November inclusive. This is in order to finalise the gathering, processing and analysis of data.

More information will be provided in blog posts, in-person briefings in Abuja and Port Harcourt, and online webinars. These will provide the opportunity for report recipients to discuss the information they contain with members of the project team.

Please visit www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections2019, which will be updated regularly, for more information on all aspects of this project, including how the reports are produced. We are also keen to hear how the reports could be made more useful.

Disclaimer: *this report is produced as part of a Niger Delta elections observation project being led by SDN in partnership with the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room. The project is funded by the UK's Department for International Development. Please note that the information and analysis contained in the report do not necessarily represent the views or policies of the British government.*

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The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) was consulted for training in data management and visualisation for this project. Democracy Reporting International led the training of Election Observers participating in this project.

