

NIGER DELTA WATCH 2019

A citizen-led election observation project

Report: Niger Delta Watch 2019 #2

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Summary

This is the second weekly report of Niger Delta Watch 2019. It highlights key incidents reported by the project's citizen election observers in each state. As of next week, we will include visual trend analysis, and specific incidents will be used to highlight key dynamics.

In **Rivers** there were several killings. The tensions in the state were highlighted by military raids on the state government's 'neighbourhood watch' training camp and by a high court ordering the arrest of APC campaign director, Chidi Lloyd, on attempted murder charges relating to alleged assaults committed in 2013 at the State Assembly. There were also several successful and peaceful political meetings.

In **Bayelsa**, citizen concerns are emerging concerning the potential for violence to be used to discourage people from voting.

In **Delta**, incidents highlight the tensions between and within the two major political parties. These include the destruction of campaign billboards and accusations of spying.

In **Akwa Ibom** the State House of Assembly crisis has deepened the polarisation of the state along PDP-APC political lines. Electioneering by these parties has been characterised by inflammatory statements, the destruction of campaign billboards, and cases of physical assaults and clashes.

One ongoing regional dynamic is the redeployment of security personnel. This continues to raise suspicions among political actors and analysts, some of whom tend to interpret change as a negative sign. Repeated changes to the Police Commissioner (now up to eight in six months) in Bayelsa have been followed by a new switch in Akwa Ibom. The latest Police Commissioner, Musa Kimo, follows his predecessor (John Abang) who lasted just a month. The new commissioner has the 'baggage' of previously being in charge in Rivers State in 2015 to 2016 when the police were reported as being directly involved in lifting election materials from polling units. Delta State also has a new Commissioner, and although this comes after a relatively normal two years, it is already arousing suspicions. The Rivers Commissioner is reportedly also due for change, and it would make a crucial difference to perceptions across the region if an officer with a track record for moderating in disputes were appointed.

Rivers

This week in Rivers State, major incidents included the raiding of the Neighbourhood Safety Corps Agency training camp by the Nigerian Army. Political campaigns are reported to be continuing with few incidents other than political actors exploiting social occasions to highlight their candidates.

Port Harcourt:

- On December 06, a State Court ordered the arrest and detention of APC Governorship Campaign Director Chidi Lloyd over an incident relating to the breakdown in the State Assembly in 2013 in the run-up to the 2015 elections. Lloyd is charged with attempted murder over an assault on another assembly member where he was videotaped assaulting him with a ceremonial mace. The case highlights the gulf between the state and the police and the presumptions of politicisation that will follow. Lloyd was first charged in a case that was dismissed because of lack of follow up by the police. The fresh charges are reportedly being brought by state prosecutors relying on state level law rather than federal law, which would require the police to lead the prosecution.

Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni:

- Two members of the local vigilante group OSPAC, from Obiyede and Akbata, were murdered while on duty. Investigations are underway regarding whether there is a political motivation.
- On 30 November 2018, the mutilated corpse of a young man was discovered along Ohiauga road. The victim is said to be from Erema Community and had just completed his National Youth Service.
- On 30 November, the APC candidate for Onelga constituency 1, Hon. Sunny ESOR Ogide, inaugurated his media team in his home Town, Akabuka. The exercise was peaceful.
- On 3 December, there was tension in Egita community, as both indigenes and other residents fled the community for fear of invasion by unknown gunmen. This happened following the killing of a retired police officer and subsequent abduction of his 14-year-old son in the early hours of December 2, 2019.

Omuma

- On December 2, PDP held a successful and peaceful LGA meeting, where they deliberated on strategies for the success of the party in the upcoming State and national elections. The elected LGA chairman and his vice were present in the meeting.

Khana

- In Khana Local Government Area (LGA), campaign activities are still low key. Party flag bearers used occasions such as church events and burials to campaign for votes.

Tai

- On 27 November, at Nonwa Uedume, a burial ceremony turned into a political ground as APC leaders in the LGA canvassed for votes for their candidates in 2019 elections.

- On 29 November, the training ground for the recently developed Rivers State 'Neighbourhood Safety Corps Agency' was raided by the Nigerian Army. 10 people were reportedly arrested and trainees 'dispersed', with the Army claiming it had discovered and broken up a militia camp. In a reaction aired on Rhythm 93.7 (view points) on December 1, 2018, the director general of the Neighbourhood Safety Corps Agency, Dr. Uch Chukwuma, a retired assistant Commissioner of Police, confirmed the incident. There is tension and anxiety in the area as the Army has stationed its personnel in the camp. The State Government has responded that this is a legitimate group and it had reached out to all the major security services for training assistance and co-ordination before its establishment. The group has been controversial since it was first mooted nine months ago with APC accusations that it was arming youth for the elections. The action by the army will likely worsen rifts and suspicions between the state government and security services.
- On December 3, in a burial ground, the PDP senatorial candidate, Hon. Barry Mpigi, presented himself to the people and solicited their votes. In reaction, other political party members present quietly left the scene without any form of confrontation.

Okrika

- It was rumoured that a group in Okrika are transporting arms into the LGA in preparation for the forthcoming elections. The ruling party PDP held a meeting of stakeholders on 3 December and deliberated on the rumour.

Oyigbo

- APC candidate for Rivers State house of assembly, Hon. Felix Ogbuokwe, and his campaign DG Hon. Precious Chigozirim Okija, met with PCA members Oyigbo chapter on 29 November, to deliberate on the way forward for the party ahead of the 2019 general elections. They were told to go home and start working for the betterment of the party and the local government.
- On 29 November, at the burial ceremony of the sister-in-law of Amb. Desmond Akawor, in Eberi Ndoki, was Hon. Chisom Promise Dike, member of Rivers State House of Assembly, and PDP candidate for Eleme/Oyigbo/Tai Federal constituency. The Executive Chairman of the LGA and his principal officers and some APC stalwarts were also in attendance. PDP and APC used the occasion to campaign for their parties peacefully.
- On the 1 December a youth body, Movement for Youth Inclusion (MYI) led by Jude Ohaekelem, was inaugurated in ward 4, 5 and 6. They pledged their full support to PDP and pledged to work to deliver the mandate of PDP candidate in the area.

Obio/Akpor

- Parties are working but no serious campaign yet and no form of security threat or politically motivated violence.
- The Governor (PDP) has continued to voice perceived intimidation by the APC ruling Federal Government. The APC in the State has not reacted.

Bayelsa

In Bayelsa, political events are still unfolding after the party primaries, and although incident tracking only began recently, a few trends appear to be emerging. Citizens' perceptions across the state show evidence of distrust of both political parties and statutory agencies with the conduct and security of elections. There are strong fears that the votes of people will not count, that certain people will instigate violence to discourage the voters from coming out to vote and defend their votes, and that personnel will compromise the integrity of the process. Many citizens think that electoral violence and fraud are mostly instigated and committed by the government in power generally.

Brass

- The intense rivalry between the two main political parties across the country continues to manifest itself in Brass. The tension remained high as a result of violent clashes that occurred on 22 November. Twon-Brass, the LGA headquarters, has been divided into sections where one faction cannot cross over to the other section of the town. Meanwhile, other political parties successfully carried out their campaigns even in Twon-Brass as well as other parts of the LGA. The ADC Candidates were in Brass to continue their campaigns and they did this successfully without any harassment. Brass remains a possible flashpoint.

Ekeremor

- The political campaigns continue this week in Ekeremor LGA with the APC candidates visiting Lalagbene and Obrigbene Towns. The campaigns were peaceful but generally witnessed sharing of money to community people. It is not clear whether it was intended to influence their choice of candidates or just a show of appreciation.

Ogbia

- Unknown persons destroyed campaign posters and billboards of candidates. A campaign billboard of the PDP candidate for the Ogbia Federal constituency and posters of the SDP candidate for Ogbia Constituency III State House of Assembly election were among those destroyed.

Yenagoa

- The political environment has continued to be peaceful. However, despite this, there have been reported cases of killings in Azikoro and other places in the LGA. The conflict in the Okordia axis is yet to be fully resolved and cases of cult related attacks are still recurring.

Sagbama

- This week, almost all the events in Sagbama were centred on the burial ceremony of the mother of the Governor. Beyond a few political gatherings here and there, virtually every known political actor appeared to be relaxed as they focused on the burial of the Governor's mother which was due to take place on 08 December.

Nembe

- From 20 November to 4 December, no serious incidence related to political violence, electoral fraud, intimidation or harassment of voters/candidates occurred in the LGA.
- On 1 December, there was an issue in Okoroma/Tereke over who controls the youth body there. Its elections were scheduled to be held but were disrupted by alleged external interference from the Otita political force, a political group within the PDP. The issue was later resolved without any further escalation. The Youth election was postponed indefinitely.
- In Bassambiri, women protested on Monday 3 December 2018 over the lack of social amenities in the town and the seemingly unending violent clashes between the APC and PDP. They also expressed their sadness over the poor level of traditional leadership in the community and vowed to take action to change the situation.

Southern Ijaw

- Political activities continued this week and it was generally peaceful. There were campaigns in Ondewari, Okputuwari, Ombugbene and Krokrosei. There was the usual distribution of monies and souvenirs.

Kolokuma/Opoluma

- In Kolga, candidates continued the visitation and courtesy visits to communities and important stakeholders. The campaigns were peaceful but the general atmosphere was sorrowful because of the sudden death of the foremost traditional ruler in the LGA, the Opoku I, HRM Diongoli. He was a frontline peacemaker, traditional ruler and public influencer.

Delta

Incidents of youth clashes and billboard destruction in Delta indicate the potential for violence between the followers of different political parties.

There has been some progress resolving internal rifts within political parties that otherwise had the potential to escalate.

Some key incidents are highlighted below.

- At Ogbolokposu junction, Uvwie LGA, PDP youths destroyed a huge billboard of the APC Governorship candidate. This has further swelled the animosity between the major political parties (PDP and APC), charging the political environment. This could degenerate into full blown violence if action to mitigating action is not taken.
- At Edjeba community, Warri South LGA, PDP and APC youths clashed when the PDP noticed that APC youths appeared to be spying on them. During the clash, bottles were freely used, and three persons sustained injuries.
- The Democratic People's Party candidate (Barr. Tuedor Akpevwe Jackson) for the House of Assembly seat in Sapele LGA has urged the electorate to collect money from those willing to give, but that they should vote for their choice of candidate despite collecting money.
- The Anglican Church, Ughelli Diocese has asked its members to bring their PVC to the church, so that they can differentiate members who have PVCs and those that do not have. The reason given for this after further probing is that they want to ensure their members' votes count.
- The internal crisis that resulted from the PDP House of Assembly primaries in Ethiope East LGA between two contending PDP Aspirants, incumbent Hon Evans Iwurie and Olorogun Barr. Arthur Akpovwowo, has been resolved by the PDP reconciliation team led by Chief Michael Adiotomre.
- Similarly, the brewing contention over the APC Party candidate in Delta State Central Senatorial District resulted in the destruction of Chief Otega Emerhor's billboard at Uvwiamuge - Agbarho, in Ughelli North LGA. This further indicates there is high internal party rivalry and discord in the Delta APC.
- At Koko community, Warri North LGA, defected PDP to APC members are seen as spies and were consequently driven out of an APC meeting, further reinforcing the APC disunity in APC State).

Akwa Ibom

There have been few developments during the week over the contested dissolution of the position of five State Assembly members, the subsequent clashes, and the formation of a minority faction in the State Assembly. There may be further clashes and there will be continued questions about the stance that the police will take between the two sides. Formal political campaigns for state and Governorship elections began on 1 December, in line with the electoral timetable, and tensions remain high.

Uyo

- Political tensions remain high after the crisis at the State House of assembly (see [Niger Delta Watch #1](#)).

Mkpat Enin

- At the Civic Centre Ikot Akpaden in Mkpat Enin LGA, supporters of the APC candidate for Ikot Abasi, Mkpat Enin and Eastern Obolo federal constituency destroyed a billboard belonging to the PDP federal house candidate for the constituency. This occurred during the APC campaign flag off for the Ikot Abasi Federal Constituency Campaign at the Civic Centre, Ikot Akpaden. A source who was at the scene informed our observer that the APC candidate Rt. Hon. Bernard Udo ordered his supporters to destroy the billboard on the ground that PDP candidate had no reason to mount a billboard in his ward.

Social media

This week is the first week of data collection for our social media monitoring. While this takes place, we are pleased to share further information on the methodology for this aspect of the reporting.

The project team has trained a small group of Social Media Analysts in how to track and log information shared on social media, in particular on Facebook and WhatsApp, which have been identified as most relevant to the Niger Delta.

The aim over the coming weeks will be to conduct systematic data analysis of the main voices shaping the political discourse online in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta.

The analysts will also conduct a non-systematic approach, tracking narratives and other information relating to the elections which have been shared on groups using platforms such as WhatsApp.

The analysis will take a broad view of those who are shaping political messages. The early part of the project has therefore involved identifying key social media feeds likely to share information on the elections. These include:

- Political candidates and parties, traditional media and other opinion makers such as religious leaders, celebrities and journalists. These will be looked at based on their relevance for the political context of their state and whether they have a public Facebook or a Twitter account. Note that some relevant stakeholders make use of Facebook, but using their personal accounts. This restricts the data that can be used.
- Non-traditional actors, such as bloggers, groups and potentially partisan media outlets. These platforms can be influential and do not have the traditional 'gatekeepers' for information that other media do. These will be looked at based on their impact on local news and presence in the online environment.

Using these sources, different forms of analysis will be conducted to identify posts that go viral online or that receive significant engagement (principally via commenting or liking).

Content that goes viral will be examined in order to analyse the narratives contained in these posts, trying to identify if any disinformation or divisive language is being spread, and to look at trends in the topics that are being discussed on social media in relation to the elections.

Limitations

The analysis of social media data on a regional level often provides less data compared with the national level. National-level narratives may influence the regional political debate and these may come from pages not being monitored. The methodology may be adapted over time to reflect these and other considerations. There are also restrictions on what type of data can be collected.

About Niger Delta Watch 2019

Niger Delta Watch 2019 is a citizen-led elections observation project reporting on the 2019 Nigerian presidential and governorship elections. The project focuses on the states of Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, and Akwa Ibom. It is a joint initiative of Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) and the Civil Society Situation Room (CSSR), and builds on previous election observation work carried out by SDN, including during the 2011 and 2015 election cycles.

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.

Please visit www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections2019 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.*

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.

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.

