

NIGER DELTA WATCH 2019

A citizen-led election observation project

Report: Niger Delta Watch 2019 #4

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Summary

This is the fourth report of Niger Delta Watch 2019.

At a regional level, the latest period has been markedly quieter politically in all of the states observed. There was a protest related to recent events at the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly. In Rivers, further rulings by the Court of Appeal have generated more uncertainty on whether the APC will be able to field candidates. This has not escalated tensions in the short run. Instead it has had a dampening effect on political activity on all sides including the mobilisation of youths and groups that we would expect to be involved in clashes over territory ahead of the polls. This has not meant a cessation of incidents across the board – for example there was a clash that led to the death of a youth in Ewu, Ughelli in Delta state and observers are still investigating an incident with a death in Choba, Rivers state.

On the most controversial topic of the week: clarity on whether the Rivers APC has candidates in the 2019 polls may not come until January 19, when INEC publishes its final list of candidates for elections to national offices. By then it must weigh which of the barrage of rulings and appeal notices it gives greatest weight and presently there seems to be sufficient uncertainty at the state level that no side has absolute confidence about how the situation will conclude. One certainty – the date for ‘swapping out’ to other political parties has expired. Parties were able to substitute candidates up until December 02 but must now live with the choices they have made. So it is possible that APC actors could swing their support behind Dumo Lulu Briggs who left APC for Accord after the APC primaries (along with some others). INEC has responded to PDP allegations about possible late swaps by denying that any further changes could take place.

This is the last report of 2018. The first report of 2019 will be released on January 14, looking at events over the new year period. Please continue to check <http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections2019/> for news and updates.

Rivers

The uncertainty about the candidature of APC Governorship contenders for the 2019 elections deepened during the reporting week, following pronouncements by the Court of Appeal in Rivers. The appeal court rulings against the APC were quite narrow, on process issues that the APC had allegedly failed to follow. The high court had originally ruled on a number of questions relating to the APC primaries. The pathway for the APC to resolve this has consequently narrowed further. (<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/12/rivers-apc-crisis-a-court-strikes-out-apc-appeal-against-its-squashed-congresses/>)

This development may change the political dynamics and calculation in the State ahead of the 2019 general elections as the PDP may seek to woo some APC members to its fold.

The week's observation also saw incidents of violence induced by politics which were orchestrated by cult groups loyal to political actors in the two major parties. These incidents were said to have occurred in the LGAs of Degema, Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, Ikwerre, Obio-Akpor, and Oyiibo.

In addition, election observers in Tai and Oyiibo LGAs reported cases relating to destruction of political campaign billboards, posters, and banners of candidates of various political parties. This emerging trend if not checked could generate attacks and reprisals.

Bayelsa

The week saw some political activity after a period dominated by the burial of the mother of the Bayelsa Governor. There were incidents of violence reported in Brass, Nembe and Ekeremor LGA. In Nembe there was a clash between factions within the PDP. In Brass there was a clash between the PDP and APC supporters, and in Ekeremor there was further destruction of election banners and posters. Other incidents saw the sharing of funds and other items during campaigning in various communities. One key event was a peace meeting called in Ogbia. All aspirants came together to sign an undertaking of good conduct during the election period.

Key incidents

Brass

- It was alleged that APC members went to the section of the town occupied by PDP supporters and shot sporadically into the air. The PDP members were alleged to have retaliated, causing trouble and tension, although no casualties have been reported.
- On 13 December, the APC Campaign for Brass Constituency III was opened amidst fanfare in Akassa. The APC flag bearer for the Nembe/Brass Federal Constituency also continued his campaigns in Brass LGA.

Nembe

- On 14 December Isaac Gabriel Topman, a supporter of Hon. Ebi Ben Ololo, the PDP candidate for Nembe Constituency I State House of Assembly Election, was allegedly attacked during a burial ceremony by the Youth Chairman, Ockiya Group of Chieftaincy Canoe House who belongs to a faction within the PDP called Otita Force. Bottles and chairs were used and some people sustained injuries before community vigilantes intervened and restored order. Since the PDP primaries, there have been two main factions in the community and the rivalry may cause serious trouble during the elections.
- On 13 December the flag bearer of the Labour Party for the Bayelsa East Senatorial District Election shared money and gift items among the leadership of Nembe Creek, Ogbolomabiri, Mini-Ikensi and Bassambiri Communities. While the claim was that it was because of the Christmas season, Observers report that it is not just a routine Christmas gift, but clearly designed to influence the leaders to corner their communities for the said candidate.
- On 15 December the flag bearer of the APC for the Brass/Nembe Federal Constituency visited the community as part of campaigning and money was freely distributed to different stakeholders in an apparent move to secure their support.

Ekeremor

- On 15 December in Agge town, APC campaign banners and posters were torn and destroyed.
- The APC campaign team composed of various candidates in the Senatorial District visited several communities and the campaigns were peaceful.

Ogbia

- The key political event that took place was the convening of a peace meeting by the traditional rulers and Ogbia Brotherhood. All candidates in Ogbia signed an undertaking to be of good conduct and shun any act that could lead to loss of life or the destruction of properties.

Yenagoa

- Security challenges continue in the state capital, with several cases of armed robbery including cult related killings, although these are not believed to be connected to any political process reported. A new Commissioner of Police was also posted to the State during the last week.

Delta

There was relative calm across most of the LGAs in Delta State during this reporting period. In Aniocha South LGA, the People's Democratic Party held the inauguration of its campaign team which was peaceful. There were some incidents of concern in Burutu Local Government Area. There were incidents of alleged threats of the use of ex-militants and arms within Burutu LGA to disrupt the election and also ensure that a preferred candidate emerges. There were reports of destruction of posters and billboards by unknown persons. Meanwhile, the wife of the Governor of Delta State, Dame Edith Okowa, visited Burutu Local Government Area Council with a team of medical doctors to provide free medical treatment to citizens and also solicit support for her husbands' re-election.

Key incidents

Burutu

- It was reported that an Aspirant for the Delta State House of Assembly, Ozobo Austin lamented the destruction of his posters in Ayakoromo Ward 7. It is alleged that he said "those boys were sponsored by the opposition party, PDP, to carry out such a malicious act, if they continue it, I am also ready to make trouble with them."
- An ex-militant from Ekogbene Ward 4, Burutu Local Government Area pledged his support and that of his boys to one of the aspirants for the Delta State House of Assembly. He reportedly said that ex-militants in the area have been disappointed by the current House of Assembly representative and have vowed to use guns and boats to cause violence on the day of the election. It was reported that he said there was a need for change in leadership based in the Delta State House of Assembly.

Ughelli South

- An incident of election-related violence led to the death of a young man in Ewu. Some young people refused to allow the body to be buried, although after dialogue the case was resolved.

Akwa Ibom

In Akwa Ibom supporters of the APC staged a protest at the state police headquarters condemning the reported interference of the governor in the affairs of the House of Assembly. There are also concerns relating to the apparent use of state resources for political activity.

Key incidents

Uyo

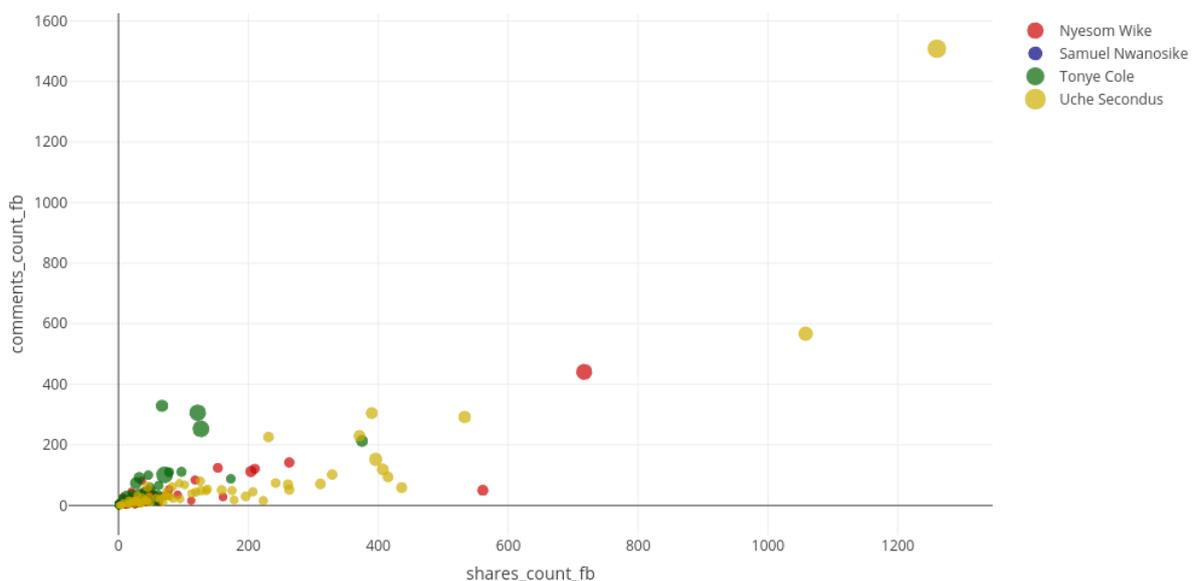
- Aisha Buhari was in the state to flag off her Future Assured Programme in partnership with the National Directorate for Employment (NDE) on Friday December 14, 2018. The event saw the provision of business starter packs, skills and cash grants to more than 11,000 people. During the event, the president's wife urged Akwa Ibom people to vote for the APC during the forthcoming elections and said that the state governor Udom Emmanuel would soon leave the PDP and join the APC. During the event, Senator Akpabio was reported as saying that 750 million naira had been set aside for the project and that "there is enough money" and "the money should be shared to the people". The APC said that the beneficiaries of the "empowerment" were selected across party lines, but the PDP in the state has dismissed the event as a political campaign by the APC and a thinly disguised attempt at vote buying.
- On Tuesday 11 December supporters of the APC in the state staged a protest at the state police headquarters condemning the role of the governor in the affairs of the House of Assembly and demanding the continued stay in office of the state Commissioner of Police, Musa Kimo. The protest was led by the State Youth leader of the APC. Also in attendance were one of the five lawmakers previously sacked, Hon. Idongesit Ituen, and other youth leaders from the party.
- On 17 December the Akwa Ibom State Ethical and Attitudinal Reorientation Commission (EARCOM) organised a one-day sensitisation meeting on "Being a socially responsible citizen" for youth corps members but the event was reportedly used to recruit the youth corps members as agents of the PDP in the state. Some corps members who attended the event reportedly said they were paid to support the PDP during the event.

Social media

This week's social media activity suggests that candidates are slowly getting into the campaign mood and that some candidates have a stronger presence than others on social media. It is positive to note that in general, from posts analysed there are no specific concerns regarding (for example) misinformation or inflammatory speech.

Rivers

The following graph shows some of the posts made by political actors which were trending on social media between 01 October and 13 December 2018 in terms of comments and shares on Facebook posts. Each circle represents a post on Facebook while the colours represent the different politicians.



Key posts in Rivers included five from by Tonye Cole, four from Uche Secoundus and one from Nyesom Wike. Election-relevant material included a video from Secoundus, with 32,000 views, showing various PDP stakeholders protesting and asking for a free and fair election.

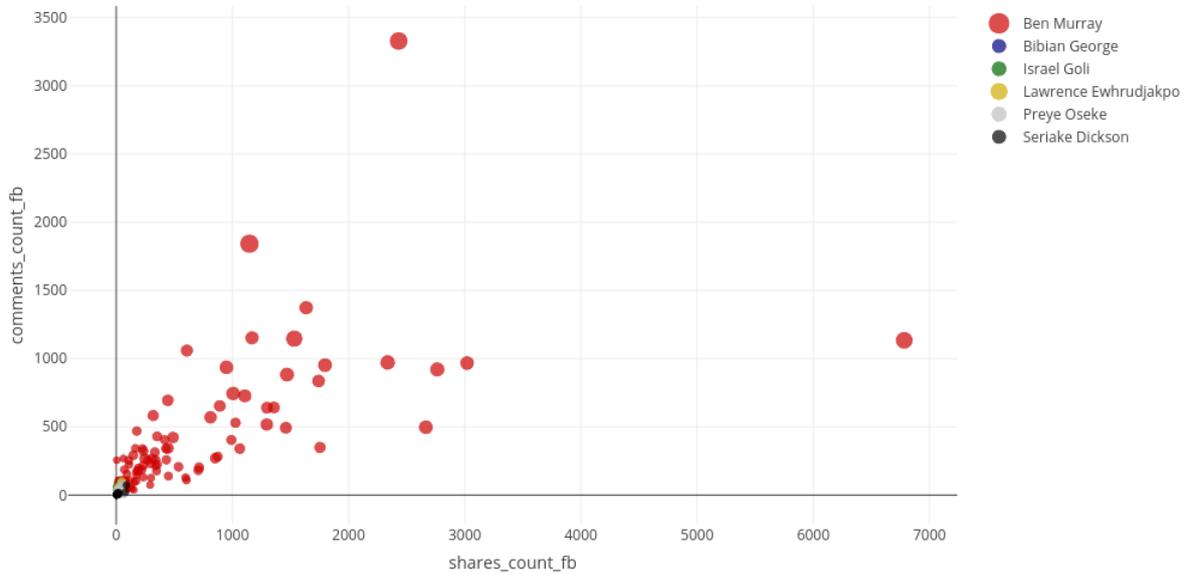
This week in Rivers, a popular topic on social media was the Federal High Court pronouncement throwing further doubt on the APC Candidates, Tonye Cole and Magnus Abe, contesting the 2019 gubernatorial elections. Cole's campaign opening speech received a lot of attention (<https://bit.ly/2CnmPlk>). Overall, there is a great share of support for the candidate in the comments.

Meanwhile, a video was uploaded on the Twitter page of Tonye Cole with over 1000 views describing his disqualification as an allegation and that the APC still had cases ongoing before the Court of Appeal regarding the election. Several Twitter users responded to the video post by describing Tonye's act as illegal and not abiding to the Federal High Court injunction.

Bayelsa

The following graph shows which political actors being followed as part of Niger Delta Watch 2019 in Bayelsa have been trending on social media between 01 October and 13 December 2018 in terms of

comments and shares on Facebook posts.

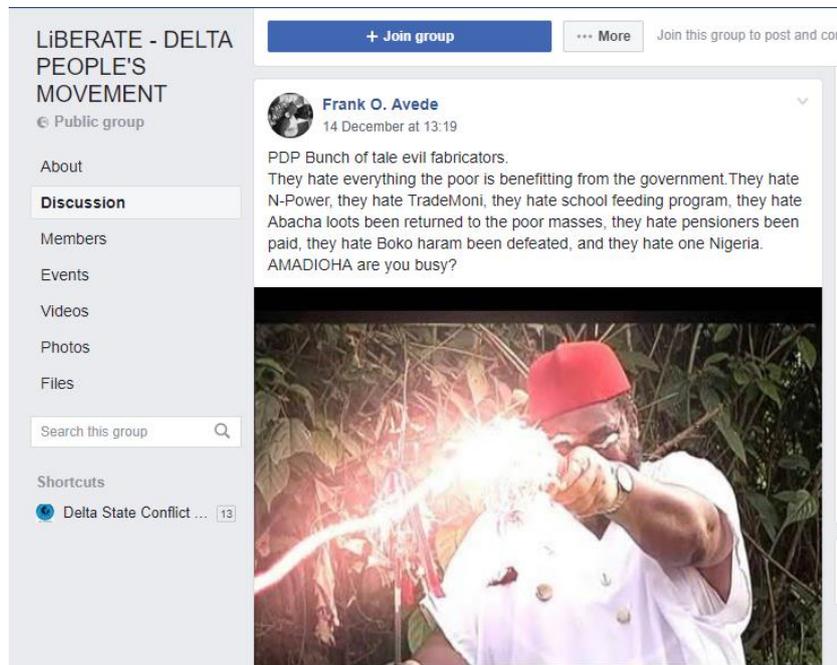


Ben Murray Bruce dominates the online presence of politicians in the Bayelsa State. Of the top 10 posts with the most engagement from social media users, all of them were from Bruce. One of the most popular posts from his page related to his withdrawal from the Bayelsa East Senatorial elections. In separate posts that received a lot of attention, Bruce criticised the APC and President Buhari. In three of the 10 most popular posts, Bruce showed strong support for Atiku at the federal level.

While the following story was not widely shared on social media this week, there was an incident which surfaced relating to an alleged attack on Robert Desmond, an APC aspirant and supporter of Hon. Israel Sunny Goli, by the PDP. Posts shared by various Facebook users showed photos of the damage done to Desmond’s property and included further details of the attack. One of these posts is pictured below.



Inflammatory speech observed was centered on issues at the national level between supporters of the APC and PDP in Delta state. One example can be seen on the Facebook page of Liberate Delta People's Movement, where users posted statements such as 'all PDP supporters are insane' and 'PDP bunch of fake evil fabricators' (see image below).



The Liberate Delta People's Movement group has approx. 30k members and an average of 10 posts a day. Members of the group tend to reach out to a lot of people and frequently distribute posts containing misinformation. The posts in the group are very anti-PDP. There are a few very active users of the group, some appearing to flood social media groups such as this one with misinformation and jokes. However, despite the groups' size and frequency of activity, no observed posts have gone viral, and the share count often does not exceed 20.

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.

