

NIGER DELTA WATCH 2019

A citizen-led election observation project

Report: Niger Delta Watch 2019 #7

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Report period: 14 – 20 January 2019

Summary

This is the seventh edition of Niger Delta Watch 2019.

In the last week, campaigns picked up in all of the states without a noticeable increase in violence or clashes. A theme this week in all of the project states has been vote buying, of which there has been a significant amount, with increasingly large sums of money shared with community members by political parties

In Rivers, political parties have been travelling to communities, demanding their supporters and members to show their voters card. While the All Progressive Congress (APC) and other parties are embarking on low key campaigns, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has been crisscrossing the State campaigning for votes.

In Bayelsa, there was a cult clash in Yenagoa LGA, leading to a number of fatalities. There were also issues involving youths; in one incident they disrupted a campaign rally, while in another they attempted to chase out candidates of the APC and PDP from the community.

There are continuing simmering signs of tension in Delta State, with the persistent destruction of opposition's billboards and posters, but only limited incidents of clashes. Voters also accused the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of giving out registered voter information to the PDP.

In Akwa Ibom, concern remains high about the preparations of both major parties (APC and PDP) for violence around the polls, but campaigning has remained normal over the week in review. There was a reported attack on INEC officials in Ikot Abasi. There are concerns that reported cash payments to suspected cult group leaders could increase their access to resources and create new conflicts between the groups, leading to more violence in the coming weeks.

This week, we examined incidents relating to electoral violence since the start of the project in the project states. Based on our data, the most electoral violence so far has occurred in Port Harcourt, which has also had the highest number of reported fatalities related to electoral incidents since the start of the project in November 2018. Rivers State has also had more election-related fatalities compared with Delta and Bayelsa. In Delta, our data shows that Ndokwa West LGA has also been a hotspot for violence.

In terms of types of electoral violence, violence against civilians has been the most prevalent. This has included kidnap and murder of the opposition on both sides, of which there have been numerous incidents in Rivers. Battles have mostly been linked to cult rivalry, which has been an issue in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers. Cult groups are often linked to political parties and carry out attacks during election time on groups supporting the opposition. There have been few reported election-related violent incidents involving women.

This week, social media analysts analysed the activity of politicians with a strong presence on social media. Those that emerged were Rivers State Executive Governor, Nyesom Wike (PDP); Former Governor of Rivers State and Federal Minister of Transport, Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi (APC); PDP member Rene Omokri; and ex-president and PDP presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar.

As elections approach, social media is more active around political topics. New pages are being created every day and discrediting campaigns will be stronger in the weeks to come. It will be important to pay attention to false messages around election day and other aspects that may influence people's opinions.

Please continue to check <http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections2019/> for news and updates.

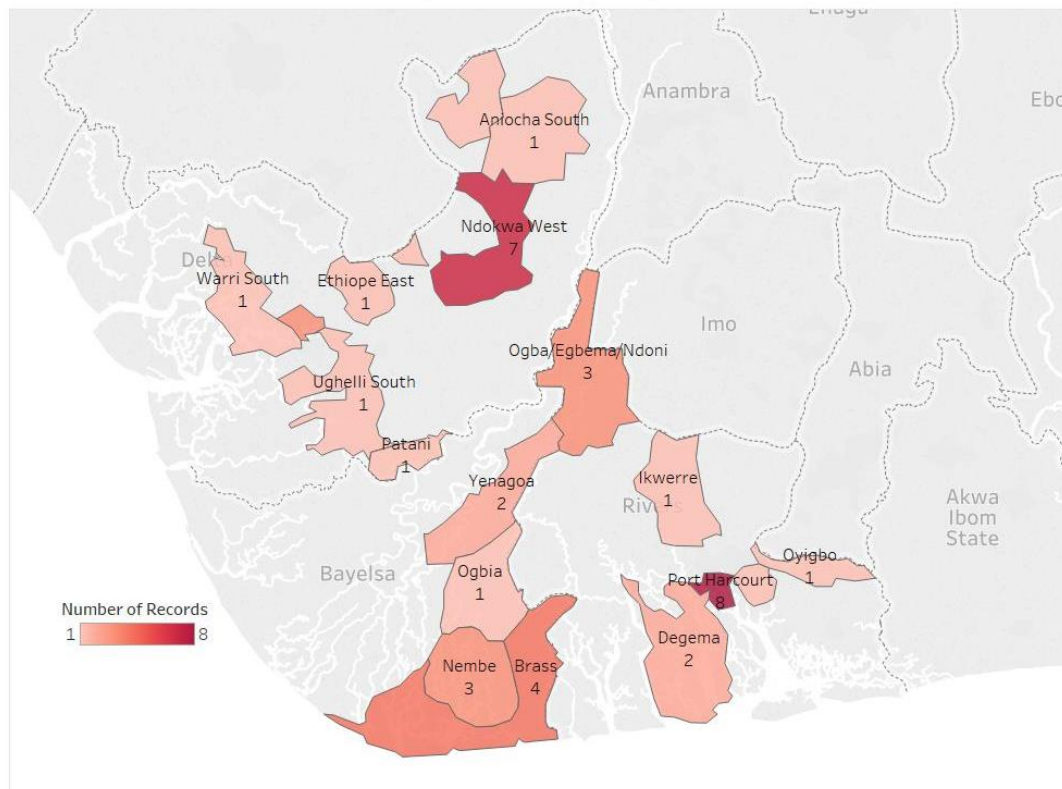
Regional Overview

We are continuing our approach of focusing on a theme each week while updating on the latest developments. In the last week, campaigns picked up in all of the states without a noticeable increase in violence or clashes. There are continuing simmering signs of tension in Delta State, with the persistent destruction of opposition's billboards and posters, but only limited incidents of clashes. In Akwa Ibom, concern remains high about the preparations of both major parties (APC and PDP) for violence around the polls, but campaigning has remained normal over the week in review.

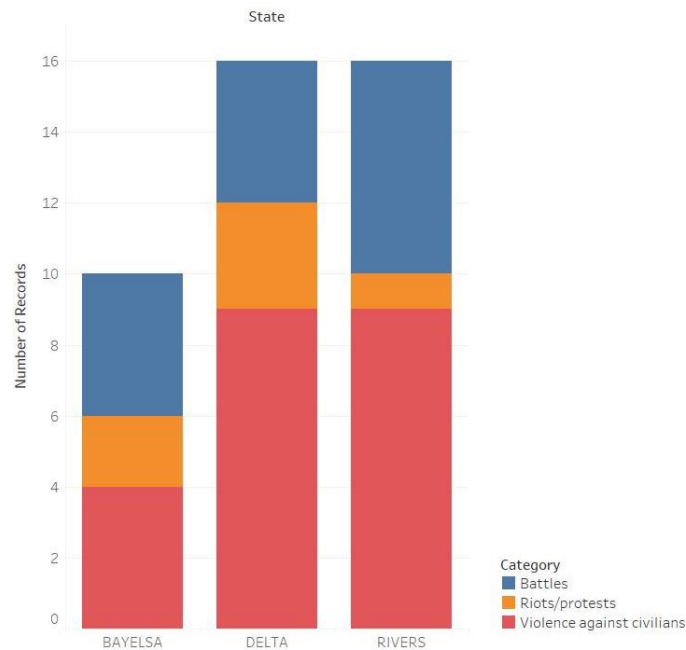
In Rivers State, the controversy over the prosecution of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court has begun to intermingle with the question of whether APC candidates will be allowed to be listed in the State. Both nationally and locally, allegations are being made that the action against the Supreme Court is intended to create pressure over the cases affecting Rivers State. Whether true or not, the controversy will continue to polarize reactions to both the fate of the Chief Justice and any rulings from the court on Rivers State.

This week, the focus is on incidents involving violence in relation to the elections that have been reported since the beginning of the project. The map below shows in which LGAs these incidents have been reported. The highest number of election-related violent incidents so far have been reported in Port Harcourt. This is probably unsurprising given that it is the area with the highest population density in the Niger Delta. The map also highlights Ndokwa West LGA in Delta State as an area with a proportionally high number of violent incidents.

In some areas we have received no reports of violent election-related incidents. This may be because there has not been any election-related violence in these locations, or that news of incidents has not spread locally, or limitations with our own observers' reach. Observers and co-ordinators have been cautious reporting incidents and clashes that do not have an obvious explanation but may have election undertones.

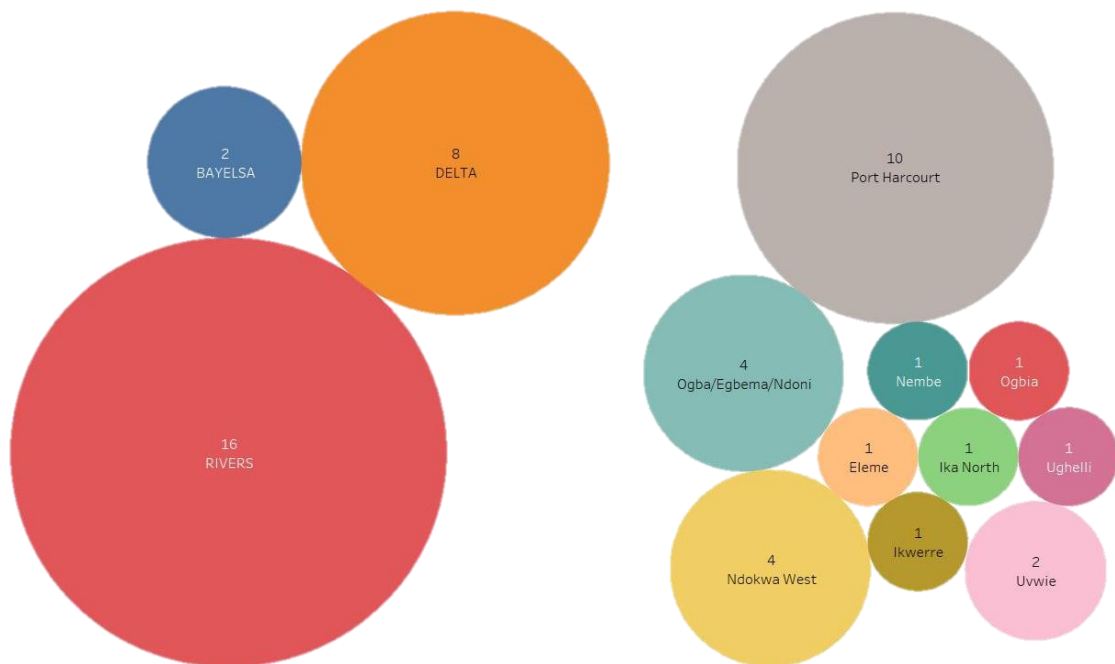


The graph below shows the number of violent incidents that have been reported in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers, by category. The following three categories are used to disaggregate violent incidents: 1)



battles, 2) riots and protests, and 3) violence against civilians. The graph shows that Delta and Rivers have received the highest number of reported violent incidents, while violence against civilians is the most commonly reported type of incident.

The graphs below show the number of fatalities that have been reported in relation to incidents involving electoral violence since the start of the project – the left graph is by State, and the right is by LGA. The highest number of fatalities, by State, have been reported in Rivers, with over half of these coming from Port Harcourt, which is the LGA with the highest number of reported fatalities overall.



Rivers

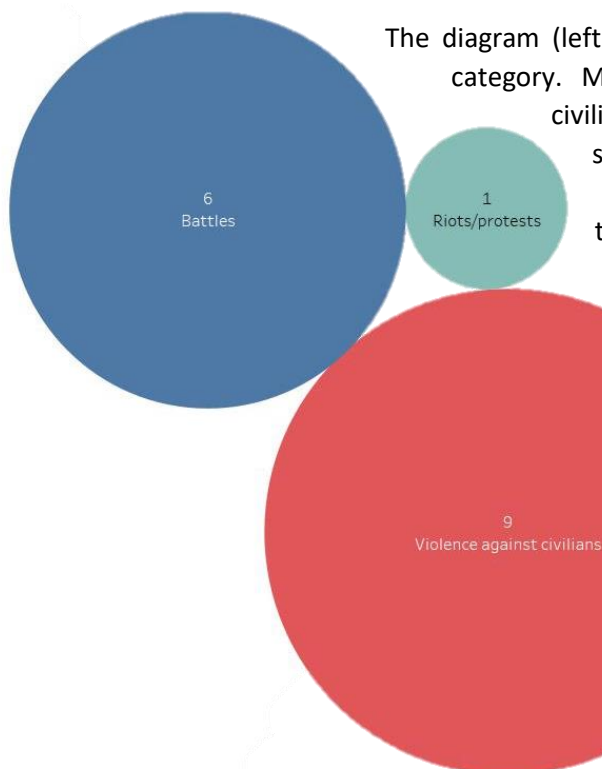
There have been many incidents of vote buying this week, involving the APC and PDP, where politicians have given gift items and cash payments to community members in an attempt to influence voting in their favour. Vote buying is an important trend to observe, as it is sometimes linked to electoral violence. One of these incidents occurred when Senator Andrew Uchendu, of APC, empowered 3 women of Rumuakunde Unit, Emohua Town, with a computer, a chest freezer and a sewing machine.

Equally trending is 'Operation Show Your Voters' Card', where the political parties are going from ward to ward, demanding their supporters and members to show their voters card and VIN numbers. While APC and other parties are embarking on low key campaigns, PDP has been crisscrossing the State campaigning for votes. The APC's low key campaign is clearly due to the uncertainty trailing the party in the State, which has recently manifested in INEC's exclusion of its party's national candidates from the list for the 16 February National Assembly elections.

An issue with deleting of APC candidates from INEC based on court order, is that, should the Supreme Court eventually overturn the appeal court judgment in favour of APC close to the time of the elections, INEC may be forced to shift the elections in Rivers State to have time to include APC and its candidates on the ballot papers. This will heighten the risk of electoral violence in Rivers State. Insinuations by PDP and some citizens in the State are that APC is pushing for a shift in the date of the Gubernatorial polls and make it a 'stand-alone' to pave the way for electoral manipulation in connivance with the State security agencies.

The Supreme Court was due to rule by Saturday 27 January on one of the key appeals but this has not happened and it seems unlikely there will be a ruling for at least a few days. Any ruling will now likely be interpreted through the "back and forth" pressures surrounding the suspension of the Chief Justice.

Electoral violence



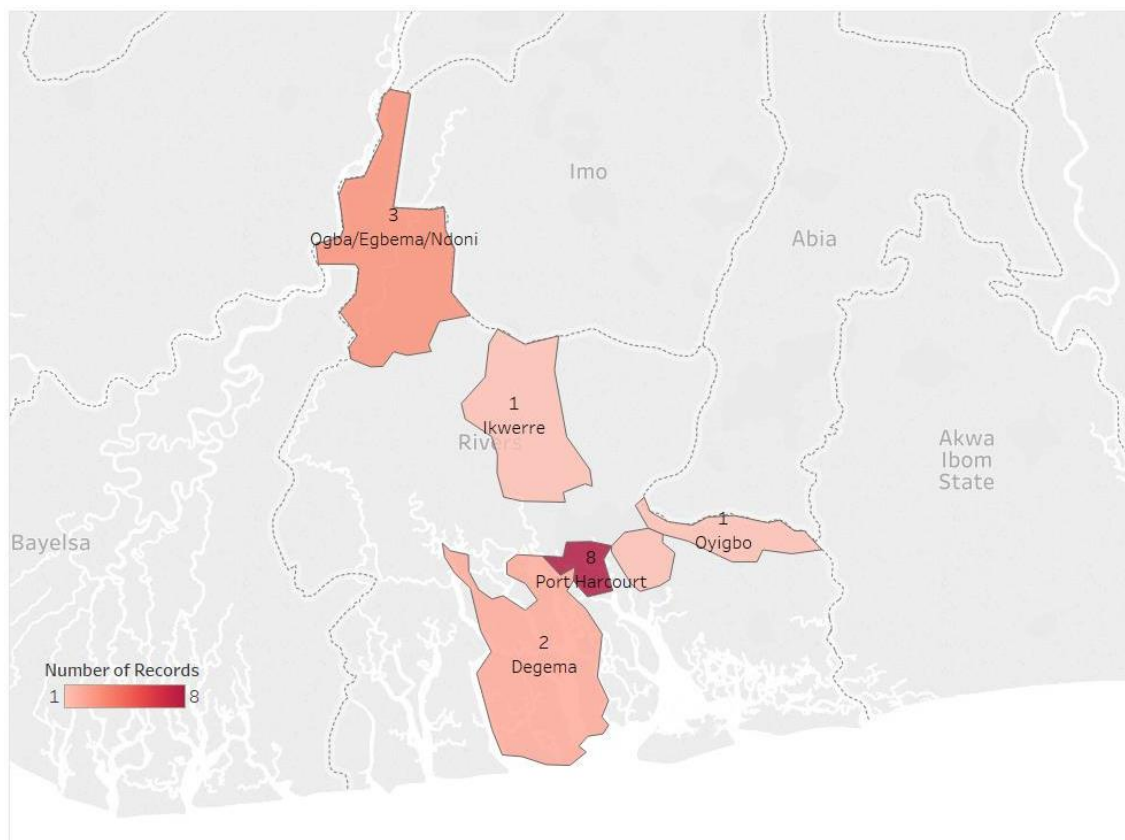
The diagram (left) shows the breakdown of violent incidents by category. Most incidents have involved violence against civilians, reflecting the overall trend across the three states. Incidents relating to violence against civilians have involved non-State armed groups, the APC and the PDP. Most of these incidents took place in December 2018. For example, on 3 December, people fled Egita community in Ogba/ Egbema/Ndoni, for fear of invasion by unknown gunmen following the killing of a retired police officer and abduction of his son on 2 December. Another incident involved the shooting and killing of an APC Ward Chairman in Eleme LGA, Ward 7, on Christmas Eve. Such targeted assassinations of perceived enemies are not rare; there was a similar incident in Ikwerre LGA, when a PDP Chieftain was murdered by

unknown gunmen, as well as the kidnapping and killing of an APC leader earlier in the year, also in Ikwerre, which has led to the APC calling for the arrest and investigation of top PDP chieftains in the State.

As mentioned in the regional overview, Rivers State has had the highest number of reported fatalities out of the three project states since November 2018. The most reported fatalities across Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers have been in Port Harcourt, which is not surprising given that it is the most densely populated LGA in the Niger Delta and the third largest city in Nigeria. Out of a total of 16 reported election-related fatalities in Rivers, 10 of these were in Port Harcourt. Three out of four of these incidents which led to loss of life in Port Harcourt took place in December 2018, the most fatal of which involved cult clashes between the Greenlanders and the Icelanders, lasted three days from 5-7 December and claimed seven lives. The same cult clash repeated itself towards the end of the month.

Cult rivalry is often politically linked, with cults frequently carrying out acts of political violence, especially during election periods. In the last three months, cult clashes have been most prevalent in Rivers, compared with Delta and Bayelsa. All but one of these reported incidents involving cult groups in Rivers occurred in December. For example, there was a battle in Degema between youths belonging to different cult factions who are also loyalists to the APC and PDP. A few days later, a leading cult gang member was reportedly killed in Ikwerre in a clash with soldiers. Then, in mid-December, another shootout occurred, this time between the Degbam and Icelanders cult groups.

The map below shows where, across LGAs, reported incidents of election-related violence have occurred in Rivers State.



Bayelsa

There have been substantial reports of money giving in Bayelsa over the last week. In Southern Ijaw, an APC campaign team moved swiftly through communities, distributing money to chiefs, Community Development Committees (CDC), and women and youth groups. APC aspirants also invited some communities from Southern Ijaw to a hotel in Yenagoa to discuss the conduct of the elections, during which money was shared with community members in attendance. Further money and food given to community leaders and women groups was reported in Ekeremor, while in Ogbia, an APC faithful gathered community members to influence their decisions on electoral voting during the forthcoming polls.

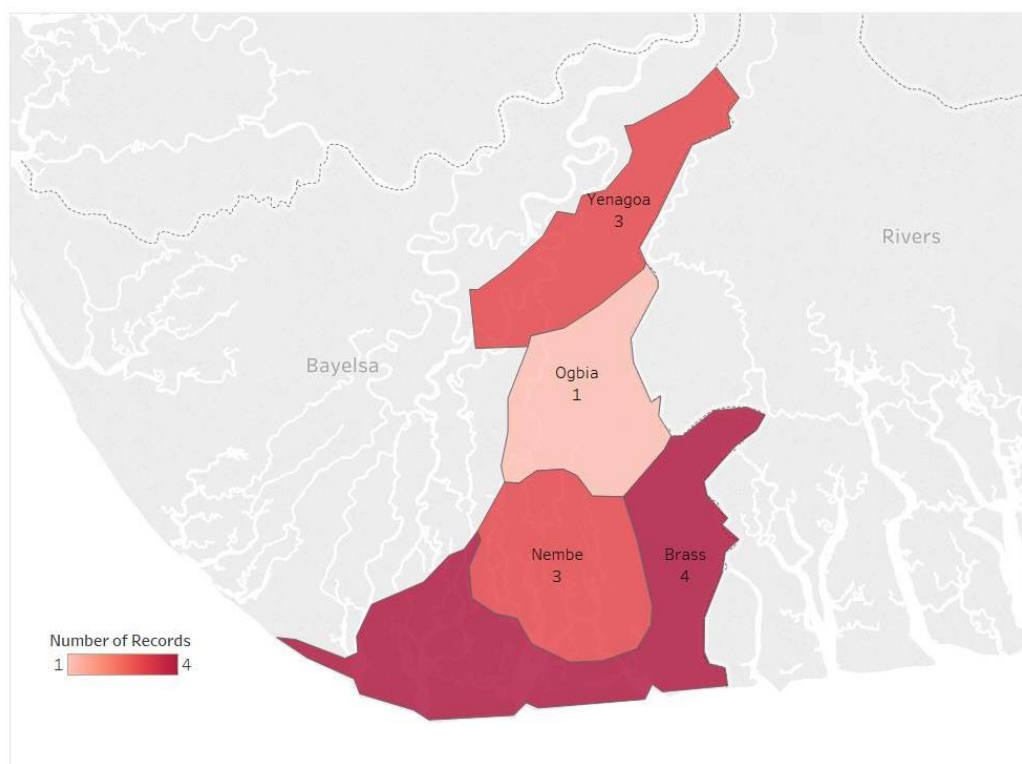
In separate developments, approximately 1000 members of the PDP in Nembe reportedly decamped to the APC, and were warmly received by the Nembe APC Chairman.

Further reports for this week are as follows:

- ❖ On 17 January, an APC Campaign rally in Sagbama was disrupted by youths speculated to be hired thugs.
- ❖ In Ekeremor, there were rumoured attempts by youths of Peretorugbene to forcefully chase out candidates of both the APC and PDP.
- ❖ In Yenagoa, a few young men were killed as a result of violent cult clashes.
- ❖ PDP candidates campaigned in Agoro community, Ekeremor LGA. Monies were publicly shared to community leaders, women groups and other participants. Food and drinks were freely distributed to participants.

Electoral violence

The following map shows where reported incidents of election-related violence have occurred in Bayelsa State since November.



Interestingly, Southern Ijaw, which was a major battle ground in the last governorship election in the State, has remained relatively peaceful. Information reaching us reveals that the peace in the area is as a result of the two main militant leaders in Southern Ijaw agreeing to work together in peace. It is unclear whether this peace will be maintained up to the time of the elections.

Unlike Southern Ijaw, the issues in Nembe and Brass have centred around struggles for supremacy between the two main political parties (APC and PDP). For example, the issue of violence in Brass revolves around the fact that the area is a stronghold of the opposition party as is evident in it producing the only opposition member in the State House of Assembly. In Nembe, cult groups have been used to intimidate opposition parties, as the two main cult groups in the area are affiliated to the two main political parties.

All three incidents in Yenagoa, the State capital, were cult-related, occurring at the end of November, mid-December, and mid-January. A new Commissioner of Police was posted to the State in December (the 9th Commissioner in 4 months), however security challenges in Yenagoa are ongoing with persistent concerns over elevated criminal activity.

There have been two reported incidents of election-related violence involving women in Bayelsa, both of which relate to protests. One incident involved a peaceful protest by women and community stakeholders in November in Brass, and another in Bassambiri, Nembe, involved a protest in early December against the lack of social amenities in the town and the continuing violent clashes between the APC and PDP. They expressed their disappointment over the poor level of traditional leadership in the community.

Delta

As the 2019 election draws even closer, this reporting period has been characterized by soaring campaign activities, with candidates travelling to the nooks and crannies of the State to appeal to the electorates with their policies and plans. The political climate appears to have been peaceful; rallies and protest have been conducted in such a way as not to dent the image of their candidates.

There have been more incidents of vote buying. In Sapele LGA Ward 5, it was reported that attendees at a PDP rally were asked to put their names down for payment. Also in Sapele, registered voters reportedly received phone calls from agents believed to be from the PDP, appealing to them to vote for the party. The voters accused INEC of giving out information of registered voters to the PDP. This is a marker for huge conflict in the State, as other political parties would lose confidence in INEC and could snowball into violence in the long run.

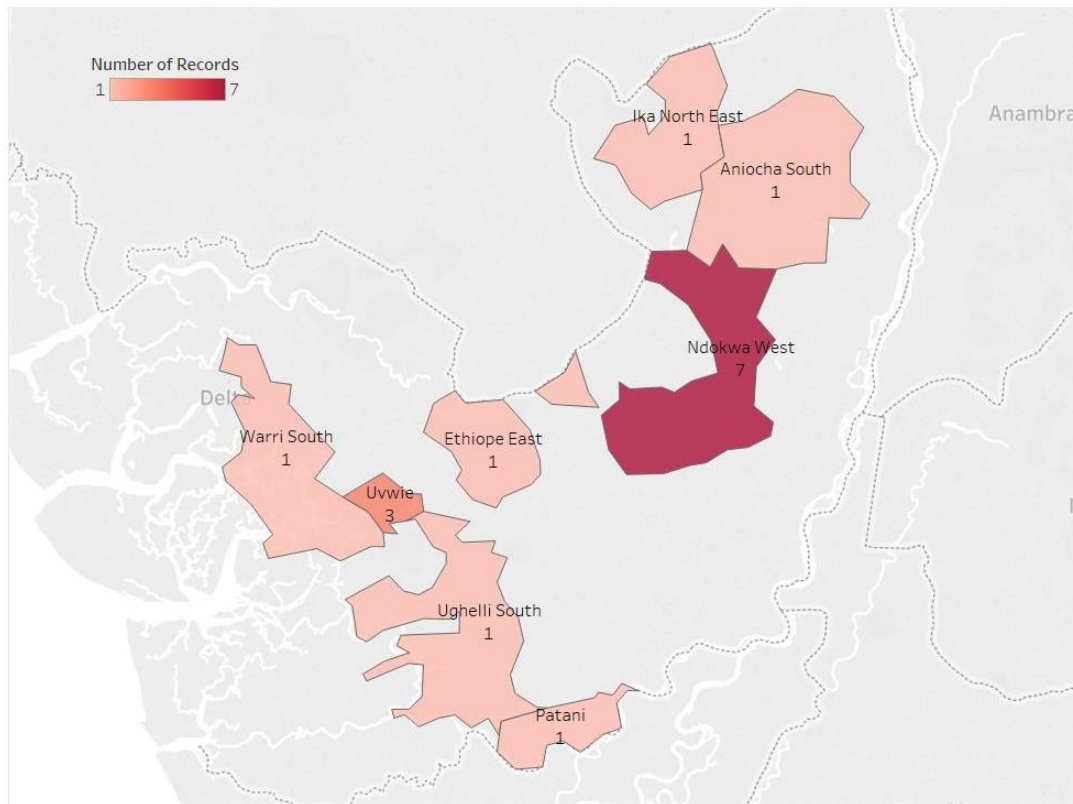
Equally, the continued destruction of political party candidates' posters and billboards might eventually trigger political violence since the perpetrators are hardly seen. Political parties may begin to attribute and accuse opposition parties as responsible for campaign poster and billboard destruction.

Summary of key incidents from the last week:

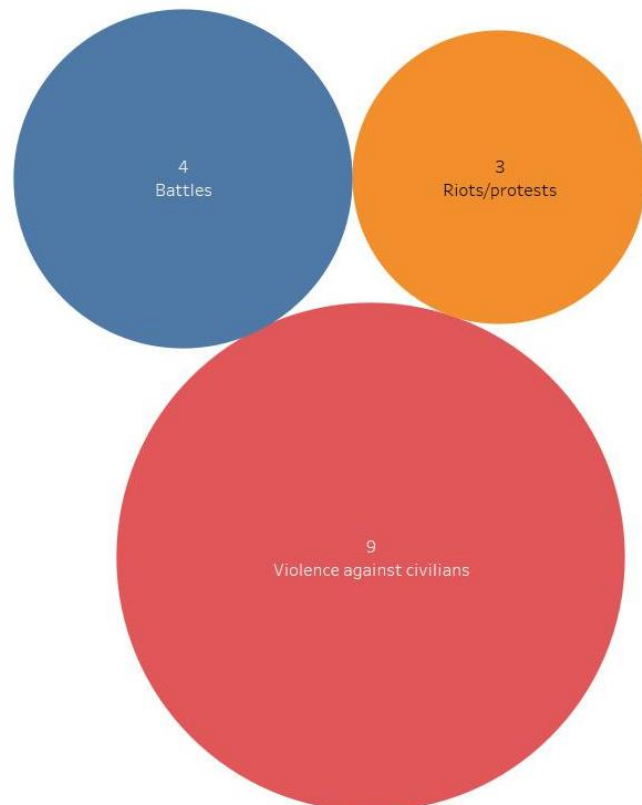
- ❖ In Ndokwa West LGA, at Aboh/Igbuku junction, the billboards and posters of a PDP candidate were seen to have been destroyed by unknown persons.
- ❖ APC members protested the delay in swearing in Emeke Ozegbe in Ndokwa West. It eventually took place and was conducted in a peaceful manner.
- ❖ Again, in Ndokwa West, a person was reported to have been murdered by suspected cultists. In a separate incident, a boy was seriously beaten for getting too close to the Delta State Governor at a rally in the LGA.
- ❖ A cross section of registered voters in Sapele alleged they received phone calls from an agent of the PDP appealing to them to vote for the party, they accused INEC of leaking the phone numbers of registered voters in the town.
- ❖ In Sapele, Ward 5, PDP members held ward campaigns towards the General Elections. They were encouraged to vote members of the party at all levels. Attendees wrote down their names in order to receive a cash payment. A package containing food was also shared.

Electoral violence

The map below shows where incidents involving electoral violence have been reported in Delta State since November.



Electoral violence is the second most frequently reported incident type in Delta State. The diagram (right) shows that most of the reported violent incidents in Delta since November have involved violence against civilians. Five of these incidents (violence against civilians) were reported in Ndokwa West. For example, in Ndokwa West in November a man was reportedly stabbed by a known PDP supporter for removing a PDP poster which the man posted at the Town Hall. Also in Ndokwa West, in early December, a man known to be a PDP supporter was murdered in his house by unknown persons.



Incidents involving battles have included violence between the APC and PDP, which led to the murder of a PDP member, in Uvwie in November, and a cult clash between Eiye and Aye groups, which also led to a murder, in Ndokwa West in December.

Incidents relating to riots and protests have included protests by women in Patani due to the neglect of the area by the successive Government; protests by supporters of the African Democratic Party (ADC) against the member representing Ndokwa/Ukwuani Federal Constituency and campaigns against the local government's refusal to release voter cards sent by INEC in Aniocha South.

In total, there have been eight fatalities reported in Delta State (four of which were in Ndokwa West). Only two incidents of election-related violence in Delta have involved women, one of which included a fatality when a politician's wife was found dead opposite a church in Uvwie in November.

Akwa Ibom

This week, there has been a significant number of incidents of electoral fraud and corruption, including vote buying and bribery. One incident saw a candidate offering N 1.4m. There have also been reports of several violent incidents in the State, as well as issues involving INEC's handling of voter's cards, and inciting statements from both camps (PDP and APC) throughout the week.

Below are key incidents from the week:

- ❖ PDP candidate for Ikot Abasi, Mkpato Enin and Eastern Obolo went on a ward to ward tour of Mkpato Enin, seeking party support. He gave N 5,000 to party members in each of the wards he visited.
- ❖ There was suspicion in Ikot Abasi, Ini and Ikono, when an INEC official was seen copying the VIN numbers of PVCs while they were being distributed.
- ❖ An APC Chieftain alleged that a person was reportedly apprehended for buying voters' cards close to the INEC office in Ini LGA.
- ❖ Barr. Emmanuel Enoidem, National Legal Adviser of the PDP, was alleged to have uploaded a video of children insulting the President to a WhatsApp group managed by the Radar Newspaper Whatsapp group. The children, ages 5-10, insulted the President and his supporters, likening them to 'cows'. APC supporters condemned the act, describing it as morally wrong and unacceptable. Public affairs commentator Franklyn Isong, said: "going by this practice, by the time these pupils are 18 years, they are already made to become political thugs and used for electoral violence in the State".
- ❖ Vote buying was reported in Onna, when Akwa Ibom State Governor Udom Emmanuel, who is PDP, invited all youth leaders to the town hall for his political campaign. Emmanuel told people to vote for PDP, promising the donation of N 10m to each village in the LGA. Youth leaders in attendance were rewarded N 65,000, while women's groups were given N 10,000.
- ❖ Also in Onna, the Eket APC Senatorial candidate visited the palace of the Clan Head of Nung Ndem and donated an unannounced enveloped cash. Afterwards, he proceeded to address a campaign in the community alongside APC chieftains and reportedly gave supporters N 1.4m to be shared amongst youths, elders and women.

Electoral violence

This week, in Ikot Abasi, Ward 8, there was an attack on INEC officials, supposedly to gain access to resources (voter cards) for the perpetration of electoral fraud. It was alleged that the attack could have been a protest action against an INEC official who was seen copying out PVC numbers. It could be recalled that late last year there was a mob action at Okobo LGA in the state which was in response to issues arising from the conduct of APC primaries in the area where a police station was attacked and completely razed down, and the INEC office, attacked and thousands of voters' cards carted away. The Resident Electoral Commissioner in the state, Mr. Mike Igini, only recently announced that the stolen cards from that incident, which amounted to 2,045, have been replaced.

Incidents in Etinan and Uyo demonstrate a different type of violence. In Etinan this week, a PDP member was seriously beaten by APC supporters for destroying the poster of their candidate, while in a separate incident, a PDP chieftain got into a fight and threatened the life of his step-brother, who is a member of the APC, after seeing APC material around his house. A similar incident occurred in Uyo, at the township stadium, when a man was attacked for tearing campaign posters which APC supporters had pasted on the walls of his property. His wife and brother were also attacked. When

the attackers noticed a suspected spy from the PDP Publicity Secretariat taking videos of the incident on his phone, they seriously beat him too.

In other developments in Akwa Ibom, there are concerns that reported cash payments to suspected cult group leaders, in preparation for the upcoming general elections, could increase their access to resources and create new conflicts between the groups, leading to more violence in the coming weeks.

Social media

As elections approach, social media is more active around political topics. New pages are being created every day and discrediting campaigns will be stronger in the weeks to come. It will be important to pay attention to false messages around election day and other aspects that may influence people's opinions.

This week, the topic of Buhari's refusal in December to sign the Electoral Act Amendment Bill resurfaced, when PDP member Ben Murray Bruce took to Twitter to voice his opinion that the reason for this refusal is because the President and his party want to fraud the elections (see below screenshot)¹.



Ben Murray-Bruce
9,550 Tweets
Common Sense Advocate, Founder, Silverbird Group. Author of A Commonsense Revolution. Businessman and Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
benbruce.org Joined October 2014
85 Following 824K Followers

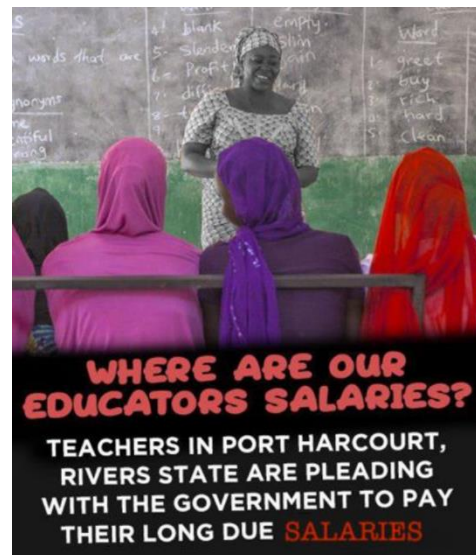
Tweets Tweets & replies Media Likes

Ben Murray-Bruce @benmur... · 3h
Buhari's Refusal to Sign the Amended Electoral Act Bill into Law is Part of APC Game Plan to Manipulate 2019 Elections thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019...
109 210 505

This fact is relevant because it casts doubt about the electoral process and suggests that APC is attempting to influence the results (this could lead to post-election violence if APC wins). This message is also important because Ben Murray Bruce is the most popular politician on social media in Bayelsa State (see 'Social media popularity' section below); something which was highlighted in our fourth Niger Delta Watch report. His messages tend to get a lot of attention online so the fact he is voicing his doubts, while part of a political strategy, may bring other negative consequences.

Our fact checking highlighted the spread of disinformation by Alliance of SDP in a Facebook post that received over 7.6k likes at the time of reporting, claiming that the Rivers State teachers were begging to be paid (see screenshot below). This was a sponsored

ad, meaning that the post was specifically targeted to a certain group of people by a particular company in order to draw a large amount of popularity and attention. While there *was* a Vanguard article published in October 2018 about the payment of teachers in Rivers State², this new content appears to be deliberately misleading, as there are not new claims about Rivers State Government owing teachers' salaries. False information can be subtle, and the fact that an old issue is being brought up again around the election period to make it seem as though it is still a problem is a commonly used strategy to make people believe that these are real facts. It is also very serious if sponsored ads are sharing disinformation; if these ads are constantly aimed at discrediting one candidate, it indicates an organized action. The issue of sponsored ads was previously highlighted in last week's report.



7.6K

415 Comments

¹ <https://twitter.com/benmurraybruce/status/1087310078129119233?s=19>.

² <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/10/pay-our-salary-arrears-teachers-beg-rivers-govt/>.

Social media popularity

Rivers State Executive Governor, Nyesom Wike, is one of the most popular actors on social media in the State. His campaign activities for the upcoming elections are centred on Twitter, Facebook and online news portals as well as print media. His social media presence has been influential in his electoral campaign; for example, his announcement to devote 60% of appointments to youths if he is re-elected for a second term in office³.

Former Governor of Rivers State, APC member and present Minister of Transport for Nigeria, Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi, has been receiving significant attention on social media, particularly on Twitter. This is mainly related to the #AmaechiTapes. As reported by the Premium Times, PDP member Atiku Abubakar's campaign released secret tapes wherein Amaechi is reportedly heard insulting President Buhari⁴. The information caught further attention when it was also shared by PDP member Reno Omokri (see screenshot, right). Premium Times stated it had not independently verified the tape's authenticity, however the tape shared by Omokri included no mention of Buhari. Amaechi is a key political ally of Buhari and the Director General of the Buhar/Osinbaio Campaign Organization. It appears that the PDP is using these audio tapes to create a divide within the APC.

Reno Omokri has a strong social media presence (both Facebook and Twitter) also in Delta State, and he is a relevant voice surrounding the elections. Omokri is a highly controversial public figure with his anti APC and Buhari approach gaining him a lot of media coverage, both good and bad. His presence on social media has given him a platform to speak after his stint as special assistant to former president Goodluck Jonathan ended. Omokri's allegations are often questioned; one of which generated a lot of controversy was the story regarding the Amaechi tapes (see above), which served as an opportunity to undermine the standing of both Amaechi and Buhari. Most of Omokri's targets are APC members, most especially President Buhari, whom he is a very tough voice against Buhari and has been campaigning hard against him. Omokri may continue to be active as elections approach.



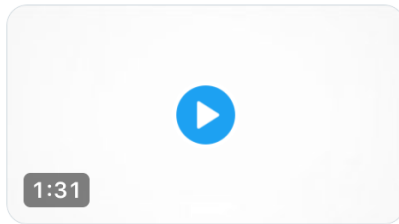
³ <https://punchng.com/wike-promises-youths-60-of-appointments-during-second-term/>.

⁴ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/304317-atiku-campaign-releases-secret-tapes-quoting-minister-amaechi-as-abusing-buhari.html>.



Atiku Abubakar ✓ @ati... · 7h ✓

Yesterday, I returned to Nigeria after my whistle-stop tour of D.C where I was able to share my plan to get Nigeria working again with members of congress, business community & our citizens abroad. Key to the success of my plan will be to drive inward investment and trade deals.



22.1K views



Former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, has been very popular on social media lately, particularly on Twitter. There has been a pending corruption allegation against him, which led to over 1000 Nigerians signing a petition to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other American authorities, demanding a thorough probe⁵. It was alleged that Abubakar will not be able to go to the US because of the criminal cases associated to him. In a bid to move past the controversy, he was eventually able to take a tour to the United States where he was able to share his plans of 'Get Nigeria Working Again' (see screenshot, left).

⁵ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/295742-2019-nigerians-petition-fbi-for-urgent-probe-of-atikus-corruptin-allegations.html>.

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.

