Summary

This is the ninth edition of Niger Delta Watch 2019.

During the week of 28 January, with less than two weeks until the Presidential and National Assembly elections, particularly in Rivers State, major campaign activities are being carried out by the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP), while the major opposition party, All Progressive Congress (APC), is still held down by the uncertainty around their participation in the Rivers State elections. While there were fewer reported election-related incidents in the week under review compared with previous weeks, we did receive a report of violence in Emohua as well as a fire at the office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Oyigbo Local Government Area (LGA), which turned out to be the result of an accident rather than politically related.

In Bayelsa during the reporting period, party campaigns intensified, with candidates covering as much ground as possible in a bid to gain voter support. This has included the ongoing giving of money and gifts to community members by political party members during rallies. The public are relieved that campaigns have generally been peaceful, given the history of political violence in Bayelsa which had led people to expect an all-round more violent campaigning period. Yet there have still been some serious exceptions which also show potential to escalate. We received the first reported fatality of the 2019 Bayelsa campaigns this week in Yenagoa LGA, as well as two further fatal incidents in Sagbama and Nembe respectively. This is a bad sign of events to come if the situation is not properly handled by the relevant agencies. The APC carried out protests to express their concern over the rising cases of violence and asked the relevant authorities to take action to stem the tide going into the general election.

This reporting period in Delta was characterised by displays of electoral violence, fraud and corruption, and political party or campaign misconduct in some parts of the State with a marked increase in serious violent incidents compared to previous weeks. We received reports from Uvwie LGA that five people lost their lives. In Burutu LGA, an APC chieftain was quoted as saying "Vote for APC and get paid, there is money to spend if you vote!" as he threw money in the air. In Warri South, APC billboards and posters were destroyed in an act which the Warri South LGA chairman lamented bitterly, blaming the main opposition, the PDP. With the elections one week away, it is imperative that security measures are strengthened, to ensure the electorate of their safety at polling units and to avoid voter apathy. It is also important that voters are educated to make use of their PVCs and votes to bring about positive change.

This week, a key issue in political discourse in Akwa Ibom has been the continuing claims by the ruling PDP that the opposition, APC, is planning to use the police to intimidate political office holders and members in the elections. There was lots of money giving from political party members to community members as well as billboard destruction. Electoral violence was reported in Etim Ekpo LGA when there was a clash between APC and PDP supporters. This is significant in light of the fact
that Etim Ekpo was until last year a hotbed of cult and militant violence, which killed many and led to the initiation of an Amnesty program by the State Government in a bid to stem the crisis. Public commentators agree that the arms collected as part of the were a small percentage of what had been in use, and there are fears that the ongoing circulation of weapons, especially small arms, are a threat to the peaceful conduct of elections in those LGAs.

On social media this week, a key topic was the story of President Buhari’s son, Yusuf, attending the campaign of Atiku Abubakar. This post went viral however was later reported as false by the News Express which claimed that Yusuf was nowhere near Abakaliki at the time of Atiku’s campaign. After further investigation, it was suspected that the page responsible for posting this information, Nigeria Politics Today, is politically aligned and posing as a media page under a false identity. There were further public accusations of election rigging, this time by the PDP who accused INEC. Separately, a woman named Zara Gift Onyinye attracted widespread attention on social media when she spread misinformation about the contents of an interview between broadcast journalist Kadaria Ahmed and the pair of Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi. Zara Gift was later blocked from Facebook after she used inflammatory speech towards the Igbo people.

Each week, the Niger Delta Watch team produce a short thematic report based on cumulative incident reports received to date. This week, we have focused on incidents involving women, which we specifically tag in our database. Our major observation is that the majority of incidents involving women relate to two of our five designated risk areas - electoral preparations, procedures and standards, and fraud and corruption. Many incidents relate to the donation of money and gifts to women’s groups (as well as others) at campaign rallies and other political events.

Please continue to check http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections2019/ for news and updates.
**Thematic report: incidents involving women**

This week we looked specifically at all incidents that have in some way involved women, which have been reported since the start of the project in November 2018. As highlighted earlier in the project, our reporting process requires incidents that mention women in the description to be flagged in our report database, in order to understand whether there are gendered effects in relation to electoral incidents.¹

The map below shows the total number of incidents - both those coded as ‘positive news’ and relating to the project’s five major risk areas - reported by Observers as specifically involving women. There are 46 in total across Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta, with the highest number of incidents reported in Delta State.

The clear inference from figure 1 is that women are principally involved in incidents (both good and bad) relating to a) fraud and corruption, and b) electoral preparations, procedures and standards.

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¹ Note that incidents are recorded as involving women when project Observers specifically note their participation, which we request they do. However, this does not mean that we assume incidents not specifically involving women solely involve men.
Figure 1: Incidents, by risk area, where women have been specifically involved, compared with all other incidents.

More than half of all negative incidents reported - 19 in total - relate to fraud and corruption, and involve the ‘empowerment’ of women, when political candidates or others party officials distribute money or gifts to presumed voters at campaign rallies or other events. This appears to be a trend, where women are specifically targeted by political party members in their campaigns to win voter support. While other societal groups (e.g. young people) also tend to be targeted in these sorts of party campaigning activities, the data suggests that, at least in some areas, attempts at vote-buying are being focused on women.

Examples of this type of report submitted by Observers to date include the following:

- The wife of PDP candidate Hon. Chisom Dike, Barr. Nora Chisom Dike, gave 500 pieces of wrapper and money to PDP women in Oyigbo LGA.

- In Southern Ijaw, the APC campaign team visited Peremabiri Town and gave money to all groups, chiefs, young people and women.

- [Also in Southern Ijaw] Party agents went to the community and shared wrappers and plastics among women in order to induce them for their votes.

- A PDP candidate in Bayelsa visited a local chief and his community in Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA. Some elders, women and youths came out to receive their House of Representatives member, who thanked the people of the community while allegedly ‘giving small cash handouts’ for their unflinching support and urged them to extend same support to a number of other candidates.

- An aspirant from APC for the State House of Assembly visited the communities and monies were given to Chiefs, CDC, women’s group and also the youth group. They did not waste time in any of the communities they visited.

Other reported incidents specifically flagged as involving women submitted by Observers include the
intimidation of and attacks on politically-linked persons, and women taking political action by protesting against insecurity and other issues:

- The mutilated corpse of a well-known politician’s wife was found by a church in Okoribi, Uvwie LGA in Delta State.

- Women along the Uto-Ewu axis have been protesting the neglect of their area by government, and the alleged killing of their children by herdsmen without government response. This has caused serious agitation in the area.

- In November 2018: Kidnapping and suspected ritual attack on Mrs [REDACTED], a well-known political woman leader of the APC, but she escaped.

- In Bassambiri, women protested 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.
Rivers

With the Presidential and National Assembly elections imminently approaching, particularly in Rivers State, major campaign activities are being carried out by the PDP, while the major opposition party, APC, is still held down by the uncertainty around their participation in the Rivers State elections. The week under review has fewer reported election-related incidents compared with previous weeks within the five risk areas under observation.

There were six incidents reported in Rivers this week, one of which was positive news. While most incidents related to electoral preparations, there was one incident of violence in Emohua. After initial reports and pictures suggesting a quite serious fire at its office in Oyigbo LGA, INEC have advised that the fire incident was an electrical fault and only caused damage to a meeting area in the building.

Specific incidents which have taken place include:

- In Ahoada East, election preparations included the inauguration of all unit executives by the PDP in the LGA, with the directive to mobilise for and protect their votes during the election.
- In Ahoada West, during a PDP LGA campaign for Ubie cluster, the LGA Chairman Hon. Evang. Hope Ikiriko told the people that nobody has a monopoly of violence and that anyone who attempts violence will be taught a bitter lesson.
- While returning from a PDP campaign at Mbiama, Engenini in Ahoada West LGA, the leader of Ahoada West Legislative Assembly Hon. Ekele Fyneface Chikobi Cohen (popularly known as EFCC) was murdered and seven were kidnapped by unknown gunmen on Emohua axis of the East-West road. Amongst those attacked was Hon. Nwanaka Okpokiri, who is a member of the Rivers State House of Assembly representing Ahoada West constituency. To the date of reporting, the whereabouts of those kidnapped was still unknown.
- The PDP Emohua LGA Chapter conducted a ward to ward campaign without violence.
- In Ogu/Bolo, INEC began training their ad-hoc staff in preparation for the elections.
- On 27 January, there was a fire which affected the INEC office at Afam in Oyigbo LGA. While there were initial concerns that this could be politically-related, it was later discovered that the fire was the result of an electrical fault and only caused minor damage.

Postscript to the period under review:

- At the time of writing the APC’s main faction had been granted a “stay of action” on the Federal High Court ruling that included injunctions against INEC listing APC candidates for any of the national and state elections.
- Initial media and public reactions have assumed that the APC is back in the race but as at Wednesday 6 February INEC has also commented that it is yet to reconsider its position delisting the party’s candidates. It is not yet clear whether the “stay of execution” granted well after INEC’s action will be sufficient to change the present situation without further court rulings.
Bayelsa

This reporting period, party campaigns have intensified, with candidates covering as much ground as possible in a bid to gain voter support. This has included the ongoing giving of money and gifts to community members by political party members during rallies.

Campaigns this week were generally peaceful. This continues to be seen as a relief by the public, with the history of political violence in Bayelsa having led people to expect an all-round more violent campaigning period.

However, there have been some serious exceptions which also show potential to escalate. On 28 January, there was a reported fatality after a fight broke out at a PDP campaign in Famgbe, Yenagoa LGA. This was followed by two further fatal incidents – first, an alleged attack during an APC campaign rally in Tungbabiri, Sagbama LGA, and, later, an attack on the PDP Nembe Constituency candidate along the Creeks in Nembe LGA, as they were returning from campaigns in Brass LGA.

This is a bad sign of events to come if the situation is not properly handled by the relevant agencies. Following the Tungbabiri incident, there was a retaliatory attack the next day, where houses were destroyed. The APC carried out protests to express their concern over the rising cases of violence and asked the relevant authorities to take action to stem the tide going into the general election.

Specific incidents this week included:

- In Yenagoa, on 28 January in Famgbe Community, violence broke out during a PDP campaign rally and a man was shot dead.

- On 2 February at Okokokiri River, Nembe LGA, Hon. Ebi Ben Ololo (Member representing Nembe Constituency I in the Bayelsa State House of Assembly and PDP flag bearer for re-election for the 2019 General Elections for the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, Nembe Constituency I) and his team were ambushed by suspected militants while travelling through the creeks for campaigns to some of the communities in his Constituency. The armed men were overpowered and handed over to the State CID.

- On 2 February, in Tungbabiri, Sagbama LGA, the campaign rally of the APC candidate for the Bayelsa West Senatorial District at Tungbabiri was attacked by alleged political thugs allegedly loyal to the PDP. One person was killed while 17 others were injured.

- On 3 February, several houses were burned down in Tungbabiri Community in retaliation to the attack on APC supporters the previous day. It was also reported that the police have arrested the person responsible for the 2 February attacks.

Further violent reports, including the kidnapping of two children by unknown gunmen in Otuogori, Ogbia LGA, and the stabbing of a boy at Akemfa Market in Yenagoa LGA, were received this week; however, at the time of reporting, it was unclear whether these were politically linked.
Delta

This reporting period was characterised by displays of electoral violence, fraud and corruption, and political party or campaign misconduct in some parts of the State with a marked increase in serious violent incidents compared to previous weeks.

A report of violence, leading to multiple fatalities, came from Uvwie LGA, which was believed to have been politically motivated. From Burutu LGA, it was gathered that an APC chieftain was quoted as saying "Vote for APC and get paid, there is money to spend if you vote!" as he threw money in the air. In Warri South, APC billboards and posters were destroyed in an act which the Warri South LGA chairman lamented bitterly, blaming the main opposition, the PDP.

With the elections one week away, it is imperative that security measures are strengthened, to ensure the electorate of their safety at polling units and to avoid voter apathy. It is also important that voters are educated to make use of their PVCs and votes to bring about positive change.

Specific incidents which took place this week include:

- In Ward 7 of Ayakoromo community, Burutu LGA, Engr. Angola Akeme, former Chairman of Ayakoromo community, was inducted into the PDP from the APC. Cash donations from the party leadership were made and Hon. Richard Teudon promised that the leadership would pay 10 people each from the 21 polling units in the LGA. This incident took place at the same time as another incident in which APC chieftain Barr. Pele Demebide, during his campaign for Emmanuel Uduaghan, was said to be praying and throwing money in the air for women and young people. He was also quoted as saying "Vote for APC and get paid, there is money to spend if you vote!". Violence was averted by community members who helped to maintain peace, as PDP supporters, who were present as a result of the town hall meeting, were ready to disrupt the respective proceedings.

- The Ethiope East PDP campaign team visited ward 11, Ethiope East LGA, as they moved from ward to ward to continue their campaign, no violence was recorded.

- In Ika South LGA, "Agbor, Owa-Oyibu stand still as Okowa takes campaign to home town" was the tag as Governor Ifeanyi Okowa and his campaign team visited the area to round up his campaign of local governments in the state. Governor Okowa, the PDP gubernatorial flag bearer for the 2019 election, advised the people of Ika land to come out en masse, and to cast and protect their votes. During the occasion, Chief James Ibori, a former PDP and Delta State governor, called for respect, equity and fairness as the governor seeks re-election. He encouraged all to vote for the Governor Okowa, in order that he could continue his work. Ibori also said that his tribe, the Urhobos, were solidly behind him and will support his quest all the way.

- Sporadic shootings were heard at Effurun market area around Jakpa junction, Alaka and Orhumarho area, in Uvwie LGA. Subsequently four boys were reported dead in Alegbor, and a 32-year-old man was also reported to have been shot dead. All of these are perceived to be politically motivated.

- The APC ward chairman for Warri South LGA was reported to have complained bitterly at the destruction of billboards and posters of APC Senate Aspirants, Dr. Emmanuel Uduagan and Ekurede Itsekiri. He attributed the incident to the work of opposing parties.
Akwa Ibom

This week, a key issue in political discourse in Akwa Ibom has been the continuing claims by the ruling PDP that the opposition, APC, is planning to use the police to intimidate political office holders and members in the elections.

Electoral violence was reported in Etim Ekpo LGA when there was a clash between APC and PDP supporters. Etim Ekpo and Ukanafun were until last year hotbeds of cult and militant violence, which killed many and led to the initiation of an Amnesty program by the State Government in a bid to stem the crisis. Public commentators agree that the arms collected as part of the program were a small percentage of what had been in use, and there are fears that the ongoing circulation of weapons, especially small arms, are a threat to the peaceful conduct of elections in those LGAs.

The recruitment of ad hoc staff for the election management body has also become controversial. Last week, during an SDN briefing in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) assured the people of Akwa Ibom that the Commission would ensure members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and federal civil servants would be deployed for the exercise. But feelers from our observers suggest that the Vice Chancellors of the University of Uyo and Akwa Ibom State University – both reportedly loyal to the ruling PDP – have been involved in some way in the recruitment process, as students dominate a list of ad-hoc staff seen by our observers.

Specific incidents reported this week are as follows:

- In Mkpat Enin, supporters of the All Progressives Congress in Ibewe Akpanya were seen destroying the billboard of the local PDP Gubernatorial candidate, Deacon Udom Emmanuel (see below).
In Mkpat Enin, it is alleged that during the recent recruitment of INEC ad-hoc staff, Professor Eno Ibanga, the Vice Chancellor of the Akwa Ibom State University, influenced the recruitment of several students of the institution who have been briefed to work in favour of the ruling PDP.

In Ibiono Ibom, supporters of the PDP Senatorial candidate in the upcoming National Assembly elections, Obong Bassey Albert, destroyed campaign posters of the gubernatorial candidate of the APC, Obong Nsima Ekere. This act was reportedly triggered by the visit of the senator to the area during which he donated monies to the people.

In Etim Ekpo, supporters of the APC and PDP clashed in Ikpe Annang. It is reported that Hon. Akanimo Edet, an APC chieftain in the area, visited the House of Representatives aspirant for Abak, Etim Ekpo and Ika federal constituency to plan for the forthcoming elections. However, the lawmaker, in a press statement released on 03 February, said that he was on a reconciliatory visit and meeting with people of the area after recent insecurity. He said that while the meeting was taking place, an AKTC bus came with armed thugs and dispersed them, although he was taken to safety by security men in his entourage.

The governor of Akwa Ibom state and PDP governorship candidate, Deacon Udom Emmanuel, took his campaign train to Etinan where he paid homage to the paramount ruler, Edidem Ime Umoette at his palace. He reportedly gave the monarch the sum of NGN 3,000,000 and a cow. He also allegedly gave the first son of the paramount ruler the sum of NGN 1,000,000 to share with palace workers, before moving to the venue of the rally, where he was received by party chieftain, women and youths, and the sum of NGN 50,000 was given to each polling unit in Etinan.

The APC governorship candidate and former director of the Niger Delta Development Commission, Obong Nsima Ekere, took his campaign train to Abak local government area. He was accompanied by the candidate for Ikot Ekpene senatorial district, and former senate minority leader, Senator Godswill Akpabio. They were received by party chieftains, women, and youth. Obong Nsima Ekere reportedly gave his supporters the sum of NGN 3,000,000 and Senator Akpabio supported with the sum of NGN 2,000,000.

A renowned cultist, Ubong, known as Killer, who is said to be a member of the Red Skin fraternity, had a fight with Ndifreke, said to be a member of Debam fraternity, over the sum of NGN 10,000 given to them to share among youth by an APC Candidate for Nsit Ibom state constituency.
Social media

As with the thematic report this week, we asked our social media analysts to look at the involvement of women in election processes, specifically female candidates and their online campaigns. We also highlight some other relevant stories on social media that give an indication of the media environment in which Nigerians are voting.

In the Niger Delta, and across Nigeria, women are heavily under-represented in politics, with few women directly participating in politics. Equally, women’s influence in politics and on social media is low, and men appear to dominate the online discourse on elections. There appear to be more female political candidates and aspirants in Rivers State, compared with Bayelsa and Delta. However, only a handful of these are present on social media, and don’t have many followers in comparison to their male counterparts. However, the comments these women do receive are supportive rather than negative, which is important to highlight given women’s broader lack of representation in politics in Nigeria. For example, Victoria Nyeche, Oby Ezekwesili, Bolanle Sarumi Aliyu and other have gained a lot of support from their online followers.

To be specific, female political candidates from Rivers state rarely contest formal political positions, which may be a result of discrimination, fear and insecurity, or the cost in monetary terms. Women in other states are more directly involved, such as Oby Ezekwesili, from Anambra, an Allied Congress Party of Nigeria politician who until recently was a presidential candidate, and Aliyu, who is the National Interest Party candidate for the governorship of Oyo.

Social media – the week in review

During the most recent reporting period, political parties have been using their social media platforms to try to confuse voters and discredit politicians. For example, a popular story that went viral this week surrounded the alleged attendance of President Buhari’s son, Yusuf, at a campaign in Ebonyi State by Buhari’s presidential competitor, Atiku Abubakar (see post, right). At the time of reporting, this post had garnered over 700 likes and over 1,000 shares. Despite the story receiving widespread attention, investigations by News Express identified that Yusuf Buhari was nowhere near Abakaliki at the time of Atiku’s campaign in the town.

After further research, it was discovered that the page that posted this story – Nigeria Politics Today – has changed its name many times in recent years (see

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2 SDN is running a separate research project on women’s in engagement in politics in the Niger Delta, and will release its findings later in 2019.

3 See video posted by Nasir El Rufai (APC) discrediting PDP presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar: https://www.facebook.com/nasirelrufai/videos/317194505595359/

screenshot below).

For example, one previous name of the page was ‘APDA Kogi State’, indicating that the page is partisan (the Advanced People’s Democratic Alliance, or APDA is a political party).

Page name changes indicate that the purpose of the page may have changed over time.

This suggests that the more recent name changes appear to be a strategy from this political party (or party supporter) to pose as a neutral source in the run-up to the elections. Furthermore, the page lists itself on Facebook as a media page (see below right), but its listed webpage, http://www.nigeriapoliticstoday.com/, does not exist.

Another post which received a lot of attention on social media concerned the content of an interview between broadcast journalist Kadaria Ahmed and the pair of Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi, who is Abubakar’s Vice-Presidential running mate. The post appeared to have modified what was said in the interview by Atiku and Ahmed (see right) as it conflicted with an article by the Vanguard which reported on the interview. At the time of reporting, the post had gained over 1.6k likes and over 2,700 shares. It is interesting to note that the same Facebook account was later blocked from posting on Facebook after being discovered as using inflammatory speech against the Igbo people.

5 https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/atiku-obi-the-kadaria-ahmed-inquisition/
In other recent developments, the debate about election rigging continues as, on 4 February, the official PDP Facebook page and Twitter account accused INEC of planning to rig the elections – see screenshots below.

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.