NIGER DELTA WATCH 2019

A citizen-led election observation project
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Summary

The Governorship polls on the weekend of the 09-10 March took place in difficult circumstances. Rivers State in particular was characterised by serious problems at every stage of the poll, with varying degrees of intensity across different local governments. Given the seriousness of the problems there, this report provides an extended section on events in Rivers. The most notable improvement on the Presidential polls was in logistics, where with the exception of local governments already seeing clashes, the distribution of materials and start times for the poll were significantly improved.

In Bayelsa, the Governorship election is off-cycle and due to be held in December 2019. However, State House of Assembly elections were held, which still saw concerning incidents reported. Reports from Delta indicate that the election involved vote buying, multiple voting, the bullying of voters, and the late and unmonitored collation of results. In Akwa Ibom there were many incidents reported by our Observers of violence, disruption, and alleged partisan behaviour by the police.

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Rivers

The elections in Rivers were deeply flawed. Voting and collation were both disrupted, often with violently, with some fatalities. The situation as so serious that INEC suspended the elections in the state. Collation of the results will now be done during 02-05 April, with any necessary supplementary elections to be held on 13 April. This section looks at different stages of the election in detail.

Pre-election

The immediate pre-election period was dominated by observer reports and party allegations of arrests of leading PDP members. On the Thursday before the poll, reports related mainly to Port Harcourt, with observers also reporting detentions in Oyigbo. In the majority of cases allegations were that detentions were carried out by uniformed personnel. Also prior to the poll, the palace of former militant Ateke Tom was raided and five people were arrested. The local interpretation of this event was that the raid was intended to provoke clashes. On a positive note, the basic logistics for preparing the election saw a marked improvement, with materials going to local governments on time and improving the roll-out to wards.

Election start-up

The start of the election was improved in most local governments, with notable exceptions. This included severe delays reported in Andoni (till around 1400 outside Ngo), Khana (delays and then disruption, so all wards except Ward 1 reportedly did not receive materials), Degema, and finally Abua Odua, where disputes prevented any distribution of materials at all. Other local governments recorded significant improvements in start times (Obio Akpor, parts of Port Harcourt, and Okrika).

In Degema, there were reports of payments by the PDP to youth corps members and electoral officials to thumb print ballot papers for PDP candidates, as well as alleged thumb printing and stamping of ballot papers for the Africa Action Congress (AAC).

Snatching of election materials

From around 1100 numerous local governments experienced snatching of materials (either at distribution, or as part of the systematic collection of materials across a ward). Impacted areas included Ahoada West, Akuku Toru, Asari Toru, Degema, Emohua, Gokana, Ikwerre and Khana. In many cases, reports cited persons in uniform accompanying gangs or groups with known politicians. In Asari Toru observers witnessed a high ranking party official moving with gangs of individuals who had uniformed personnel accompanying them.

Truncation of Unit and Ward Collation

In a majority of local governments, unit and ward collation was abnormal, with materials being taken to local government centres before counting would take place. In some centres, wards which had been snatched resurfaced at collation centres. For example, in Gokana, ward election materials which had been taken away by groups with uniformed personnel re-emerged at the collation centre at Kpor Police Station – on Sunday 10. PDP party agents and domestic observers were not granted entry but international observers were able to gain access. On Saturday evening domestic observers were being refused access to multiple collation centres, including in Asari Toru, Degema, Akuku Toru, Oyigbo, Gokana, and Khana.
In some of these centres, access was possible later, but it was difficult to ascertain what had transpired, with control of the centres changing hands. In other centres, there was initial access for observers, which was truncated by incidents around the collation centre and the security services forcing people to leave, for example in Emohua and Ahoada West. In addition, the Nigerian Army has alleged that clashes with PDP agents (including allegedly the governor) at Obio Akpor LGA’s collation resulted in injury to two of its soldiers.

**Collation Issues on Sunday 10**

Observers were able to gain access to some collation centres and continued to be denied access to others. In many collation centres observed, PDP party agents were being denied access while it was alleged that AAC/APC agents and key supporters were inside the same centres. Centres which had closed collation without any apparent declaration of results included Emohua, Degema, and Asari Toru. In numerous others it was difficult to ascertain whether any declaration had been made, because of a lack of access to centres and lack of information after collation staff and security had departed.

Some collation concluded violently. For example, in Khana, despite observers seeing evidence of voting only in Ward 1, collation commenced for the LGA. Observers had been denied access through Saturday night. On Sunday morning a clash took place at the collation centre, where it has been alleged one of the PDP Agents Dr Farry Gberegbe, who later died, was shot (with video footage of the incident circulating widely). Immediately after the incident all election materials were taken to Port Harcourt.

In Ogu Bolo and Okrika, women formed vigils outside the collation centres that continued from Saturday night to Sunday afternoon. In both cases access was restricted to the centres so their protest was focused on seeing results for these LGAs declared before departing. In both cases these protests continued into Sunday afternoon when materials were forcibly taken out in one case and through a back route in the other.

**Port Harcourt Collation Centre**

Our observer was at the State INEC Office (the collation centre) from around 10am and noted a heavy uniformed presence from his time of arrival. Several local governments had brought in their materials but were still compiling the results and effectively seemed to be completing collation at the state office (several of the LGAs appeared to be reconciling ward results for final calculation of the Local Government result). LGAs in this category included Ikwerre, Onelga, Ahoada West, Eleme, Port Harcourt (Phalga), and Etche.

**Closure of State Office/Access to State Office**

Our observer noted an absence of INEC staff from mid-morning on Sunday at the same time that the uniformed presence was seen to be escalating. INEC’s Head of Voter Education in the state later made a statement noting that the military had taken over the area and pleading that election officials be allowed to access the state office without hindrance. It was in this period that allegations of election materials being screened at the Police Headquarters and in Bori military camp began emerging online. Our observers were also able to determine that election results for a number of LGAs appeared to have significant and ongoing time gaps between when they left their centres and should have reached the state office. Local government collation was clearly not being completed for LGAs before reaching the state office as some were observed still compiling results at the state collation centre.
Reported role of the military

Observers reported throughout Saturday 09 and Sunday 10 that uniformed personnel were directly involved in pre-election arrests, the snatching of ballot boxes, denial of access to collation centres, and the apparent abduction of INEC staff.

The headquarters of the Nigerian Army has put out a press statement highlighting the presence of ‘fake military personnel’ and their alleged responsibility for security incidents.

From debriefings with observers it seems possible that some incidents could have been committed by persons impersonating security personnel. In other cases, particularly around collation centres, it seems unlikely that fake personnel could have been responsible, as those responsible were interacting with other security personnel and seemed to be following a chain of command.

Results chain/collation

In a number of LGAs, it was only possible to see part of the results chain; the lack of access to additional information was disturbing in itself. In the majority of the LGAs where it was possible to see information at several levels, there were multiple breaches of the process:

- Wards that reportedly had seen material snatching or where observers had reported no election were seemingly having results collated (Khana, Degema, Gokana).
- The same local governments that had serious issues with ‘snatching’ during the day also saw partisan access to collation centres.
- None of the most ‘troubled’ LGAs (eg Degema, Gokana, Asari Toru) appear to have had results announced at their collation centre.
Bayelsa

There was no governorship election in Bayelsa, as in this state the election is ‘off-cycle’, and due to take place in December 2019. However, State House of Assembly Elections for 21 of 24 constituencies were held (the remaining three elections, which were declared inconclusive for a number of reasons, including violence and card machine failure, are scheduled to take place this weekend).

The incidents below relate to these elections, where, compared with other areas, it appears that they were relatively peaceful. However, there were incidents of violence recorded in some areas, despite the notably heavy presence of armed personnel in uniform. Some have also cited alleged intimidation by the military towards opposition parties in the state.

Bayelsa saw large scale vote buying from both major parties. Reports said that votes were being sold for as little as NGN 5,000 and as high as NGN 30,000, depending on the party and competition in the area. The areas most affected reportedly included Southern Ijaw, Ekeremor, Sagbama, and Ogbia

Key incidents reported over the period under review include those in the following LGAs:

Ekeremor

- The APC and PDP in Ekeremor town made a last minute effort to woo voters for the elections. Most of these were geared towards rigging, including making arrangements to buy over security agencies and potentially INEC ad-hoc staff. Money was given to polling units. The PDP were allegedly boasting that the APC would not win any Bayelsa House of Assembly seats in Ekeremor.

- On 06 March, in Ekeremor town, there were allegedly threats of violence by the current Minister of State for Agriculture, who is an APC chieftain and an indigene of the community. Sources close to the APC chieftain said that he was planning to use the military to intimidate voters in the LGA in order to scare away voters. According to the source, the man was very angry that the APC did not win any of the National Assembly seats in Bayelsa West Senatorial District in the February 23 elections. Note that a Peace Agreement was signed between the APC, PDP and other parties in Ekeremor in the run-up to these, and that the Presidential and National Assembly elections were, to a large degree, peaceful.

- In Ward 9, APC leaders forcefully moved materials and INEC ad-hoc staff to a secluded place.

- APC youths snatched a ballot box from a presiding officer on the way to Ekeremor Ward 8 Collation Centre. However, security agencies were able to recover the box with everything intact.

- A young person was badly beaten by PDP youth. He was injured in the head. This incident caused security to be on high alert for the rest of the day.

- In Ward 8, PDP members were not satisfied with the results as collated at the Ward Collation Centre. They believe that the Collation officer altered the results received from the polling units. This led to a protest march by PDP members in the community. However, the protest was not violent. This protest took place at the same time as APC was celebrating their victory.
Sagbama

- Voting was disrupted by uniformed personnel alleged to be working for an APC chieftain.
- Vote buying by both PDP and APC agents took place in units 5, 7, and 9.

Nembe

- On March 07, the Executive Governor of Bayelsa State, His Excellency, Henry Seriake Dickson deployed a Special Security Force, popularly called Operation Doo-Akpo, to Ogbolomabiri in preparation for the coming elections.

Ogbia

- On 04 March, in Otuasega town, House of Assembly aspirants from most political parties were canvassing for votes by visiting potential voters. Vote buying formed the main agenda.
- On 08 March in Otuasega town, different political parties held meetings canvassing for votes. They did this on a one-on-one basis and via group meetings. The key topic of discussion was the price they were willing to offer to vote sellers.
Delta

Reports from Observers deployed across Delta state indicate that the elections were marred by various forms of electoral malpractice, including vote buying, multiple voting, and the bullying of voters by party agents and uniformed men. Collation Officers also reportedly appeared late to collation centres. As a result, collation of polling unit results was only concluded in the early hours of the following day, often in the absence of key monitoring officials.

Specific incidents reported over the period include the following:

Bomadi

- On the day of the election, a young man, apparently colluding with a Polling Officer, voted with more than 2,000 Permanent Voter Cards in his possession. Some voters in Esanma apparently double-voted, going to further polling units after cleaning their fingers with sand. The Assistant Presiding Officer at one of the polling units complained that INEC officials posted only three people to each polling unit, compared with seven during the Presidential Election, and saved the money for themselves. Observers were also restricted from gaining entrance to the INEC office.

Burutu

- Barr Demeibe Arekoudoumene Pele called for the militarisation of the riverine area, claiming that Ayakoromo Community was harbouring militants who he said would be used to perpetuate violence and fraud on election day. However, the chairman of the APC, Paul Amabiri Azobor, debunked the statements and urged others to ignore Pele on March 5, 2019.

Ethiope East

- In Okpara Inland, violence broke out between voters and thugs while trying to snatch ballot boxes and intimidate voters. This resulted in the cancellation of unit 1.

- In Kokori Inland, Ward 6, a disagreement which broke out between APC and PDP party agents almost resulted in violence, but the situation was calmed by security agents on duty for the 09 March elections.

Ndokwa East

- APC House of Assembly candidate Olisa Obiechina and his supporters went on a quarter-to-quarter campaign in Aboh, Umuti and Akarai. Most INEC ad-hoc staff left the INEC office at Aboh for the Registration Area Centre on Friday with their materials under tight security.

- Ward 3 in Ozoro saw vote buying from party agents.

Ughelli North

- Accreditation and voting did not begin until late morning, and some voters were also bullied by party and other agents.
The police prevented access for Observers to the collation of the Governorship and House of Assembly results on March 10-11.

Warri South-West

On election day the distribution of electoral materials at Okerenkoko Town was delayed as INEC took time to brief their ad hoc staff, and this fuelled tension and anxiety. Complaints were also made at the late arrival of materials and personnel in Okerenkoko after several hours of delay caused by the Nigerian Army.

Also, at NPA Warri River, over 50 boats conveying INEC electoral materials, personnel and various party supporters were blocked by several army gunboats while moving to the various Wards of Warri South West.
Akwa Ibom

Akwa Ibom saw many incidents and disturbances during the reporting period. Ahead of the elections, the PDP accused the APC of importing political thugs to the state, while there were reports that most parties were involved in trying to force people to vote for them, including that the PDP disguised themselves, claiming to be agents from other parties. There were generalised issues involving card readers not working, a lack of technical support, delays in the release of materials, and voter inducements. Some specific incidents are reported below:

• On 05 March, the residence of an aide to Governor Emmanuel on Research and Documentation and supporter of the PDP in the state was said to be surrounded by armed men, with the aide going into hiding.

• Similarly, a media aide to Governor Emmanuel was also arrested and detained at the state police headquarters allegedly on the orders of former Senate Minority leader and Chieftain of the APC, Senator Godswill Akpabio.

• Engr. Uwem Okoko of Hensek was arrested at his residence. Okoko, who is a strong supporter and financier of the PDP in the state, hails from Ikot Abasi LGA, where the APC Gubernatorial candidate also comes from. It has been suggested that the arrest was with the intention to limit the chances of the PDP in the area.

• On 06 March, the PDP through its publicity secretary alleged that men of the Nigeria Police Force were taking oaths to collect money with the intention of working for Nsima Ekere and the APC, and went ahead to say that the act was coordinated by the trio of CSP Brown, Nathaniel Uyio and Mr. Femi, who works as Police Security Coordinator for Nsima Ekere. A similar development was also said to be underway in Essien Udum LGA, the home government of Senator Godswill Akpabio, with the plan being to arrest various PDP-linked people.

• The trend of using security agencies manifested itself on election day, with several reports of the police aiding political thugs either in ballot box snatching or the disruption of electoral processes. Such incidents were recorded in Uyo LGA and Ukana Offot junction, where a group of over 30 policemen and thugs came in five vehicles including an anti-robbery squad vehicle to the unit and shot into the air, destroyed ballot boxes and materials, then chased voters away. This happened while results were being announced. A similar incident was also recorded in Essien Udum where security personnel colluded with political thugs to intimidate PDP voters and prevented them from exercising their franchise, as well as taking electoral officials hostage.

• On 05 March, gunshots were fired into the campaign ground of the APC gubernatorial candidate Obong Nsima Ekere, located at Edet Akpan Avenue, where a meeting of party agents had just been concluded. Two people were seriously wounded and taken to hospital.

• It was also alleged that the APC gubernatorial candidate, Obong Nsima Ekere had a meeting with observers and INEC officials where they were financially induced ahead of the elections.

• In Ini, politicians were reported to be in possession of large numbers of voter cards.
Election related violence was recorded in Ini LGA, specifically at Mbiabong Ikot Udofia, Ikono North, where serious violence took place resulting in the death of one person. Trouble started when materials were being distributed as both PDP and APC agents struggled for the materials. The presence of uniformed personnel at the scene was resisted by gunshots from APC thugs in the area loyal to Dr. Godwin Udoudo, who was arrested immediately after the incident, although he returned to the area within a few hours.

Similarly, at Itie Ikpe in Ini, a stray bullet fired by an APC thug hit one of the voters in the area who was immediately rushed to hospital.

An INEC official working with the commission in Essien Udim LGA was reportedly beaten repeatedly by a political thug.

In Uruan LGA, a lawyer was reportedly hit by a gunshot at his polling unit in Ekpene Ukim.

In Ibiono Ibom, a PDP supporter was allegedly shot in the back.

The PDP Chapter Chairman in Essien Udim was also allegedly beaten up by APC thugs.

In Nsit Atai, an APC agent was seriously beaten by PDP thugs.

In Nsit Ibom, it was reported that, on the eve of the Gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections, an APC member was killed by PDP thugs in the area, and that, as a result, most of its party agents in the area could not go outside because of fear.

In Udung Uko LGA, the PDP agent tore up original unit results sheets that did not favour the PDP. Elsewhere, a former Committee Chairman of Udung Uko LGA was stopped by the Army from attempting to tamper with electoral materials.

In ward 9, there were reported cases of violence between PDP and APC party agents, with the APC agent seriously injured. The cause of the fight, according to an eyewitness, was an attempt to snatch election materials by a PDP agent.

In Ukanafun, it was reported that a young man was killed after initiating a shootout with a member of the army.

In Abak LGA, election materials were burnt by irate APC young people. Hence there was no election as INEC officials fled for safety. In Manta village there was a fierce fight between APC and PDP members. The APC agents were very angry for losing. Some who attempted to video the scene were mobbed by the APC agents. They equally complained about being cheated by their chief agent concerning the distribution of their money.

In Oruk Anam, there were reported incidents of ballot snatching by uniformed personnel and mobile police allegedly hired by the APC. INEC officials deployed to this area were taken hostage to help them with thumb printing.

Incidents of ballot box snatching and hostage-taking of electoral officials were also reported in Ibesikpo, as elections were cancelled in most of the areas affected by such incidents.
Social media

Around election period the potential reach for allegations and accusations made on social media is higher than usual. The following section highlights some key stories which were discussed on social media over the election period covered in this report, including, for example, allegations of impartiality made concerning the INEC REC in Bayelsa.

Response to Presidential election outcome and rigging speculation

The results from the Presidential election appeared to polarise voters, with many from the South-East/South-South region in particular believing or claiming that the re-election of President Buhari was rigged by the APC (such as in the tweet below), while others deemed the elections to be credible.

One Facebook post watched more than 95,000 times was edited to make it seem as though the election was rigged. The page that posted it, Moves Magazine, is operated from Malaysia and does not have a website or further information about it. Other posts suggest that the page shares unreliable content aimed at misinforming people.

A United State Congressman, Gerald Connolly recently said the Nigerian elections were a sham and lacked credibility. This generated a lot of attention on Nigerian social media.

Gubernatorial election outcome in Delta State

Governor Ifeanyi Okowa of the PDP was declared the winner of the 9 March 2019 Gubernatorial election in Delta State, but APC candidate Chief Great Ogboru took to his official Facebook page to question the credibility of the election. In a press conference, he claimed that with a few hours until the end of the polls, the PDP used thugs under the watch of State Security Personnel to intimidate voters and APC agents across Delta State, as well as to snatch ballot boxes from polling units where the APC was clearly in the lead.
Ogboru also alleged that in Burutu, Bomadi and Warri, voting commenced on Friday 8 March, claiming that the APC had called the attention of the INEC to no avail. He further alleged that the PDP had hired thugs and provided them with State Security Personnel uniforms to rig the elections and that the PDP was never ready for credible elections. He also said that accredited voter numbers were much lower than those announced in the INEC collation office.

**Bayelsa State REC accused of lacking integrity**

On 6 March, the ‘Bayelsa Election Watch’ posted on Facebook about the Inter Party Advisory Council (IPAC) and Coalition of United Political Parties (CUPP). The chairs of those organisations in a joint statement accused the Bayelsa INEC’s Resident Electoral Commission, Pastor Monday Tom Udoh, of lacking integrity and being partial. They further accused Udoh of failing to follow electoral guidelines during the 2019 elections, for example relating to the announcement of results in areas where card readers were missing.

**Apparent military violence in Rivers State**

Videos have been circulating on social media allegedly showing the involvement of the military in Rivers state, including reportedly using violence towards civilians.

An incident in Khana took place at the collation centre in Bori during the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections. Shots were fired and a man who was the PDP collation officer during the 09 March election in Khana died.

An incident in Eleme LGA was posted on the Rivers PDP Facebook and Twitter pages as well as on Scannews, involving PDP supporters and agents alleging that the military drove everyone away from the collation centre in Eleme, leaving one man with the INEC Resident Electoral Commission in a bid to alter the results in Eleme in favour of the African Action Congress (AAC).

It was reported by PDP supporters that Minister of Transport Rotimi Amaechi conspired with INEC and the military to influence the election. The PDP alleged that one Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) agent, Akin Fakorede, hijacked election results along with his men. This video post went viral on social media with 62,000 views in 48 hours.
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.