

# NIGER DELTA WATCH 2019

## *A citizen-led election observation project*

Report: Niger Delta Watch 2019 #15

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## Summary

This is scheduled to be the final full weekly report from Niger Delta Watch 2019. It covers incidents where data is available for the end of the reporting period, the last week (25 – 31) of March. This report also includes a summary of the elections held in Rivers State on Saturday 13 April.

With the final House of Assembly elections taking place in Rivers State over the weekend, the election cycle has now concluded, with the national Presidential election, as well as Governorship and State House of Assembly elections concluded in Rivers, Delta and Akwa Ibom. The Bayelsa Governorship election is off-cycle, and scheduled to take place later in the year.

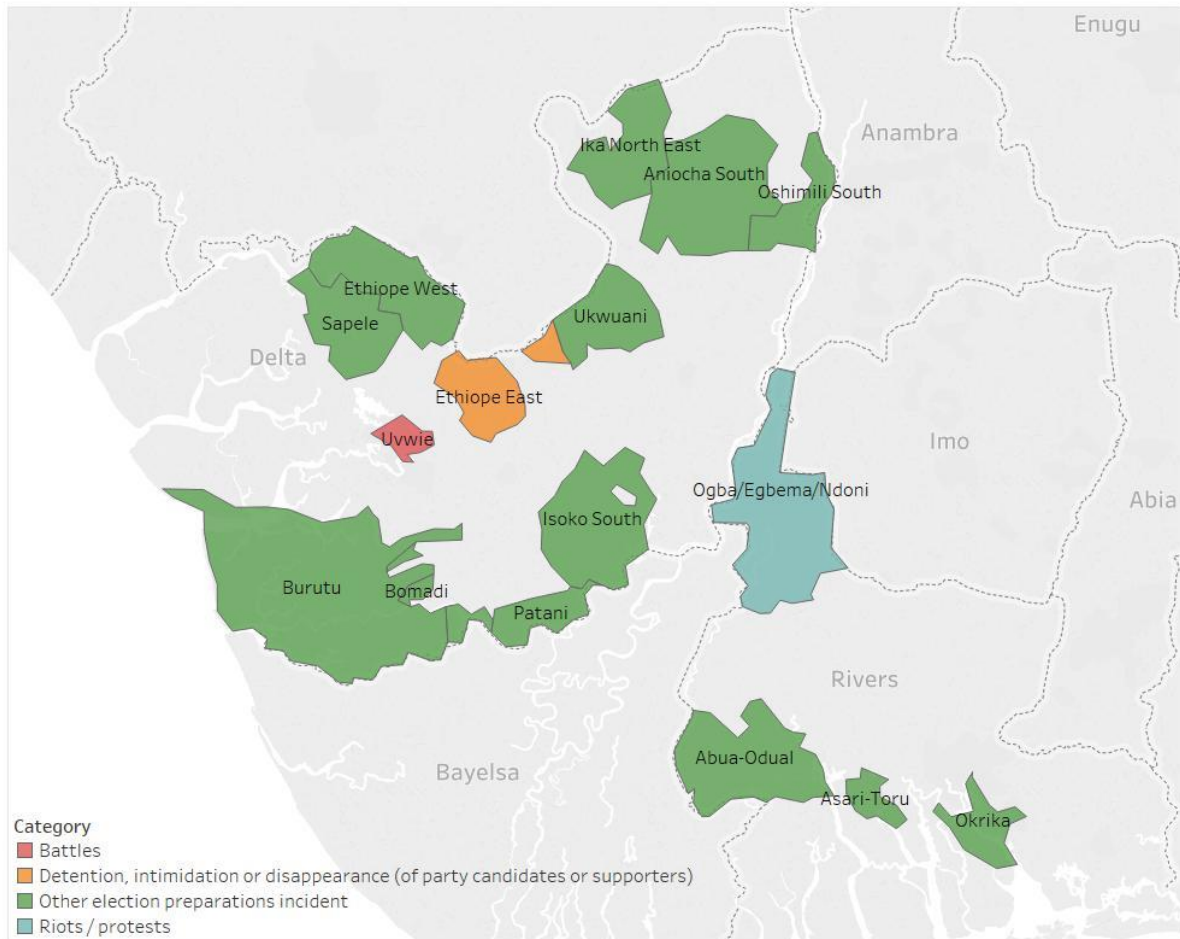
With tension beginning to dissipate, our observers have taken a look back at some of the issues which have arisen in their states.

The Niger Delta Watch team will now produce a final election assessment report. This will look in detail at the conduct of the election campaign and polling itself across Niger Delta Watch's four focus states, as well as the region itself. It will be published in May and supported with a webinar discussion of where Nigerian democracy goes next.

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

## Regional snapshot

During the week in review, incidents were reported in the following LGA in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta:



We are now receiving significantly fewer reports of election-related incidents now that the formal election period has nearly concluded, with the final elections concluding on 13 April.

## Rivers

The final elections in Rivers State were held on Saturday 13 April. See below for a summary of these.

Despite cult clashes in Ahoada West and Gokana LGAs, electoral violence has reduced since the elections were suspended in Rivers State. This has been a relief after the high levels of violence recorded before and during the elections in the State, sometimes allegedly involving the military and Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (FSARS) of the Nigerian Police, which resulted in the suspension of the elections by INEC.

As previously, the suspended election was greeted with a number of peaceful demonstrations calling for INEC to announce the final results. The AAC/APC alliance and PDP each claim that on the basis of the pre-suspension results collated, their party won the election and should be declared the winner by INEC.

As INEC rolled out the timetable for resumption of the collation of results and six LGAs where there might be rerun elections, the AAC/APC alliance intensified their demonstrations, this time calling for the outright cancellation of the Governorship and House of Assembly Elections, and the removal of the INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC). The AAC/APC alliance threatened to violently disrupt the resumption of results collation if the REC were not removed. The intensity of the demonstrations by AAC/APC-sponsored groups led to the banning of demonstrations in the State by the Governor Wike, and orders for the security agencies to arrest and prosecute any group that violates the order.

### Port Harcourt

- On 26 March, the AAC Deputy Governorship Candidate, Chief Akpo Bomba Yeeh, withdrew from the 2019 election and defected to the PDP, after the announcement of the re-election of Governor Wike. He said that the collated results further showed that contrary to other claims, the PDP overwhelmingly won the elections in 18 out of the 19 LGAs.
- In a swift reaction to this, the African Action Congress (AAC) Governorship Candidate, Biokpomabo Awara, expressed disappointment over the resignation of his running mate. He also said that he had previously, and to the knowledge of his running mate, been offered NGN 3 billion by Governor Wike (PDP) to drop his ambition, which he turned down. This claim was denied by Emma Okah, who is the Director of Information and Communications in the Rivers PDP Campaign Council. AAC's Awara made further claims that Wike had offered his running deputy NGN 200 Million to abandon him.<sup>1</sup>

### UPDATE ON CONCLUSION OF THE RIVERS ELECTIONS, HELD 13 APRIL 2019

The remaining 'run-off' elections for State House of Assembly positions in Rivers State were held in 4 local governments on Saturday 13th April. Two local governments were holding complete elections (Gokana, Abua Odua) due to earlier disruption while parts of Ahoada West and Opobo Nkoro had polls.

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<sup>1</sup> In later developments, Governor Wike has extended an olive branch to Minister of Transportation and APC leader Rotimi Amaechi, calling for reconciliation in Rivers State and proposing they work together to develop the State: <https://leadership.ng/2019/04/12/wike-extends-olive-branch-to-amaechi/>

The polls were conducted with dramatically lower tension than the main elections with only limited prospects of the main two LGAs being competitive. There were only very limited issues of delays reported (Gokana) and security was reported as complying with models for the polls with no involvement of military personnel.

Despite the polls having very limited competition there were reports of vote buying and also voters demanding payment assurances before voting (Ahoada West, Opobo Nkoro). There was one serious incident regarding INEC officials in a unit in Akinnima Ahoada West but at the time of writing there are still contradictory reports on the cause of the incident and its conclusion (though the affected election officials are reportedly safe).

Observers also witnessed payments to election officials (Ahoada West) in association with the use of bulk sets of voters cards to increase voter 'turnout'. As would be expected for a non-competitive election on its own, observers noted generally low turnouts with exceptions in some areas (e.g. Bodo Ward 1). Final results were predictably wins for the PDP with vote shares of close to 100% - and some clear indications of other parties functionally withdrawing from the race (absence of party agents and APC not backing some candidates who had hoped for support). Official results varied from turnouts of under 10% to over 90% for entire wards. high official turnouts in some wards were markedly different to observed activity at the units (e.g Gokana Ward 17, 89% turnout)

The 4 State Assembly elections were declared for the PDP and in combination with the final Supreme Court Rulings on APC candidacy issues now leaves only election tribunals as the only issue hanging over results from the state.

## Bayelsa

This report provides a short reflection on some of the issues which arose during the Presidential, National Assembly and State Assembly polls in Bayelsa State. Overall, many people judged these to be poorly organised. There were serious issues with regard to communication, the deployment of personnel, and the conduct of security personnel. The electoral atmosphere was tense, while key agencies fuelled mistrust among prospective voters. INEC sought to ensure the elections were conducted peacefully, but other agencies were reported to be openly compromising their roles.

INEC has finally announced the date for the Bayelsa off cycle Governorship elections, which are due to be held on 2 November 2019.

### Logistics/commencement of polls

- Major logistical challenges led to the initial postponement of the elections. In many areas, electoral materials did not arrive on time and sensitive materials were also insufficient. When the elections were eventually held on 23 February and 9 March, many of these challenges had been addressed in Bayelsa State. However, transportation was generally poor and further affected the commencement of polls in many Polling Units due to late arrival of materials. In some areas, elections did not commence until 11:00.

### Ad Hoc staff of INEC and their conduct

- Over 10,000 ad-hoc staff were engaged for the General Election in Bayelsa State. There were some reports of misconduct by these staff in Yenagoa, Kolokuma /Opokuma, Ekeremor, Ogbia and Sagbama LGAs, which contributed to tension during the elections.

### Smart Card Readers

- According to INEC regulations, it was mandatory to use Smart Card Readers for the election. In Bayelsa, these functioned better than in 2015. However, in some locations, the elections nonetheless took place without them.

### Election security and conduct of security personnel

- During the preparation for the election, there were reports of security risks in many LGAs. Flash points were highlighted and security was tightened. Some security personnel overstepped their constitutional role during the elections, for example by setting up unnecessary road blocks and restricting voter movement. In some instances, these actions openly supported certain political parties and influenced the outcome of the elections. There were also reports of security personnel giving protective cover to political thugs during the elections, particularly during the Presidential and National Assembly Elections. It appears that security personnel conducted themselves better during the State House of Assembly Elections on 9 March.

### Vote buying and violence

- During the elections, there was massive vote buying reported in virtually all LGAs in Bayelsa. All the major political parties were involved and many voters willingly collected money to cast their ballot. There were also reports of electoral violence in Nembe, Brass, Ogbia,

Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa LGAs, including many deaths. Election observers said the level of violence was higher during the Presidential and National Assembly Elections.

#### **Voter turnout**

- Bayelsa State has over 900,000 registered voters, and nearly 800,000 collected their Permanent Voters Card. However, less than half of this turned out to vote. This could be attributed to a number of factors during the run up to the elections, including the effect of the postponement, fears of violence and around the conduct of security personnel, and actual violence.

#### **Voters' perception of the quality of the elections**

- Many voters in Bayelsa expressed their disappointment with the conduct of the elections in the State. Many blame INEC and other stakeholders, especially the security agencies, for the poor conduct and quality of the General Elections. According to some, it will be difficult to rebuild confidence.

## Delta

The post-election period in Delta commenced with litigation initiated by the losers. In Ethiope East LGA, there is persistent harassment and intimidation of persons suspected of having voted for the APC, who won a significant numbers of votes and actually won the Governorship and House of Assembly elections in the LGA.

The following events or incidents took place during the week of 25-31 March.

### APC internal crisis developments

- The APC Leadership tussle continued with the sacking of the faction led by Prophet Jones Erue by the High Court, Asaba. Erue Faction produced the Gubernatorial Candidate of the APC in the Just concluded Governorship/State House of Assembly Elections held on March 9,2019. There is growing perception that the High Court Judgment which sacked the Erue Led Executive of the Delta State APC was politically motivated by PDP to thwart the ongoing effort of the APC Gubernatorial candidate to challenge the results of the 2019 Governorship poll in Court.

### Persistence of cult-related violence

- In Uvwie LGA, cult related violence and clashes persist, with the general perception that these have a political undertone. The cult clashes involve members of the Revenue Task Force and Uvwie Youth Council competing for roles instigated by the LGA Chairman. The Revenue Task Force is seen to be usurping the powers and roles of the Uvwie Youth Council, hence, the continued violence.

### Intimidation and harassment of reported APC supporters

- In Ethiope East, there is ongoing intimidation of APC members by PDP members in the aftermath of the polls. This includes apparently increased Local Government levies on businesses owned by reported APC supporters, the seizure of equipment, and transfer of civil servants to remote areas because APC won the Election of the LGA.

### Preparation for litigation

- The majority of the candidates that lost elections are gathering information to enable them to litigate. In Burutu, we received a report on the NPC candidate Austin Ozobo accusing ward 7 leaders of betrayal and threatening to go to court to challenge the victory of PDP candidate Hon. Asupa Forteta.

## Akwa Ibom

The APC and PDP continue to trade accusations regarding the elections. Parties have registered their grievances with the election petition tribunal. The gubernatorial candidate of Abundant Nigeria Renewal Party (ANRP), Mr. Iboro Out, challenged the outcome of the Governorship and State House of Assembly Elections in the State, blaming his election loss on vote buying.

On 28 March, INEC presented certificates of return to Governor Udom Emmanuel and his running mate, as well as 25 members-elect from 25 out of 26 State Assembly constituencies. INEC's Akwa Ibom spokesperson, Mr. Don Etukudo, announced that the remaining constituency would be determined by INEC's national headquarters, stating that the constituency has outstanding issues that need settling. The Commission's position on the remaining constituency has been widely condemned by both the opposition APC and Civil Liberties Organization in the State, who stated that the provisions of the laws are explicit on the functions of INEC and other institutions in the electoral system. Members of the APC claimed that the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) had been compromised by the PDP.

Politicians have continued to reward people for their support during the election period, including with cash and motorcycles. We could not confirm any specific cases this week, although we received several anecdotal reports.

Also during this week, the PDP in the state, led by Obong Paul Ekpo, asked the courts to discount the call by the APC for the relocation of the tribunal.

On security, the week saw the deployment of a new Commissioner of Police to the State. The State Police Public Relations Officer announced that Zaki Ahmed would take over from Bashir Makama. Note that the PDP claim that the high turnover of police chiefs in Akwa Ibom is evidence of the Federal Government's alleged attempts to influence the 2019 elections in Akwa Ibom.

The APC has also accused INEC of colluding with the PDP in the state to destroy electoral materials that might be needed at the tribunal, although INEC has rejected this.

One trending topic has been the alleged order by APC Governorship Candidate, Nsima Ekere, that all campaign vehicles and money held by party chieftains who could not deliver their units be returned. It is said that a committee has even been set up for this purpose. News stories report that some chapter chairmen of the APC were trying to convert party vehicles for their private use by remodeling the vehicles.

Specific incidents that took place during the week included the following:

### **Ikot Abasi**

- Businessman, State Government contractor and influential PDP member, Uwem Okoko, gathered young people from Ukpong Ette and shared the sum of NGN 5,000 to all who voted for the PDP in the area. According to him, this was his way of thanking them for their support. Ikot Abasi is the LGA of the APC candidate in the recent Governorship Elections.



## Nsit Ibom

- On Saturday 26 March, the APC Chapter Chairman of Nsit Ibom LGA was assaulted. The incident took place near Afaha Offiong, Eket Road at around 1915. Eyewitnesses said that a group of about seven boys who were well armed and suspected to be political thugs of the APC Governorship Candidate, Obong Nsima Ekere, approached the chair and demanded the keys to his official party vehicle. They claimed that they had been sent on the orders of their principal Obong Nsima Ekere to collect the vehicle from him. When the chair refused to hand over the keys, they attacked him, took the keys and left with the vehicle. The chair was taken to hospital for treatment.

## Social media

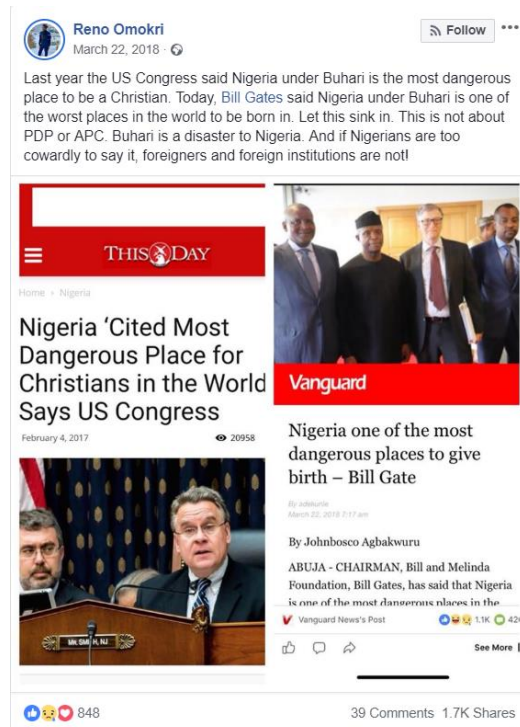
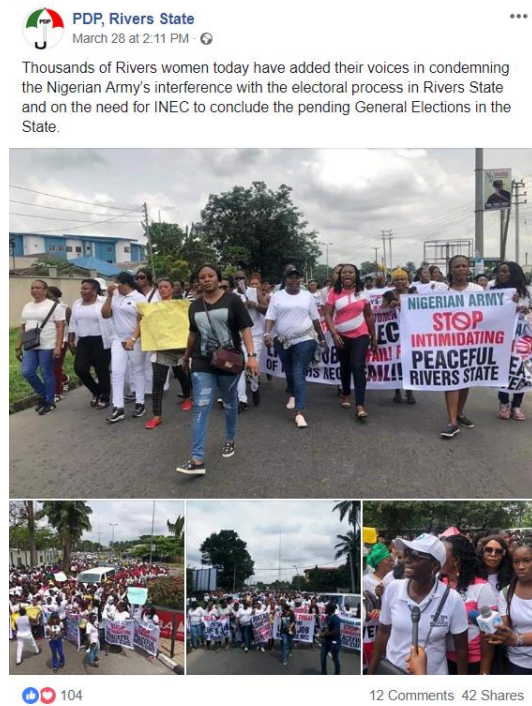
During the week in review, the PDP continued its apparent campaign against the APC by condemning the Nigerian Army's actions during the Presidential Elections. Influential public figures also continue to discuss the outcome of the elections, with their posts receiving lots of interest from social media users. In Akwa Ibom State, a letter by an APC member went viral on social media, prompting the PDP to release a press statement which was widely condemned for risking to aggravate ethnic tensions. These stories are discussed below.

### PDP accusations against the Army

On 28 March, the official PDP page for Rivers State shared this [post](#), in which women from Rivers state are seen protesting against the Nigerian Army's reported interference with the electoral process. The women called for the need for INEC to conclude the pending General Elections in the State. The story is a further demonstration of the content discussed in last week's report, showing PDP dissatisfaction at losing the Presidential Elections and attempts to discredit the APC win.

### Public figures continue to influence the political narrative

Author and lawyer, Reno Omokri, publicly criticised President Muhammadu Buhari in this [post](#) on his Facebook page. The post received a lot of attention from social media users in the week following. With specific reference to key international actors, namely the US Congress and Bill Gates, this is another clear attempt to discredit Buhari's win in the Presidential Elections.



### APC – PDP accusations

Senator Godswill Akpabio (APC) sent out a letter during the week, which went viral, captioned 'The Lies and Liars of the Election'. The story was reported by many online news channels, including the [Premium Times](#). In the letter, which was forwarded to the Premium Times from Akpabio's media office, Akpabio claims that men, including clerics, were paid to lie against him during the elections.

The Akwa Ibom State PDP released a press statement in response to Akpabio's letter, titled 'The Lamentations of Godswill Akpabio' (reported by the [Daily Post Nigeria](#), among other news outlets). The press statement was received with mixed reactions from the public, and has been widely condemned in most quarters on the grounds that it could risk increasing ethnic tensions in the State.

## 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](http://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.*

