

**Public Perceptions of Security Dynamics  
and Stabilisation Interventions in the Niger Delta**  
March 2018 - September 2018

# Summary

This report presents the results of a public perceptions survey, carried out by Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) in Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers states. It focuses on citizens' perceptions of the current security situation in the Niger Delta, and views on the actors and interventions aiming to address the problem of instability and insecurity in the region. The survey was conducted in September 2018 and captures perceptions for the preceding six-month period (Mar 2018–Sept 2018).

## Key Messages

- Across the survey, men and women generally had a positive outlook for the period during the survey, from March 2018 to September 2018. Slightly more respondents felt that the security situation got worse rather than better. 35% of respondents felt that the situation got better, whilst 39% felt it got worse. Respondents that felt it got worse highlighted that the effect of insecurity led to people living in fear, businesses closing early due to fear, and loss of life.
- The biggest perceived threats to security in the region were cults, criminal activities in the forms of armed robbery and kidnappings, and activities of politicians in and around elections. Perceptions of these threats were notably high in Bayelsa state, compared to the other states. Respondents across the states predicted that these threats will remain, and anticipate a further rise in political violence in the five months following (October 2018–March 2019).
- There was a growing concern of the Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)—renamed Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (FSARS)—becoming a significant source of violence and intimidation of citizens, especially in Delta state, during this period. This survey indicates SARS has lost some of its credibility, and many respondents did not think SARS and the police were open to hear public complaints.
- Women tended to have a more negative view on the security situation, highlighting clashes with herders as a major concern, with a higher percentage feeling that the situation had worsened over the period, compared with men.
- Although it is common for the security services to be seen as a source of insecurity themselves, only a small number of respondents saw security services as a security threat during the period, even with the upcoming elections in six months.
- Respondents showed a higher optimism in their state government's efforts to improve stabilisation and development in the region than that of the federal governments'. Efforts of PANDEF and NGOs were perceived to be the least effective in improving the security situation during the survey period.
- 58% of respondents reported they will vote in the 2019 elections. Of these, respondents aged 18–24 were the least likely age group to vote. Overall, male respondents were more likely to vote than female respondents. Respondents that will not be voting stated their top reasons to be: a fear of their votes not counting, their lack of faith/belief in the candidates, and the fear of voter intimidation and outright violence against voters.

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# 1. Introduction

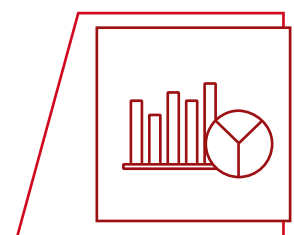
This report focuses on the perceptions held by the public on the current security situation and conflict dynamics in the region, how this has changed in the six months since our previous survey (March 2018), and any new dimensions to the situation in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states.

This public perceptions survey is the third in a series of bi-annual reports carried out by SDN, and this report provides a comparison between the six-month period (April 2018–September 2018) and the preceding period (October 2017–March 2018).

This survey was conducted over three days between 30th August 2018 and 01st September 2018. 304 respondents were surveyed, and a focus group discussion (FGD) was held with 18 participants representing Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta states, respectively, to validate findings. Participants were drawn from different levels of government, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, the private sector, community leadership (including vigilante representatives), and members of the general public. Conducting this survey has allowed us to further refine the methodology, including some survey questions and response categories.

## Limitations:

The sample of respondents is not statistically representative across the selected states or at the state level. The challenges of travel within the Niger Delta, coupled with the available resources, means certain trade-offs have been made to practically implement the survey and ensure it can take place on a regular basis. However, FGDs with key experts have been used to provide an additional level of confidence in the validity of the findings, and in this regard, the surveys provide a valuable indication into citizens' perceptions across the focal states.



## 2. Key contextual dynamics in the six-month period (March 2018 – September 2018)

### Criminality and gang-related violence

During the period surveyed, gang wars and supremacy battles among cult groups were prevalent and resulted in fatalities. In April 2018, there was a clash between two rival cult groups during a cultural expedition in Rundele community, Emohua Local Government Area (LGA) in Rivers State, that led to the killing of two people<sup>1</sup>. In a similar chain of events in June 2018, cult clashes also led to killings in Odi community and Ovwian/Aladja communities in Bayelsa and Delta states respectively. The latter, which was triggered by a supremacy battle over the control of a motor park in the area, saw the cultists attack each other with guns and machetes<sup>2</sup>.

### Political tensions

Political tensions have risen in view of the forthcoming general elections in February 2019, especially between the two major political parties in Nigeria—the All Progressives Congress (APC) and People’s Democratic Party (PDP). In August 2018, three people were reportedly killed during a clash between the political thugs of PDP and APC in Brass LGA, Bayelsa State<sup>3</sup>. The clash was rooted in an alleged power tussle between a member of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly and the Chairman of Brass Local Government Council. The same month saw a State House of Assembly by-election, conducted in Port Harcourt LGA, marred by violence characterised by sporadic shootings and hijacking of voting materials. In the following month, gubernatorial primaries were held across the states surveyed, with internal squabbles within APC in Delta<sup>4</sup> and Rivers<sup>5</sup> states, as parallel primaries were held by different factions of the same party. In October 2018, the PDP House of Assembly primaries was disrupted by political thugs loyal to one of the aspirants running for the Ethiope East House of Assembly seat. A police vehicle was set ablaze, while officials of the party ran for safety during the invasion<sup>6</sup>.

### Government interventions

The Maritime University in Okerenkoko, Delta State, commenced operations in 2017. Shortly after, President Buhari approved an increase in the take-off grant from an initial NGN2 billion to NGN5 billion. Lectures commenced fully in April 2018 with a total of 196 students accepted into the university. This bought the government respite during a period

<sup>1</sup> VANGUARD Newspapers, April 2018. “Two Murdered, Chief Abducted in Rivers Community” Available at [www.vanguardngr.com/2018/04/2-murdered-chief-abducted-rivers-community/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/04/2-murdered-chief-abducted-rivers-community/)

<sup>2</sup> VANGUARD Newspapers, June 2018. “3 Dead, Scores Injured in Delta Motor Park Leadership Tussle”. Available at: [www.vanguardngr.com/2018/06/1011966/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/06/1011966/)

<sup>3</sup> Niger Delta Quarterly Conflict Tracker—2018 Q3 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eUMmw2X3cOBTULZ9QAA1sDqTtTusoW2N/view?usp=drivesdk>

<sup>4</sup> SAHARA Reporters, October 2018. “Utomi, Ogboru Emerge Delta APC Gov Candidates At Parallel Primaries”. Available at: <http://saharareporters.com/2018/10/01/utomi-ogboru-emerge-delta-apc-gov-candidates-parallel-primaries>

<sup>5</sup> Daily Post, September 2018. “APC Holds Parallel Governorship Primaries in Rivers State”. Available at: <http://dailypost.ng/2018/09/30/apc-holds-parallel-governorship-primaries-rivers/>

<sup>6</sup> VANGUARD Newspapers, October 2018. “Thugs Set Police Van Ablaze as Violence Rocks PDP Primary in Delta”. Available at: [www.vanguardngr.com/2018/10/thugs-set-police-hilux-van-ablaze-as-violence-rocks-pdp-primary-in-delta/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/10/thugs-set-police-hilux-van-ablaze-as-violence-rocks-pdp-primary-in-delta/)

where a lot of demands were made by militants and PANDEF amongst other stakeholders in the region. However, in June 2018, the funding of the university was characterized by uncertainty and controversy when the take-off grant was reduced by 32% (from NGN5 billion to NGN3.4 billion) by the Nigerian Senate<sup>7</sup>. The university has continued operations despite the controversy but remains one of the key symbolic issues in disputes between the federal government and citizens.

## Other issues

In October 2018, there was a border dispute that led to communal clashes between Ogbe-Ijoh and Aladja communities in Udu and Warri South West LGAs of Delta State. The situation escalated when men in military uniforms purportedly opened fire on residents, killing seven people (six young people and a woman). A total of nine people were reportedly killed and twenty-five people critically injured during the clash<sup>8</sup>. Previous reports indicate that both communities have been involved in a series of clashes for years. There were also a few attacks by herdsmen reported, and a growing concern of the Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) becoming a significant source of violence and intimidation of citizens, especially in Delta state. As highlighted in the previous survey, the SARS appeared to have lost the trust of the public due to several incidences of extrajudicial killings and citizen maltreatment. In August 2018, the Vice-President (then Acting-President), Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, instructed the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to either shut down the unit or overhaul the management and activities of SARS. The VP then mandated the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to set up a Committee to conduct a nation-wide investigation of the alleged unlawful activities of SARS to address the grievances of the general public.<sup>9</sup> After the reform, SARS was renamed Federal SARS (FSARS).

<sup>7</sup> Niger Delta quarterly conflict, January-March 2018. [www.p4p-nigerdelta.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Niger-Delta-Conflict-Tracker-2018-Q1.pdf](http://www.p4p-nigerdelta.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Niger-Delta-Conflict-Tracker-2018-Q1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> NIGERIAN TRIBUNE, June 2018. "PANDEF Condemns Slash of Take-Off Grant for Maritime University". Available at: [www.tribuneonlineng.com/152449/](http://www.tribuneonlineng.com/152449/)

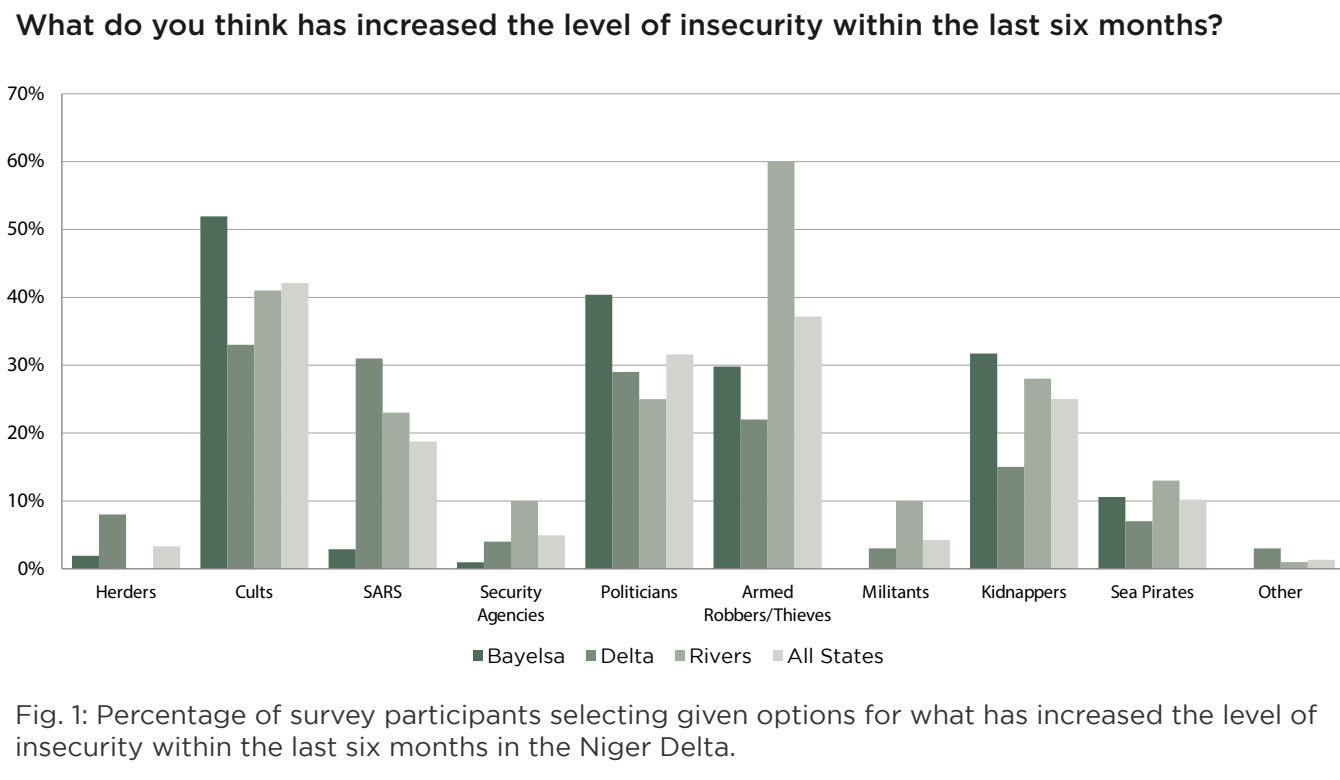
<sup>8</sup> PUNCH Newspapers, October 2018. "Aladja/Ogbe-Ijoh: Nine killed, many injured as Delta communities" Available at <https://punchng.com/aladjaogbe-ijoh-nine-killed-many-injured-as-delta-communities-clash/>

<sup>9</sup> PULSE.NG (Aug 2018). "Osinbajo Orders IGP Idris to Reform Notorious Police Unit". Available at: [www.pulse.ng/news/local/endsars-osinbajo-orders-igp-idris-to-reform-notorious-police-unit/698mvdw](http://www.pulse.ng/news/local/endsars-osinbajo-orders-igp-idris-to-reform-notorious-police-unit/698mvdw)

# 3. Findings

## 3.1 Perceptions of the current security situation

The biggest threats to security across the states



Across the survey, perceptions of the biggest threats to security in the region were similar between men and women in the last six months. The results show that the top four biggest threats to security overall were perceived to be: Cults, Armed robbers/Thieves, Politicians<sup>10</sup>, and Kidnappers. These threats are all closely related, as politicians often rely on cult gangs to enforce their plans, who then turn to kidnap (and other illicit activities) to make money with the weapons provided by politicians. A participant in the FGD from Bayelsa state asserted that:

*“The major threat is cultism coupled with the political build[-up] where you have the cultists working with the politicians and the politicians using the cultists. I don’t see a fine line across these issues, one patronizes activities of the other and vice versa.”*

Armed robbery and kidnappings have often been associated with cult-related activities in the region. For instance, in April 2018, a 23-year old robber was reportedly killed during a gun battle between the police and his gang in Yenagoa LGA, Bayelsa state. One of the robbers, a 22-year old male, was injured during the incident, and later confessed that they are members of a cult group—the ‘Bobos’. According to the Peace Map analysis by Partners for Peace (P4P)<sup>11</sup>, 8 incidents and 31 fatalities were recorded as being perpetrated by members of cult groups across the three states in the period of the last survey (October 2017–March 2018). This increased to 21 incidents and 57 fatalities in the period this survey

<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this report, please note that “Politicians” as a threat to security, refers to motivated violence.

<sup>11</sup> P4P is a network dedicated to promoting peace in the Niger Delta. The P4P Peace Map is an interactive map that compiles the shared knowledge of the wider peacebuilding community on the patterns of conflict risk and vulnerability, as well as the locations of peacebuilding actors working to address those risk factors.

[www.tgpccloud.org/p4p/index.php?m=p4p](http://www.tgpccloud.org/p4p/index.php?m=p4p)

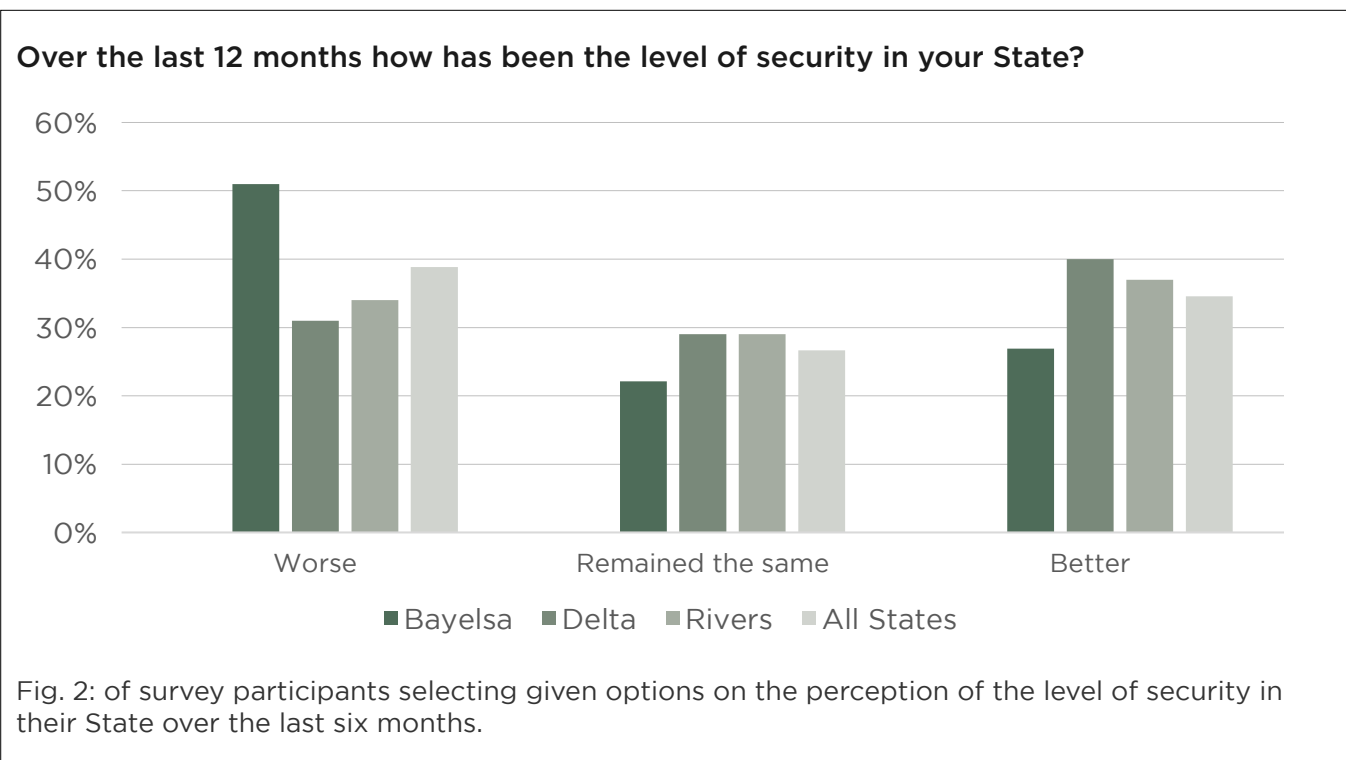
(April 2018–September 2018). The sharp rise in these cult activities may be attributable to the upcoming 2019 general elections, as cult violence tend to escalate during election cycles as witnessed in previous elections. Across the survey, male respondents were more likely to identify cults as the biggest security threats than female respondents, perhaps due to the fact that these gangs are male-dominated.

Perceived security threats associated with armed robbers/thieves were highest in Rivers State, with 60% of respondents more commonly identifying this option. Delta state perceived SARS as the second highest security threat (31%) after cultism (33%). FGDs suggested that the reason why respondents in Delta state perceived SARS threats so high is because of actions of some SARS officials against state citizens. SARS is being tasked with curbing the high reported rate of cyber-crime in the state. However, some officials of SARS had been compromised and their extrajudicial treatment of citizens posed a significant threat to the security situation in the state. Also from the chart (fig. 1), militancy and herder threats were perceived to be very low across the states. Notably, respondents recorded no security threat from militancy in Bayelsa state, as well as from herders in Rivers state:

Furthermore, when asked about what the biggest threats to security will be in the following six months (October 2018–March 2019), respondents most frequently selected cultism, politicians (politically motivated violence), kidnappings and militants as their top four, possibly due to the 2019 elections that draw near and will be held within this period. This view is further validated by a respondent from Bassambiri community in Nembe LGA, Bayelsa state:

*“Government does not help us at all, the only time they remember us is during the election period. They use the cult boys in Nembe to terrorise us. We can’t even speak out during meetings because we are afraid they might come after us. Now they have started recruiting young boys and even girls, and almost every day there are cult clashes that leave people dead.”*

### Change to the security situation over the last six months





Across the survey, the results indicate a slight difference between respondents that felt that the security situation got worse and those that felt it was better over the last six months. 35% of respondents felt that the situation got better whilst 39% felt it got worse—especially in Bayelsa state where 51% of respondents reported a worsening security situation most often attributed to three of the four perceived major threats (see fig. 1). Respondents who felt it got worse highlighted that the impact of insecurity led to people living in fear, businesses closing early due to fear, and loss of life.

A respondent’s view from Ogbia, Bayelsa state is indicative:

*“Look around you, what do you see? Everybody has a burglary in their houses and shops because of insecurity.”*

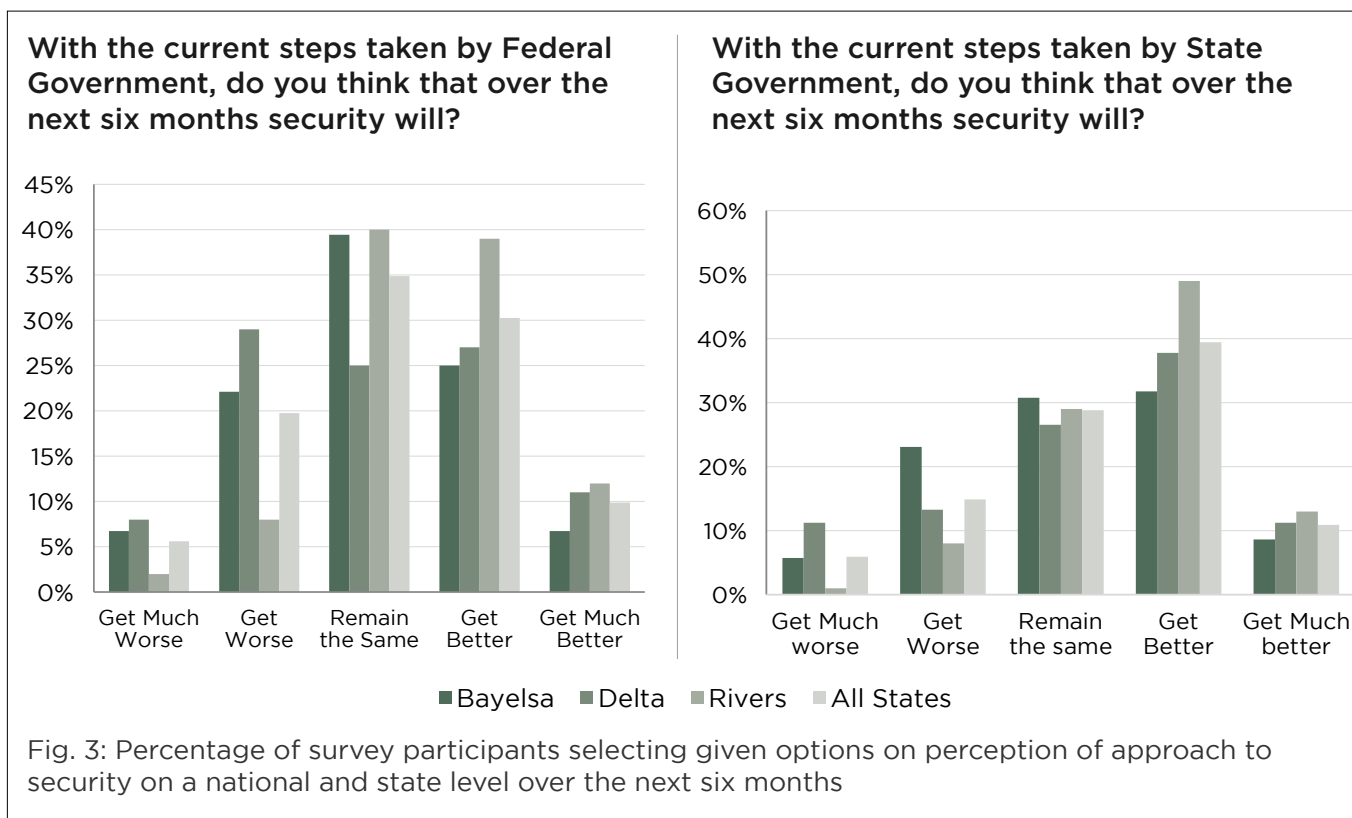
Another respondent stated:

*“Once it is 6pm, all the stores will lock up because you don’t want these bad boys to meet you and harass you. There is hardship and the few businesses here don’t make much money.”*

Respondents from Rivers and Delta states had a more positive outlook of the period under review compared to Bayelsa state. The relatively positive outlook in Delta state may be due to state-level infrastructure and federal government initiatives such as the maritime university currently being implemented in the state. Although some respondents commended the maritime university initiative, they also expressed displeasure over how the university was being run. A FGD participant’s view from Delta state asserts:

*“The state government has been the one sustaining the university. The university is stretched financially because there is no equipment and no money to get facilities. The federal government has not released any money. There is a lot of spite, the whole thing is not working; the hostels are stinking, it is a terrible situation. They are still owing up to three months’ salary of workers.”*

### Impact of current Government approach on security over the next six months



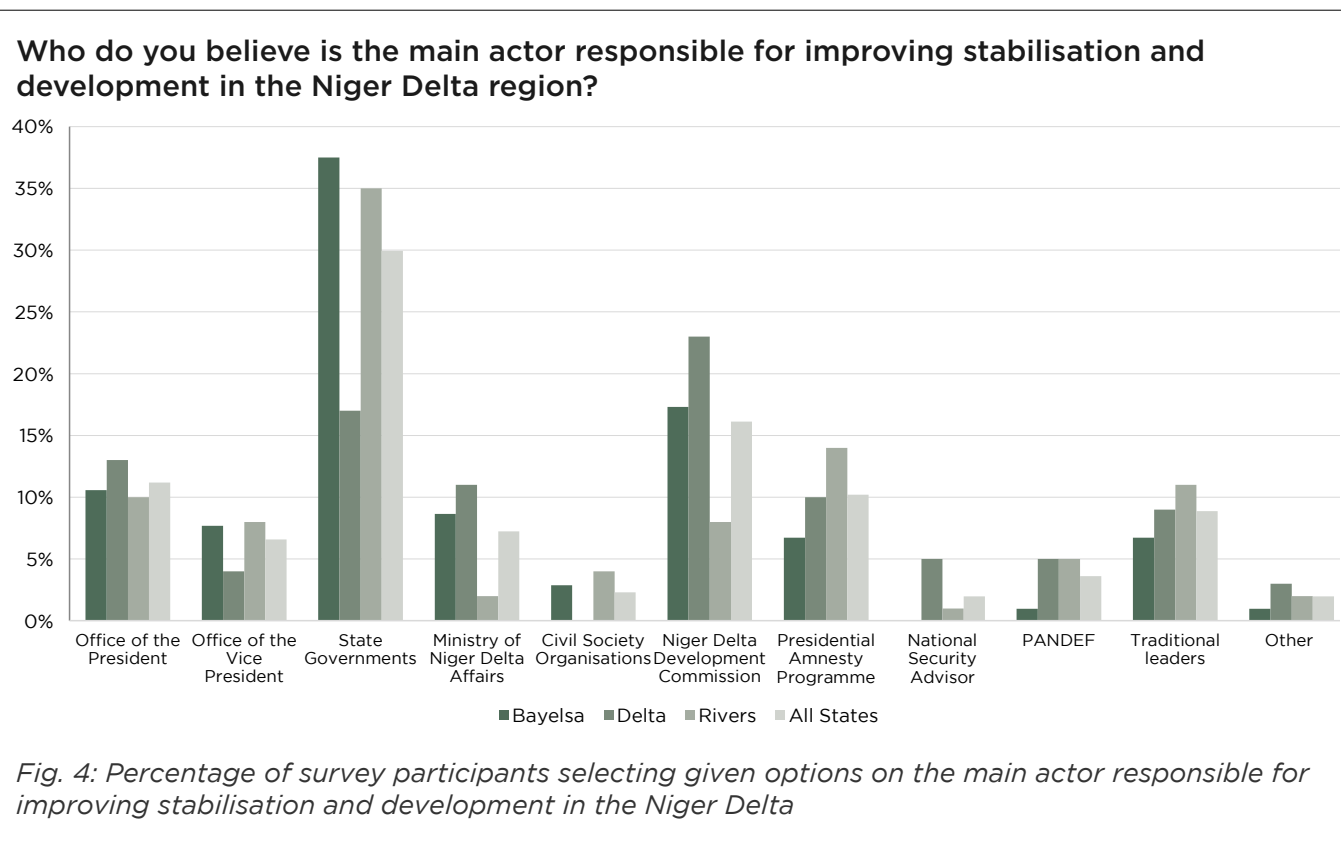
The survey results above show that there are mixed feelings about the security situation over the next six months, under the federal government’s current approach to tackling insecurity in the Niger Delta. This may be attributable to the volatile nature of security during national and state elections, and the level of violence/insecurity that will arise from the outcome of an election. An aggregate 40% of respondents across the three states are optimistic that the security situation will be over the next six months under the current steps taken by the federal government to tackle insecurity in the region, whilst 35% of respondents feel that the security situation will remain the same, and 20% of respondents feel that it will worsen. An aggregate of 51% of respondents in Rivers state had a positive outlook on the security situation over the next six months, following a trend of rising optimism reported in this survey series. Notably, the aggregate perception of respondents in Delta state is split almost equally between those that feel it will be better (38%) and those that feel it will be worse (37%) in the next six months. The reason for this may be because some LGAs in Delta state experienced different levels of violence during the last elections. Ahead of the forthcoming elections, a participant from Delta state asserted:

*“Moving to 2019, there will be ethnic violence along the voting line, war among the Itsekiris and the Ijaws. Ijaws will want to keep the senatorial position and Itsekiris will want to take it, arms are cued up so anything can happen.”*

When asked about the perception of what the security situation will be over the next six months with the current steps taken by the state government to tackle insecurity in the region, an aggregate of 50% respondents showed a higher level of optimism than under the current steps by the federal government (aggregate of 40%).

### 3.2 Perception of actors and interventions relating to security and stabilisation

Actors perceived to be responsible for security and stabilisation in the region

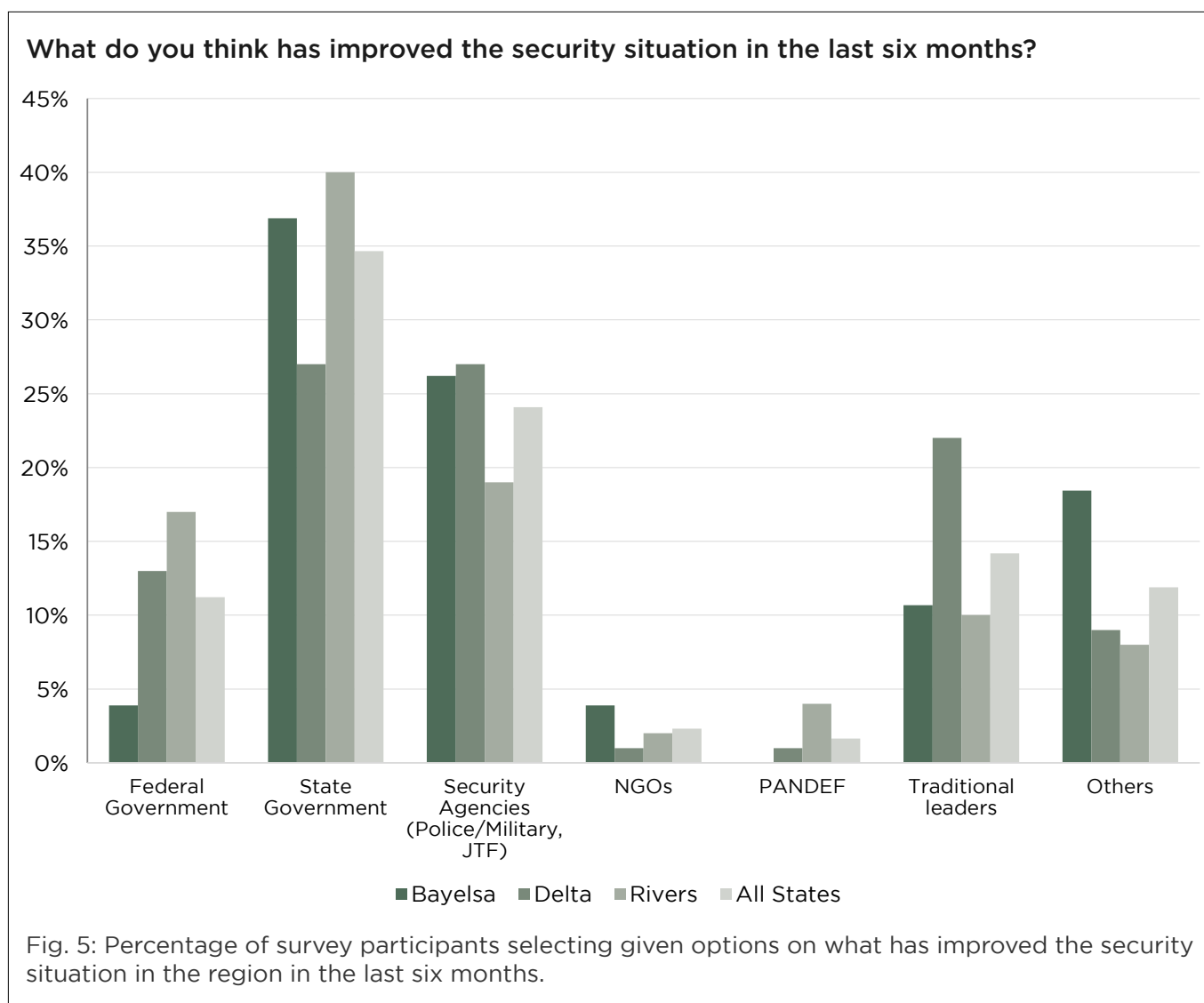


30% of respondents overall held state governments as the main actor responsible for development and stabilisation in the region. This response was particularly high in Bayelsa and Rivers state at 38% and 35% respectively, and may be attributable to the number of planned or ongoing state government projects. In Delta state, respondents identified NDDC as being the most responsible actor in the past six months (23%). This may be attributable to development projects being implemented by NDDC across some communities in Delta state, as asserted by some respondents in the previous survey in this series.

There was a slight improvement in the perception of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA) as the main actor responsible for leading efforts to improve stabilisation and development in the region when compared to perceptions recorded in the previous survey. However, participants in the FGD expressed a contrary perception, highlighting the “non-existence” of projects supposedly being implemented by the MNDA in the three states surveyed. A participant from Delta state noted that:

*“In my perception, MNDA is not in existence. The minister said that the ministry trained some Niger Delta youths in different vocations like agriculture and that there were several projects scattered in the region. We (Ijaw Youth Council) wrote to him in an open publication asking him to publish the projects and the different vocations he spoke about, but till now, there is no response.”*

### Perception of what has improved the security situation in the region



Overall, 35% of respondents felt that the security situation over the last six months was improved by actions of the state government. This view was held mostly by respondents from Rivers and Bayelsa states, and correlates with the perception that state governments are the main actors responsible for leading efforts to improve stabilisation and development in the Niger Delta (fig. 4). The results also indicate that respondents felt the actions of security agencies and traditional rulers contributed more to improving security than the federal government in the last six months. On the other hand, efforts of PANDEF and NGOs were perceived to have been the least effective in improving the security situation in the region in the last six months.

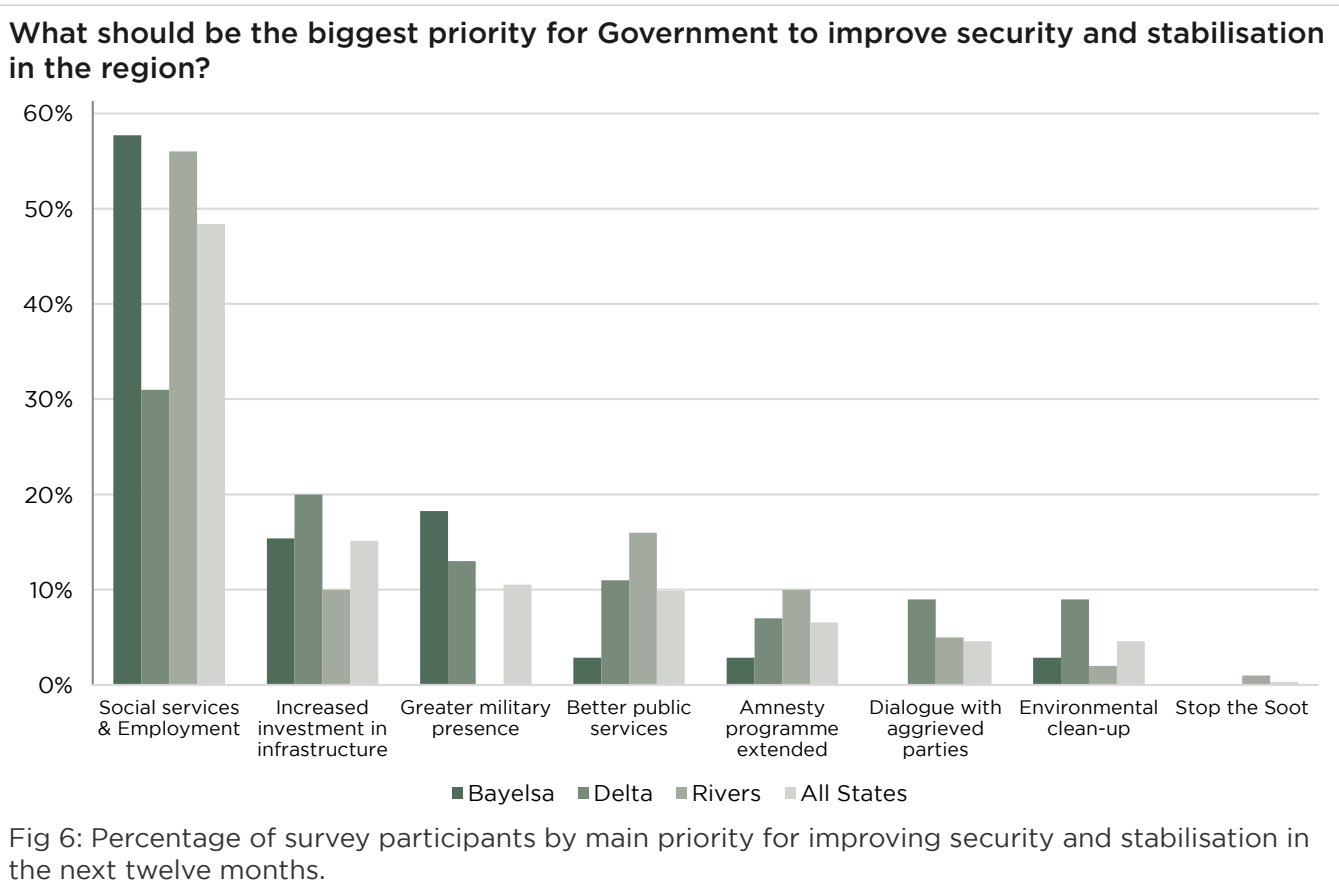
It is interesting to note that although it is common for security agencies to be seen as a source of insecurity themselves, only a small number saw them as a security threat during the period, even with the upcoming elections in the six months following. These results may be attributable to the role security agencies have been perceived to play in curbing criminal activities, as asserted in the FGD by a respondent from Bassambiri community in Nembe LGA, Bayelsa state:

*“The army checkpoints from Ogbia to Nembe have helped reduce violence in this community. They sometimes check vehicles coming and arrest any boy found guilty. Sometimes, these kpo-fire boys (artisanal oil refiners) with their products are arrested. They also raid the bad spots in this community sometimes so they are really trying.”*

12% of respondents across the three states selected the survey option 'others', noting that interventions of local vigilantes, the cooperation between state governments and security agencies, and people coming together to identify and hand over perpetrators of violence to the necessary authorities are some other factors that contributed to improved security.

### 3.3 Priorities for security and stabilisation in the next twelve months

Priority interventions for improving security stabilisation in the next six months



The responses to this question have been consistent since the very first survey. Respondents have continued to identify two clear priorities from the available options: social services and employment (48%) and increased investment in infrastructure (15%). Of significance, the proportion of respondents selecting a greater military presence as a priority increased by 5% (from 6% to 11%) when compared with the previous survey. FGDs suggested that the reason for this could be the rise in sea piracy as a security threat to the region and the perceived efforts of the military in curbing these.

## Citizen Engagement

In addition to questions about security and stabilisation, respondents were asked whether the Federal Government consults enough with them on development and security stabilisation policies and programmes related to their states, and what their major source of information is on security and development in their region. 79% felt that citizens were not consulted enough. Radio (40%), internet (22%), TV (18%) were cited as the top three ways of accessing information. These responses were similar to the previous survey.

# Appendix: Methodology

This research encompasses three states in the Niger Delta—Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states. A survey was administered by the SDN research team in various locations, including communities and towns, split between rural and urban areas to provide a balanced view. Based on multistage sampling—purposive (to ensure gender balance) and simple random sampling methods, questionnaires were administered to 304 respondents in 14 Local governments across the three states. The LGAs selected were Yenagoa, Nembe, Ogbia, Southern Ijaw, Warri South, Patani, Ughelli North, Udu, and Bomadi, Port Harcourt, Obio/Akpor, Ogu Bolo, Tai, Etche LGAs. Respondents were drawn from ages ranging from 18 years to over 50 years old.

The table below highlights the total number of respondents disaggregated by state, gender, and age.

State	Male	Female	Total of respondents
Bayelsa	53	51	104
Delta	59	41	100
Rivers	66	34	100

Age (years)	Total of respondents
18-24	62
25-34	115
35-49	105
50 and above	22

Table 1: Number of Respondents per state, gender, and age

Thereafter, the results were analysed by SDN to highlight differences between states, and to situate the findings in the contextual dynamics over the period under review (April 2018–September 2018).



June 2019

**SDN supports those affected by the extractives industry and weak governance. We work with communities and engage with governments, companies and other stakeholders to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to a healthy environment. Our work currently focuses on the Niger Delta.**

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