

FLASHPOINTS: THE 2015 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

SDN

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Days to Presidential Poll: 18

Days to Governor and House of Representatives Poll: 32



TIME EXTENSION TO COLLECT PVCS, BUT ACCESS REMAINS PROBLEM IN NIGER DELTA

As the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has extended the deadline for collection of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) by two weeks, we are dedicating this edition of Flashpoints to report on the issue from the Niger Delta.

The original deadline given following readjustment of the timetable following the postponement of the elections was Sunday 8th March. The news was announced in a statement signed by Mr Kayode Idowu, Chief Press Secretary to the INEC Chairman.

According to INEC, as of last week, 80.24 % of the 68,833,476 persons on the register of voters had collected their PVCs.

Eleven States - Akwa-Ibom, Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Taraba and Zamfara - have all passed 90 % distribution.

Yet time is not the determining

factor for a significant number of those yet to collect their PVCs in the Niger Delta. Registered voters report that their cards are still not available at their local distribution centres, and many are resorting to desperate tactics to secure their democratic right.

Citizen Journalist Reports

SDN trained Radar reporters from around the Niger Delta are assessing how the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been performing so far.



"It is common that some people who are not interested in voting sell their cards to those that need it most", reports Glad Amadi - Rivers State, "after the election the cards will be returned back to the rightful owner".

Many are complaining that their PVC is not at their designated unit for collection: "In Ogbia, people are still complaining that the PVC have not arrived. I think it is 60:40 in favour of distribution," reports Awotongha Gbaligha from Bayelsa State.

Uncertainty Taking Hold

Collins Newuwumi, based in Warri, Delta State, said that people in his community who hadn't received PVCs were attempting to photocopy them.

The fact that PVCs are not distributed to all citizens also affects the selling of votes in Delta State. "Political party vote canvassers, reach out to potential voters with the appeal to commit to vote for their political principal,"-explains Okonta Emeka-"to prove their commitment, the political canvassers demand

a photocopy of their permanent voters card as a proof that they are dealing and spending their every penny with the right potential voters.”

In my area people are asking to other people to make photocopies of their PVCs, so that they use it to negotiate with aspirants,” says Damasus Henry about votes selling in the Delta State. “What they said is: bring 100 people with PVC, than you get 10 thousand Naira.”

Coercion Allegations

One reporter claims that on political party is coercing voters in who have obtained their PVCs to surrender their details.

“PDP campaigners are requesting individuals with Permanent Voter’s Cards to send them the pin number of the card. I believe this is an effort to disenfranchise voters. This happened to me. I refused,” reported Nkaiso Akpan.

This follows allegations by Nkaiso’s Radar colleague in Delta State, Damasus Henry, who found that “police women were demanding five hundred Naira before assisting people to look for their names.

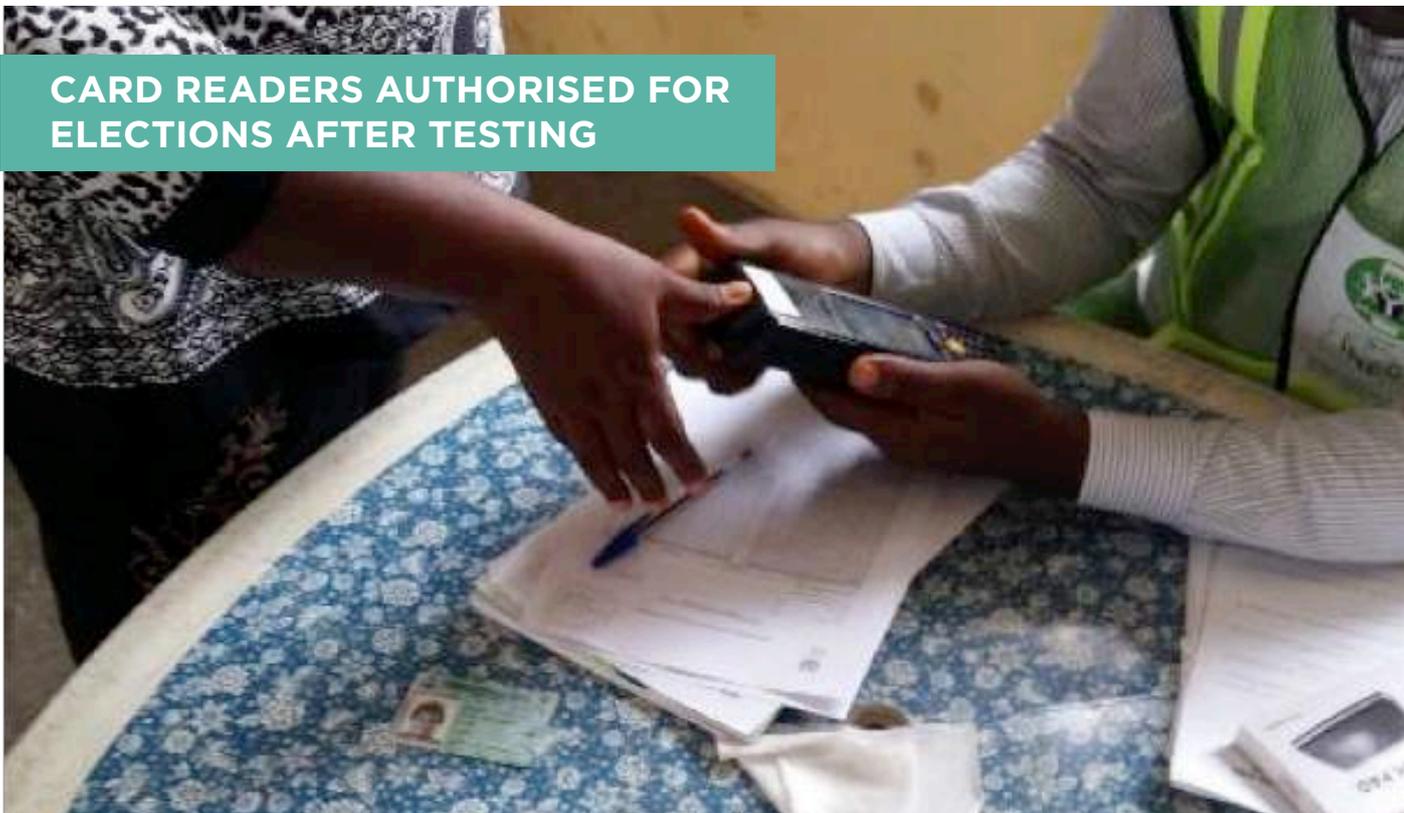
It is not clear exactly how politicians who go about acquiring PVCs and voter information on the cards intend to use them on election day. Cheating the card reader will be

almost impossible as seen in the demonstrations that have been carried out.

One sure thing is that voters who give out their cards will not be eligible to vote as possessing and presenting the card before INEC officials at the unit qualifies one to vote.



CARD READERS AUTHORISED FOR ELECTIONS AFTER TESTING



INEC deployed 1,602 personnel for a largely successful mock run of accreditation that gave observers a glimpse of the card readers in action.

The exercise held on Saturday at 225 polling units and 358 voting centres in 12 wards, across 12 states of the federation - two from each political zone. In the South-South zone the exercise held in Umuezeu ward in Oshimili South and Oromenike Ward 1 in Port Harcourt, in Delta and Rivers States respectively.

It ran the dual purpose of allowing registered voters to experience the much-discussed procedure, and gave INEC the opportunity to test their technical and logistical capability.

It should be noted that the exercise as observed was fairly successful. INEC officials performed their duties and functions in a professional manner in collaboration with security personnel, and the failure to recognise fingerprints

was the exception rather than the rule. That said, our observations highlighted a few concerns, which are discussed below.

Failure to Scan Fingerprints

SDN observed the exercise in the Rivers State ward selected. Out of the 6 polling units and 3 additional voting points observed, 157 came to participate. Out of this number, 34 failed the accreditation procedure, despite being in ownership of a PVC.

The cause was mostly failure of machine to read fingerprints, which may have been due to dirt and grease on the finger or the quality of the original fingerprints taken for the voter. Difficulties experienced with scanning in 2011 whether due to the same issues or technology limitations will have been passed on to the validation process of 2015.

The failure rate on fingerprint verification works out at roughly 22 percent with some significant variation in performance between units.. It is expected that not more than half of the 68 million registered voters will turn out to vote. Taking the 22 percent as an average failure rate, out of 34 million this would mean roughly 7.5 million voters will be rejected by the technology. Polling staff will have to fill out an incident report form on the day before voting without biometric verification.

This could lead to long delays, and friction with staff making the decision on the day unless careful preparations are made.

Technical Glitches

It is obvious that introducing new technology requires a basic level of technical support for when things go wrong. At one unit observed, the reader failed to connect to the central server. This error took the INEC personnel 17 minutes to fix. The prospective voter lost patience and went home.

This raises an important technical question on the capacity of the server to handle thousands of simultaneous requests from across the nation on election day. More robust stress testing needs to take place before the day.

Staffing Capacity

As no personnel at the site knew how to amend the issue it was fortunate that the particular unit was located on the opposite side of the road from the State INEC office. Polling unit staff were able to send for help from a technical expert. Clearly polling unit staff have not yet been trained to manage the simple technical glitches.

In addition, INEC were able to pool all their staff across the participating states to attend to the exercise. This showed the strain of the work on the



commission as it sucked all staff away from PVC distribution responsibilities.

Come election day the same number of staff will be spread a lot thinner. If permanent INEC staff are able to draw lessons from the exercise then their ability to support ad hoc staff will have been improved but it will be a challenge to ensure there is swift responses to problems encountered by junior officials.

Voting Environment

Accreditation is scheduled to open at 8am sharp on election day. While the same was set to be enforced for the test run, at one cluster of polling units observed it was not until 9am had passed that INEC staff started setting up. Most of those observed opened the accreditation exercise closer to 9:30.

After testing their cards, prospective voters were free to head home. On election day they will have to wait until accreditation ends and voting commences at 13:00. Under current circumstances, not only will they have to endure long queues in the blazing heat (it reached 37 degrees Celsius on Saturday), but once accredited all voters will need to hang

around in that same space.

Hopefully better provisions are made for the comfort of voters so that the rise in temperature is not in parallel with heightened tensions and tempers. Political parties may take advantage of this lapse in preparations and offer essentials like water or shade, which could influence the voting.

In addition, security agents will have to be punctual. In the Rivers exercise they were not seen at the units until mid-morning. This is of greater concern for rural and hard to reach polling units.

Sensitisation

There was a low turnout for the exercise, which implies that INEC and community leaders had not done enough to mobilise people.

The Situation Room reports that in Ekiti State, voters were initially scared to come out because of allegations of being arrested in the Card Reader could not verify their PVCs.

This highlights important areas for action before election - low turnout and misinformation. Civil Society has arguably the largest and most trustworthy outreach and should therefore be supported to catalyse voter education.

Right:

Two polling units and a voting point in the Rivers State ward observed sit in a courtyard with the PDP office. The party provided seating, tables and shading for the event.



REACTION TO THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE ELECTIONS



The public debate on PVCs tends to be focussed on logistics and politics. Furthermore, all efforts have been targeted towards dissemination and collection, and not on advocacy for voting.

SDN has been engaging people across the Niger Delta throughout the electoral period to educate on the importance of civic rights and the importance of protecting votes. This week we asked our network if they encountered problems with collection, and whether they intend to use their card to vote with.

“No problem, yes I’ll use it to vote if there is PEACE in Port Harcourt.” Enenimiekpre in Nembe, Bayelsa

“I’ve collected my PVC card since last year June in my home town and the exercise that very day was awesome to everyone who turned up to collect theirs. I’ll definitely go out to exercise my franchise because it’s necessary to vote & elect good, diligent leaders.” Anon

“I think the extension of PVC is good to enable those who don’t have to have.” Stanley in Port Harcourt

“I had no problem collecting my PVC. I did that in less than 20 minutes and will definitely vote on the election day.” Anon

Experiences with INEC

“I got my PVC at the first distribution with what I call minor prob, because I lost my temp card.... It was simple to fill a form provided for such cases, I will surely use it to vote.” Blessing in Oduha, Rivers State

“I didn’t have problems collecting my PVC but there are lots of issues in my ward concerning the PVC collection so I think the extension will help a lot. And I’ll vote with my PVC bcos it’s my right and civic duty.” Bokolo in Nembe, Bayelsa State

“Yes I have collected my PVC card, people are collecting also. Last week Friday was declared holiday by Delta State government just to enable people to collect their card and there was a good turn out. I will go out and cast my vote.” Collins in Warri North, Delta State



“It will not work. Awareness ZERO. Power supply ZERO. Illiteracy of the systems HIGH.” Anon

“The two weeks extension to me is just for formalities. ONELGA INEC is not helping matters. 70 percent of the PVC are being held by greedy politicians, mine inclusive. Am afraid we may not vote.” Anon

“In my community many have not collected theirs which d INEC officials are not 2 sincere, saying dat d flood has taken some of d PVC. There is intension of reregistration of those that did not see theirs from d unit dey registered.” Awotongha in Nembe, Bayelsa State.

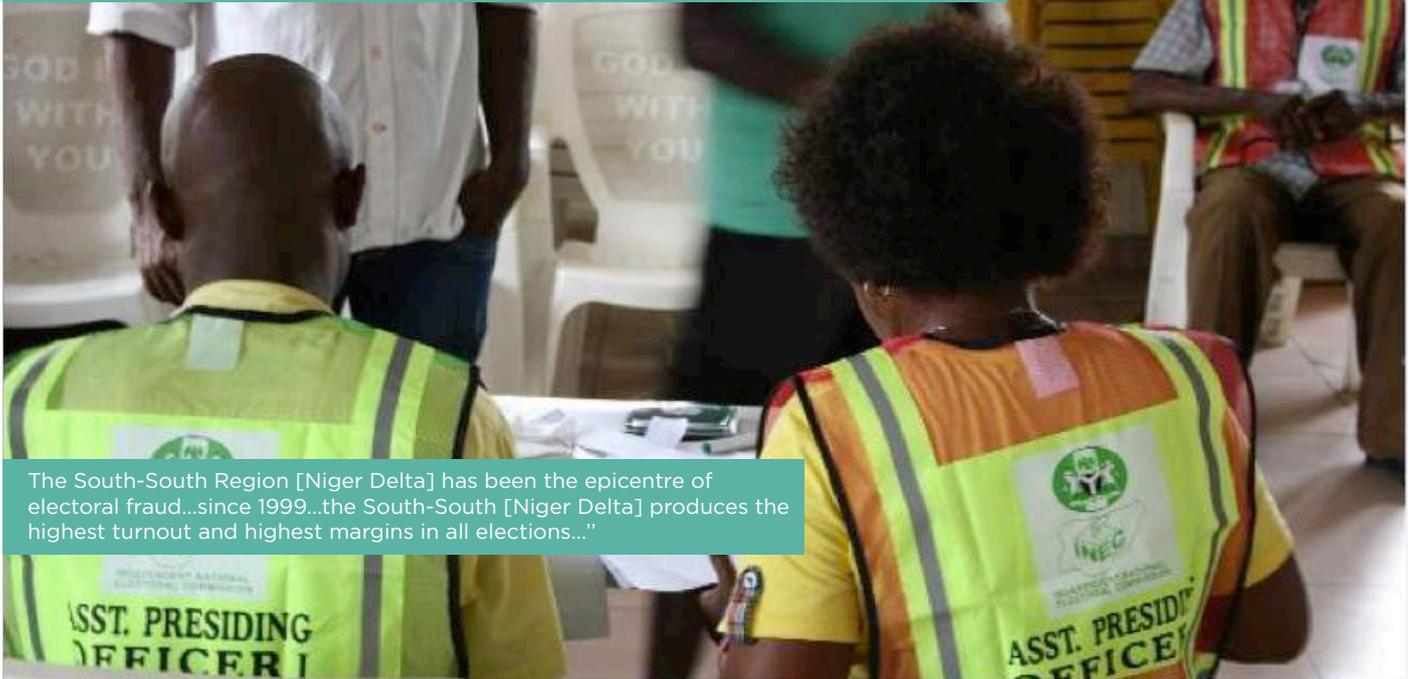
Transferring Location

“No problems collecting PVC but I was unable to transfer to my new location. I may not be voting.” Anon

“I’ve not seen my PVC to collect. I’ve phoned to INEC office at d LGA 10 times to no avail. I want my PVC so I can vote with it. In addition, I registered in 2011 next to my wife, my wife got her’s easily while my own got stocked. It’s astonishing.” Mr Ogor in Oshimili North, Delta State

“I permanently relocated to my state of birth & I’ve applied for transfer in my Zonal INEC office here in Eleme as required. But up till today no positive response from them.” Anon

IN FOCUS: PVC, CARD READER AND PROSPECTS FOR CREDIBLE 2015 ELECTIONS IN THE NIGER DELTA



The South-South Region [Niger Delta] has been the epicentre of electoral fraud...since 1999...the South-South [Niger Delta] produces the highest turnout and highest margins in all elections..."

Those words are Dr. Chidi Odinkalu's, Chairman of Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) as he spoke on the degree of electoral fraud in the Niger Delta. His statement was at a public hearing on Electoral Accountability held in Rivers State in 2014. According to the human rights boss, his remark derived from thorough research undertaken by a team at the NHRC.

His opinion corroborates the European Union Election Observer Mission which noted that "the high turnout rates for the Niger Delta region - Akwa Ibom State 83%, Bayelsa State 96%, Delta State 76%, Rivers State 80%- [in the 2007 general elections] are highly implausible, particularly given the credible reports of low voter turnout from those states". This concern has been expressed by different observer groups following elections in the region.

SDN has been observing elections in the Niger Delta, South-East and South-West. While the experiences in the South-East and South-West have not been without significant incidents, the situation in the Niger Delta has been of utmost concern.

The emergence of President Goodluck Jonathan as the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2011 presidential election ordinarily meant more voters turning out to elect him in the South-East, South-West and particularly the Niger Delta - his origin.

However, the turnout in the Niger Delta beat the national average of 51.95% (Bayelsa 85.6%; Akwa Ibom 76.2%; Cross River 63.2%; Delta 69.4%; Rivers 76.3%; Edo 37.5%; Average= 68%), a figure that many election observer groups find incredible.



The intension here is not to tag the Niger Delta as the core of electoral fraud, or that elections are more credible in other regions of Nigeria. The history of elections in Nigeria is fraught with manipulations, including vote conjuration and result fabrication that in many

instances defy total number of registered voters in registration areas across the country.

Inaccessibility

A significant part of the region is riverine and accessible only by boat. Water transportation in the region is expensive and cumbersome. The election management body has, due to budget constraints, consistently failed to make adequate plans to deploy personnel and materials to the fluvial places.

Due to these impediments, prompt arrival of election officials and materials in communities, and effective deployment of election observers has been lacking. Voter apathy is therefore high among citizens in the region due to many years of neglect by the government.

Also, there is the history of oil related conflict that assumed a violent proportion with the emergence of armed militancy. Many observer groups as a result do not deploy observers to the region as they believe the region is still volatile. These conditions pave the way for the electoral manoeuvrings that have characterized elections in the region in the last 16 years. There are reports of results in places elections did not hold.

The introduction of the Permanent Voter Card (PVC) and Card Reader by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for the 2015 elections appears to present some prospects for credible elections in the region. Greeted widely as timely, the innovations could help ensure that actual turnout figures are ascertained and compared with final results announced at units to verify authenticity, even where there are no observers or party agents. This will be better understood if we consider the benefits the PVC and Card Reader bring to the process.

Election Day Fraud Prevention

The use of PVC and Card Reader prevents voter impersonation and vote inflation which happen considerably in the Niger Delta. Every election since 1999 has been followed by allegations of voter impersonation and mass ballot paper thumb printing in places where materials and INEC staff did not show up or voter turnout was low. The practice was easy with the collaboration of INEC personnel.

With stories of the capabilities of the Card Reader reverberating in the ranks of the political elites, the push to commit electoral fraud on election day may be diminishing even though those geographic and social conditions persist. Politicians contemplating voter impersonation and vote inflation will have known that the Card Reader keeps a perfect record of accredited voters against which disagreeing parties will compare results announced. Any manoeuvres to bypass the Card Reader will therefore be in futility.

Data integrity

According to INEC, the



Polling units are often poorly signposted.

Card Reader records and disaggregates election day data in read-only format, and sends the data to a central server. The Card Reader keeps a record of total number of accredited and rejected voters according to gender. Election results must, in the new system, agree with accreditation information. Election officials have no control over the data and cannot alter it in any way.

This is a major improvement on the situation in the past where the manual data recording system was easy to alter by conniving election personnel. There will therefore be impeccable data evidence for the prosecution of cases in election tribunals and courts if there is reason to doubt a result.

Difficult to Bypass

While it will be fool hardy to try to fool or bypass the PVC and Card Reader because of the manner data are recorded, attempting to do so comes with a great difficulty that is

almost impossible to surmount. To bypass the Card Reader will require the complicity of the electorate, party agents, INEC officials, security agents and observers.

This certainly will be difficult to achieve. If other stakeholders agree to evade the PVC and Card Reader, it is not likely that either political party will reach an agreement to do so.

Vote soliciting on the rise

Many observers have remarked that since the beginning of the present democratic dispensation in 1999, politicians and political parties seeking elective positions have never campaigned to solicit votes as much as they are doing now across the country. Their strategies to curry votes include open air campaigns, road shows, visits to religious, traditional and business communities, meetings with key individuals, and one-on-one engagements with every day people like artisans, market traders, and transporters.

The situation is the same in the Niger Delta. It is the first time to see candidates and political parties engage with the electorate for votes so vigorously. The development is a clear pointer to how the political class is responding to the change the PVC and Card Reader bring to the electoral process.

It may not be wrong to conclude that in the Niger Delta stakeholders are increasingly realising that with the innovations, elections must be genuinely won if they are not to be lost at the tribunals and courts.



Thumbs are marked with permanent ink following accreditation to prevent fraud

Ahead of the elections hundreds of Nigerians fearing election violence based on ethnic differences are forfeiting their vote to move to the other end of the country, reports World Watch Monitor.

Sam Nwodo told reporters that, “Many Igbos (from the majority Christian south) in Gusau are leaving en masse because we don’t know what will happen. No matter how brave you are, when you see your people leaving in such large numbers you have no choice but to move too”.

Innocent Anya, 48, relocated his family back to his hometown in the southern Enugu State, even prior to postponement of the election. The father of four has lived in Kaduna, where he earned his living repairing air conditioning units, for the past 22 years.

He told WWM that there were glaring signs of violence, even before the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) postponed the election. “Each time there are problems in the North, we Igbos are always the target of attack by northern Muslims as if we are the cause of the problems.”

“I was almost killed during the 2011 election violence. Many of our people were killed and our properties were either looted or destroyed. So we don’t want



to be caught in another wave of violence again.”

Donatus Ezenakwe, a stationery dealer in Kaduna, recalled that “in 2011, they took us unawares, and many of us were killed. So I can’t stay back and witness another killing.”

“I had no choice than to relocate to my village in (the southern) Anambra State where we will be safe from the mindless killings,” he added.

Reverse Trend

A similar trend has been observed in various southern States where hundreds of mainly

Northern Hausas have fled back to the North.

Alhaji Abdullahi Aliyu, a 51 year old Muslim lived and worked in Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta for about 20 years. He has now moved his wife and six children to the northern town of Funtua, in Katsina State.

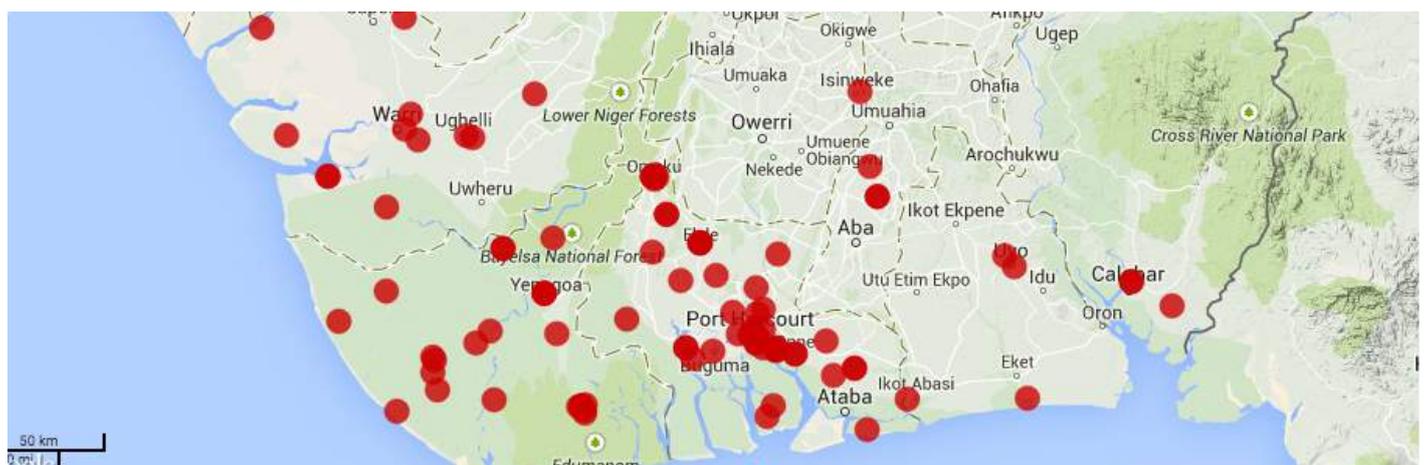
“We are afraid because the moment they start attacking people in the north, the southerners will want to retaliate by attacking northerners who are living in their communities and we will have to run to the military and police barracks,” he said.

NIGER DELTA WATCH:

The Niger Delta Watch (www.nigerdeltawatch.org) is designed to receive reports from citizens across the Niger Delta relating to violence, conflict and election irregularities.

Reports can be submitted on any issue - from Permanent Voter Card (PVC) distribution irregularities, to intimidation and attacks at political events. You can also explore all the reports submitted.

Anybody can submit a report by filling out an online form, and also by SMS, email, and twitter.



FOR ELECTION UPDATES AND TO REPORT YOUR PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS, STAY IN TOUCH WITH SDN

Across the 2015 elections cycle you can report incidents you observe in your area to SDN.

The SDN network is spread across every LGA across Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers State, and will aim to respond to verified reports of incidents within the shortest possible time. This initial response will be followed by a number of positive steps for resolution where appropriate.

SDN has experience working with communities on tackling election related violence. Our aim is to help communities voice their experiences with the election process, whether good or bad.

There are a number of ways you can send a report:

1. **ONLINE** at www.nigerdeltawatch.org under the 'Submit a Report' tab



2. **ANDROID** download the 'Ushahidi' app and search for the map 'Niger Delta Watch'



3. **TWITTER** to our twitter handle @SDNNigerDelta
4. **EMAIL** to election2015@stakeholderdemocracy.org
5. **SMS** to 0701 067 9724

We will be circulating regular updates on elections and educational materials. Please keep in touch by following www.stakeholderdemocracy.org